



Beyond Remittances: Nafaqah, Labour Migration, and Relational Responsibility in Sustaining Family Harmony in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Labour migration is frequently adopted by rural families as a strategy to improve household economic security, yet husbands' prolonged physical absence may simultaneously affect marital relationships, parenting, and emotional well-being. This study examines the fulfilment of material and non-material family responsibilities by migrant husbands and their implications for family harmony in Kaliwuluh Village, Kepil District, Wonosobo Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative field-research design with a case-study approach was employed. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation involving 15 wives of migrant husbands, supplemented by contextual information from local community figures. The findings show that material nafaqah generally contributed to the fulfilment of food, clothing, housing, education, health, and daily household needs. However, geographical separation also reduced direct paternal involvement, increased wives' household responsibilities, and generated emotional challenges including longing, misunderstanding, suspicion, and decreased marital closeness. Family harmony was better maintained when financial provision was accompanied by regular communication, affection, trust, religious guidance, shared responsibility, and continued emotional involvement. The study concludes that material provision is necessary but insufficient for sustaining migrant families. Family harmony depends on the interaction between economic provision and continuing relational responsibility across geographical distance.

Keywords: *nafaqah, labour migration, migrant husbands, family harmony, relational responsibility*

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INTRODUCTION

Family life is shaped not only by marital commitment but also by the continuous fulfilment of economic, emotional, social, and caregiving responsibilities among its members. In many rural communities, however, limited local employment opportunities compel husbands to migrate to other cities, islands, or countries in search of more secure and adequate income (Mishra & Kunnwar, 2025). Labour migration consequently becomes an important household livelihood strategy physical separation is accepted in

exchange for the expectation of improved economic security. Yet this strategy produces a fundamental tension within family life. The same migration that strengthens a household's financial capacity may simultaneously reduce everyday interaction, redistribute domestic responsibilities, weaken paternal involvement, and create emotional distance between spouses and children (Iqbal & Gusman, 2026). International scholarship has therefore increasingly approached labour migration not merely as an economic movement but as a process that restructures intimacy, care, household authority, and family relations across geographical distance (Waruwu, 2023).

This tension is particularly relevant to Muslim families because economic provision is embedded within a broader normative structure of marital responsibility. Islamic family law places nafaqah the husband's obligation to provide for his wife and dependants among the central consequences of marriage (Hasanuddin et al., 2026). The Qur'an establishes that fathers are responsible for providing food and clothing in a reasonable manner (Qur'an 2:233) and that the level of expenditure should correspond to the husband's economic capacity (Qur'an 65:7). In the Indonesian legal context, the *Kompilasi Hukum Islam* (Compilation of Islamic Law/KHI) similarly places responsibility for household maintenance on the husband according to his ability (Danil et al., 2026). In this article, nafaqah refers primarily to material provision such as food, clothing, housing, education, health expenses, and everyday household needs (Novrianti, 2025). For analytical purposes, however, material provision is examined together with non-material marital responsibilities including attention, communication, protection, religious guidance, emotional support, and paternal involvement because the empirical experiences of migrant families demonstrate that economic provision alone does not exhaust the responsibilities through which family harmony is sustained (Domingo, 2026). The term migrant husband in this study refers to a married man who works for an extended period outside his home village, whether elsewhere in Indonesia or abroad, while his wife and children continue to reside in the place of origin.

Existing migration research demonstrates why this distinction between material and relational responsibilities is important. Remittances can increase household purchasing power and enable families to meet daily consumption, education, housing, and health needs. Nevertheless, husbands' migration may also create new burdens for wives who remain at home (Fauk et al., 2025). Using large-scale household data, Lei and Desai (2021) found that male out-migration generated economic opportunities but also increased household responsibilities among left-behind wives, while inadequate remittances contributed to adverse outcomes. Their findings are significant because they show that the consequences of migration are mediated not simply by whether migration occurs, but by the amount and continuity of economic transfers and by the redistribution of responsibilities within the household (Lei & Desai, 2021).

Research on Indonesian migrant families reveals a similar duality. Alfiasari et al. (2022), studying children from migrant-worker families in rural Indonesia, showed that parental migration can expose left-behind children to well-being vulnerabilities and that family-based social capital and social support play an important protective role. More

recent qualitative evidence from Indonesia also indicates that although labour migration may generate regular remittances, it can impose substantial mental, physical, social, and caregiving burdens on those who assume responsibilities for family members remaining at home (Alfiasari et al., 2022). Such studies move the debate beyond the assumption that successful migration can be measured primarily through income. Instead, they demonstrate that the sustainability of migrant households depends on the quality of care arrangements and relationships that continue after geographical separation (K. F. Acedera & Yeoh, 2021).

A further issue concerns communication and marital intimacy. Physical distance does not necessarily terminate family relations, because mobile phones, video calls, and social-media platforms enable migrant family members to maintain what may be described as forms of mediated presence. Nevertheless, digital communication cannot automatically guarantee transparency, intimacy, or mutual understanding. Research on transnational marriages shows that migrant spouses continually negotiate intimacy, gender roles, and marital expectations across distance (K. F. Acedera & Yeoh, 2022). Likewise, Ur Rehman's (2023) study of migrants and spouses who remained at home found persistent information asymmetries within transnational households even when communication was possible, demonstrating that the availability of communication technology does not by itself eliminate problems of trust, information sharing, or financial decision-making. Thus, what matters is not simply the frequency of communication but its openness, consistency, emotional quality, and relationship to household decision-making (Ur Rehman, 2023).

Within Indonesian Islamic family-law scholarship, the issue has generally been approached from a somewhat different direction. Studies concerning migrant husbands have predominantly examined whether husbands continue to fulfil their legal and religious maintenance obligations, whether the practice conforms to Islamic law, or how migrant couples attempt to construct a *sakinah* family. For example, research on migrant husbands in Mirring Village found that economic conditions could improve and material maintenance could be fulfilled, while wives simultaneously experienced longing and assumed responsibilities ordinarily performed by husbands; regular telephone or video communication consequently became an important strategy for maintaining family relationships (Irfanb et al., 2022). Other Indonesian studies identified in the present research similarly concentrate on the implementation of husbands' maintenance obligations or their conformity with Islamic law rather than systematically examining how different dimensions of provision interact with the relational quality of migrant marriages.

This body of scholarship leaves an important analytical gap. Migration studies have generated substantial knowledge about remittances, left-behind children, caregiving, role redistribution, health, and transnational communication, while Islamic family-law studies have established the normative importance of the husband's obligation of *nafaqah* (Fauzi et al., 2025). These two bodies of literature, however, are often treated separately. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to how the continuity of material provision and the disruption or reconstruction of non-material responsibilities interact in

shaping family harmony when the husband is the migrant breadwinner (Agadjanian & Chae, 2023). Moreover, much Indonesian research on migrant-worker families has focused on international migration, female migrant workers, children left behind, or the normative fulfilment of maintenance. The lived experiences of wives in rural male-out-migration households particularly the ways they interpret financial adequacy, emotional presence, communication, paternal responsibility, religious guidance, trust, role substitution, and marital stability as interconnected dimensions remain comparatively underexplored (Koirala, 2023).

Kaliwuluh Village in Kepil District, Wonosobo Regency, Central Java, provides a particularly relevant setting for examining this problem. Agriculture and irregular forms of labour constitute important sources of livelihood in the village, while employment outside the locality has become a practical strategy through which some husbands seek more stable earnings (Pranawati et al., 2025). The study data show substantial variation in migration trajectories: husbands work in destinations including Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Solo, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Samarinda, and Japan, with periods of separation ranging from approximately one year to more than two decades. The field data also reveal that wives do not experience migration in purely financial terms (Kutor & Oklikah, 2025). Although remittances contribute to food, clothing, housing, education, health, and everyday household expenditure, geographical separation simultaneously affects communication, paternal involvement, emotional closeness, household decision-making, the distribution of domestic responsibilities, feelings of loneliness and suspicion, and the possibility of marital conflict. This empirical configuration makes Kaliwuluh an appropriate case through which to examine the apparent paradox of migrant family life: economic provision may improve while relational proximity declines (Opiniano & Tan, 2025).

The novelty of this study therefore lies in treating nafaqah not simply as an isolated financial transfer or a binary question of whether a husband fulfils a legal obligation, but as part of a broader relational responsibility structure through which family harmony is negotiated across distance. The article connects Islamic family-law understandings of marital responsibility with contemporary scholarship on migration, remittances, care, communication, and transnational intimacy. This perspective makes it possible to distinguish between economic adequacy and relational adequacy: a migrant husband may successfully provide money while his family continues to experience deficits in emotional presence, parenting, guidance, communication, or protection. Conversely, geographical absence does not inevitably produce family breakdown when spouses maintain trust, open communication, shared religious commitments, responsible financial provision, and adaptive mechanisms for managing household roles. Rather than testing a statistical hypothesis, this qualitative study proceeds from the analytical proposition that material provision alone is insufficient to explain the maintenance of family harmony in migrant households; the effects of migration are shaped by the interaction between economic provision and continuing relational responsibility.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine (1) the forms through which migrant husbands fulfil material and non-material family responsibilities, and (2) the implications

of husbands' labour migration and provision for family harmony in Kaliwuluh Village, Kepil District, Wonosobo Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative field-research design with a case-study orientation was employed because the research concerns lived experiences, marital relationships, economic responsibilities, communication practices, emotional responses, role adaptation, and strategies for maintaining family stability that cannot be adequately understood through financial indicators alone. Data were generated through observation, interviews, and documentation, with the empirical investigation centred on wives whose husbands worked away from home and supplemented by relevant local perspectives. By integrating the normative dimension of Islamic family responsibility with the lived realities of labour migration, this article seeks to contribute to Islamic family-law scholarship and migration studies by demonstrating that sustaining a migrant family requires not only the transfer of resources across distance but also the continuous reconstruction of care, trust, communication, parental responsibility, and emotional connection.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative field-research design with a case-study approach to examine how husbands' labour migration affects family provision and marital harmony in Kaliwuluh Village, Kepil District, Wonosobo Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The participants were wives whose husbands worked outside the village while the wives and children remained at home. Participants were selected based on their direct relevance to the research focus. The study involved 15 wives of migrant husbands, supported by contextual information from local community figures. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the research focused on lived experiences, economic responsibilities, communication, emotional relationships, and changes in family roles that are best understood within their natural social context (Suparno et al., 2024).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to understand the social and family context directly, while interviews served as the primary technique for exploring participants' experiences concerning material provision, communication, emotional needs, household responsibilities, and strategies for maintaining family harmony. The interviews were guided by questions directly related to the research problems and were conducted face-to-face in Kaliwuluh. Interviews are particularly useful in qualitative and socio-legal research because they enable researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in depth (Chand, 2025). Documentation included field photographs, village information, and supporting records related to migrant family life (Altafiah et al., 2024).

The researcher functioned as the primary research instrument, supported by an interview guide, observation notes, writing materials, a mobile phone, and a laptop. The data were analysed descriptively by organizing and comparing interview, observational, and documentary evidence according to two main themes: (1) the fulfilment of material and non-material family responsibilities by migrant husbands and (2) the implications of migration for family harmony. Particular attention was given to patterns involving

economic provision, communication, emotional closeness, paternal involvement, household role changes, trust, and conflict (Sukiati et al., 2024). No statistical tests were applied because the study was qualitative rather than quantitative.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened by comparing information obtained from interviews, observation, and documentation; transferability through detailed contextual description; dependability through documentation of research procedures; and confirmability by grounding interpretations in field evidence (Fauzan & Harianto, 2025). The study was limited to one rural community and primarily reflected the perspectives of wives who remained at home; therefore, the findings are intended for contextual interpretation rather than statistical generalization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that husbands' labour migration in Kaliwuluh produces a dual effect on family life. On the one hand, migration functions as an economic strategy that enables husbands to continue providing for food, clothing, housing, children's education, health care, and routine household expenditure. On the other hand, physical separation creates relational costs involving communication, emotional closeness, paternal involvement, role redistribution, and marital trust. Thus, the central finding is that the consequences of migration cannot be evaluated solely from the continuity of financial provision. Family harmony depends on whether economic provision is accompanied by continuing relational responsibility.

Material provision was generally perceived by the wives as the most immediate benefit of husbands' migration. Participants consistently described food and daily household expenses as priorities that had to be maintained regardless of geographical separation. One participant emphasized that daily food needs remained the husband's responsibility even when he worked away from home, while another explained that regular transfers enabled her to manage household expenses more effectively. Other participants identified clothing, adequate housing, education, and health expenses as important components of provision. These accounts indicate that migration was primarily understood as a livelihood strategy intended to secure or improve the household's economic capacity rather than as withdrawal from family responsibility.

Table 1. Major Findings on Migrant Husbands' Provision and Family Harmony

Dimension	Empirical finding	Implication for family harmony
Food and daily expenses	Financial provision continued to support routine household needs	Strengthened economic security
Clothing, housing, education, and health	Considered essential components of husbands' responsibility	Supported family welfare and stability

Affection and attention	Maintained mainly through communication from a distance	Helped preserve emotional connection
Communication	Distance and work sometimes restricted interaction	Poor communication increased misunderstanding and suspicion
Paternal involvement	Direct involvement in children's education and religious guidance declined	Increased mothers' caregiving responsibilities
Household roles	Wives assumed responsibilities normally shared with husbands	Created a greater practical and emotional burden
Physical presence	Long separation generated longing and emotional discomfort	Reduced perceived closeness in some families
Trust and commitment	Necessary to manage long-distance marriage	Protected relationships from conflict and external interference

Source: Field interviews and observations, Kaliwuluh Village

These findings confirm that remittances have an important stabilizing function, but they also demonstrate why economic improvement should not automatically be equated with family harmony. Lei and Desai (2021) similarly found that male out-migration may produce economic benefits while simultaneously increasing the responsibilities carried by wives who remain at home. Their study showed that the effects of migration were partly mediated by the adequacy of remittances and additional responsibilities assumed by left-behind wives (Lei & Desai, 2021). The Kaliwuluh findings extend this observation into the context of Muslim rural households: adequate material provision can reduce economic pressure, but it does not eliminate relational and caregiving consequences arising from prolonged separation.

The field data further demonstrate that participants did not understand husbands' responsibilities exclusively in monetary terms. Attention, affection, communication, protection, religious guidance, and emotional availability were repeatedly described as necessary for sustaining the family relationship. One wife explained that even simple acts of communication and expressions of concern remained meaningful because they preserved a sense of emotional proximity despite geographical distance. Another participant stressed that family members needed reassurance that the migrant husband continued to care about and remain responsible for them. This supports the argument that the function of nafaqah in migrant families is relationally embedded: money fulfils material needs, but its contribution to household harmony is strengthened when accompanied by attention and continuing involvement.

Communication emerged as one of the strongest mediating factors between migration and family harmony. Participants acknowledged that telephone-based communication helped sustain relationships, but they also reported that distance, work schedules, and limited interaction could produce emotional pressure, misunderstanding, and suspicion. One participant described communication as the principal mechanism for

preventing the emotional relationship between husband, wife, and children from becoming distant. Another reported that suspicion and misunderstanding sometimes arose because of geographical separation but could be resolved through open communication and *musyawarah* (mutual deliberation). These findings suggest that access to communication technology is not sufficient by itself; what matters is the quality, continuity, and openness of communication.

This interpretation is consistent with Ur Rehman's (2023) research on migrants and spouses remaining at home, which demonstrates that geographical separation can create information asymmetries even where communication remains possible. Migrants and spouses may hold inaccurate beliefs about one another's economic circumstances, illustrating that communication technology does not necessarily guarantee complete transparency (Ur Rehman, 2023). Similarly, Acedera and Yeoh (2020) show that intimacy within transnational marriages must be continually negotiated rather than assumed to persist automatically across distance (K. A. F. Acedera & Yeoh, 2020). The Kaliwuluh evidence therefore indicates that communication acts not simply as an exchange of information but as a mechanism through which trust, emotional presence, and marital commitment are continually reconstructed.

A second major consequence was the redistribution of household and parenting roles. Several wives reported assuming responsibilities normally undertaken jointly with their husbands. These included caring for children, transporting them, managing domestic affairs, supervising everyday activities, and making household decisions. One participant explained that she had to perform not only domestic work but also responsibilities associated with children and daily decision-making because her husband was away. Migration therefore altered the practical organization of the household: while the husband's economic contribution continued from outside the village, the wife became the primary actor responsible for day-to-day family management.

This role redistribution is significant because it reveals a less visible cost of migration. The household may become economically more secure while the wife experiences a concentration of caregiving and managerial responsibilities. Lei and Desai (2021) similarly found that increased responsibilities among left-behind wives helped explain some of the adverse consequences associated with husbands' migration. Recent Indonesian evidence likewise demonstrates that labour migration may improve household income while producing substantial caregiving, social, and emotional burdens for those who remain responsible for family members at home (Lei & Desai, 2021). The present findings therefore suggest that evaluating migration only by the amount of money sent home risks overlooking the unequal redistribution of unpaid family labour.

Paternal involvement was particularly affected. Participants reported that fathers' physical absence reduced their direct involvement in children's development, especially religious guidance and everyday role modelling. A wife whose husband worked in Japan explained that her children received most of their daily supervision and religious instruction from her because direct interaction with their father was limited. Other participants similarly emphasized that children continued to need a father's

encouragement, attention, and presence even when migration was economically necessary. This finding does not indicate that migrant fathers ceased to be involved altogether; rather, it shows that some paternal functions were more difficult to reproduce through distance communication than financial provision.

From an Islamic family-law perspective, this distinction is important. Qur'anic provisions concerning maintenance emphasize reasonable material responsibility according to capacity (Qur'an 2:233; 65:7), but marital and parental responsibility more broadly also involves *mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*—the maintenance of family relationships in a good and responsible manner. The findings therefore support a multidimensional understanding of responsibility in migrant households. A husband may fulfil a substantial part of his material obligation while limitations remain in areas that require direct presence, such as everyday parental modelling, immediate emotional support, and shared domestic participation. This does not negate the value of migration as a livelihood strategy; rather, it clarifies that economic and relational responsibilities operate simultaneously.

Emotional consequences were also prominent. Long periods of separation produced feelings of longing, loneliness, and reduced closeness, particularly during significant family occasions. One participant whose husband had migrated for many years described the emotional difficulty of experiencing important moments without his presence. Such responses indicate that physical presence continues to have relational value that digital interaction cannot completely substitute. This helps explain why some families can experience improved economic conditions while simultaneously perceiving a reduction in marital or emotional harmony.

Trust was another critical factor. Participants acknowledged that prolonged separation could create suspicion, misunderstanding, and concerns about third-party relationships. The village head also reported that some migrant-family problems involved husbands rarely communicating with their families and, in certain cases, families receiving information that husbands had entered another marriage while away. These accounts must be interpreted cautiously because they do not establish that migration itself causes infidelity. Rather, they show that prolonged separation combined with weak communication and declining relational commitment may create conditions perceived by family members as threatening to marital stability.

This distinction provides an important alternative explanation for the findings. The negative experiences identified in the study should not be attributed to geographical distance alone. Families differed in migration duration, employment conditions, destinations, communication patterns, and relationship quality. Consequently, long-distance marriage may produce very different outcomes depending on whether financial transfers are regular, communication is maintained, spouses trust one another, household responsibilities are negotiated, and migrant husbands remain involved in family decisions. Migration therefore functions less as a direct determinant of harmony than as a condition that intensifies the importance of relational mechanisms already necessary within marriage.

The findings consequently refine the initial proposition of this study. Material provision remains indispensable, and its continuity can protect families from economic insecurity. However, it is not sufficient by itself to sustain family harmony. The strongest pattern across the data is the interaction between material provision and relational responsibility. Families appeared better able to manage geographical separation when husbands maintained economic responsibility while also providing communication, attention, reassurance, religious guidance, and continued involvement in children's lives. Conversely, financial provision did not entirely compensate for prolonged communication breakdown, reduced emotional presence, or weakened parental participation.

This finding contributes to earlier Indonesian research on migrant households by shifting the analytical focus from whether nafaqah is formally fulfilled toward how different dimensions of responsibility work together after migration. It also supports broader transnational-family scholarship showing that migration reorganizes intimacy and gendered family responsibilities rather than simply separating workers from their place of origin (Norholis, 2022). In the Kaliwuluh context, the practical implication is that migrant-family resilience requires more than regular remittances. Couples need predictable communication, financial transparency, shared decision-making, deliberate paternal involvement, mutual trust, and opportunities for children to maintain meaningful relationships with migrant fathers.

These interpretations should nevertheless be considered within the study's limitations. The investigation focused on one rural community and predominantly captured the perspectives of wives who remained at home. Husbands and children were not interviewed with equivalent depth, and the participants experienced widely different durations and destinations of migration. The study therefore cannot determine causal relationships between migration length, remittance levels, and specific degrees of marital harmony. Future research should incorporate husbands' and children's perspectives, compare domestic and international migration, and examine how migration duration, communication frequency, remittance regularity, and family structure interact over time. Within these boundaries, the present findings demonstrate that the central challenge for migrant families is not merely how to provide across distance, but how to remain relationally responsible across distance.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is intended to help the reader understand why your research should matter to them after they have finished reading the paper. A conclusion is not merely a summary of the main topics covered or a re-statement of your research problem, but a synthesis of key points. It is important that the conclusion does not leave the questions unanswered.

Tips:

1. State your conclusions clearly and concisely. Be brief and stick to the point;
 2. Explain why your study is important to the reader. You should instill in the reader a sense of relevance;
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3. Prove to the reader, and the scientific community, that your findings are worthy of note. This means setting your paper in the context of previous work. The implications of your findings should be discussed within a realistic framework, and;

For most essays, one well-developed paragraph is sufficient for a conclusion, although in some cases, a two or three paragraph conclusion may be required. The another of important things about this section is (1) do not rewrite the abstract; (2) statements with "investigated" or "studied" are not conclusions; (3) do not introduce new arguments, evidence, new ideas, or information unrelated to the topic; (4)do not include evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper.

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