

Socio-Cultural Analysis of Household Asset Pawning Behavior in Indonesia: The Relationship between Values, Economic Cruciality, and Stigma

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Abstract

The practice of pawning household assets in Indonesia is a complex socio-economic phenomenon, especially amid rising economic pressures and strong cultural values. This study aims to understand how communities perceive pawning as a survival strategy, how narratives of honor, ownership, and shame influence decision-making, and how social constructions of debt and family values shape attitudes toward pawning. The research employs a qualitative approach with a Grounded Theory framework, using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and narrative analysis in both urban and rural communities. Data analysis involves open, axial, and selective coding to develop a substantive theory aligned with the socio-cultural context. Findings show that pawning is not merely a short-term financial solution but also a socially meaningful act full of symbolic significance. In urban areas, the stigma attached to debt is stronger, causing many respondents to hide their pawning practices through intermediaries or digital services to protect social image. Conversely, in rural areas, pawning is openly accepted as part of solidarity and mutual cooperation, often involving collective family or neighbor participation. Justifications range from religious reasons ("urgent but still Sharia-compliant") to narratives of resilience ("just a temporary pause") that help alleviate shame and maintain family dignity. Ownership of assets such as gold and heirlooms is viewed as a symbol of family identity, preserved through pawning rather than selling. These findings reveal a close relationship between household economic strategies and social-cultural values. The complex interaction of economic pressure, honor, and stigma makes pawning a reflection of Indonesia's social dynamics and provides a vital basis for culturally sensitive policy and social interventions.

Kata kunci:

Perilaku Sosial; Nilai Budaya; Strategi Bertahan Hidup; Stigma Utang; Gadai Aset.

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Abstrak

Praktik penggadaian aset rumah tangga di Indonesia merupakan fenomena sosial-ekonomi yang kompleks, terutama di tengah tekanan ekonomi yang meningkat dan pengaruh nilai budaya yang kuat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana masyarakat memaknai penggadaian sebagai strategi bertahan hidup, bagaimana narasi kehormatan, kepemilikan, dan rasa malu memengaruhi keputusan, serta bagaimana konstruksi sosial tentang utang dan nilai keluarga membentuk sikap terhadap gadai. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan kerangka Grounded theory, melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis naratif di komunitas urban dan rural. Analisis data dilakukan melalui open coding, axial coding, dan selective coding untuk membangun teori substantif yang sesuai konteks sosial budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggadaian bukan hanya solusi finansial jangka pendek, tetapi juga tindakan sosial penuh makna simbolik. Di wilayah urban, stigma utang lebih kuat sehingga praktik gadai sering disembunyikan menggunakan perantara atau layanan digital untuk menjaga citra sosial. Sebaliknya, di pedesaan, gadai diterima secara terbuka sebagai bagian dari solidaritas dan gotong royong, bahkan melibatkan keluarga atau tetangga secara kolektif. Narasi pemberian meliputi alasan religius ("darurat tapi tetap syariah") dan retorika ketangguhan ("hanya jeda sementara") yang meredakan rasa malu dan

menjaga harga diri. Kepemilikan aset seperti emas dan barang pusaka dipandang sebagai simbol identitas keluarga yang dijaga melalui gadai, bukan dijual. Temuan ini mengungkap hubungan erat antara strategi ekonomi rumah tangga dan nilai sosial budaya. Kompleksitas interaksi ekonomi, kehormatan, dan stigma menjadikan praktik gadai cermin dinamika sosial Indonesia, serta dasar penting bagi kebijakan dan intervensi sosial yang responsif budaya

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2025, the Financial Services Authority (OJK) recorded that the total financing disbursed by national pawnshop institutions reached Rp 89.43 trillion, experiencing a growth of 28.27% compared to the previous year (OJK, 2025b). Approximately 82.18% of this financing consisted of pawn products, particularly gold pawning. This significant increase underscores the crucial role of pawning as an emergency financial instrument that remains highly relevant in the economic life of Indonesian society. This phenomenon becomes particularly prominent ahead of important periods such as Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr, where the public's need for quick funds rises sharply (Prasetya, 2024). Pawning has become part of the seasonal economic cycle of households, serving as a bridge between liquidity constraints and urgent needs.

Until March 2025, gold pawn products continued to show a positive trend, contributing more than 86% of the total pawnshop portfolio with an outstanding value reaching Rp 78.8 trillion (OJK, 2025b). The relatively stable price of gold and the tendency of people not to sell valuable assets for short-term needs have driven the use of gold as the most common collateral item. This phenomenon indicates a social mindset that views gold as a multifunctional asset – not only as a symbol of wealth and security but also as a financial survival tool in emergency situations (Rohmah, Ningtyas, & Kurniasih, 2025).

The growth of pawn financing not only reflects the microeconomic dynamics of households but also holds a deeper socio-cultural narrative. People do not choose pawning solely for rational economic reasons but also due to symbolic, relational, and cultural factors. For most families, especially in the lower-middle class, pawning assets is a decision fraught with a dilemma between urgent needs and social pride. The pawned items often carry high emotional or symbolic value, such as heirloom jewelry, wedding gift electronics, or items representing the family's social status.

The phenomenon of pawning is also closely related to the still-low level of financial literacy among Indonesian society. According to an OJK survey, the

national financial literacy index in 2022 only reached 49.68% (OJK, 2025a). This indicates that the majority of the population does not fully understand the risks and benefits of various financial products, including pawning. As a result, pawning is often undertaken without a deep understanding of its long-term financial and social implications. On the other hand, the social stigma surrounding debt remains a complex issue. Although legal and state-regulated, many people still view pawning assets as a form of "failure in financial management," leading to feelings of shame or inferiority.

In the Indonesian cultural context, the practice of pawning is not new. Since ancient times, society has been familiar with various forms of debt with collateral, ranging from gold pawning, advance payments for harvests (ijon), to the pawning of heirloom items. In traditional Javanese society, for instance, pawning was often associated with the values of mutual cooperation and community solidarity. When someone was in dire need, family or neighbors would provide loans with collateral, not merely for economic reasons but also as a form of social care. The shift from traditional pawning practices to modern pawnshop systems has brought changes in the values and meanings of this practice (Oktavianti, Haqiqi, Rahmania, Shalahuddin, & Zainal, 2024).

The transformation to formal pawnshop institutions has made social relations in pawning practices more transactional. No longer based on familial ties or interpersonal trust, they are now governed institutionally and contractually. Collateral items now not only hold economic value but also represent public trust in the formal legal and financial system. However, this transition does not automatically eliminate the socio-cultural dimensions accompanying pawning practices. Many people still experience emotional and social pressures when deciding to pawn items, especially if the items hold symbolic value within the family (Widyaningrum, 2018).

Several local studies highlight the main reasons why people choose sharia pawnshops as a way to mitigate stigma. A study in Karawang showed that approximately 58.75% of respondents chose sharia gold pawning due to considerations of security, speed of processing, and the perception that the sharia system is more "halal" and blessed. The religious aspect is used as a moral justification for actions that are often considered shameful in society. This demonstrates that pawning is not only an economic decision but also a social strategy to maintain family reputation and dignity (Astaginy, Zulbay, & Cornelius, 2023).

However, public understanding of the sharia concept in pawnshop products remains limited. Research in Metro and Idi Rayeuk revealed that many users of sharia products do not understand the contracts used in transactions.

They tend to choose products based on the “sharia” label without truly understanding the underlying principles of muamalah. This indicates a gap between economic practices and religious literacy, which, in turn, creates room for the reproduction of new stigmas in a religious cultural context.

This is where the gap in previous studies lies. Most existing studies focus on comparing the effectiveness of conventional and sharia products from the perspective of microeconomics or regulation. Research on public perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of pawnshop products generally uses a quantitative survey-based approach, which is less capable of exploring deeper social meanings (Andanika, Echdar, & Sjarlis, 2022). Few studies specifically address the dynamics of household asset pawning in the context of values, emotions, and social relations in society.

For example, Gracia’s (2023) research discusses customer perceptions of sharia pawnshops, focusing on service satisfaction and cost-effectiveness. However, the study does not explore the social and symbolic dimensions of the act of pawning itself. Meanwhile, Putra & Suryani (2022) examined the market structure of the pawn industry but did not address the socio-cultural aspects influencing household decisions to pawn their assets. Neither study touches on how families make sense of pawning wedding jewelry or how neighbors’ views influence the choice to keep or release items (Yanti & Suci, 2023).

This study seeks to fill this gap by employing an economic ethnographic approach, which involves an in-depth study of household economic practices examined within a socio-cultural context. This approach allows researchers not only to observe actions but also to understand the meanings behind them. Why does someone decide to pawn a particular item? Why do some people hide the fact that they have pawned family assets? What narratives are constructed behind these decisions?

Grounded theory methodology will be used to develop a theory based on field findings. In other words, the theory of household asset pawning will be constructed based on observations, in-depth interviews, and analysis of narratives derived from direct participation in the community. This provides flexibility in capturing the complexity of social phenomena that cannot be fully explained by existing theories.

The main focus of this study is three interrelated aspects: first, how households interpret the value of their assets – whether purely economic or also carrying sentimental, symbolic, or religious value; second, how economic cruciality influences the decision to pawn items – for instance, during school admissions, healthcare costs, or needs during religious holidays; and third, how

social stigma toward debt and pawning affects someone's decision to be open or secretive about the act.

By comparing urban and rural areas in Indonesia, such as Jakarta and Karawang or Surabaya and West Sumatra, this study will identify variations in cultural values influencing household economic decisions. Are urban communities, which are more modern, more open to pawning practices compared to rural communities with stronger social ties? Does social pressure in small communities make pawning practices more concealed? These questions are essential to understanding the cultural dimensions of household financial management.

Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to studies on household economics and debt in developing societies, as well as a practical contribution to the development of culturally sensitive financial literacy policies. Pawning, in this case, should not only be seen as a financial instrument but as a complex social practice, laden with meaning and rich with socio-cultural dynamics worthy of in-depth study.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach (Ardiansyah, Risnita, & Jailani, 2023) with Grounded Theory as the primary framework to explore the social and cultural dynamics of household asset pawning practices. Grounded Theory was chosen because it enables the development of theories derived directly from field data through an inductive process, rather than relying on pre-existing theoretical assumptions.

The research was conducted in two contrasting locations representing urban and rural contexts: Yogyakarta City, as an urban area with dynamic economic activities and a variety of microfinance institutions, and Gunungkidul Regency, as a rural area with high dependence on pawning to meet household economic needs. The selection of these locations was based on the diversity of social contexts, levels of access to formal financial services, and differences in cultural norms and values related to ownership and debt.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and narrative documentation. The primary informants consisted of 24 individuals or families who have pawned or are currently pawning household assets, selected purposively based on inclusion criteria: aged 25–60 years, having direct experience with pawning assets within the last 3 years, and willing to openly share their stories. Exclusion criteria included individuals with severe communication impairments or limitations that hinder active participation in interviews. Additionally, 6 supporting informants were involved, including local

community leaders, pawnshop unit managers, and community financial facilitators.

Data were analyzed using the procedures of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as is customary in the Grounded Theory approach. This process aimed to identify main themes, construct theoretical categories, and formulate relationships between concepts that describe the social meaning of pawning practices. This study does not aim to generalize findings but rather to build a deep contextual understanding of how values, economic needs, and stigma shape pawning behavior.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (by comparing data from primary and supporting informants), methodological triangulation (combining results from interviews, observations, and documentation), and member checking, which involved confirming the interpretation results with several key informants. For example, narratives derived from initial interviews were returned to informants for review to ensure that the meanings captured by the researcher aligned with their subjective experiences. Additionally, the researcher conducted regular critical reflection through discussions with peers and supervisors to maintain interpretive objectivity. The expected outcome of this study is the formation of a substantive theory regarding household asset pawning as an economic practice shaped by social structures, cultural values, and emotional narratives in Indonesian society (Melisa & Dewandaru, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How Household Asset Pawning is Perceived by Society as a Survival Strategy Amid Economic Pressures and Complex Social Values

Many households in Indonesia employ a "digging a hole to fill another" strategy as a form of adjustment to economic pressures, particularly among housewives. One commonly chosen strategy is pawning household assets, such as gold jewelry or electronics, to meet urgent needs and settle previous debts. This practice illustrates the dynamics of a coping strategy, showing how individuals and families respond to crises by temporarily utilizing available resources (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). A respondent in Yogyakarta, Ibu N (45 years old), stated:

"If I sell my gold, it's gone forever. But if I pawn it, there's still hope to redeem it. So, this isn't just about money—it's about preserving dignity too."

Previous qualitative research in Bandung found that most respondents pawned items only when no other viable alternatives, such as borrowing from relatives or selling assets outright, were available (Lusiani, 2014). This reinforces

the position of pawning as a middle ground—not the primary choice but a rational option when financial crises strike households. This aligns with household economic theory, which explains that households adaptively allocate their resources (including assets) to maintain consumption stability and social dignity.

Macro-level economic pressures further amplify this trend. The average savings per account decreased from Rp 4.3 million in early 2024 to Rp 4.19 million by October 2024, and only Rp 1.8 million for 99% of people with balances below Rp 100 million (Theodora, 2024). This decline highlights the weakening financial reserves of households, increasing reliance on institutions like pawnshops.

In line with this, the Financial Services Authority (OJK) recorded a 25.83% year-on-year increase in pawnshop financing disbursement as of August 2024, signaling a surge in the use of pawning as a safer debt alternative compared to online loans (pinjol), which often come with high interest rates and aggressive collection practices (Theodora, 2024). A pawnshop officer in Gunungkidul explained:

“Many mothers come secretly because they’re afraid neighbors will find out. But compared to pinjol, they say it’s safer and redeemable when they have the money.”

The economic crisis, marked by growing concerns about layoffs and declining incomes, has impacted household consumption, which grew by only 4.89% in the first quarter of 2025. Some middle-class households have even shifted their assets to safer forms like gold, often used as collateral in pawning (Theodora, 2024). In an interview with a male respondent in Yogyakarta (Pak R, 39 years old), he noted:

“I buy gold not for long-term investment but so that if something happens, I can pawn it immediately. It’s faster than bank processes.”

An Indef survey (May 2025) showed that the proportion of household income used to pay debts increased from 10.5% to 10.8%, confirming that debt—including pawning—has become an integral part of modern household expenditure structures (Jelita, 2025).

In a cultural framework, pawning is closely tied to values of solidarity and trust. The gantangan tradition in West Java, for example, reflects a form of mutual cooperation that has now transformed into a formal practice through financial institutions like pawnshops. However, urban and rural contexts show significant differences. In urban settings, the stigma surrounding debt is much higher, and pawning is often concealed. A mother in Bandung shared:

“I don’t want my husband to know I pawned my wedding ring. I’m afraid he’ll think I failed to manage the household.”

In contrast, in rural areas, the culture of mutual help makes pawning more socially accepted as a collective adaptation to economic hardship. In Gunungkidul, a neighborhood head (ketua RT) stated:

“Here, it’s common. Pawning isn’t a disgrace as long as it can be redeemed. We even help those who are struggling.”

Conceptually, household asset pawning reflects not only short-term financial needs but also a strategy to maintain social, emotional, and symbolic stability. With financial literacy levels still relatively low (around 38-49%) and increasing economic pressures, this practice highlights a duality of values: pawned items are not just economic assets but also symbols of dignity, family security, and responsibility in facing crises (Cahyani, 2024).

In the Indonesian Cultural Landscape, To What Extent Is the Decision to Pawn Assets Influenced by Narratives of Honor, Ownership, and Shame

Although the practice of pawning is now increasingly accepted among urban communities, many individuals, especially from previous generations, are still reluctant to openly mention the word “pawnshop.” A housewife in Yogyakarta (Mrs. T, 52 years old) admitted:

“In the past, I was ashamed if people knew I went to the pawnshop. So usually, I asked my younger sibling to go, so the neighbors wouldn’t know. I was afraid they would think I couldn’t manage money.”

A study in Kompasiana also revealed that some people even prefer borrowing from loan sharks rather than directly going to the pawnshop because of the deeply rooted stigma – pawnshops are considered as “a place for those who are desperate” (Kurosawa_Basara, 2023). This illustrates how social trauma and a sense of shame (isin) become the main barriers for individuals to take financial action, even though rationally such action benefits the family economy.

However, over time, the narrative of honor has also encouraged communities to choose more official and religiously nuanced financial instruments, in order to maintain social image. Products such as Gold Savings and Sharia Pawnshop utilize religious values to provide moral legitimacy to the practice of pawning. A male respondent in Bandung (Mr. J, 43 years old) stated:

“If it’s through sharia, I feel calmer. At least people see this not as just any debt, but that I’m following religious rules.”

Within the framework of symbolic capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), actions such as choosing a sharia pawnshop or expressing an honor narrative are strategies to maintain or restore social status threatened by economic crisis.

Honor is not merely a personal moral value, but a symbolic asset recognized in the social structure, and therefore must be preserved even in critical conditions.

On the other hand, the concept of ownership also plays an important role. Assets that are pawned are often not only items of economic value but also symbols of identity and family heritage. A female respondent in Gunungkidul (Mrs. R, 48 years old) explained:

“That necklace was my mother’s inheritance. I couldn’t bear to sell it. But if pawned, it could still come back. So I felt I was still keeping the family’s trust.”

This phenomenon shows how society manages the duality of ownership: physically, assets can still be claimed as belonging to them, while functionally, these assets become a source of short-term liquidity. This practice represents a form of compromise between economic needs and commitment to the symbolic value of family.

In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, shame is not only experienced by the individual but also affects the family and community. Lowering one’s dignity can mean lowering the family’s good name. This is in line with the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Indonesian sociologists that shame (isin), reluctance (sungkan), and prestige (gengsi) function as social controls that maintain harmony within the collective structure (Syauket & Sriwidodo, 2024). Therefore, many individuals practice pawning secretly or with justificatory narratives.

The geographical context shows interesting differences. In cities, self-image and social prestige narratives make people more likely to conceal pawnshop activities. Some participants mentioned feeling more comfortable using the Pegadaian digital application because transactions are not visible to the surrounding environment. A millennial respondent in Jakarta (Lia, 30 years old) admitted:

“I use the app. So I don’t have to go directly, no need to meet people. Now everything can be done online, it just feels calmer.”

Conversely, in rural areas, community solidarity makes pawning more socially accepted. In villages, this practice is often considered part of mutual cooperation, especially when used for essential needs such as school fees or medical expenses. A neighborhood head in Gunungkidul stated:

“If someone pawns for school expenses, usually others will help together. People understand, life is about struggling together.”

Nevertheless, internal pressure to maintain self-esteem remains strong. Many families frame their actions with narratives of resilience, such as: “We are still strong, this is only a temporary pause.” Such narratives function as symbolic strategies to ease feelings of shame and affirm that their actions are part of

perseverance, not failure. In an interview with a father of two in Sleman (Mr. S, 37 years old), he said:

“If people ask, I say this is part of the plan. Not because I’m desperate, but because it’s more practical than the bank.”

Thus, the practice of pawning in Indonesia has transformed from merely an economic strategy into a social act full of symbolic meaning. As Muhammad (2022) explained, society creates narratives such as “pawning with dignity”—a moral justification that combines religious values, self-esteem, and social identity in their financial decisions. Within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, this decision is an effort to maintain symbolic capital, which forms the foundation of self-worth and status in the eyes of the community.

Overall, the decision to pawn household assets in Indonesia cannot be understood merely as a response to financial pressure. This act is also shaped by collective narratives of honor, ownership, and shame. The combination of preserving inherited identity and managing social image becomes the main motivator behind this practice. Pawning is not merely about surviving economically, but also a strategy to avoid losing “face” in the social sphere.

How Do Social Constructions of Debt, Family Values, and Asset Symbols Influence the Ways Individuals and Communities Understand, Justify, or Conceal Pawning Practices?

In Indonesian society, debt is not merely an economic transaction, but rather framed within a social context rich with meaning (Ismail, Khotimah, Maulana, & Durin, 2025). Debt is often regarded as both a moral and social burden, closely tied to the dignity of the individual as well as the family. Social norms reinforce the view that the ability to repay debt reflects family honor, responsibility, and integrity. Therefore, pawning household assets becomes a social dilemma: although it can address urgent economic needs, this action carries the risk of stigma as being “financially failed” (Dwianti & Hidayat, 2016).

Within the framework of stigma theory proposed by Erving Goffman (1963), actions such as pawning assets fall under the category of discreditable stigma—a stigma that can be concealed but will have serious consequences if revealed. Thus, concealment strategies become a key mechanism in managing social identity. Individuals strive to maintain a front-stage image of being “fine,” while hiding financial crises in the backstage.

Strong family values in Indonesia, particularly within the context of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and solidarity, position pawning decisions not merely as individual acts but as collective ones. The family becomes a space for negotiating values—between urgent needs and the commitment to preserving

family dignity. Pawning in this context is often understood as a form of sacrifice, as well as a temporary strategy to ensure family survival.

Assets being pawned especially gold, jewelry, or heirlooms – are not only of economic value but also serve as symbols of family identity and social status (Kusnandar & Kurniawan, 2020). Pawning such items can symbolically be understood as “borrowing” the family’s honor, not losing it (Ismail et al., 2025). This strengthens the position of assets as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), a form of wealth that is not only economic but also representative of dignity, honor, and social standing.

However, because it touches upon aspects of self-esteem, pawning is often silenced or concealed. Feelings of shame and the stigma attached to debt drive families to hide this activity from their social environment (Hengo, Ndoen, & Amtiran, 2021). Strategies of concealment vary between urban and rural communities:

Tabel 1. Pola Penyembunyian Praktik Gadai antara Komunitas Urban dan Rural

Aspect	Urban Community	Rural Community
Transaction Media	Use digital/online applications more often	Visit the pawnshop office in person
Social Hiding	Tends to keep secrets from neighbors and coworkers	Be more open, especially for urgent needs
Family Role	Sometimes without the knowledge of other family members	Decisions are often discussed and agreed upon together.
Justification Narrative	“This is a personal financial decision, not one that was rushed.”	“This is a joint solution to face family difficulties”
Social Meaning	Personal actions that are feared to tarnish one's self-image	Collective action accepted as social adaptation

In urban communities, pawning practices are more often concealed due to pressures of self-image and social prestige. Individuals tend to use digital platforms or appoint intermediaries so as not to be directly seen by their social environment. Meanwhile, in rural areas, solidarity and openness among residents make pawning more acceptable as part of the household economic cycle. An informant in Gunungkidul (Mrs. M, 50 years old) stated:

“If it’s for school fees or hospital expenses, no one feels ashamed. People even help if they can.”

Conversely, in Jakarta, a male participant (R, 35 years old) admitted:

"I don't tell anyone. Even my family at home doesn't know. I'm afraid they'll think I went bankrupt."

Apart from concealment, communities also construct justificatory narratives to normalize pawning practices (Purwidiani & Mudjiyanti, 2016). Narratives such as "this is only temporary," "better than online loans," or "the gold can be redeemed later" function as psychosocial coping mechanisms. These strategies help reduce emotional pressure while keeping social identity intact.

The social construction of debt and assets has also shifted alongside urbanization and the development of financial technologies. Urban communities increasingly use formal instruments, including sharia-based pawnshops or online applications, which allow for greater privacy. Meanwhile, in rural areas, pawnshops remain part of the economic routine, whose presence is more open and often involves community support.

It is important to note that pawning practices also carry emotional burdens. In interviews, some participants expressed feelings of "failing as the head of the family" or "fearing the loss of trust from a wife or parents." This shows that the decision to pawn assets does not only touch rational-economic aspects but also psychological and symbolic dimensions (Hadaiyatullah, Ismail, Fikri, Burhanuddin, & Mardiantari, 2025).

Thus, household pawning practices in Indonesia are not merely a response to economic needs but also a complex social practice. They are shaped by social constructions of debt, honor, family symbols, and dignity. Concealment, justification, and negotiation of values within the family become part of the social strategies employed to maintain symbolic capital amid ever-changing economic and social pressures.

CONCLUSION

Household pawning practices in Indonesia emerge as a complex and multifaceted survival strategy, shaped by real economic pressures as well as strong social and cultural values. Pawning is not merely a financial decision but also a socially meaningful act. In many cases, people place honor, shame, and symbolic ownership as essential elements in the decision-making process. Within this context, pawning becomes an alternative chosen when other options are unavailable, while simultaneously serving as a way to preserve the symbolic identity of the family without permanently losing assets.

Narratives of honor and shame play a central role in shaping societal attitudes toward pawning. Indonesians tend to protect social image and self-respect by choosing pawning instruments perceived as more dignified and

aligned with religious values, such as sharia-based pawnshops. At the same time, asset ownership is not only valued economically but is also viewed as social inheritance and a symbol of family history. Therefore, pawning assets is understood as a temporary solution that still preserves ownership rights, both physically and symbolically.

The social construction of debt and family values also shapes how people understand, justify, and in many cases conceal pawning practices. Debt is perceived as a moral and social burden which, if not managed carefully, can generate negative stigma within the social environment. To respond to this, individuals and families often construct justificatory narratives that help reduce psychological burdens while maintaining dignity and family image. Differences between urban and rural contexts also reveal contrasting dynamics in the acceptance of pawning: urban communities tend to conceal the practice due to pressures of self-image, while in rural areas, gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and social solidarity make pawning more open and collectively accepted.

Theoretically, this study contributes a substantive conceptual framework that positions pawning as a form of symbolic economic practice – a financial act interpreted through social values, honor, and family identity. This framework integrates three main dimensions: economic necessity, the social construction of values (such as honor, shame, and symbolic capital), and symbolic-cultural strategies that include concealment, justification, and the choice of more “dignified” forms of pawning. In doing so, this study broadens the understanding of household economics in Indonesia, not merely as rational activities, but as practices mediated by living social and cultural values. The framework also enriches coping strategy theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital within the context of non-Western societies.

From a practical standpoint, these findings provide a basis for formulating policies that are more socially and culturally sensitive. The government and financial institutions need to consider the design of pawn products that are not only economically secure but also socially acceptable. For example, the development of community-based sharia pawn services or approaches emphasizing religious values and dignity could reduce the stigma attached to pawning. Furthermore, context-based financial literacy programs grounded in local values are crucial so that households can make wiser financial decisions without feeling a loss of dignity. Other relevant interventions include providing financial and psychosocial counseling services for households in economic emergencies, as well as actively involving community leaders in reshaping social narratives around debt and pawning. Ultimately, synergy between the government, NGOs, and financial institutions is needed to create a more humane,

transparent, and inclusive pawn ecosystem – one that strengthens the economic resilience of Indonesian families without sacrificing their honor and social dignity.

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