

## Maintaining a Long-Distance Marriage: Communication and Spirituality

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### Abstract

Long-distance marriage (LDM) can pose significant challenges for couples in preserving emotional intimacy, trust, and overall relationship stability, highlighting the importance of resilience in sustaining connections. This study investigated the interplay between spirituality, WhatsApp communication, and resilience in long-distance marriages. Resilience encompasses a couple's ability to effectively navigate challenges within a long-distance marriage (LDM). This study employed a quantitative correlational design and included 138 married individuals who have been engaged in LDM for at least one year. Data collection involved questionnaires assessing WhatsApp communication, spirituality measured by the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES), and couple resilience evaluated through the Couple Resilience Inventory Scale (CRIS). Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS. The results indicated a positive correlation between WhatsApp communication and positive resilience behaviour ( $r = 0.489$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), along with a negative correlation with negative resilience behaviour ( $r = -0.442$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, spirituality exhibited a positive correlation with positive resilience behaviour ( $r = 0.422$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a negative correlation with negative resilience behaviour ( $r = -0.299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). WhatsApp communication and spirituality accounted for 28.6% of the variance in couple resilience, with other factors influencing the remaining percentage. These findings suggest that both digital communication and spirituality play significant roles in enhancing resilience among couples in long-distance relationships.

Keywords: communication, couple resilience, long-distance marriage, spirituality

### Abstract

Pernikahan jarak jauh (Long-Distance Marriage/LDM) dapat menimbulkan tantangan yang signifikan bagi pasangan dalam menjaga keintiman emosional, kepercayaan, dan stabilitas hubungan secara keseluruhan, sehingga menekankan pentingnya ketahanan (resiliensi) dalam mempertahankan ikatan. Penelitian ini menyelidiki hubungan antara spiritualitas, komunikasi melalui WhatsApp, dan resiliensi dalam pernikahan jarak jauh. Resiliensi mencerminkan kemampuan pasangan untuk secara efektif menghadapi tantangan dalam LDM. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional dan melibatkan 138 individu yang telah menjalani pernikahan jarak jauh selama minimal satu tahun. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kuesioner yang mengukur komunikasi melalui *WhatsApp*, spiritualitas yang diukur menggunakan *Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale* (DSES), serta resiliensi pasangan yang dievaluasi dengan *Couple Resilience Inventory Scale* (CRIS). Analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan *IBM SPSS*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya korelasi positif antara komunikasi melalui *WhatsApp* dengan perilaku resiliensi positif ( $r = 0.489$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), serta korelasi negatif dengan perilaku resiliensi negatif ( $r = -0.442$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Selain itu, spiritualitas juga menunjukkan korelasi positif dengan perilaku resiliensi positif ( $r = 0.422$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) dan korelasi negatif dengan perilaku resiliensi negatif ( $r = -0.299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Komunikasi melalui *WhatsApp* dan spiritualitas

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menjelaskan 28.6% variansi dalam resiliensi pasangan, sementara sisanya dipengaruhi oleh faktor lain. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi digital dan spiritualitas memiliki peran penting dalam meningkatkan ketahanan pasangan dalam hubungan jarak jauh.

Keywords: komunikasi, ketahanan pasangan, pernikahan jarak jauh, spiritualitas

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## Introduction

Marriage is a form of social relationship that is both individual and interpersonal, as well as a manifestation of love between a man and a woman who previously lived separately and then became one, physically, geographically, and psychologically, with a promise to live together in a bond, where both will interact continuously in various aspects of life (Savitri & Hidayati, 2019). However, in today's globalized world, a new marriage model has emerged that does not require both individuals to live together and engage with one another daily. This phenomenon, known as long-distance marriage, involves couples who sustain their marital relationship despite being geographically separated (Syafhil & Herawati, 2024). Long-distance marriages refer to partnerships in which the couples live separately from one another, limiting their ability to interact physically on a daily basis. Such arrangements often arise due to the escalating global demands associated with work and education (Sawai et al., 2023). Key contributors to long-distance marriages include job assignments in different cities or countries (Kauffman, 2010) and pursuing academic studies at institutions located away from the couple's primary residence (Purwanto et al., 2019). Jimenez (2010) further elaborates that long-distance marriages are characterized by couples who are not in close physical proximity and may face challenges in returning home within a single day.

Individuals choose to engage in long-distance marriages for various reasons. In addition to mandatory assignments, such as those in the military and certain civil service roles in Indonesia—including customs officers, tax officials, judges, and prosecutors—some couples consciously decide to maintain geographical separation as part of their marital arrangement. Economic fluctuations have made dual-income households increasingly essential, and job opportunities can be limited in specific fields or locations. Furthermore, individuals are placing a greater emphasis on personal success and individualized job satisfaction. Consequently, when partners in committed relationships receive promising job offers or encounter more appealing employment opportunities, the decision to prioritize job satisfaction may force them into a long-distance marriage (Oakes & Brown, 2016).

Previous research aimed at examining and comparing overall health variables, including mental and physical health, between couples in proximal relationships and those in long-distance relationships indicated that proximal marriages are associated with better mental health outcomes. However, couples in long-distance relationships demonstrated a healthier profile characterized by lower alcohol consumption. Additionally, no significant differences in overall physical health were observed between the two groups (Puranachaikere et al., 2021). Research on long-distance marriages predominantly focused on aspects such as marital satisfaction (Afdal et al., 2022), risk

factors including susceptibility to infidelity (Silalahi et al., 2022), and potential issues related to commitment (Johnson & Moosath, 2019). Furthermore, some studies only concentrated on the role of communication technology in facilitating long-distance relationships (Nurhayati et al., 2022). There is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the influence of personal factors, such as spirituality, which individuals often rely on to navigate the challenges of long-distance marriages (Silalahi et al., 2022). Additionally, the role of technology-mediated communication in supporting the longevity of these relationships warrants further exploration. A study conducted by Silalahi et al. (2022) examined the resilience of long-distance married couples, specifically emphasizing spiritual factors and social support. However, it did not address the role of communication technology, which is a critical aspect of long-distance relationships, as these couples face unique challenges in direct interaction and communication. Additionally, the research was limited to individuals who belonged to specific religious communities, preventing broader generalizations to other groups. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the impact of spirituality and communication technology—specifically *WhatsApp*—on the maintenance of long-distance marriages.

Currently, no specific data details the number of couples engaged in long-distance marriages in Indonesia. However, data from BNP2TKI, processed by the Centre for Research, Development, and Information (PUSLITFO), indicates that between 2017 and 2019, there were 26,927 Indonesian Migrant Workers who were married (Jamil et al., 2023). According to Suryadi et al. (2022), Indonesian Migrant Workers are defined as citizens who plan to, are currently working, or have worked for wages outside Indonesia. Therefore, it can be inferred that many Indonesian Migrant Workers may be individuals who are married or in long-distance marriages. Additionally, other professions with a likelihood of resulting in long-distance marriages include members of the Indonesian National Armed Forces and Civil Servants (Safitri et al., 2020). This data suggests that long-distance marriages are relatively common in Indonesia, highlighting the importance of fostering relationship harmony and addressing the challenges posed by physical distance.

Maintaining a marriage and cultivating a resilient partnership while being physically separated presents distinct challenges. According to Qorifah et al. (2023), couples in long-distance marriages encounter several difficulties, including (1) restricted communication, which involves not only the frequency and duration of interactions but also the intention behind them, (2) feelings of longing, loneliness, and anxiety stemming from physical absence, (3) increased risk of infidelity due to the lack of proximity, (4) challenges in conflict resolution resulting from distance, (5) imbalances in household decision-making, (6) unmet sexual needs, and (7) difficulties in preserving the overall quality of the marital relationship. While conflict is a natural aspect of marriage, couples in long-distance relationships often confront more intricate challenges. The challenges of meeting each other's needs, expectations, and desires can significantly affect overall satisfaction in married life across various dimensions (Safitri et al., 2020).

Limited communication, feelings of longing, and anxiety stemming from physical absence can create challenges in conflict resolution and lead to an imbalance in household decision-making. While these issues may be addressed with effective communication, the question remains regarding fulfilling emotional and physical

intimacy in long-distance marriages. The geographical distance can complicate sexual relationships, as couples can only engage in physical intimacy when together. This limited interaction may hinder couples' ability to engage in sexual activity as often as they desire, potentially diminishing their sexual satisfaction. However, research suggests that reduced sexual enjoyment in long-distance marriages does not necessarily correlate with lower relationship satisfaction, as intimacy may hold a different significance for these couples (Bloom, 2015). Thus, it is important to consider whether alternative means of connection can effectively satisfy emotional and physical needs and ultimately strengthen the resilience of couples in long-distance relationships.

Fidelity serves as a fundamental pillar in marriage. However, despite the sanctity of this commitment, instances of infidelity can occasionally arise. Various behaviours contributing to infidelity fall along a spectrum, ranging from emotional connections facilitated by technology to the desire for sexual novelty and engagement in relationships outside the primary partnership. Key motivational factors such as emotional fulfilment, sexual exploration, and dissatisfaction within the existing relationship play a significant role in causing infidelity among couples. The ramifications of infidelity extend beyond the individuals involved, impacting both relationship dynamics and overall household well-being. Notable challenges such as communication breakdowns and unrealistic expectations can hinder effective relational engagement (Hartnett et al., 2023). Research into the potential for infidelity, particularly within long-distance marriages, remains an area of interest. Silalahi et al. (2022) identified marital satisfaction as a significant predictor of infidelity intentions alongside the influence of religiosity. Their findings suggest that both marital satisfaction and religiosity, though their effect may be modest, collectively affect the likelihood of individuals in long-distance marriages considering infidelity.

Despite the inherent challenges associated with long-distance marriages, Desiana et al. (2024) suggested that these arrangements can be advantageous for addressing economic needs and facilitating personal growth through career development. Couples in long-distance marriages often make considerable sacrifices to meet life's increasing demands. A qualitative study indicated that while these marriages may experience strain due to geographical separation, couples also find that their non-cohabiting status fosters greater interdependence (Lindemann, 2017). Research supports the notion that individuals in long-distance marriages report relationship satisfaction that is comparable to, if not better than, that of their counterparts in proximal relationships. A nationally representative study in the United States found that those in long-distance marriages indicated higher relationship quality across various domains, including relationship adjustment, affection for their partner, shared enjoyment, and the quality of their conversations, when compared to individuals in proximal relationships (Puranachaikere et al., 2021). Recent research indicates that there are no significant differences in relationship satisfaction ratings between individuals in long-distance relationships and those in proximal relationships (Du Bois et al., 2016). The success of these relationships largely depends on the couple's resilience in overcoming challenges, which includes effective conflict resolution, stress management (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and the enhancement of empathy and problem-solving skills that contribute to marital satisfaction (Puranachaikere et al., 2021). According to the theory proposed by Sanford

et al. (2016), couple resilience refers to the behaviours that enable couples to adapt and maintain their well-being during stressful life situations. This concept is also understood as the ability of couples to navigate challenges effectively (Suriyah et al., 2021).

One significant factor that can enhance resilience in long-distance marriages is the advancement of communication technology. Lubis (2021) highlighted that recent technological developments have transformed the way individuals communicate, as is evident by the emergence of various applications and tools that facilitate communication at any given time. In the context of long-distance marriages, online communication serves as a vital means for maintaining relationships and offering emotional support to couples (Muslimah et al., 2023). As a result, long-distance couples often utilize platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Zoom*, and *Skype* to stay connected, share their feelings, and address challenges (Desiana et al., 2024). Additionally, Dewi (2020) underscored that the use of communication media like *WhatsApp* is instrumental in sustaining communication and aiding in conflict resolution within long-distance relationships.

Beyond communication technology, the resilience of long-distance marriages is bolstered by a positive mindset, effective communication, adaptability in relationships, and both economic and social support (Aydogan & Ozbay, 2018). Couples who maintain positive adaptations and healthy expectations for their relationships generally experience higher levels of trust and satisfaction in their marriages (Huber et al., 2010). Furthermore, spirituality significantly contributes to promoting calmness, alleviating anxiety, and enhancing optimism (Underwood, 2011), thereby aiding couples in navigating the challenges associated with long-distance marriage (Jurjewicz, 2016).

Skerrett (2015) describes couple resilience, referred to as 'We-ness', as an essential approach for couples not only to cope with challenges in their relationship but also to resolve issues. This concept is regarded as a distinctive phenomenon in the coping process for couples. Empathy is crucial for sustaining a robust partnership. Emotional awareness and social intelligence contribute to resilience in relationships and can be measured and influenced by factors such as generosity, curiosity, healthy boundaries, and interpersonal sensitivity. As couples encounter adversity, these components can facilitate recovery and repair within the relationship. This aligns with the couple resilience theory proposed by Sanford et al. (2016), who identified a process whereby couples exhibit behaviours that enable them to adapt and maintain overall well-being in the face of stress. For some individuals, long-distance marriages may pose challenges to couple resilience, suggesting that spirituality and effective communication through platforms such as *WhatsApp* may be beneficial in enhancing the resilience of couples in long-distance marriage.

Muthohar (2014) discusses that the term 'spirituality' is derived from the Latin word 'spiritus,' which translates to 'breath.' In both Western and Eastern traditions, this concept is often associated with the breath of life. Underwood (2011) defines spirituality as a facet of personal life that encompasses an awareness of the divine or transcendent, which is integral to religious life. Additionally, spirituality may pertain to an individual's relationship with themselves, their connection to the surrounding environment or nature, and their relationship with God.

According to Dr. Christina Puchalski, director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, spirituality represents a fundamental aspect of humanity, encompassing how individuals seek and experience explicit meaning, purpose, and their connections with nature, others, meaning of life, and the sacred (Ardian, 2016). It is a multifaceted concept that includes the experiences, practices, and relationships individuals or groups cultivate with something greater than themselves, incorporating the transcendent dimensions of daily life. Spirituality involves the pursuit of life's purpose, establishing connections with nature and fellow individuals, and fostering a sense of trust in a higher power to address challenges and navigate grief. It also encompasses feelings of awe in response to the wonders of nature, the comfort and strength derived from spiritual faith, gratitude for inner peace, and a personal connection with the Almighty. Therefore, the integration of spirituality into long-distance marriages may positively impact couple resilience when faced with difficulties. *WhatsApp*, as a social media application, exemplifies the impact of the modern information technology revolution by enabling users to communicate and interact effectively across distances without incurring messaging fees, as it utilizes internet connectivity (Pranajaya & Wicaksono, 2018). Beyond simple messaging, *WhatsApp* serves as a versatile platform for sharing information, facilitating discussions, and exchanging various media types, including images, videos, and voice messages (Pranajaya & Wicaksono, 2018). Additionally, Fauzi (2017) highlights that *WhatsApp* offers user-friendly features that enhance interaction, such as reliable text messaging, free voice and video calls, and group chat capabilities. As a result, *WhatsApp* is a valuable tool for communication, information exchange, and discussion, all conducted conveniently and cost-effectively from a distance (Ningsih et al., 2022).

The *WhatsApp* application proves to be a valuable tool for enhancing digital communication and interaction. Its features, including text messaging, complimentary voice and video calls, and group chats, contribute significantly to its effectiveness in providing convenient, efficient, and cost-effective communication solutions. Consequently, *WhatsApp* is recognized not only as a platform for facilitating communication but also as a means of enriching social interactions in today's digital landscape.

This study aimed to address a gap in existing research by exploring the impact of *WhatsApp* communication and spirituality on the resilience of couples in long-distance marriages. The study proposed the following hypotheses: 1) Both spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication play a simultaneous role in predicting the resilience of long-distance marriages; 2) Spirituality has a significant positive impact on the resilience of these couples; and 3) *WhatsApp* communication also contributes positively to the resilience of long-distance marriages. The anticipated results aim to offer valuable insights for couples in long-distance marriages, as well as for practitioners who work to help such people, thereby enhancing the theoretical understanding of couple resilience within this specific demographic.

## Methods

### Participants

This study employed a quantitative research design and was conducted from May 12, 2024, to July 18, 2024. The target population included individuals engaged in long-distance marriages. A sample of 138 participants was obtained through snowball sampling and convenience sampling methods (mean age = 32.7 years; 104 females and 34 males). Two participants were disqualified due to not meeting the inclusion criteria related to the duration of their long-distance marriages (LDM). The criteria for inclusion consisted of individuals who have been married for more than one year, have been experiencing LDM for at least one year, and utilize *WhatsApp* as their primary means of communication with their partners.

### Measurement

Data on couple resilience was gathered using the Couple Resilience Inventory Scale (CRIS), Consisting of 49 items divided into two dimensions. The first dimension, Positive Behaviours, includes 44 items that reflect the couple's ability to adapt to and manage various situations (for example, "My partner and I take time to listen to each other, understand, and empathize"). The second dimension, Negative Behaviours, comprises 5 items that indicate a lack of control in life situations (for example, "My partner and I are critical, hostile, and blame each other"). The CRIS measuring instrument utilized in this study has been validated through an expert assessment process and demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of 0.98 for Positive Behaviours and 0.853 for Negative Behaviours. Developed by Sanford et al. (2016), the CRIS instrument has been adapted and translated from English to Indonesian to accommodate the language preferences of the participants. The measurement scale remains consistent, employing a Likert scale for all items, with response options ranging from 1 to 6 (1 = definitely does not happen to 6 = definitely happens, with the option to provide two or more examples).

Spirituality was assessed using the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES), comprising 16 items. Of these, 15 items gauge various spiritual experiences (e.g., seeking divine assistance during daily activities, expressing a desire for closeness to God or connection with the Divine), while the remaining item aims to invite respondents to articulate their spiritual perspective, thereby reinforcing their response to the 15 items (e.g., my partner and I assist each other in viewing situations from a positive standpoint). The DSES instrument utilized in this study has been validated through expert evaluation and demonstrates strong reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = 0.89). The Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) was originally developed by Underwood and Teresi (2002), subsequently revised by Underwood (2011), and has been re-evaluated by Parlia et al. (2018).

In this study, the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) measurement tool has been adapted and translated from English to Indonesian to align with the language preferences of the participants. The measurement scale continues to utilize a Likert scale for items 1-15, ranging from 1 to 6 (where 1 indicates 'never' and 6 indicates 'constantly'). However, the response options for item 16 have been revised from a 3-

point scale to a 6-point scale (1 = not close to 6 = very close) to enhance sensitivity and achieve a more nuanced variety of responses.

Meanwhile, we have developed a measurement instrument designed to assess *WhatsApp* communication. This instrument builds upon existing literature regarding the role of *WhatsApp* in maintaining relationships between couple, particularly among long-distance married couples (Nurhayati et al., 2022), focusing primarily on the frequency of communication. The instrument, titled "*WhatsApp* Communication," comprises 14 questions and has undergone validation through content validity testing conducted by experts in the field of social psychology. Their evaluation was aimed at ensuring the relevance of the content and identifying the attributes being measured. Furthermore, the instrument's reliability has been assessed, yielding a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.83.

The *WhatsApp* Communication measurement tool is structured around two main dimensions to assess communication. The first dimension focuses on interpersonal topics, which encompass discussions regarding feelings, expectations, and plans to enhance emotional closeness. This aligns with the significance of emotional support and communication in fostering relationship resilience (Sanford et al., 2016). Indicators within this dimension include: a. Sexual communication (e.g., my partner and I utilize *WhatsApp*'s voice call or video call features for intimate activities), b. Emotional communication (e.g., my partner and I engage attentively and respond to each other's emotional needs), c. Spiritual communication (e.g., my partner and I support one another by sharing spiritual values), and d. Motivational communication (e.g., my partner and I encourage each other through spiritual discussions). In total, there are eight items associated with this dimension.

The second dimension focuses on external topics, which include conversations about work, studies, hobbies, and current news to keep the relationship balanced. These discussions help couples stay connected to the outside world and are in line with Social Media Theory, which emphasises the role of digital communication in social interaction (Van Dijk in Setiadi, 2016). The indicators in this dimension consist of: a. Communication about family (e.g. my partner and I use *WhatsApp* to resolve conflicts or differences concerning family issues), b. Communication about work (e.g. my partner and I share details about work life and professional challenges via *WhatsApp*), c. Communication about neighbours/neighbourhood (e.g. my partner and I chat about neighbourhood dynamics via *WhatsApp*), 6 items in total. The measurement scale used a Likert scale for all items with points 1-5 (1 = never to 5 = very often).

### Analysis

Data collection was performed through a series of systematic steps, which included editing, cleaning, coding, data entry, scoring, and statistical analysis. The analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel 2019 for data organization and IBM SPSS version 25 for Windows for statistical evaluation. The analytical techniques employed in this study included classical assumption tests, followed by descriptive tests to examine the demographics of the sample. Additionally, tests of differences in couple resilience based on marital duration and long-distance marriage duration were conducted, along with Spearman Rho correlation tests, T-tests, and F-tests to validate the hypotheses.



## Findings

### Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Most participants were aged between 25 and 34 years (61.6%), with a higher representation of females (75.4%) compared to males (24.6%). A significant portion of participants identified as Muslim (92.8%) and held a bachelor's degree (57.2%). In terms of occupation, the majority were employed outside of civil service roles (79.7%). Approximately half of the participants had been married for 1 to 5 years (50%), and a notable percentage had experienced long-distance marriage (LDM) for a similar duration (68.8%). Additionally, 45.7 percent of participants had one child, and 87.7 percent reported that their partners worked in Indonesia. Finally, 51.4% of participants indicated they were living apart from their families.

Table 1. Demographic and family characteristics of respondents

| Category             | Subcategory               | N   | %    |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Age (Years)          | 20 – 24                   | 7   | 5.1  |
|                      | 25 – 29                   | 43  | 31.2 |
|                      | 30 – 34                   | 42  | 30.4 |
|                      | 35 – 39                   | 24  | 17.4 |
|                      | 40 – 44                   | 11  | 8.0  |
|                      | 45 – 49                   | 7   | 5.1  |
|                      | >50                       | 4   | 2.8  |
|                      | Total                     | 138 | 100  |
| Gender               | Male                      | 34  | 24.6 |
|                      | Female                    | 104 | 75.4 |
| Total                |                           | 138 | 100  |
| Religion             | Moslem                    | 128 | 92.8 |
|                      | Christian                 | 6   | 4.3  |
|                      | Catholic                  | 2   | 1.4  |
|                      | Hinduism                  | 2   | 1.4  |
|                      | Total                     | 138 | 100  |
| Education            | Primary Education         | 2   | 1.3  |
|                      | Secondary Education       | 1   | 0.7  |
|                      | Upper Secondary Education | 42  | 30.4 |
|                      | Bachelor's Degree (S1)    | 79  | 57.2 |
|                      | Master's Degree (S2)      | 14  | 10.1 |
|                      | Total                     | 138 | 100  |
| Occupation           | Non-Civil Servant         | 110 | 19.6 |
|                      | Civil Servant             | 27  | 79.7 |
|                      | College Student           | 1   | 0.7  |
| Total                |                           | 138 | 100  |
| Duration of Marriage | 1 – 5 Years               | 69  | 50   |
|                      | 5 – 10 Years              | 35  | 25.4 |
|                      | >10 Years                 | 34  | 24.6 |
| Total                |                           | 138 | 100  |
| Duration of LDM      | 1 – 5 Years               | 95  | 68.8 |
|                      | 5 – 10 Years              | 20  | 14.5 |
|                      | >10 Years                 | 23  | 15.7 |
| Total                |                           | 138 | 100  |

Table 1. Demographic and family characteristics of respondents (Continue)

| Category           | Subcategory    | N   | %    |
|--------------------|----------------|-----|------|
| Number of Children | 0              | 28  | 20.3 |
|                    | 1              | 63  | 45.7 |
|                    | 2              | 25  | 18.1 |
|                    | 3              | 18  | 13   |
|                    | >3             | 4   | 2.9  |
| Total              |                | 138 | 100  |
| Spouse's Location  | In Country     | 121 | 87.7 |
|                    | Overseas       | 17  | 12.3 |
| Total              |                | 138 | 100  |
| Residence          | With Family    | 67  | 87.7 |
|                    | Without Family | 71  | 12.3 |
| Total              |                | 138 | 100  |

In Table 2, the average score for positive couple resilience behaviour is 154, with a maximum value of 264, a minimum value of 44, and a standard deviation of 36.667. Conversely, the negative behaviour variable of couple resilience shows a minimum value of 5 and a maximum value of 30, with an average of 17.5 and a standard deviation of 4.1667. For the Spirituality variable, the scores ranged from a minimum of 16 to a maximum of 96, resulting in a mean of 56 and a standard deviation of 13.333. The *WhatsApp* communication variable exhibited a minimum value of 14 and a maximum value of 70, leading to a mean of 42 and a standard deviation of 9.333. This descriptive analysis effectively summarizes the research data, facilitating a clearer understanding of the findings (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012, as cited in Shadiqi, 2023).

Furthermore, to ensure the validity of the descriptively analyzed data, a classic assumption test was conducted, with particular emphasis on the normality test. The purpose of the normality test is to evaluate whether the variables in the distribution model meet the assumption of normality. According to Gravetter and Forzano (2012, as cited in Shadiqi, 2023), a dataset is considered normally distributed if the significance value from the test is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). As indicated in Table 2, the data do not conform to a normal distribution for the following variables: positive spouse resilience behaviour ( $D = 0.160$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), negative spouse resilience behaviour ( $D = 0.140$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), spirituality ( $D = 0.142$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and *WhatsApp* communication ( $D = 0.111$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings will inform the subsequent correlation analysis utilizing the Spearman rank correlation method.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and normality assessment for resilience, spirituality, and communication variables

| Variable                      | N   | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation | D     | P      |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|----------------|-------|--------|
| Positive Resilience Behaviour | 138 | 44  | 264 | 154  | 36.667         | 0.160 | <0.001 |
| Negative Resilience Behaviour | 138 | 5   | 30  | 17.5 | 4.1667         | 0.140 | <0.001 |
| Spirituality                  | 138 | 16  | 96  | 56   | 13.333         | 0.142 | <0.001 |
| <i>WhatsApp</i> Communication | 138 | 14  | 70  | 42   | 9.333          | 0.111 | <0.001 |

A Test of Difference is performed to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between groups on a particular variable. In this study, due to the non-normal distribution of the data, the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric analysis was utilized to compare multiple groups. Differences were deemed significant when the significance value was  $(p) < 0.05$ .

Table 3 indicates that there are no significant differences in positive resilience behaviours among couples based on the length of their marriage,  $\chi^2 (2) = 4.232$ ,  $p = 0.120$ , nor based on the duration of their long-distance marriage (LDM),  $\chi^2 (2) = 1.354$ ,  $p = 0.508$ . In contrast, significant differences were observed in negative resilience behaviours among couples. Specifically, the length of marriage demonstrated a significant association with negative resilience behaviours,  $\chi^2 (2) = 11.709$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , with median values of 9.00 for marriages lasting 1-5 years, 10.00 for those lasting 5-10 years, and 15.00 for marriages exceeding 10 years. Similarly, the length of LDM also showed significant differences,  $\chi^2 (2) = 7.558$ ,  $p = 0.023$ , with median values of 9.00 for relationships lasting 1-5 years, 10.50 for relationships lasting 5-10 years, and 14.00 for relationships lasting more than 10 years.

Furthermore, the variable of spirituality exhibited significant variances based on the duration of marriage,  $\chi^2 (2) = 8.113$ ,  $p = 0.017$ , with median scores of 82.00 for those married for 1-5 years, 85.00 for 5-10 years, and 79.00 for over 10 years. Similarly, significant differences were observed in relation to the length of Long-Distance Marriages (LDM),  $\chi^2 (2) = 6.360$ ,  $p = 0.042$ , with median scores of 83.00 for 1-5 years, 86.50 for 5-10 years, and 77.00 for over 10 years.

The analysis of *WhatsApp* communication revealed notable differences associated with the length of marriage,  $\chi^2 (2) = 13.548$ ,  $p = .001$ , with median values of 53.00 for couples married for 1-5 years, 54.00 for those married for 5-10 years, and 47.50 for those married for over 10 years. Additionally, differences were observed based on the duration of long-distance relationships (LDM),  $\chi^2 (2) = 11.278$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , with median values of 53.00 for 1-5 years, 54.00 for 5-10 years, and 47.00 for over 10 years. These findings indicate that couples with longer marriages or extended periods of long-distance relationships may exhibit more negative resilience behaviours and communicate less frequently via *WhatsApp*.

Table 3. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test, including post hoc analysis and median values for each variable categorized by duration of marriage and length of long-distance marriage

| Variable                      | Demographics         | Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) | P     | Post Hoc Comparison       | 1-5 Years | 5-10 Years | >10 Years |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Positive Resilience Behaviour | Duration of Marriage | 4.232                   | 0.120 | No Significant Difference | 237,00    | 236,00     | 221.50    |
|                               | Duration of LDM      | 1.354                   | 0.508 | No Significant Difference | 236,00    | 243.50     | 220.000   |

Table 3. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test, including post hoc analysis and median values for each variable categorized by duration of marriage and length of long-distance marriage (Continue)

| Variable                      | Demographics         |    | Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) | P      | Post Hoc Comparison   | 1-5 Years | 5-10 Years | >10 Years |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----|-------------------------|--------|---|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Negative Resilience Behaviour | Duration of Marriage | of | 11.709                  | 0.003* | There is a significant difference >10 years > 1-5 years (p= .002)   | 9.00      | 10.00      | 15.00     |
|                               | Duration of LDM      |    | 7.558                   | 0.023* | There is a significant difference >10 years > 1-5 years (p = 0.018) | 9.00      | 10.50      | 14.00     |
| Spirituality                  | Duration of Marriage | of | 8.113                   | 0.017* | No significant post hoc differences                                 | 82.00     | 85.000     | 79.000    |
|                               | Duration of LDM      |    | 6.360                   | 0.042* | No significant post hoc differences                                 | 83.00     | 86.50      | 77.00     |
| WhatsApp Communication        | Duration of Marriage | of | 13.548                  | 0.001* | No significant post hoc differences                                 | 53.00     | 54.00      | 47.50     |
|                               | Duration of LDM      |    | 11.278                  | 0.004* | No significant post hoc differences                                 | 53.00     | 54.00      | 47.00     |

Note. (\*) significant at  $p < 0.05$

### Post Hoc Analysis

Due to the identification of significant differences in certain variables, post hoc analyses were performed utilizing Bonferroni correction. The findings indicated that couples married for over 10 years exhibited significantly greater negative resilience behaviours compared to those married for 1-5 years ( $p = 0.002$ ). Similarly, couples in LDM for more than 10 years demonstrated significantly higher negative resilience compared to those in LDM for 1-5 years ( $p = 0.018$ ). No significant differences were observed between the 5–10-year age group and the other groups.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of negative resilience behaviours concerning the duration of LDM. The box plot indicates that couples in LDM for over 10 years tend to exhibit elevated negative resilience scores compared to other groups. This observation implies that as the duration of a long-distance relationship increases, couples may encounter a heightened level of stress and conflict.

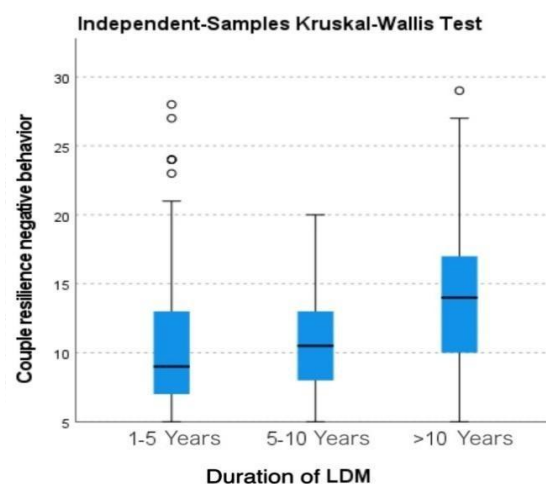


Figure 1. Boxplot of Kruskal-Wallis test results: negative resilience based on LDM duration

Figure 2 illustrates the pairwise comparisons of negative resilience behaviours across different categories of LDM duration. The post hoc analysis revealed that couples who had been in a long-distance marriage for more than 10 years exhibited significantly higher levels of negative resilience compared to those in LDM for 1 to 5 years ( $p = 0.018$ ). However, no significant differences were found between the 5 to 10-year group and the other segments, suggesting that the level of negative resilience in this group falls between that of the other two categories without substantial variation.

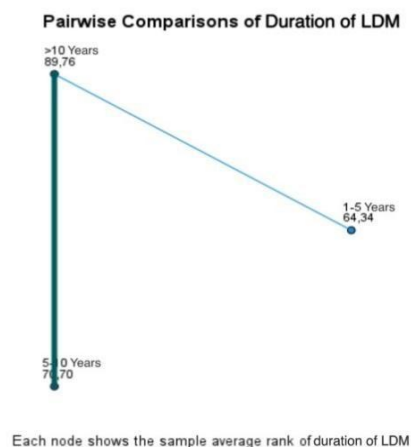


Figure 2. Pairwise Comparison of LDM Duration: Negative Resilience

### Hypothesis Test Results

This study provides strong evidence supporting the hypothesis that both spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication play significant roles in predicting couple resilience in long-distance marriages. Additionally, it highlights that spirituality has a

substantial positive effect on couple resilience, as does *WhatsApp* communication when analysed separately.

The results of the Spearman Rho correlation test indicated a significant relationship between spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication in relation to couples' resilience behaviour. As presented in Table 4, spirituality demonstrates a positive correlation with positive resilience behaviours among couples ( $r = 0.422$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and a negative correlation with negative resilience behaviours ( $r = -0.299$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Similarly, *WhatsApp* communication shows a positive correlation with positive resilience behaviours ( $r = 0.489$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and a negative correlation with negative resilience behaviours ( $r = -0.442$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that there is a moderate to low correlation, indicating that increased spirituality and more intense communication via *WhatsApp* are associated with higher positive resilience behaviours and lower negative resilience behaviours among couples.

Table 4. Spearman rho correlation hypothesis test of variables

| Variable X             | Variable Y                    | p-value | R        |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Spirituality           | Positive Resilience Behaviour | 0.001   | 0.422*   |
| WhatsApp Communication | Positive Resilience Behaviour | 0.001   | 0.489*   |
| Spirituality           | Negative Resilience Behaviour | 0.001   | -0.299** |
| WhatsApp Communication | Negative Resilience Behaviour | 0.001   | -0.442** |

Note. (\*) Medium correlation if  $.40 \leq |r| < .60$ ; (\*\*) low correlation if  $.20 \leq |r| < .40$ . The direction of correlation is positive if  $r > 0$ , and negative if  $r < 0$ .

Table 5 indicates that the combined influence of the two independent variables—spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication—on the dependent variable of couple resilience accounts for 28.6%. The remaining 71.4% is attributed to variables that were not included in this research model. The results of the simultaneous regression analysis presented in Table 5 reveal an F-value of  $F(\text{count}) (2.136) = 27.096$ , which surpasses the F-table value, with a p-value of less than 0.001. This suggests that spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication have a significant combined impact on couple resilience.

Table 5. Summary of the model and f test regarding the impact of spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication on couple resilience

| Model | R     | R-Squared | Adjusted R-Squared | Standard Error of the Estimate | F      | p-value |
|-------|-------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------|---------|
| 1     | 0.535 | 0.286     | 0.276              | 29.741                         | 27.096 | 0.000** |

Note. (\*) Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*) Significant at  $p < 0.001$

The influence of each variable on couple resilience is as follows: spirituality has a beta coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $t (185) = 2.021$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while *WhatsApp* communication demonstrates a greater impact with a beta coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.439$ ,  $t (185) = 5.376$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that *WhatsApp* communication plays a more significant role in enhancing couple resilience compared to spirituality, as detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. The impact of spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication on couple resilience

| Model                         | Unstandardized Coefficient | Standard Error | Standardized Coefficient | t-value | p-value |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| (Constant)                    | 101.164                    | 20.374         |                          | 4.965   | 0.000   |
| Spirituality                  | 0,052                      | 0.261          | 0,165                    | 2.021   | 0,045*  |
| <i>WhatsApp</i> Communication | 1.828                      | 0.340          | 0.439                    | 5.376   | 0,000** |

Note. (\*) Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*) Significant at  $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the influence of spirituality and communication via *WhatsApp* in predicting the resilience of couples navigating long-distance marriages (LDM). The findings indicate that both spirituality and *WhatsApp* communication significantly contribute to predicting the resilience of LDM couples, both collectively and independently. *WhatsApp* communication demonstrated a substantial correlation with positive resilience behaviour, including openness and support within relationships. It also contributed to the reduction of negative behaviours, such as withdrawal and conflict avoidance. Similarly, spirituality was linked to enhanced positive resilience behaviour, enabling couples to approach conflicts with greater patience and collaboratively seek solutions while also diminishing negative behavioural tendencies in managing relationship challenges. These findings corroborate and strengthen earlier research on the significance of information technology in facilitating communication during long-distance marriages (Nurhayati et al., 2022; Hampton et al., 2018) and align with previous studies emphasizing the role of spirituality in such relationships (Rauer & Volling, 2015). Geographical distance, which is anticipated to impact the effectiveness of communication in long-distance marriages, can be somewhat mitigated using technology, particularly *WhatsApp*. Research conducted by Zebua and Kartikawati (2023) suggests that dialectical relationships can be enhanced through computer-mediated communication and, in this case, via *WhatsApp*.

The availability of communication technology, such as *WhatsApp*, enables married couples to maintain connections and engage in interpersonal communication despite physical separation. Research conducted by Hampton et al. (2018), Sulfitri et al. (2023), and Nurhayati et al. (2022) indicated that active communication via instant messaging can enhance relationship satisfaction and facilitate conflict resolution. Moreover, spirituality, as a personal factor, contributes to the resilience of couples by fostering inner peace and enhancing emotional strength in navigating relationship challenges (Underwood, 2011; Rauer & Volling, 2015).

Interpersonal communication plays a significant role in the resilience of couples in long-distance marriages, often surpassing personal factors such as individual spirituality, as demonstrated in this study. This aligns with existing research on marital resilience in long-distance circumstances, which suggests that effective communication can enhance marital commitment (Akbar, 2023) and foster trust between partners (Ulviani et al., 2024). The physical distance between couple can lead to increased feelings of anxiety, worry, and jealousy due to the lack of direct interaction (Joshi, 2021). Furthermore, the frequency, duration, and variety of topics discussed through messaging platforms, such as *WhatsApp*, can compensate for the quality time spent together, providing emotional

support and addressing household challenges (Pasaribu & Arjadi, 2023). It is important to note that this finding contrasts with the research conducted by Savitri & Hidayati (2019), which suggests that religiosity plays a role in the relationship between intimate communication and marital satisfaction, particularly in the context of ta'aruf, a process focused on getting to know someone with the intention of marriage.

In a marriage, personal factors such as spirituality play a significant role. However, effective interpersonal communication appears to be an even more critical factor in supporting couples, particularly those facing the challenges of long-distance relationships for various reasons. Individuals with a strong sense of spirituality often recognize a power greater than themselves and their partner (Ardian, 2016). This foundational belief can facilitate a more positive interpretation of the challenges that arise in long-distance marriages, allowing individuals to draw wisdom from those difficulties (Maskhor & Baharudin, 2018). Furthermore, a strong spiritual foundation can promote calmness when addressing personal issues, differences of opinion, or miscommunications that may arise due to geographical distance (Holland et al., 2016; Underwood, 2011). Another important aspect of spirituality in marriage is the concept of spiritual consensus. Rauer and Volling (2015) highlight that spiritual consensus and relational spirituality, as a general approach to religion, are vital in marriage. Therefore, it becomes clear that communication plays a crucial role in the resilience of married couples living apart, as expressing differences, expectations, and spiritual ideals necessitates strong communication skills.

Additionally, the difference test results indicated that the duration of long-distance marriage (LDM) significantly affects the resilience towards negative behaviours. Couples who have been in an LDM for over ten years face greater challenges in maintaining relationship stability, which may result in increased stress and conflict. However, no significant differences were identified between couples in LDM for five to ten years and those in other categories, suggesting the presence of a transitional phase prior to the emergence of more substantial effects associated with longer LDM durations. These findings emphasize that the psychological effects of LDM duration may be more pronounced than the length of the marriage itself. Specifically, couples in a long-distance marriage for over ten years demonstrated greater resilience to negative behaviours compared to those who had been in an LDM for one to five years. This aligns with the research conducted by Levenson et al. (1993), which studied couples in traditional marriages of long duration rather than those in long-distance arrangements. The study indicates that long-term marriages tend to experience fewer conflicts compared to newly established ones; however, communication problems frequently arise in both contexts. Long-distance marriages face significant challenges in communication due to geographical separation, which increases the likelihood of miscommunication. Therefore, it is evident that communication technology can play a vital role in enhancing the resilience of long-distance marriages by enabling couples to maintain emotional connections despite physical distances. Research conducted by Hampton et al. (2018), Sulfitri et al. (2023), and Nurhayati et al. (2022) demonstrates that frequent communication through instant messaging can lead to higher relationship satisfaction and facilitate conflict resolution. Furthermore, spirituality contributes to the



resilience of couples by fostering inner peace and strengthening emotional fortitude when confronted with relational challenges (Underwood, 2011).

For married couples navigating long-distance relationships, effective communication serves as a critical component in fostering connection and understanding. Rauer and Volling (2015) emphasize that high-quality communication enables couples to articulate their feelings, address conflicts, and fortify their emotional connections. Research indicates that couples who engage in positive communication typically experience more stable and satisfying relationships. Additionally, previous studies have demonstrated that spirituality can play a significant role in alleviating anxiety and enhancing optimism (Underwood, 2011), thereby equipping couples to better manage the unique challenges associated with long-distance marriage (Jimenez, 2010). Furthermore, communication platforms such as *WhatsApp* have been found to facilitate the maintenance of relationships and the provision of emotional support (Muslimah et al., 2023), as well as assist in conflict resolution within long-distance partnerships (Dewi, 2020).

This study acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, it does not consider various individual and contextual factors that may affect the resilience of long-distance marriage (LDM) couples, such as social support from extended family, levels of trust, economic conditions, physical health related to travel activities, and other personal attributes beyond spirituality and measures to deter infidelity. Secondly, the study does not differentiate between the impacts of various types of *WhatsApp* communication (text, voice, or video calls), which may have varying effects on couple resilience. Additionally, the factor of geographical distance was not examined in depth, despite its potential influence on the quality of communication and relationship dynamics. From a methodological perspective, future research could benefit from utilizing qualitative or mixed methods to gain further insights into the dynamics of relationships in long-distance marriages.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

### Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that spirituality and communication via *WhatsApp* significantly contribute to resilience in long-distance marriage (LDM) couples. Effective communication fosters emotional connectedness and aids in conflict resolution, while personal attributes, such as spirituality, offer inner peace and meaning within these relationships. Notably, the variable of *WhatsApp* communication appears to be more influential than the personal factor of spirituality. The practical implications of these results highlight the importance for LDM couples to leverage communication technology effectively. It is essential to cultivate openness and honesty in digital interactions, ensuring that communication is not only frequent but also intimate, relaxed, and purpose driven. Furthermore, enhancing shared spirituality through reflection or engaging in religious activities could serve as a valuable strategy to bolster relationship resilience. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the existing literature on relationship psychology by confirming that the resilience theory applicable to couples is relevant within the context of long-distance marriages. Additionally, it

supports communication theories in long-distance relationships, emphasizing the critical role technology plays in sustaining intimacy between partners.

### Recommendation

The implication of this study highlights the critical importance of strong and effective communication in fostering resilience among couples in long-distance marriages. Additionally, there is a need for ongoing personal development, including the enhancement of spiritual qualities. It is essential to carefully consider the duration of a long-distance marriage and to establish a clear goal for reunification, as prolonged separations may diminish the resilience of these couples over time. Future research should aim to incorporate additional variables such as social support from extended family, levels of trust, and economic conditions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the resilience of long-distance marriage (LDM) couples. It is also important to examine potential risk factors associated with long-distance marriages, including the risk of infidelity, health issues arising from frequent travel, and the likelihood of transitioning to cohabitation or concluding the long-distance marriage arrangement. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the specific effects of various forms of communication—such as chat, voice calls, video calls, voice notes, and video messages—on the resilience of LDM couples. There is also merit in exploring how different aspects of spirituality and other personal qualities can contribute to maintaining resilience in long-distance marriages. Lastly, research should take into consideration the impact of geographical distance on the resilience of couples engaged in long-distance relationships.

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