

Suami Budi and Family Well-Being: A Conceptual Framework of Culturally Grounded Husband Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to develop a conceptual framework of *suami budi* as a culturally grounded form of husband leadership and to examine its role in shaping family well-being. While contemporary family research increasingly emphasizes relational and emotional dimensions of marriage, the literature remains largely Western-centric, with limited integration of indigenous value systems. Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes *suami budi*, rooted in Malay cultural philosophy, as a multidimensional construct comprising *budi bicara* (wise judgment), *budi bahasa* (respectful communication), and *budi pekerti* (moral conduct). Drawing on emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and relational theories, the proposed framework positions relationship quality as a mediating mechanism linking husband leadership to family well-being outcomes. The key contribution of this paper lies in extending family and leadership literature by embedding culturally specific values into a theoretically grounded model. The framework offers important implications for both theory and practice and provides a foundation for future empirical validation across diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: suami budi, husband leadership, family well-being, emotional intelligence, cultural values

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly work increasingly highlights that husband leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping family functionality and long-term stability (Putung & Azahari, 2021). Increasingly, leadership within the family is conceptualized not merely as a structural role, but as a value-driven responsibility grounded in ethical conduct, relational accountability, and moral integrity. In parallel, family well-being has emerged as a central concern in contemporary research, particularly in light of evolving family structures, the rise of dual-income households, and intensifying relational pressures. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that relationship quality, emotional dynamics, and communication patterns serve as critical determinants of family functioning and overall well-being (Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Overall et al., 2022).

Despite these advancements, the dominant body of literature remains largely anchored in Western theoretical perspectives, with limited integration of culturally embedded value systems. This imbalance constrains a more nuanced understanding of how family relationships are constructed and sustained within non-Western contexts. Within Malay cultural philosophy, the concept of *budi* embodies a holistic integration of moral conduct, relational sensitivity, and practical wisdom in social interaction. However, notwithstanding its deep cultural significance, *budi* has yet to be systematically theorized within family studies, particularly in relation to husband leadership.

This paper advances a theoretically grounded conceptual framework of *suami budi* as a culturally embedded form of husband leadership, examining its impact on family well-being through relationship quality as a central mediating mechanism.

Background Of Study

Family well-being has become an increasingly prominent concern in contemporary discourse, driven by rapid socio-economic transformation, shifting family structures, and the growing prevalence of dual-income households. These developments have intensified the demands placed on marital relationships, requiring greater adaptability, emotional maturity, and role negotiation between spouses. Within this evolving landscape, the quality of spousal interaction has emerged as a central determinant of family functioning, with increasing emphasis on relational harmony, psychological support, and constructive communication as foundational elements of well-being (Walsh, 2021; Prime et al., 2020).

In this context, leadership within the family is no longer viewed as a static or authority-based role but as a dynamic, relational process grounded in values and interpersonal responsibility. Husband leadership, in particular, is increasingly interpreted through the lens of influence, emotional engagement, and ethical guidance, where the capacity to nurture trust, manage conflict, and foster mutual respect becomes essential. This perspective aligns with emerging leadership scholarship that positions relational leadership and moral agency as central to effective interpersonal influence (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021; Hoch et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, prevailing conceptualizations of family leadership remain largely shaped by dominant theoretical paradigms that may not fully account for culturally specific value systems. This creates a limitation in capturing the depth and complexity of family relationships in contexts where social behavior is guided by collective norms, moral expectations, and culturally embedded principles. Consequently, existing models risk overlooking the influence of indigenous values in shaping leadership practices and relational outcomes within families (Jackson, 2021).

Within the Malay cultural tradition, the notion of *budi* offers a distinctive and deeply rooted framework for understanding human conduct and social interaction. It embodies a synthesis of moral virtue, practical wisdom, and relational sensitivity, emphasizing the importance of acting with respect, discernment, and ethical awareness in interpersonal relationships. Despite its enduring relevance, *budi* has yet to be systematically integrated into contemporary academic discourse on family leadership and well-being (Rahim et al., 2022; Yusof & Abdullah, 2023).

Accordingly, there is a need to advance a culturally grounded conceptualization of husband leadership through the lens of *suami budi*. Such an approach enables a more contextually attuned understanding of how leadership is enacted within the family, while also enriching existing theoretical perspectives with culturally embedded insights. By foregrounding the role of values in shaping relational dynamics, this study seeks to contribute to a more holistic and inclusive understanding of family well-being.

Problem Statement

Despite growing recognition of the importance of husband leadership and relational dynamics in shaping family well-being, existing scholarship remains conceptually fragmented and culturally constrained. Much of the prevailing literature conceptualizes leadership and family functioning through predominantly Western-derived frameworks, which often emphasize individualistic orientations and may not fully capture the relational, moral, and culturally embedded dimensions of family life in non-Western societies (Jogulu, 2021; House et al., 2020). Consequently, there remains limited theoretical clarity on how culturally grounded leadership constructs operate within family contexts, particularly in influencing relational quality and well-being outcomes.

Furthermore, although constructs such as emotional intelligence and ethical leadership have received considerable scholarly attention, their application within family settings, especially in culturally nuanced forms remains underexplored (Miao et al., 2020; Banks et al., 2021). This gap is particularly evident in the absence of a systematic conceptualization of *budi* as a culturally rooted leadership construct. While *budi* is deeply embedded in Malay socio-cultural philosophy, encompassing moral conduct, relational sensitivity, and wisdom in social interaction, its integration into contemporary family and leadership research remains limited (Hashim & Hassan, 2022; Ismail et al., 2023).

This lack of integration constrains both theoretical advancement and contextual relevance, thereby limiting the development of culturally sensitive models of husband leadership. Accordingly, there is a need to conceptualize *suami budi* as a multidimensional construct and to examine its role in shaping family well-being through key relational mechanisms, particularly relationship quality. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing a more inclusive and culturally grounded understanding of family dynamics and leadership in diverse contexts (Overall et al., 2022; Falconier et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study proposes:

1. To conceptualize *suami budi* as a culturally grounded leadership construct.
2. Develop a conceptual model linking husband leadership to family well-being

Theoretical Background

Relationship Quality and Family Well-being

Relationship quality, encompassing trust, communication, and emotional support, is widely recognized as a central mechanism influencing family well-being. High-quality relationships contribute to marital satisfaction, psychological stability, and positive child development outcomes (Overall et al., 2022).

Emotional Intelligence in Family Systems

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in shaping interpersonal relationships and family functioning. Recent studies indicate that EI is associated with improved psychological well-being, family cohesion, and relational stability (Molina-Moreno et al., 2024). Existing studies consistently demonstrate that emotional intelligence and relational processes are critical determinants of marital satisfaction and family resilience (Andrepati et al., 2025; Ghumman et al., 2025). Furthermore, emotional regulation has been shown to reduce relational stress and enhance couple well-being (Kocyigit, 2025). These findings highlight the importance of integrating emotional, moral, and relational dimensions in understanding husband leadership within families.

Furthermore, EI functions as a relational mechanism, enabling individuals to manage conflict, regulate emotions, and maintain harmony within family systems.

Value-Based Leadership in Family Contexts

Leadership within families extends beyond authority and provision to include relational and moral responsibilities. Ethical leadership and servant leadership highlight the importance of integrity, empathy, and responsibility in shaping relational outcomes (Eva et al., 2019; Hoch et al., 2018). Leadership within relational contexts has increasingly been conceptualized as a value-based and relational process rather than a purely hierarchical role. Recent research suggests that ethical and relational leadership behaviours significantly enhance trust, emotional connection, and well-being in interpersonal relationships (Banks et al., 2021).

Furthermore, emerging evidence highlights that leadership grounded in empathy, moral responsibility, and relational sensitivity contributes to stronger relationship quality and long-term well-being outcomes, reinforcing the importance of value-based leadership in family systems (Hoch et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2023).

Cultural Values and Indigenous Perspectives

Recent scholarship emphasizes the need to incorporate indigenous cultural values into mainstream research to enhance contextual relevance (Li, 2021). In the Malay context, *budi* serves as a foundational value guiding interpersonal behavior and social relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Well-Being and Relational Dynamics

Recent literature conceptualizes family well-being as a multidimensional construct shaped by emotional, relational, and psychological processes within the household. Contemporary systematic reviews highlight that well-being is not merely an individual outcome but emerges from dynamic interactions between family members, particularly through communication patterns, emotional exchanges, and mutual support systems (Pandey et al., 2025). Increasing attention has also been given to micro-level relational processes, where everyday interactions—such as conflict management and emotional responsiveness—significantly influence overall family functioning. Emerging evidence suggests that even subtle emotional dynamics within family interactions can shape long-term well-being outcomes, reinforcing the importance of relational quality as a central mechanism (Gao et al., 2025).

Leadership as a Relational and Emotional Process

Leadership research has undergone a notable shift from trait-based and authority-driven models toward relational and emotionally grounded perspectives. Recent systematic reviews emphasize that effective leadership is increasingly defined by interpersonal competencies, including empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness, which collectively enhance relational outcomes and group cohesion (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

More recent studies further demonstrate that emotional intelligence functions as a critical mechanism linking leadership behavior to well-being outcomes. For instance, leader emotional intelligence has been shown to positively influence relational environments and well-being through mediating processes such as social support and emotional climate (Li et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the view that leadership effectiveness is deeply embedded in relational and emotional competencies rather than positional authority alone.

Emotional Intelligence and Well-Being Mechanisms

The relationship between emotional intelligence and well-being has been extensively explored in recent scholarship, with growing consensus that emotional intelligence enhances individuals' capacity to navigate interpersonal relationships and manage emotional demands. Systematic reviews indicate that emotional intelligence contributes to well-being by facilitating emotional regulation, strengthening social support networks, and improving conflict resolution (Tjimuku et al., 2025).

Importantly, recent models highlight the mediating role of relational factors—such as work-family support and interpersonal trust—in translating emotional intelligence into well-being outcomes (Li et al., 2025). This suggests that emotional intelligence operates not in isolation but through relational mechanisms, a perspective that is highly relevant in family contexts where interactions are continuous and emotionally embedded.

Cultural Perspectives in Leadership and Family Research

Despite the growing sophistication of leadership and well-being research, recent scholarship continues to highlight a persistent imbalance in cultural representation. Studies emphasize that dominant models are still largely derived from Western epistemological foundations, limiting their applicability in culturally diverse settings. Contemporary cross-cultural research calls for greater integration of indigenous knowledge systems and culturally embedded values to better capture context-specific relational dynamics (Jackson, 2021).

Recent discussions further argue that culturally grounded constructs provide deeper insights into moral behavior, relational expectations, and social harmony, which are often overlooked in universalized leadership models. This underscores the need to move beyond context-neutral theories toward frameworks that reflect local cultural philosophies and lived experiences.

Toward a Culturally Grounded Conceptualization: *Suami Budi*

Building on these developments, there is a clear theoretical opportunity to integrate cultural values into leadership and family research. While recent literature acknowledges the importance of relational leadership and emotional intelligence, limited attention has been given to culturally specific constructs that inherently embody these dimensions (Epitropaki et al., 2021; Lemoine et al., 2022).

In the Malay context, *budi* represents a comprehensive value system that integrates moral conduct, relational sensitivity, and practical wisdom. It reflects a culturally embedded framework of behaviour that emphasizes ethical awareness and harmonious social interaction. However, contemporary research has yet to systematically position *budi* within leadership or family well-being frameworks (Ahmad & Ismail, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). Given that recent studies consistently highlight the mediating role of relational quality and emotional processes in well-being outcomes, *budi* offers a theoretically rich foundation for conceptualizing leadership as both a moral and relational practice within the family (Holt-Lunstad, 2021; Randall & Bodenmann, 2021).

Accordingly, the notion of *suami budi* can be advanced as a culturally grounded leadership construct that aligns with, yet extends, existing theories of emotional intelligence and relational leadership. This integration provides a novel pathway for understanding how culturally embedded values shape leadership behavior and, ultimately, family well-being (Fischer et al., 2022; Hoch et al., 2021).

Conceptualizing Suami Budi

Suami budi is defined as a culturally grounded form of husband leadership that integrates cognitive, relational, and moral dimensions.

Budi Bicara (Wise Judgment)

Refers to thoughtful and context-sensitive decision-making, incorporating emotional awareness and consideration of family members' perspectives.

Budi Bahasa (Respectful Communication)

Represents empathetic, respectful, and non-dominating communication that fosters relational harmony.

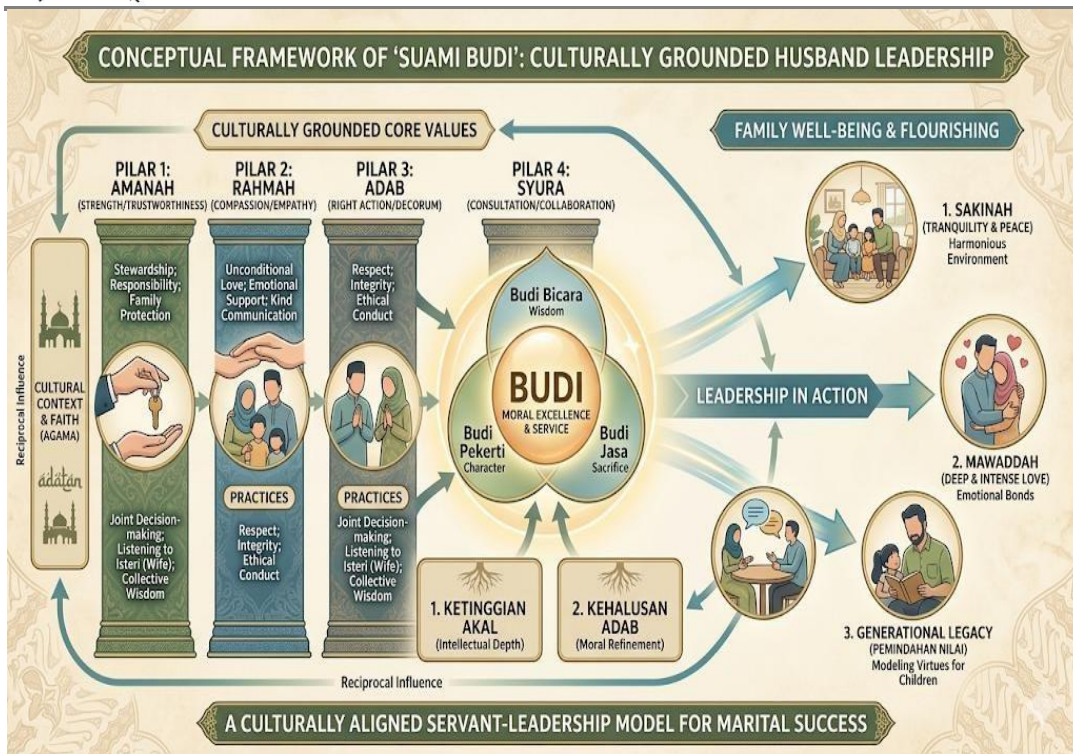
Budi Pekerti (Moral Conduct)

Reflects ethical behavior, integrity, and responsibility demonstrated in daily interactions.

Together, these dimensions form a higher-order construct that captures the essence of value-based husband leadership.

Conceptual Framework

This study proposes that *suami budi* influences family well-being both directly and indirectly through relationship quality.



Propositions Development

Drawing on relational and leadership theories, the following propositions are proposed:

- **H1:** Budi bicara is positively associated with family well-being.
- **H2:** Budi bahasa is positively associated with family well-being.
- **H3:** Budi pekerti is positively associated with family well-being.
- **H4:** Suami budi is positively associated with relationship quality.
- **H5:** Relationship quality is positively associated with family well-being.
- **H6:** Relationship quality mediates the relationship between suami budi and family well-being.

Theoretical Contributions

Contemporary research contributes to the advancement of family leadership theory in three significant ways. First, this study introduces *suami budi* as a novel, culturally grounded construct, thereby extending existing family leadership scholarship beyond its dominant Western-centric orientation. Much of the prevailing leadership and family research has been shaped by universalist assumptions that often overlook culturally embedded values and relational norms. In contrast, emerging scholarship emphasizes that leadership is inherently shaped by cultural worldviews, kinship systems, and moral traditions, particularly within non-Western and Indigenous contexts (Shaneé A. Washington & Lauri Johnson, 2023; Yuria Celidwen & Dacher Keltner, 2023). For instance, culturally grounded leadership models emphasize relational accountability, collective well-being, and moral responsibility as central elements of leadership practice rather than individualistic authority structures. By positioning *suami budi* within the Malay cultural context, this study responds directly to the need for context-sensitive theorizing in family leadership research.

Second, this study advances theory by integrating emotional, relational, and moral dimensions into a unified framework of husband leadership. Existing constructs such as emotional intelligence and ethical leadership have often been examined in isolation, resulting in fragmented understandings of leadership within family systems. However, contemporary research on culturally embedded family functioning highlights that effective

family leadership is inherently holistic, encompassing emotional regulation, shared responsibilities, relational harmony, and moral obligations (Ryan Yumin Chua et al., 2021). Empirical findings from culturally specific family models demonstrate that family processes are guided by interconnected dimensions such as collective decision-making, shared responsibilities, and community-oriented values, rather than discrete psychological traits. Similarly, Indigenous leadership scholarship underscores that leadership is not merely a role but a relational and moral practice embedded in everyday interactions and intergenerational responsibilities (Dara Kelly & Amber Nicholson, 2022). In this regard, *suami budi* offers a more comprehensive framework that captures the integration of akhlak (moral character), emotional intelligence, and relational conduct as inseparable dimensions of husband leadership.

Third, this study responds to increasing scholarly calls for culturally responsive and indigenous-informed theorizing in family and leadership research. Recent literature highlights that applying Western-derived constructs to non-Western family systems may lead to conceptual misalignment and reduced explanatory validity (Arvind Ponnappalli et al., 2023). Instead, there is a growing emphasis on incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, cultural values, and local epistemologies to better understand family dynamics and well-being outcomes. Research on Indigenous family well-being demonstrates that culturally grounded perspectives are essential for capturing dimensions such as spiritual connectedness, communal responsibility, and relational identity, which are often absent in mainstream frameworks. Furthermore, contemporary studies argue that leadership models rooted in indigenous traditions—such as relationality, mutual care, and collective accountability—offer valuable insights for rethinking modern leadership paradigms (Courtney Defriend & Celeta M. Cook, 2024). By embedding *suami budi* within these broader movements, this study contributes to the development of culturally resonant, contextually valid, and theoretically enriched models of family leadership.

In sum, this study not only introduces *suami budi* as a culturally grounded construct but also advances the field by offering a holistic, integrative, and culturally responsive framework of husband leadership. It bridges the gap between universal leadership theories and culturally specific family practices, thereby enhancing both theoretical development and contextual relevance in family well-being research.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a sequential mixed-method research design to empirically operationalize and validate the criteria of *suami budi*, thereby addressing prior limitations related to the absence of empirical evidence. The study is conducted in two phases to ensure both cultural grounding and methodological rigor. In Phase 1 (qualitative), semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 12–15 informants, including married Malay men, wives, and family studies experts, to refine and contextualize the dimensions of *suami budi*. Thematic analysis will be employed to capture culturally embedded meanings of *budi*, ensuring that the construct reflects indigenous values rather than merely replicating existing constructs such as emotional intelligence or ethical leadership. This approach is consistent with recommendations for construct development in culturally specific contexts (Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, 1989; Danny E. Miller, 2007).

In Phase 2 (quantitative), a cross-sectional survey design will be employed to validate the measurement model and examine its relationship with family well-being outcomes. The target population comprises married Malay Muslim couples in Malaysia, with a minimum of one year of marriage. A dyadic sampling approach will be utilized, collecting data from both husbands and wives to reduce common method bias and enhance the validity of behavioral assessments (David A. Kenny et al., 2006). Using purposive sampling, the study aims to obtain 200 pairs ($N = 400$ individuals), which satisfies recommended sample size thresholds for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and ensures adequate statistical power (Joseph F. Hair Jr. et al., 2019; Rex B. Kline, 2016).

Instrument development follows a systematic scale development procedure. Measurement items for *suami budi* will be generated through the integration of qualitative findings and established theoretical domains, with explicit efforts to differentiate the construct from overlapping concepts. Content validity will be established through an expert panel review, as recommended in scale development literature (Robert F. DeVellis, 2017). A pilot study ($n \approx 100$) will be conducted to assess item clarity and internal consistency. Subsequently,

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) will be performed to identify the underlying factor structure, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using a separate dataset to establish construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability) (Joseph F. Hair Jr. et al., 2019).

To enhance methodological transparency and address prior reviewer concerns, the study specifies clear measurement approaches, including Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and multi-source data (husband self-report and wife-report). Data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the predictive relationships between *suami budi* and family well-being outcomes, including marital satisfaction, emotional harmony, and perceived family stability. While the study focuses on the Malay cultural context, *suami budi* is explicitly positioned as a culturally embedded construct, and future cross-cultural validation is recommended to enhance generalizability.

Ethical procedures, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, will be strictly observed. Overall, this methodology ensures empirical validation, conceptual clarity, and rigorous measurement, directly addressing previously identified limitations in the study.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study provides important implications for both future research and practical application. From a research perspective, the introduction of *suami budi* as a culturally grounded construct expands family leadership studies beyond Western-based perspectives. It highlights the importance of integrating cultural values, moral character, and relational behavior when examining husband leadership. Future research should test this construct in different cultural settings to examine its broader applicability and improve generalizability (Cheung et al., 2023). Researchers are also encouraged to further validate the *suami budi* scale using robust methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2022). In addition, longitudinal studies would be useful to understand how *suami budi* influences family well-being over time.

From a practical perspective, the *suami budi* framework can be applied in family development programs and marital education. It offers a culturally relevant guide for designing premarital and marriage enrichment modules, especially within the Malay-Muslim context. The framework emphasizes key elements such as respectful communication, emotional control, ethical behavior, and spiritual leadership, which are essential for healthy family relationships. Practitioners such as counselors and social workers can also use *suami budi* as a tool to better understand and improve marital dynamics. Additionally, policymakers and organizations may use this framework to support family well-being initiatives and responsible husband and father roles.

Overall, this study bridges the gap between theory and cultural practice by offering a model that is both academically meaningful and practically relevant. It encourages future collaboration between researchers and practitioners to develop approaches that are culturally appropriate and effective in strengthening family well-being.

CONCLUSION

This paper introduces *suami budi* as a culturally grounded framework that helps to better understand husband leadership in relation to family well-being. Unlike many existing leadership models that are based on Western perspectives, *suami budi* is rooted in Malay cultural values, especially the concept of *budi*, which emphasizes good character, respect, responsibility, and emotional sensitivity. This makes the framework more relevant for understanding husband–wife relationships within the local cultural context.

By combining cultural values with relational processes, *suami budi* shows that husband leadership is not only about authority or providing for the family, but also about how a husband behaves in daily life—such as how he communicates, manages emotions, and treats his spouse with respect. This view supports the idea that family well-being is shaped by both individual behaviour and the quality of relationships within the household (David A. Kenny et al., 2006; Joseph F. Hair Jr. et al., 2019).

The framework also highlights the importance of culturally responsive research, which means understanding family life based on local values and context rather than applying one universal model. Recent studies emphasize that family and leadership concepts should reflect cultural and indigenous perspectives to better explain real-life experiences (Yuria Celidwen & Dacher Keltner, 2023; Sarah A. Washington & Lauri Johnson, 2023). In this way, *suami budi* contributes to more inclusive and culturally meaningful family research.

Overall, *suami budi* offers a clearer and more holistic understanding of husband leadership. It shows that strong families are built not only on roles and responsibilities, but also on values such as respect, kindness, emotional balance, and moral conduct, all of which are shaped by culture and lived experience.

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