



The Meaning of Success Among Single Career Women Aged 30–40: an Indonesian Indigenous Psychology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is witnessing a growing number of single, career-oriented women aged 30–40, particularly in urban areas. They continue to face social pressure rooted in collectivistic and patriarchal values equating women's success with marriage and motherhood. This study aims to explore how single career women construct and interpret the meaning of success from an indigenous Indonesian psychology perspective. A qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed with three purposively selected participants representing variation in ethnicity, religion, and career field. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews and daily reflective diaries. Findings reveal that the meaning of success shifted from a material and achievement-oriented definition toward a process-based orientation centered on small, daily, gratitude-laden experiences, inner peace, and consistency in upholding spiritual values rooted in local wisdom and religiosity. These findings affirm the relevance of an indigenous psychology approach in understanding success as inseparable from religiosity, family values, social relations, and local cultural wisdom, contributing to culturally sensitive psychological practice and challenging the stigma attached to unmarried career women in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Meaning of Success; Single Career Women; Indigenous Psychology; Social Stigma; Religiosity.*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently undergoing a significant demographic transformation, one indication of which is the increasing number of early-adult women who remain unmarried. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2023), the percentage of single women aged 30 to 34 in urban areas reached 18.7%, while those aged 35 to 39 accounted for approximately 9.4%. This figure indicates a steady increase from previous years. This trend is particularly pronounced among

women with higher education degrees and professional careers. This phenomenon can no longer be regarded as a social anomaly, but rather as an increasingly common reality within modern Indonesian society.

Given that Indonesian society remains deeply attached to collectivistic and patriarchal values, single women above the age of 30 often face layered social pressure. This pressure comes from extended family members, social environments that associate adult women with the roles of wife and mother, and religious norms that position marriage as a developmental task expected to be fulfilled by a certain age. A gap therefore emerges between the forms of success achieved by career-oriented single women and the way society defines success. On the one hand, these women may possess financial independence, professional positions, and a high degree of life autonomy. On the other hand, they are still often perceived as “not yet successful” simply because they have not fulfilled dominant social expectations related to marriage and motherhood. This phenomenon raises a fundamental question: how do career-oriented single women in Indonesia construct and interpret the meaning of success in their lives?

Ideally, an individual’s success should be understood holistically and contextually, rather than measured solely by a single dimension of life. From a developmental psychology perspective, Erikson (1963) proposed that the developmental task of early adulthood is the achievement of intimacy versus isolation, which need not always take the form of formal marriage. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) asserts that psychological well-being depends on the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs do not require marital status. From a positive psychology perspective, Seligman (2011), through the PERMA model, asserts that true success is multidimensional and personal in nature. Every individual has the right to define their own success based on their value system, life experiences, and surrounding cultural context, without having to conform to a single standard imported from elsewhere.

However, existing theories on the meaning of success are largely rooted in Western individualistic psychology, which tends to overlook the collective, spiritual, and relational dimensions embedded in Indonesian culture. The concept of success used in Western research is heavily influenced by individualistic values, achievement orientation, and material measures that are not necessarily relevant to Indonesian women. In Javanese culture, for instance, the concepts of “*nrimo ing pandum*” (accepting with sincerity whatever has been given) and “*rasa amongroso*” (sensing the condition of others) represent important psychological dimensions that are not captured by standard success measurement scales.

In Indonesia, previous research on single women has largely focused on negative aspects, such as stress resulting from social pressure to marry (Amalia, 2017), romantic loneliness (Marfuatunnisa et al., 2023), and psychological well-being from a mainstream psychological perspective (Putri & Hartini, 2022; Listy & Dwatra, 2025). However, studies examining how career-oriented single women construct the meaning of success from the perspective of Indonesian indigenous psychology remain limited. This indicates a need for a more culturally grounded exploration of how single career women interpret success within Indonesia’s social, spiritual, and relational context.

The indigenous psychology approach (Kim & Berry, 1993) asserts that psychology should examine human thought and behavior within their ecological, historical, and

cultural contexts. As a country rich in ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, Indonesia offers a distinctive perspective on success that can become a valuable scientific resource when explored systematically. As Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) emphasize, each culture must be understood from within its own frame of reference.

Based on the complexity of the phenomenon and the theoretical framework, the researchers were motivated to conduct an in-depth study on the meaning of success among single career women aged 30–40 from an Indonesian indigenous psychology perspective. This study aims to explore how single career women aged 30–40 in Indonesia construct and interpret the meaning of success from the perspective of Indigenous psychology, focusing on how cultural, spiritual, and relational values shape their subjective understanding of success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Meaning of Success

Success is one of the most widely discussed psychological constructs, yet it remains difficult to define universally. Locke and Latham's (2002) Goal-Setting Theory conceptualizes success as the outcome of setting and achieving specific, challenging goals. From a humanistic perspective, Maslow viewed success as self-actualization, or the process through which individuals realize their highest potential. For the present study, however, Meaning-Making Theory (Park, 2010) offers a more relevant framework because it explains how individuals cognitively and emotionally integrates life experiences into a broader system of meaning. Park distinguishes between global meaning, which refers to general belief systems and life goals, and situational meaning, which emerges in response to events or experiences. In the context of single career women, success can therefore be understood as a dynamic meaning-making process through which women continuously negotiate their achievements, identities, and social expectations within specific cultural contexts.

Dimensions of the Meaning of Success

Various researchers have attempted to identify the dimensions that constitute the meaning of success. Ryff (1989), through the Psychological Well-Being model, identified six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This model is more comprehensive than definitions of success based solely on achievement.

Seligman (2011), through the PERMA model, proposed five elements: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Both models position meaningful relationships and purpose as equally important to material achievement, making them particularly relevant to single career women in Indonesia who often have rich relational lives beyond the framework of marriage. More recent studies have further emphasized that subjective well-being in collectivistic cultures is closely tied to social harmony and relational fulfillment (Lestari, 2013; Putri et al., 2012).

Indonesian Indigenous Psychology

In Indonesia, single women aged 30 and above remain heavily stigmatized. Terms such as 'old maid' or 'lonely' are frequently attached to single women, reflecting the strength of social norms positioning marriage and motherhood as a woman's highest

achievement (Prasetyaningrum, 2007). This social construction is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system that remains dominant across many layers of Indonesian society, including economically advanced urban communities.

Indigenous psychology emerged as a critical response to the dominance of Western psychology, which is considered inadequate in capturing the psychological uniqueness of non-Western peoples. Kim and Berry (1993) define indigenous psychology as the scientific study of human behavior and mentality that is native, not transplanted from other regions, and designed for the society that is the subject of the research. This approach rejects the assumption of universality in mainstream psychological theories and encourages the development of conceptual frameworks rooted in local cultural contexts.

Epistemologically, indigenous psychology proceeds from the premise that psychological knowledge is contextual and inseparable from the ecology, history, and cultural value systems in which it develops. Kim, Yang, and Hwang (2006) identified ten characteristics of indigenous psychology, including an emphasis on studying psychological phenomena within their ecological, historical, and cultural context; the integration of contextualist and universalist perspectives; and the use of local philosophical and religious texts as sources for explaining psychological phenomena.

In Indonesia, the development of indigenous psychology gained important momentum with the establishment of the Center for Indigenous and Cultural Psychology (CICP) at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Research has explored local psychological concepts such as "*rukun*" (harmony) (Lestari, 2013), "*ngemong*" or protective nurturing (Hakim et al., 2012), happiness from a Javanese perspective (Muslih & Erawati, 2025), and sadness within Indonesian society (Putri et al., 2012). Ranimpi, Hyde, and Oprescu (2023) further emphasized the importance of culturally appropriate mental health services rooted in indigenous frameworks. However, the construct of the meaning of success among career-oriented single women has not been explored from this perspective.

The strong value of cooperation (*gotong royong*) and communal connectedness within Indonesian culture means that success is often understood relationally. In this context, success is not measured solely by individual achievement, but also by the extent to which one's accomplishments contribute to the well-being of family and community. A single career woman who has achieved financial success but does not have a husband or children may experience cognitive dissonance between her individual achievements and society's relational expectations of success.

Relevant Previous Research

Several prior studies provide an empirical foundation for this research. Putri and Hartini (2022) examined differences in psychological well-being between voluntary and involuntary singlehood among 74 early adult women and found no significant difference between the two groups. This finding indicates that singlehood status, whether voluntary or involuntary, does not necessarily determine women's psychological well-being. However, the study was limited to women aged 20–25 and did not specifically address single women aged 30–40 who had established careers and more firmly developed personal value systems.

Listy and Dwatra (2025) examined the relationship between social stigma and psychological well-being among single Minangkabau women. Their study contributed to understanding how cultural stigma affects the psychological condition of single women. However, its focus remained on the impact of stigma rather than on how women actively construct personal meanings of success in relation to culture, spirituality, career, and family expectations.

Previous studies have provided important insights into the psychological condition of single women in Indonesia, particularly in relation to stigma, loneliness, and well-being. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to the subjective meaning-making process through which single career women define success within Indonesia's cultural and relational context. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how single career women aged 30–40 construct the meaning of success from an Indonesian Indigenous Psychology perspective.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the consideration that this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective meaning of participant's lived experiences, rather than to measure or test statistical relationships between variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). IPA was chosen as it focuses on how individuals make sense of personally significant life experiences, providing sufficient space for participants to express their unique value systems and cultural constructions, while also allowing the researcher to conduct theoretically and culturally rich interpretation.

Participants

Three participants were purposively selected using a maximum variation sampling strategy. The inclusion criteria were: (a) aged 30–40 years; (b) single (never married); (c) actively engaged in a professional career; (d) residing in an urban area in Indonesia; and (e) willing to participate voluntarily. Participants were recruited through professional networks and snowball sampling. Initial contact was made via email or messaging applications, followed by a brief screening call to confirm eligibility and provide an overview of the study. The three participants represented variation in ethnicity (Palu NTT, Javanese, Chinese Indonesian), religion (Catholic, Islam), and career field (teacher, lecturer, entrepreneur). This variation was important for exploring how differing cultural factors influence the construction of the meaning of success.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for psychological research involving human participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and reflective daily journals. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they offer a balance between sufficient direction to maintain the research focus and adequate

flexibility for participants to express their unique experiences and perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). The interviews focused on exploring participants' general life and career experiences, allowing narratives about success to emerge naturally. The reflective journal served as a data triangulation technique while also helping participants enter the interview session with more mature reflection.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to complete a reflective journal for 3–5 days, guided by open-ended prompts encouraging reflection on moments when they felt 'successful' and moments when they questioned their own measures of success. The reflective journal prompts included:

- a) "Describe a recent moment when you felt successful. What happened, and how did you feel?"
- b) "Have you ever questioned your own definition of success? When and why did that happen?"
- c) "Think of a day when you felt you had accomplished something meaningful – what made that day different?"
- d) "Reflect on a challenge you faced today. How did you respond, and what does that say about what you value?"
- e) "Write about someone you admire. What about their life or achievements do you consider successful?"

Participants were encouraged to write freely without restrictions on length or format. These reflections served as an entry point for subsequent interviews. The semi-structured interview guide explored several broad domains, including: (1) participants' life and career trajectory; (2) definitions and experiences of success; (3) challenges and pressures related to singlehood; (4) the role of spirituality and cultural values; and (5) sources of meaning and fulfillment. The key interview questions included:

1. "How would you define success in your own words?"
2. "Can you describe a recent moment when you genuinely felt successful?"
3. "How have cultural, family, or spiritual values shaped your understanding of success?"
4. "What aspects of life determine whether you consider yourself successful (e.g., career, relationships, spirituality, finances)?"

Follow-up probes were used to explore participants' emotions, meanings, and contextual experiences in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was conducted in a setting chosen by the participant. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IPA following the six-stage procedure outlined by Smith et al. (2009): (1) reading and re-reading transcripts to achieve immersion in the data; (2) initial noting of linguistic, descriptive, and conceptual features; (3) developing emergent themes by clustering notes and identifying patterns; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes within each participant; (5) moving to the next participant's case and repeating stages 1–4; and (6) looking for patterns across all cases to identify

superordinate themes. Journal data were analyzed separately before being integrated with interview data to enrich and triangulate the findings.

Throughout the analytic process, participant quotations were systematically linked to initial notes, emergent themes, and superordinate themes to maintain transparency and consistency in interpretation.

Table 1. Illustration of the IPA Analytic Process: From Verbatim Quotation to Superordinate Theme

Participant	Verbatim Quotation	Initial Noting	Emergent Theme	Superordinate Theme
Y	"Dulu sukses itu kalau dapat satu tujuan besar langsung..."	Shift from outcome-focused to process-focused	Redefining success through daily process	Shifting Meaning of Success
Y	"Hari ini aku berhasil mengontrol emosi..."	Emotional regulation framed as achievement	Self-regulation as hidden success	Self-Regulation and Resilience
R	"Berhasil itu damai..."	Success associated with absence of suffering	Success as inner peace	Spirituality and Local Wisdom
R	"Ada sodara bilang 'kamu jangan terlena ya...'"	Independence generates stigma	Independence as ambivalent resource	Independence and Ambivalence
N	"Rasanya seneng banget bisa bikin orang lain seneng..."	Others' happiness as greater reward	Other-oriented success	Contributing to Others
N	"Nikah itu bukan tujuan hidup..."	Rejection of marriage as benchmark	Resisting social expectations	Negotiating Singlehood

RESULTS

The participants consisted of three single women of different religions and ethnic backgrounds (Table 2). Regarding educational background, N holds a bachelor's degree, while Y and R hold master's degrees. The three participants had different employment statuses: Y is an elementary school teacher, R is an undergraduate lecturer, and N is an entrepreneur.

Table 2. Participant Profile

Initial Name	Age	Occupation	Ethnicity	Religion	Education
Y	31	Teacher	Palue, NTT	Catholic	Master's Degree
R	30	Lecturer	Javanese	Islam	Master's Degree
N	37	Entrepreneur	Chinese Indonesian	Catholic	Bachelor's Degree

Theme 1: Shifting Meaning of Success – From Major Achievements to Daily Process

The interview and diary data from the three participants revealed a consistent shift in the meaning of success, from an orientation toward major achievements to a process-based understanding centered on small daily steps and personal growth.

Y stated, “Dulu sukses itu kalau dapat satu tujuan besar langsung. Tapi itu malah bikin stres. Sekarang aku sadar, penting untuk memecah tujuan besar menjadi langkah-langkah harian” [“Previously, success meant achieving one major goal directly. However, this often-caused stress. I now realize the importance of breaking major goals into daily steps”]. This pattern was reflected in her diary entries. On Day 1, she described successfully making flower props for a talent show after two failed attempts. On Day 4, she completed all her students’ assignment corrections after a two-week delay caused by emotional pressure.

R also described a shift in her definition of success, from a material- and status-based orientation, such as becoming a doctor or owning a large house, toward inner peace and gratitude. She stated, “Berhasil dulunya: dokter itu kaya, jalan-jalan ke luar negeri, punya rumah yang bagus besar... sekarang berhasil itu damai” [“Previously, success meant becoming a wealthy doctor, traveling abroad, and owning a large, beautiful house. Now, success means peace”]. This shift was closely related to her experience of failing for three years to gain admission to medical school. In her diary, R described success as something accumulated gradually through the completion of daily responsibilities, indicating a gradual redefinition of personal achievement.

Similarly, N stated that her definition of success had changed from “working according to one’s hobbies and personal desires” to a condition in which “money works” for her, with gratitude serving as a central value. She explained, “Dulu berhasil itu kita kerja sesuai sama hobi, sesuai kemauan kita... sekarang ‘uang bekerja buat aku’” [“Previously, success meant working according to one’s hobbies and personal desires. Now, it means that money works for me”]. This pattern was evident in her diary when she successfully completed a delayed insurance invoice on Day 2 and finished household chores before the deadline, she had set for herself on Day 3.

Theme 2: Spirituality as a Framework for Making Meaning of Success

All three participants indicated that spiritual and religious values served as important frameworks in constructing the meaning of success, despite their different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Y described her ethnic group's philosophy of interconnectedness with nature. She stated, "Kalo kita sudah berusaha semaksimal mungkin, pasti ada kekuatan yang lebih besar yang bantu" ["If we have made our best effort, a greater force will surely help us"]. She further explained that this belief was rooted in her parents' teaching: "Mama papa selalu bilang hidup sama alam saling terhubung, jadi ga perlu terlalu ngoyo... bisanya apa lakukan dulu, lakukan yang terbaik, nanti alam yang akan mengerjakan sisanya" ["My parents always said that life and nature are interconnected, so there is no need to force everything. Do what you can, do your best, and nature will take care of the rest"]. This belief was also reflected in her diary entry on Day 3, when she initially felt reluctant to attend church but eventually went after feeling uneasy and guilty.

R explained that disciplined worship practices, such as performing obligatory prayers on time and observing optional (*sunnah*) prayers, were closely connected to order and discipline in other aspects of life. She also interpreted life's difficulties as God's reminder to remain grateful. She stated, "Di Islam ga boleh terlalu bahagia, terlena dengan duniawi... diingatkan untuk banyak bersyukur, sehingga bisa mencapai perasaan damai... hidup itu juga ujian, tidak lepas dari ujian" ["In Islam, one should not become overly attached to worldly happiness. We are reminded to be grateful so that we can attain a sense of peace. Life itself is also a test and cannot be separated from trials"].

N described experiences of "answered prayers," including unexpected financial assistance during critical moments, such as when she needed funds to pay employee salaries. She also shared another example: "Contoh simple, duh aku pingin ke BK, cek mahal e tiket ini... doh Tuhan kok aku pingin ke BK... eh terus kejawab minggu depan e bawa tour ke BK. Ini pasti campur tangan e Tuhan" ["A simple example was when I wanted to go to Bangkok, but the ticket was expensive. I prayed, 'God, I really want to go to Bangkok,' and the following week I was assigned to lead a tour there. I believe this was God's intervention"]. These findings show that the participants' understanding of success cannot be separated from their religious beliefs, cultural values, and spiritual interpretations of everyday life.

Theme 3: Success as Self-Regulation and Resilience Under Pressure

The participants' daily journals indicate that success was interpreted not only through work outcomes, but also through self-regulation and resilience in responding to pressure. For Y, success was reflected in her ability to manage emotions when facing a challenging work situation. In her Day 2 diary, she wrote, "Hari ini aku berhasil mengontrol emosi, meskipun harus berurusan dengan atasan yang micromanaging. Akhirnya pulang dalam keadaan capek, tapi setidaknya aku bisa mengendalikan diri" ["Today, I succeeded in controlling my emotions, even though I had to deal with a micromanaging supervisor. I went home exhausted, but at least I was able to control myself"].

A similar pattern appeared in R's diary. Although she felt irritated by additional work demands, she still considered herself successful because she was able to complete her responsibilities. She wrote, "Meskipun kesel, tetap dikerjakan... itu namanya berhasil untuk hari ini" ["Even though I was annoyed, I still completed the task. That counted as success for today"]. N also interpreted success through her ability to resolve work-related pressure. In her Day 1 diary, she wrote, "Awalnya stress banget, invoice salah terus... tapi setelah beres, rasanya lega. Itu juga keberhasilan" ["At first, I was very

stressed because the invoice kept being incorrect. However, after the problem was resolved, I felt relieved. That was also a form of success"]. These findings suggest that, for the participants, success was not limited to visible achievements but also included the internal ability to remain composed, fulfill responsibilities, and recover from stressful situations.

Theme 4: Success and Meaningfulness Through Contributing to Others

The theme of being beneficial to others emerged strongly across the participants' narratives, although it was most prominent in N's data. N described one of her most memorable experiences of success as successfully negotiating a complimentary hotel room upgrade for a guest. She stated, "Rasanya senang banget bisa bikin orang lain senang. Itu lebih berarti daripada dapat bonus" ["I felt very happy to make someone else happy. It meant more to me than receiving a bonus"]. She also described making a prayer rosary for a friend: "Dia share bahan-bahane... bisa lho hari minggu selesai rosario ne... gawe senang-senengane" ["She shared the materials, and I was able to finish the rosary by Sunday simply to make her happy"].

A similar pattern was evident in R's account. R associated success with her role as an examiner in a student practical assessment, particularly when she was able to provide constructive feedback. She explained, "Pernah jadi mahasiswa, sekarang merasa berhasil ketika memberikan hacks bagaimana memberikan tugas untuk penggunaan AI yang secara bijak... bukan hanya copas, tapi ada promptnya, dengan kriteria seperti ini" ["Having once been a student myself, I now feel successful when I can provide practical guidance on how to use AI wisely in assignments – not merely by copying and pasting, but by using appropriate prompts and clear criteria"].

Y also perceived success through her contribution to students' development. She described her experience of teaching dance routines and supporting a shy student's confidence during preparation for a talent show. She stated, "Anak ini amat sangat super-duper pemalu... di term 1 ini, targetku bikin anak ini untuk datang ke aku untuk bertanya kalo dia tidak paham. Akhirnya, dia mulai berani. Di term sekarang, dia mulai bisa diskusi" ["This child was extremely shy. In the first term, my goal was to encourage her to come to me and ask questions when she did not understand. Eventually, she became more confident. This term, she has started to participate in discussions"]. These accounts indicate that the participants understood success not only as personal achievement but also as the ability to create meaningful benefits for others.

Theme 5: Tension Between Professional Roles and Personal Needs

The participants' daily journals revealed a tension between professional success and personal needs. This tension was most clearly reflected in R's diary. In her Saturday entry, R distinguished between two evaluations of success within the same day: she felt successful in fulfilling her institutional responsibilities and caring for her sick mother, yet unsuccessful in meeting her personal needs, such as doing laundry and shopping for daily necessities. She wrote, "Hari ini berhasil di kantor, tapi gagal untuk diri sendiri... belum sempat laundry, belanja, semua urusan pribadi ketunda" ["Today, I succeeded at work but failed myself. I did not have time to do laundry or shopping, and all of my personal matters were postponed"].

N showed a slightly different pattern. Rather than framing success only in terms of completing responsibilities, she interpreted an unexpected situation – the

unavailability of a desired menu item – with gratitude rather than disappointment. She wrote, “Aku kepingin makan A, tapi ga ada. Ya udah, aku makan B aja... ternyata B juga enak. Bersyukur aja” [“I wanted to eat one particular dish, but it was not available. So, I ate another dish instead, and it turned out to be good. I chose to be grateful”]. This response suggests that success was also understood as the ability to regulate expectations and maintain gratitude in everyday situations.

Y also reflected a similar process of adjusting personal expectations. She noted, “Dulu semua pengen sempurna, sekarang yang penting jalan dulu” [“Previously, I wanted everything to be perfect. Now, what matters is to keep moving forward”]. Together, these accounts show that success was not only associated with professional achievement, but also with the ability to balance responsibilities, manage personal needs, adjust expectations, and maintain emotional stability in daily life.

Theme 6: Singlehood Status and the Negotiation of Social Pressure

The three participants demonstrated different experiences in negotiating social pressure related to their single status. Y experienced pressure mainly from her immediate family regarding the age at which a woman is socially expected to be married. However, she also found validation in the norms of her ethnic community, where women marrying after the age of 40 are considered relatively common. She stated, “Di kampung, nikah umur 40 itu biasa kok. Jadi aku nggak terlalu merasa tertekan” [“In my village, marrying at the age of 40 is considered normal. Therefore, I do not feel too pressured”]. She further explained that her response to such pressure had changed over time: “Dulu kaya lebih emosian, baper... kenapa kok blum nikah? Sekarang lebih rileks, becanda aja” [“In the past, I was more emotional and easily affected when people asked why I was not yet married. Now, I am more relaxed and tend to respond with humor”].

R experienced stronger pressure from extended family members in her village, who viewed unmarried status as a source of family shame. She stated, “Dari sodara jauh yang beda mbah... mereka yang tinggal di desa, jadi mirip aib dan beban di keluarga” [“The pressure came from distant relatives, particularly those living in the village, who saw being unmarried as something close to a disgrace and a burden to the family”]. This indicates that the stigma attached to singlehood may be stronger in more traditional social environments.

In contrast, N reported relatively minimal social pressure and emphasized that marriage was not her primary life goal. She stated, “Kalo ditanya, ya ada berasa gimana gitu... tapi ya udah, biasa. Kenyataannya belum nikah ya gimana” [“When people ask about it, I do feel something, but I have come to see it as normal. The reality is that I am not married, and I have accepted that”]. These accounts show that social pressure related to singlehood was not experienced uniformly by the participants, but was shaped by family expectations, cultural background, and personal values.

Theme 7: Independence – A Resource and a Source of Ambivalence

Independence as a single woman was interpreted ambivalently by all three participants. On the one hand, independence was perceived as a psychological and practical resource. On the other hand, it was also associated with social assumptions and expectations, particularly the belief that successful independent women no longer need a partner.

Y viewed emotional independence as an important psychological resource for coping with social expectations, while also enabling her to enjoy personal freedom, such as attending concerts and spending time with friends. She wrote, "Kemandirian kematangan secara emosionalku lebih banyak membantu... dari kematangan emosional belajar menanggapi sesuatu, mana yang ditanggapi dengan becanda jadi ga keluar energi banyak" ["My emotional maturity has helped me a lot. Through emotional maturity, I have learned how to respond to certain situations, including which ones can be addressed with humor so that I do not spend too much emotional energy"]. She also noted, "Fix nonton konser... nongkrong sama teman... kebebasan itu yang masih ada" ["I can still go to concerts and spend time with friends; that sense of freedom is still there"].

R regarded independence as a form of capital for building a business and becoming a woman who is able to support both her own needs and her parents' responsibilities. However, she also noted that independence could generate stigma, as women perceived as "already successful" were often assumed to no longer need a partner. She stated, "Ada sodara bilang 'kamu jangan terlena ya, karena uda berhasil, jadi ga butuh cowok'" ["A relative once said, 'Do not become too comfortable just because you are already successful, as if you no longer need a man'"]. She further emphasized, "Memang saya berusaha mandiri dan independent... dan tetap butuh pasangan" ["I do try to be independent and self-sufficient, but I still need a partner"].

N described how financial independence, particularly after ending a romantic relationship, created greater opportunities for personal enjoyment and self-actualization, such as attending concerts and purchasing collectible items. For N, independence was closely associated with the ability to support oneself without relying on others. She wrote, "Waktu masih pacaran, mending tabung, mending untuk kebutuhan lain lebih penting... tapi sekarang, dengan kondisi yang uda ga punya pacar, sekarang kebahagiaan sendiri nomor satu sih" ["When I was still in a relationship, I preferred to save money and prioritize other needs. However, now that I am no longer in a relationship, my own happiness has become my main priority"]. She added, "Mandiri ini bisa ya bisa menghidupi diri sendiri, ga repotin orang lain, dan ga bergantung dengan siapapun" ["Independence means being able to support oneself, not burden others, and not depend on anyone else"].

These accounts show that independence was not understood in a single way. For the participants, independence could provide freedom, emotional strength, and self-sufficiency, but it could also create ambivalence when society interpreted women's independence as a sign that they no longer needed intimate relationships or family life.

DISCUSSION

Success as a Process Rather Than a Single Achievement

The shift in the meaning of success among the three participants, from major achievements to daily processes and small accomplishments, presents an interesting contrast to Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2002), which emphasizes explicitly defined long-term objectives. While Goal-Setting Theory focuses on measurable outcomes, the participants in this study found satisfaction when they moved away from a singular focus on major goals and instead evaluated their success through the

completion of small daily tasks. This finding aligns with Indigenous Psychology, which emphasizes that psychological meanings are contextual and should be understood through individual lived experiences and personal values (Kim & Berry, 1993; Ranimpi et al., 2023). This shift also resonates with Park's (2010) meaning-making framework, suggesting that success is not a fixed endpoint but a dynamic construction shaped by ongoing life experiences.

Spirituality and Local Wisdom as Meaning-Making Frameworks

The variation in spiritual expressions among the three participants demonstrates that psychological content cannot be separated from religious and cultural contexts (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Y expressed this through a philosophy of interconnectedness with nature, R through disciplined Islamic practice, and N through experiences of "answered prayers." These findings reinforce critiques of Western psychological instruments that may inadequately represent the religious and cultural dimensions shaping psychological well-being among Indonesians. The present study extends existing literature on indigenous psychology (Lestari, 2013; Muslih & Erawati, 2025) by demonstrating how spiritual values directly shape the construction of success among single career women.

Self-Regulation and Resilience as Hidden Forms of Success

Patterns found in participants' daily journals, where success was defined through the ability to regulate emotions and continue fulfilling responsibilities under pressure, suggest that success may take the form of internal achievements that remain largely unrecognized within conventional standards. Such forms of success are particularly relevant within Indigenous Psychology, which emphasizes exploring personal meanings from everyday experiences rather than relying solely on standardized indicators (Ranimpi et al., 2023). This finding extends previous research on resilience among single women (Septiana & Syafiq, 2013) by revealing how daily emotional regulation constitutes a meaningful form of achievement.

Being Beneficial to Others in a Collectivistic Context

The prominence of contributing to others, particularly in the accounts of N, R, and Y, suggests that success within Indonesia's collectivistic cultural context is not understood solely as personal achievement. Rather, success is closely connected to social relationships and the ability to provide meaningful benefits to others. This finding aligns with the indigenous concept of *gotong royong* and relational well-being, in which individual accomplishment gains meaning when it contributes to family members, students, clients, or the broader community. In this sense, the participants' narratives extend the understanding of success beyond self-oriented achievement and support the argument that psychological constructs should be interpreted within their specific cultural context (Kim & Berry, 1993).

The Double Burden: Professional and Domestic Roles

The tension experienced by R between professional success and perceived failure to fulfill personal and domestic needs reflects a form of double burden among single career women. Although the concept of double burden is often associated with married women who manage both work and household responsibilities, the present findings show that single women may also experience similar pressures. In this study, professional obligations coexisted with family caregiving, domestic tasks, and personal

responsibilities. This finding suggests that traditional gender expectations may continue to shape women's everyday experiences regardless of marital status. It also indicates that well-being models grounded primarily in individual achievement may not fully capture the relational and role-related tensions experienced by women in collectivistic cultural contexts (Prasetyaningrum, 2007).

Negotiating Singlehood and Social Stigma

The participants' varying experiences of social pressure indicate that stigma surrounding single women in Indonesia is not homogeneous. R experienced stronger pressure from extended family members, Y experienced moderate pressure that was negotiated through cultural justification, while N reported relatively minimal pressure. These differences suggest that singlehood stigma is shaped by the intersection of family norms, cultural background, social environment, and personal values. These findings extend Septiana and Syafiq's (2013) discussion of the positive reinterpretation of singlehood as a coping strategy. The present study shows that singlehood stigma may be experienced with different levels of intensity, depending on the extent to which marriage is positioned as a central marker of women's success within each participant's family and community. Therefore, a more nuanced understanding is needed to capture the diversity of single career women's experiences in negotiating social expectations and constructing their own meanings of success.

Independence as Both a Resource and a Source of Ambivalence

The ambivalent meaning of independence among the three participants suggests that the independence of single women in Indonesia cannot be understood through a single perspective. Independence functioned as a psychological and practical resource, but it also generated social assumptions and expectations. For Y and R, independence provided freedom, self-sufficiency, and emotional strength, while also attracting social labels suggesting that successful independent women no longer needed a partner. For N, financial independence after ending a romantic relationship created opportunities for personal enjoyment and self-actualization, which she explicitly prioritized. These findings underscore the relevance of Indigenous Psychology, which emphasizes the importance of personal context and life history in understanding the meanings individuals attach to independence and success (Ranimpi et al., 2023). They also extend previous quantitative studies (Putri & Hartini, 2022; Listy & Dwatra, 2025) by revealing the nuanced and sometimes contradictory meanings of independence among single career women. These variations challenge generalized assumptions about single women's experiences and highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches in psychological practice.

The findings of this study show that the meaning of success among single career women in Indonesia is constructed through the interaction of personal experience, cultural values, spirituality, family expectations, and social relationships. Success was not understood merely as material achievement or professional accomplishment, but also as daily progress, emotional regulation, gratitude, contribution to others, and the ability to negotiate social expectations related to singlehood. These findings highlight the importance of understanding success within the specific cultural context in which women live and make meaning of their experiences. By using an Indigenous Psychology perspective, this study contributes to a more culturally grounded understanding of

success among Indonesian single career women and shows that their experiences cannot be fully explained through universal or individualistic models alone.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that the meaning of success among single career women aged 30–40 in Indonesia is dynamic, shifting from material achievements toward processes, gratitude, and inner peace. The findings demonstrate that success is constructed through cultural, spiritual, and relational values, with participants redefining success through daily accomplishments, emotional regulation, and contributions to others. The three participants also demonstrated varied experiences in negotiating social pressures related to singlehood, revealing the heterogeneity of single women's experiences in Indonesia.

The daily journals revealed dimensions of success that were not fully captured through interviews alone, particularly the tension between professional success and personal needs. This suggests the presence of a double burden among single career women within Indonesia's collectivistic cultural context. The findings reinforce the relevance of the Indigenous Psychology perspective by showing that the construct of success is inseparable from religiosity, family values, social relationships, and local cultural wisdom.

The main contribution of this study lies in its effort to broaden the understanding of success among single career women in Indonesia through culturally grounded, spiritual, and relational perspectives. This study shows that success is not merely defined by material achievement, career status, or marital status, but is also shaped by gratitude, inner peace, family values, social contribution, and the ability to negotiate cultural expectations. This contribution is important for developing a more culturally sensitive understanding of women's success in the Indonesian context.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the small sample size, while appropriate for IPA, limits the generalizability of findings. Second, participants were recruited from urban areas with relatively high educational attainment, which may not reflect the experiences of single career women in rural settings or with lower educational levels. Third, the cross-sectional design captures the meaning of success at a single point in time, whereas two participants reported substantial changes in their perspectives over the past five to ten years.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should include larger and more culturally diverse samples encompassing participants from a wider range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as women who are involuntary single or residing in non-urban settings. A longitudinal approach would be valuable to capture shifts in the meaning of success over time and life transitions. Future studies could also examine how professional and domestic role tensions evolve and how women negotiate these competing demands within collectivistic cultural contexts.

Practical Implications

These findings provide valuable insights for psychologists and counselors working with single career women. Practitioners should explore clients' personal

meanings of success as rooted in family values, spirituality, and local cultural contexts, rather than relying on standardized frameworks. The findings on social stigma toward singlehood may serve as foundation for family- and community-based psychoeducational interventions aimed at reducing pressure on single career women by fostering broader understandings that success and happiness are not necessarily synonymous with marriage.

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