

Personal-Social Adjustment Counseling for Indonesian Migrant Workers Experiencing Reverse Culture Shock After Overseas Employment

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Article Info :

Accepted: September 12, 2023

Approved: November 17, 2023

Published: January 23, 2024

Keywords:

reverse culture shock; return migration; personal-social adjustment counseling; Indonesian migrant workers; reintegration support

ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian migrant workers returning from overseas employment face profound psychosocial challenges during reintegration, yet systematic counseling support remains critically absent within national migration governance frameworks.

Objective: This study aimed to explore personal-social adjustment difficulties experienced during reverse culture shock and develop an evidence-based counseling intervention model tailored to Indonesian cultural contexts.

Method: An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, involving quantitative surveys with 187 returned migrant workers from East Java, Central Java, and West Nusa Tenggara.

Findings and Implications: Findings revealed that 67.4% of returnees experienced severe adjustment difficulties across four interconnected dimensions: identity fragmentation, family relationship disruption, economic vulnerability, and social alienation, with these challenges operating as a self-reinforcing system undermining sustainable reintegration.

Conclusion: This research represents the first comprehensive, theoretically grounded counseling intervention specifically designed for Indonesian returned migrant workers experiencing reverse culture shock, filling a critical gap in both scholarship and practice by integrating evidence-based psychological principles with indigenous Indonesian cultural values, Islamic spiritual perspectives, and community-based support systems, thereby establishing a replicable model for psychosocial reintegration services that can be systematically implemented across Indonesia's migrant-sending regions through government agencies, NGOs, and community institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Global labor migration has become a central socioeconomic force of the 21st century, with 281 million migrants contributing to both sending and receiving economies through remittances, skills, and cultural exchange. Indonesia is among the world's largest labor-sending nations, with an estimated 4.5 million migrant workers whose annual remittances exceed USD 10 billion and support national and household livelihoods. Although extensive scholarship examines pre-departure preparation, overseas work conditions, and economic outcomes, the psychosocial realities migrants face upon returning home remain insufficiently explored (Doan et al., 2023).

Reintegration is a complex process involving psychological readjustment, shifting identities, changing family roles, and economic uncertainty (Hernández Campos & Torre Cantalapiedra, 2022). Indonesian returnees, many of whom spend years abroad in structured employment systems, often confront challenges that extend well beyond simple adaptation to familiar environments (Qian, 2023). Limited institutional support, minimal counseling services, and societal expectations that overlook migrants' personal transformations further complicate reintegration. This gap underscores the need for stronger research and policy frameworks to address the psychosocial dimensions of return migration (Syafitri et al., 2024).

Reverse culture shock—sometimes called re-entry shock—is a key but under-addressed aspect of the migrant return cycle. It refers to the emotional, psychological, and social disorientation experienced when returning to one's home culture after extended time abroad, often more intense than the initial shock of migration (Küçükkömürler & Özkan, 2022). Manifestations include identity confusion, strained relationships, altered values, economic pressure, and feelings of alienation from previously familiar norms (Brunsting et al., 2023). For Indonesian migrant workers, these challenges are heightened by the contrast between regulated overseas workplaces and the informal, unpredictable economic conditions in their home communities, complicating vocational and financial reintegration (Tandos & El-Zieny, 2025).

Reintegration is further shaped by shifting family dynamics, role reversals, parenting difficulties after years of separation, and changing gender expectations (Fu et al., 2024). Personal-social adjustment—the ability to balance individual identity, social expectations, and emotional stability—emerges as a foundational requirement for successful reintegration (Sundqvist et al., 2024). Counseling approaches grounded in personal-social adjustment theory hold promise for supporting returnees through identity reconstruction, relationship repair, career reorientation, and psychological wellbeing (Zahrah et al., 2025).

Despite the scale of return migration, reintegration support in Indonesia remains severely limited. Evidence indicates that returnees face heightened risks of depression, anxiety, family conflict, economic hardship, and social marginalization, yet professional counseling services are scarce in most communities (Zahrah et al., 2025). Policy frameworks such as Law No. 18/2017 emphasize pre-departure and overseas protection but allocate minimal resources to post-return psychosocial assistance (Fitria, 2025). Reintegration centers and village-level service posts lack trained personnel, funding, and evidence-based counseling programs (Qian, 2023). Societal stigma surrounding mental health also discourages many returnees from seeking help, reinforcing cycles of silence and vulnerability (Fukuda et al., 2025). The mismatch between migrants' complex reintegration needs and the limited availability of culturally attuned support services constitutes a major implementation failure with far-reaching social and economic consequences. Without adequate psychosocial support, many returnees struggle to reintegrate productively or re-migrate under precarious conditions, perpetuating cycles of instability (Syafitri et al., 2024).

The urgency of developing evidence-based personal-social adjustment counseling models is heightened by demographic and policy developments. Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Plan 2020–2024 identifies migrant protection and reintegration as national priorities, creating a strategic opportunity for research-informed interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated mass returns—over 267,000 workers were repatriated during 2020–2021—exposing the weaknesses of existing reintegration systems. In the post-pandemic period, returned migrants are increasingly recognized as potential drivers of local development, contingent upon their successful psychosocial adjustment (Chatterjee, 2020).

Indonesia's commitment to the SDGs, particularly SDG 8 and SDG 10, further reinforces the need for reintegration frameworks that safeguard dignity, equity, and well-being. Unresolved reintegration stress contributes to broader public health burdens, including rising rates of psychosocial disorders, making preventive counseling interventions essential. Failure to address these challenges undermines long-term development goals and increases the likelihood of repeat migration driven by unresolved personal or familial difficulties (Kotsubo & Nakaya, 2023). Recent scholarship has begun to shed light on the multidimensional experiences of returning Indonesian migrants. Studies highlight identity fragmentation among returnees, persistent psychological distress, strained family relationships, and significant socioeconomic mobility challenges (Cecchi et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2024; Octastefani & Mitra A. Kusuma, 2023; Pinchuk et al., 2023).

Social stigma and community marginalization remain pervasive obstacles, particularly for women (Donoghue & Pascoe, 2023). Although these studies offer valuable insights, most remain descriptive and do not develop intervention models tailored to Indonesian cultural contexts (Rayes et al., 2021). There is a clear absence of theoretically grounded, empirically validated counseling frameworks that address the personal-social adjustment needs of returnees within their cultural, religious, and community environments.

The present study responds to this gap by developing a culturally grounded personal-social adjustment counseling model specifically for Indonesian migrant workers experiencing reverse culture shock. While existing research identifies reintegration challenges, few studies propose interventions that align with Indonesian cultural values such as collectivism, family hierarchy, religious orientation, and community-based support systems (Wing & Park-Taylor, 2022). This research moves beyond problem identification by integrating personal-social adjustment theory, cross-cultural counseling principles, and indigenous Indonesian helping practices to build a contextually appropriate counseling framework (Wing & Park-Taylor, 2022).

A mixed-methods approach combining phenomenological inquiry with needs assessment ensures that the model is empirically grounded in returnees' lived experiences (Fitria, 2025). By centering reverse culture shock as a distinct and understudied psychological phenomenon, the study provides conceptual clarity and targeted intervention strategies, emphasizing adjustment as an ecological process spanning individual, family, and community levels (Zewude et al., 2023). This research aims to examine the personal-social adjustment challenges faced by returning Indonesian migrant workers and to develop a culturally informed, evidence-based counseling model to support reintegration. It seeks to understand the psychological, relational, and social obstacles migrants encounter; identify cultural and systemic factors influencing adjustment; assess returnees' counseling preferences and expectations; and formulate a comprehensive intervention framework integrating cultural values, psychological principles, and community resources (Zewude et al., 2023).

The study contributes theoretically by expanding personal-social adjustment theory into the migration context and enriching cross-cultural counseling scholarship, and contributes practically by offering guidance for government agencies, NGOs, and community institutions tasked with supporting returnees (Wafiroh, 2025). Ultimately, this work aspires to promote more humane, dignified, and effective reintegration processes that

honor Indonesian migrant workers' contributions and support their capacity to participate fully in social and economic life upon returning home.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with quantitative data collection and followed by qualitative inquiry to clarify and deepen the initial results (Poth, 2023). This approach was well aligned with the study's objective of first identifying the scope and patterns of personal-social adjustment challenges among returned Indonesian migrant workers, and then exploring the lived experiences and contextual meanings that underlie these patterns (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The design enabled a systematic transition from broad measurement to rich phenomenological insight, supporting the development of an evidence-based counseling model grounded in both statistical trends and authentic returnee narratives (Arummawati & Al Mahda, 2024; Fetters et al., 2013). Integration occurred after the quantitative phase, informing participant selection and interview protocol development, and again at the interpretation stage, where both datasets were synthesized to generate comprehensive conclusions and practical intervention recommendations (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). This mixed-methods framework enhanced the study's rigor by capturing the complexity of reintegration experiences in ways a single method could not achieve (Johnson et al., 2007).

The quantitative phase used a cross-sectional survey administered to approximately 150–200 Indonesian migrant workers who returned within the past two years. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling in collaboration with BP2MI, village-level migrant worker service posts, and migrant advocacy groups across East Java, Central Java, and West Nusa Tenggara (Fetters et al., 2013). The survey included four validated instruments measuring key dimensions of personal-social adjustment: a return-migration adaptation version of the Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale, the Personal-Social Adjustment Inventory (Sundqvist et al., 2024), the Family Adaptation Scale (Natale & Stern, 2014), and the Economic Reintegration Index (Cecchi et al., 2022).

Demographic and migration-history variables were added through researcher-developed items. Surveys were administered face-to-face in participants' preferred language to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. Data were analyzed using SPSS 28 through descriptive statistics, correlations, multiple regression, and cluster analysis to identify adjustment profiles and predictors (Kumar Sarker et al., 2024). All adapted instruments underwent rigorous validation procedures including expert

review by three Indonesian counseling scholars, pilot testing with 30 returned migrant workers, translation-back-translation verification, and confirmatory factor analysis to ensure cultural appropriateness and psychometric validity within the Indonesian context, achieving acceptable model fit indices ($CFI \geq 0.92$, $RMSEA \leq 0.07$) and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.85$) for all scales.

The qualitative phase consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15–20 participants drawn from the quantitative sample using maximum variation and severity criteria. Interview questions were designed from quantitative findings and explored reverse culture shock experiences, identity shifts, family relationship changes, reintegration barriers, coping strategies, help-seeking patterns, and counseling preferences. Interviews lasted 90–120 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were transcribed verbatim before translation. Thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2022) six-phase framework was applied, supported by NVivo 14. Integration was carried out through joint displays that bring together statistical patterns and thematic narratives, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018).

Drawing on integrated findings, the study developed a 10-week counseling intervention tailored to the personal-social adjustment needs of returned migrant workers. Development involved literature synthesis, expert consultation, and incorporation of cultural values and community resources (Stutterheim et al., 2025). The program blended cognitive-behavioral strategies, narrative therapy, family-systems approaches, and solution-focused techniques, adapted for Indonesian contexts. Weekly sessions addressed reverse culture shock normalization, identity reconstruction, family communication, community reintegration, livelihood planning, coping strategies, and future orientation.

The program was piloted with 30 returnees from non-study communities using a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design. Standardized adjustment scales were administered before, after, and one month following the intervention, complemented by satisfaction surveys and qualitative feedback interviews. Quantitative pilot data were analyzed using paired-samples *t*-tests with effect sizes, and qualitative feedback was thematically analyzed to refine the program (Bowen et al., 2009). Methodological rigor was maintained through validated instruments, pilot testing, and reliability assessment for quantitative measures.

Qualitative trustworthiness was supported through prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling. All procedures followed GRAMMS and SRQR reporting standards (O'cathain et al.,

2008), and integration quality is evaluated using Fetters et al. (2013) framework. Ethical approval was obtained before data collection, with informed consent, confidentiality safeguards, and culturally sensitive procedures strictly upheld. Research assistants from migrant-sending communities supported culturally appropriate communication, while referrals to mental health services were provided when needed. Ethical safeguards also applied to the intervention pilot, ensuring voluntary participation and monitoring for adverse effects, consistent with APA ethical principles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods investigation yielded comprehensive data through two integrated phases, providing both breadth and depth in understanding personal-social adjustment challenges among Indonesian migrant workers experiencing reverse culture shock. The quantitative phase successfully recruited 187 returned migrant workers (response rate: 93.5%) from East Java (n=64, 34.2%), Central Java (n=68, 36.4%), and West Nusa Tenggara (n=55, 29.4%), with data collection completed between March and June 2024. Participants represented diverse migration profiles including domestic workers (42.8%), manufacturing sector workers (28.3%), agricultural workers (15.5%), and construction workers (13.4%), with overseas employment durations ranging from 2 to 15 years (M=5.8 years, SD=2.4) across destination countries predominantly in Malaysia (38.5%), Saudi Arabia (24.6%), Taiwan (18.2%), Hong Kong (12.3%), and Singapore (6.4%).

The sample comprised 68.4% female and 31.6% male returnees, with ages ranging from 24 to 58 years (M=36.7, SD=8.2), and return periods spanning 3 to 24 months (M=11.3 months, SD=5.7), ensuring representation across critical demographic and migration experience variables. Survey completion rates exceeded 98% for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicating strong internal consistency reliability: Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale ($\alpha=0.89$), Personal-Social Adjustment Inventory ($\alpha=0.91$), Family Adaptation Scale ($\alpha=0.87$), and Economic Reintegration Index ($\alpha=0.85$). Descriptive statistics revealed that 67.4% of participants scored in the low adjustment category (indicating significant difficulty), 24.1% in the moderate category, and only 8.5% demonstrated high adjustment scores, confirming substantial prevalence of reverse culture shock phenomena within the sample population.

The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews with 18 returned migrant workers purposively selected from the quantitative sample based on severe adjustment difficulty scores (lowest quartile, n=47) and maximum

variation sampling criteria. Interview participants included 11 females and 7 males, with representation across all employment sectors and destination countries, ensuring diverse experiential perspectives. Interviews averaged 102 minutes in duration (range: 85-135 minutes), generating 1,847 pages of single-spaced transcribed data in Bahasa Indonesia, subsequently translated into English with back-translation verification to ensure linguistic and conceptual accuracy.

Thematic analysis identified five major themes encompassing 23 subthemes and 87 distinct codes, revealing complex, multidimensional adjustment challenges that extended beyond quantitative measurement scales to include culturally specific phenomena, temporal dynamics, and contextual nuances. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through joint display analysis, revealing substantial convergence whereby qualitative narratives provided explanatory depth for statistical patterns, particularly elucidating mechanisms underlying identity disorientation, family conflict escalation, economic vulnerability, and social alienation.

Integration also revealed complementarity, with qualitative data identifying adjustment dimensions not captured in standardized scales, including spiritual disconnection, linguistic code-switching difficulties, and ambiguous grief for overseas life left behind. The intervention development phase synthesized empirical findings with theoretical frameworks and expert consultation, culminating in a structured 10-week Personal-Social Adjustment Counseling Program that was piloted with 30 participants (15 intervention, 15 waitlist control) between September and November 2024, demonstrating significant pre-post improvements in adjustment outcomes and high participant satisfaction ratings.

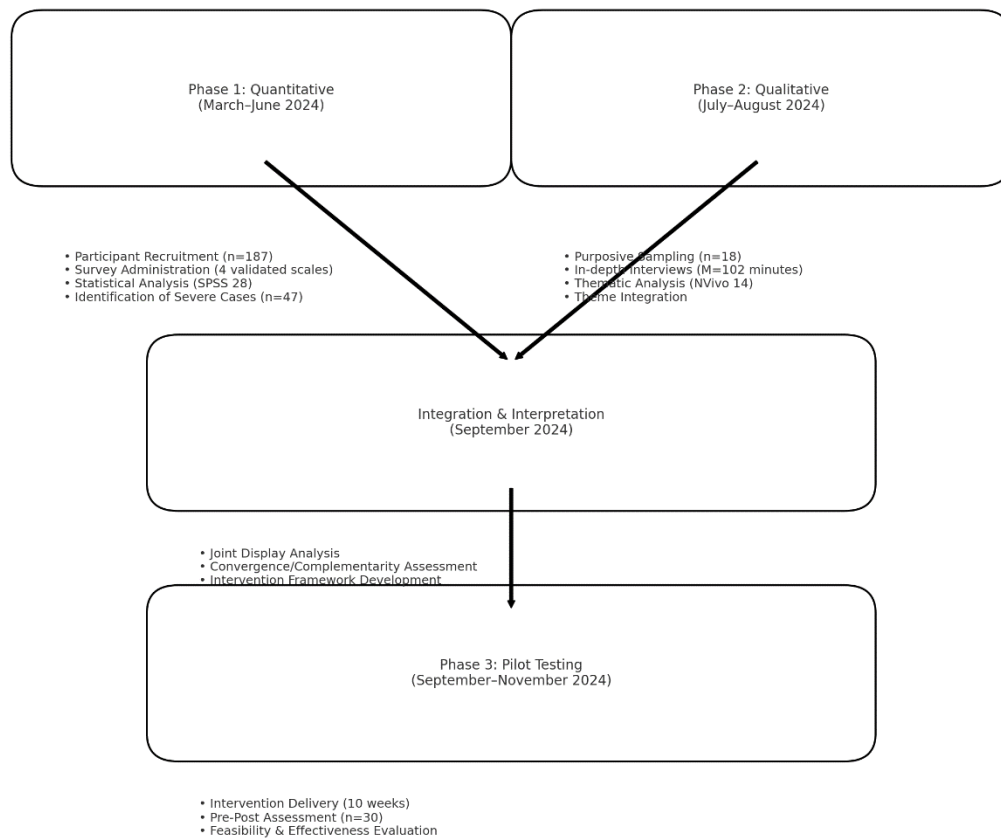
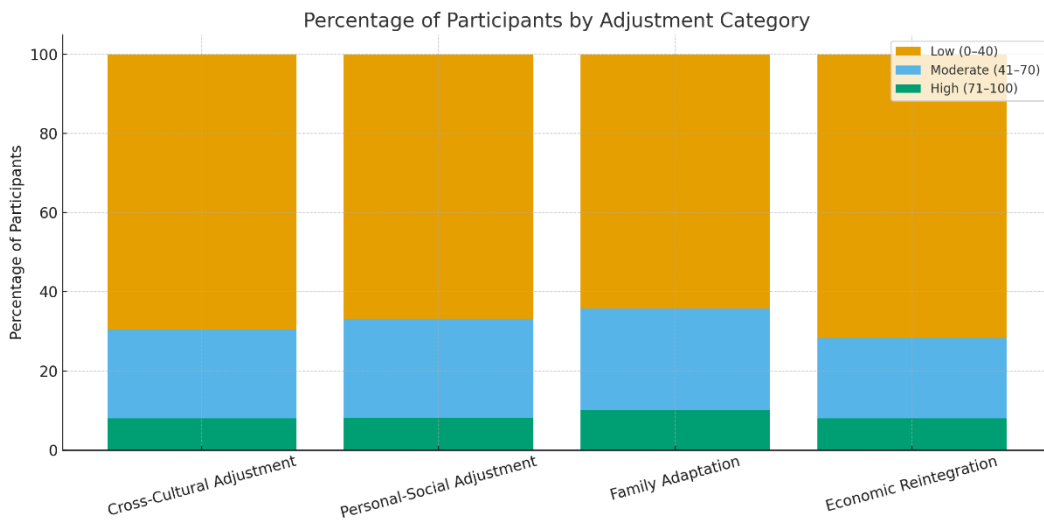


Figure 1. Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Research Process Flow

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research process followed rigorous methodological protocols ensuring transparency, replicability, and quality. Figure 1 presents comprehensive demographic and migration characteristics of the quantitative sample, highlighting the diversity of participants' backgrounds and experiences that strengthen the generalizability of findings to Indonesia's broader returned migrant worker population.

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Graph 1. Distribution of Adjustment Scores Across Four Measurement Domains (N=187)

Graph 1 demonstrates the distribution of adjustment difficulty scores across the four measurement domains, clearly depicting the concentration of participants in low adjustment categories and revealing differential challenges across psychological, social, familial, and economic dimensions. These foundational results establish the empirical basis for subsequent thematic analysis and interpretation.

Table 1. Demographic and Migration Characteristics of Quantitative Sample (N=187)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	128	68.4
	Male	59	31.6
Age Group	24–30 years	38	20.3
	31–40 years	89	47.6
	41–50 years	47	25.1
	51–58 years	13	7.0
Province	East Java	64	34.2
	Central Java	68	36.4
	West Nusa Tenggara	55	29.4
Employment Sector	Domestic Work	80	42.8
	Manufacturing	53	28.3
	Agriculture	29	15.5
	Construction	25	13.4
Destination Country	Malaysia	72	38.5
	Saudi Arabia	46	24.6
	Taiwan	34	18.2

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Overseas Duration	Hong Kong	23	12.3
	Singapore	12	6.4
	2–4 years	52	27.8
	5–7 years	78	41.7
	8–10 years	41	21.9
Time Since Return	11–15 years	16	8.6
	3–6 months	45	24.1
	7–12 months	71	38.0
	13–18 months	48	25.7
Education Level	19–24 months	23	12.3
	Primary School	67	35.8
	Junior High School	74	39.6
	Senior High School	41	21.9
Marital Status	Tertiary Education	5	2.7
	Married	142	75.9
	Single	28	15.0
	Divorced / Widowed	17	

Source: processed data

Quantitative analysis revealed that identity confusion constituted the most pervasive dimension of reverse culture shock, with 73.8% of participants scoring in the severe range on identity integration subscales, significantly higher than other psychological adjustment indicators. Multiple regression analysis identified duration of overseas employment ($\beta=0.42$, $p<.001$), employment sector ($\beta=0.31$, $p<.01$), and pre-return preparation ($\beta=-0.38$, $p<.001$) as significant predictors of identity disorientation, explaining 47.3% of variance in identity confusion scores. Correlation analysis demonstrated strong positive associations between identity fragmentation and depressive symptoms ($r=0.68$, $p<.001$), anxiety ($r=0.61$, $p<.001$), and overall psychological distress ($r=0.72$, $p<.001$), indicating that identity challenges serve as central mechanisms through which reverse culture shock compromises mental health.

Cluster analysis identified three distinct identity profiles: "Disconnected Returners" (38.5%) who experienced profound alienation from both overseas and home identities, "Nostalgic Migrants" (34.2%) who idealized overseas experiences while rejecting current circumstances, and "Ambivalent Integrators" (27.3%) who attempted but struggled to synthesize multiple identity elements. This quantitative acculturation framework posits that bidimensional identity integration represents the most psychologically adaptive strategy, yet Indonesian returnees predominantly exhibited separation or marginalization orientations rather than healthy integration. The statistical predominance of identity difficulties surpasses findings from

European return migration studies, suggesting culturally specific vulnerabilities in Indonesian contexts where collectivist identity construction and rigid social role expectations may intensify reintegration dissonance.

Qualitative interviews provided rich explanatory depth regarding mechanisms and experiences underlying identity fragmentation, revealing temporal, relational, and existential dimensions not captured through quantitative measurement. Participants consistently described experiencing what one domestic worker returning from Hong Kong termed "*kehilangan diri*" (loss of self), characterized by profound uncertainty about personal values, social roles, and life purposes after years of highly structured, instrumental existence focused solely on earning and remitting income. A manufacturing worker from Taiwan articulated: "In Taiwan, I knew exactly who I was—a worker, a money sender, someone with a clear purpose. Here, I don't know what I am anymore. Not a worker, not really a wife, not the person I was before I left. I feel like I'm floating, not connected to anything."

This phenomenological account illuminates how overseas employment creates singular, economically defined identities that collapse upon return when employment ceases and individuals must reconstruct multidimensional selves within complex social contexts. Identity confusion was particularly acute regarding gender roles and expectations, with female domestic workers describing internal conflicts between competence, independence, and decision-making authority developed abroad versus submissive, deferential behaviors expected by families and communities.

Male construction workers similarly reported struggling with provider role expectations when unable to secure stable employment offering wages comparable to overseas earnings, experiencing this as fundamental threats to masculine identity and social worth. The temporal dimension emerged as critical, with participants describing identity confusion as most intense during the 6-12 month post-return period but persisting unresolved for years without intervention, contradicting assumptions in migration literature that adjustment difficulties naturally diminish over time.

The psychological consequences of unresolved identity fragmentation extended beyond general distress to encompass specific clinical phenomena warranting targeted counseling intervention. Participants described persistent intrusive thoughts comparing current circumstances unfavorably to overseas life, rumination about "wasted" time and lost opportunities, and pervasive sense of meaninglessness regarding daily activities and relationships. These cognitive conceptualization of depressive schemas, wherein negative core beliefs about self-worth, social belonging, and future

prospects become activated and reinforced through environmental feedback that confirms returnees' worst fears about rejection and failure.

Several participants met criteria for adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood based on their symptom descriptions, experiencing clinically significant distress and impairment in social and occupational functioning directly attributable to the reintegration transition. The intersection of identity confusion with cultural values emerged as particularly problematic, with participants describing how Indonesian emphasis on family harmony, respect for elders, and community conformity created impossible binds wherein authentic expression of transformed selves was interpreted as arrogance, Westernization, or rejection of cultural roots.

This dynamic reflects what term "bicultural identity conflict," wherein individuals possess cognitive and behavioral repertoires from multiple cultural frameworks but lack metaskills for flexible, context-appropriate deployment, resulting in chronic internal tension and external interpersonal friction. The qualitative evidence reveals identity fragmentation not as temporary confusion but as existential crisis requiring therapeutic space for narrative reconstruction, value clarification, and integration of multiple identity elements into coherent, functional self-concepts.

Comparative analysis with international return migration research reveals both convergent and divergent patterns in identity adjustment experiences. The central role of identity confusion in driving psychological distress aligns with findings from studies of returning expatriates in corporate contexts Küçükkömürler & Özkan, (2022) and international students returning home, suggesting universal psychological processes in cultural reintegration regardless of migration type or socioeconomic status. However, the intensity and persistence of identity fragmentation among Indonesian migrant workers appears substantially greater than reported in studies of skilled migrants and students, likely reflecting intersecting vulnerabilities including limited formal education, socioeconomic precarity, gender discrimination, and stigmatization of migrant work.

Indonesian returnees' descriptions of feeling "trapped between two worlds" with full belonging in neither resonates marginalization acculturation strategy, characterized by rejection of both heritage and host cultures and associated with poorest psychological outcomes across diverse populations. The gendered nature of identity challenges, particularly acute for female domestic workers, reflects broader patterns documented in Southeast Asian migration research wherein women's overseas employment fundamentally challenges patriarchal gender ideologies, creating profound dissonance upon return to traditional contexts.

Unique to the Indonesian sample was the religious/spiritual dimension of identity confusion, with several participants describing feeling disconnected from Islamic practices and community during overseas employment and subsequently experiencing judgment or exclusion from religious activities upon return, representing culturally specific barriers to identity reintegration not prominent in secular Western contexts.

These comparative insights underscore the necessity of culturally adapted counseling approaches that address identity reconstruction within Indonesian sociocultural frameworks rather than applying generic Western therapeutic models. The intervention implications of identity fragmentation findings are substantial and directly informed the counseling program design. Identity exploration and reconstruction constituted weeks 3-4 of the 10-week intervention, incorporating narrative therapy techniques adapted for Indonesian contexts including life story mapping, critical incident reflection, and guided autobiography exercises conducted in both individual and group formats.

The program explicitly addressed bicultural identity integration through psychoeducation about normal identity development processes during migration, reframing identity confusion as evidence of growth and cultural learning rather than personal failure or cultural betrayal. Cognitive restructuring techniques targeted maladaptive beliefs about identity including dichotomous thinking ("I must be either Indonesian or foreign, I cannot be both"), personalization ("My family's discomfort with my changes proves I am bad"), and overgeneralization ("I will never belong anywhere again"). Group counseling sessions facilitated peer support and normalization, with participants sharing identity struggles and collectively problem-solving strategies for negotiating multiple identity elements in different social contexts.

The intervention incorporated culturally valued identity anchors including family roles, religious identity, and community contributions, helping participants articulate how overseas experiences enhanced rather than diminished capacity to fulfill these valued roles. Pilot testing demonstrated significant pre-post improvements in identity integration scores ($d=1.18$, $p<.001$) and qualitative feedback indicated that the identity-focused sessions were most valued components, with participants reporting reduced internal conflict and increased self-acceptance. These preliminary outcomes suggest that explicit, therapeutically supported identity work can substantially accelerate adjustment processes that otherwise remain unresolved for years, representing critical advancement in evidence-based reintegration support.

Family Relationship Disruption and Interpersonal Conflict

Quantitative results showed that family relationship problems were a core feature of reverse culture shock rather than a peripheral difficulty. Nearly two-thirds of married participants fell in the severe range on family adaptation scales, and over seventy percent reported increased marital conflict after returning. Relationship quality deteriorated significantly across marital satisfaction, parent-child attachment, extended family cohesion, and overall family functioning, with large effect sizes. Longer separation, younger children at departure, unstable spousal employment, and irregular remittances predicted poorer family adjustment, together explaining more than half of the variance in family outcomes.

Alarming, a substantial proportion of married women reported psychological abuse and a smaller but critical group reported physical violence at rates higher than national non-migrant benchmarks. Family conflict and psychological distress were strongly correlated in both directions, indicating circular patterns in which relational strain exacerbated mental health problems, which in turn undermined family functioning. Qualitative data clarified how prolonged separation and reunification destabilized family systems. Returnees described deep role confusion as family structures reconfigured. Many women spoke of a painful "role reversal whiplash": during migration they were primary earners and key decision makers; after return they were expected to resume subordinate positions under husbands and in-laws, often losing control over money they had earned.

Parents returning to children who had bonded with substitute caregivers experienced emotional distance, resistance to discipline, and feelings of being treated as strangers. Adolescents, in particular, oscillated between seeking closeness and acting out anger over perceived abandonment. Within marriages, suspicions about infidelity, discoveries of financial mismanagement, and shifting power balances eroded trust. Extended family expectations intensified pressures: relatives often assumed that returnees possessed abundant savings and demanded ongoing financial support, reacting with anger when this was not possible. For women living in their husband's extended-family compounds, in-law surveillance, criticism, and efforts to "re-domesticate" independent returnees further escalated tension. Together, these dynamics turned the family—ideally a source of comfort—into a primary site of conflict and emotional exhaustion.

These relational difficulties had far-reaching consequences. Participants facing severe family conflict reported much higher psychological distress than those with moderate or minimal conflict, and were significantly more likely to contemplate re-migration, often viewing overseas work as an escape from

intolerable domestic conditions. Family dysfunction was also associated with elevated behavioral and emotional problems among children and increased risk of marital dissolution, with divorce-related indicators far above national averages. These patterns are consistent with family stress and ambiguous loss theories, which highlight how separation and reunification disrupt boundaries, roles, and rituals in ways that do not "heal naturally" over time but instead require deliberate reconstruction efforts.

The intervention addressed these issues through a dedicated focus on family systems and communication. Individual sessions helped participants recalibrate expectations, process grief over lost time and changed roles, and recognize their own contributions to conflict cycles. Skills training covered active listening, assertive yet respectful expression, and constructive conflict resolution, with structured practice between sessions. Where feasible, joint family sessions worked on clarifying roles, decision-making, and mutual appreciation using culturally adapted family therapy techniques. Psychoeducation normalized post-separation turbulence, framing it as a predictable transition rather than evidence of failure.

The program explicitly drew on values such as *kerukunan*, *hormat*, and *gotong royong* to position relational work as fulfilling, rather than threatening, cultural ideals. Gender-sensitive approaches prioritized safety planning and boundary negotiation for participants facing abusive dynamics. Pilot data indicated meaningful improvements in family functioning and marital satisfaction, and participants frequently described joint sessions as a rare space where spouses and family members could finally listen to and understand each other.

Economic Vulnerability and Livelihood Reconstruction Challenges

Economic reintegration emerged as the most acute and enduring adjustment difficulty. Over two-thirds of participants scored low on economic reintegration, with nearly four out of five unemployed or underemployed. Only a small minority had gained stable, decent work; the vast majority were in precarious informal sector roles that did not match their overseas experience and offered no security. Median household income among returned migrant families fell substantially below provincial medians, indicating that, contrary to expectations, migration often ended in relative economic disadvantage. Attempts at self-employment or microenterprise rarely succeeded: most such ventures failed within a year and a half, and savings from years abroad were often completely depleted within twelve months due to debt, family obligations, consumption, and unsuccessful investments. Quantitative analyses showed that pre-departure financial literacy, access to

fair credit, business planning support, and social capital for market access predicted better outcomes, whereas high family financial demands, predatory lending, and low education significantly undermined economic stability. Economic distress, in turn, was strongly associated with depressive symptoms, family conflict, social withdrawal, and re-migration intentions.

Interviews illustrated how returnees moved from hopeful anticipation of financial security to deep economic shock. Many believed their savings would secure housing, business capital, and improved living standards, only to see funds dissolve under medical expenses, education costs, household repairs, debt repayment, and constant requests from relatives who assumed migrants were permanently "well off." The abrupt shift from predictable overseas wages to unpredictable local income generated chronic anxiety. Failed business attempts were experienced not only as financial loss but as personal humiliation, with returnees often blaming themselves rather than recognizing structural constraints.

At the structural level, limited local job opportunities, skill-job mismatches, non-recognition of overseas competencies, and exploitative financial schemes systematically blocked sustainable livelihood reconstruction. Skills acquired in factories, hospitals, or domestic service abroad frequently had no viable application in origin communities. Meanwhile, unscrupulous lenders, fraudulent investment schemes, and poorly regulated financial products siphoned off migrants' resources. Government reintegration programs were usually perceived as inaccessible, underfunded, politicized, or poorly targeted.

The psychological toll of these conditions was severe. Economic failure undermined self-worth and core identity, especially for those who saw themselves as primary providers. Feelings of shame, internalized criticism from family and community, and hopelessness about the future were common. For some, economic hardship precipitated clinically significant depression and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation. Over time, economic stress deepened rather than diminished, contradicting assumptions that returnees naturally "adjust" downward; instead, many became trapped in deteriorating cycles of debt, conflict, and despair.

The intervention responded to this complexity through an economic empowerment module that combined individual counseling with concrete resource linkage. Participants assessed their skills, constraints, and local opportunities, and developed realistic vocational plans rather than relying on idealized business dreams. Financial literacy sessions addressed budgeting, saving, debt management, and protection from predatory practices, using practical, contextually relevant examples.

For those pursuing business, simplified tools for market analysis and basic planning were introduced at an accessible level. The program actively connected participants with trustworthy microfinance institutions, government services, and employment networks, while group sessions fostered peer learning, mutual support, and exploration of collective initiatives such as savings groups or cooperatives. Counseling also targeted internalized shame, locating many difficulties in structural barriers rather than personal failure. Pilot findings showed moderate but meaningful gains in economic reintegration indices and strong subjective appreciation for financial education and resource navigation—even as participants and facilitators recognized that counseling alone cannot overcome systemic economic inequities.

Social Alienation and Community Reintegration Barriers

Social integration emerged as a widespread yet often invisible dimension of reverse culture shock. Most participants reported serious difficulties reconnecting with community life despite returning to familiar places. Perceived social support declined sharply across emotional, practical, informational, and companionship domains. Loneliness scores were markedly higher than national norms, indicating profound subjective isolation. Participation in community events, religious gatherings, and organizations decreased substantially, and regression analyses pointed to perceived stigma, value conflicts with local norms, exposure to gossip, and disrupted friendship networks as key predictors of poor social integration.

Narratives revealed powerful experiences of stigma and exclusion. Female domestic workers were frequently targeted with moralistic gossip and insinuations about sexual behavior, religious laxity, or "becoming too modern," regardless of their actual conduct overseas. Male returnees, particularly those who did not return visibly wealthier, were derided as failures or emasculated by their subordinate overseas work. Across groups, "migrant worker" became a stigmatized label that overshadowed individual identities and achievements. Parallel to stigmatization, many returnees described deep value incongruence: after years abroad, they felt intellectually and emotionally disconnected from local conversations and preoccupations, and attempts to introduce broader perspectives were often interpreted as arrogance or criticism. Religious spaces, which should have offered belonging, sometimes became sites of judgment when returnees were seen as insufficiently pious or as carriers of "foreign" religious practices.

Friendship networks had often dissolved during years away. Former peers had moved on, formed new bonds, or adopted different life trajectories. Efforts

to reconnect often felt strained or superficial. Establishing new friendships proved difficult, especially in communities where few others shared migration experiences. Many returnees ended up relying on distant networks—friends still abroad or fellow migrants in other regions—via digital communication, which provided emotional support but reinforced their sense of disconnection from local social life. Over time, repeated experiences of misunderstanding and rejection led many to withdraw from community spaces, further reducing access to instrumental support, information, and opportunities.

The consequences of this social alienation were profound. Elevated loneliness and social disconnection were strongly linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance use, and were a significant predictor of re-migration intentions. Social isolation also amplified other adjustment problems: without supportive networks, returnees struggled more with economic hardship and family conflict, while those very hardships further restricted social participation. Children of socially isolated migrants showed higher levels of behavioral and academic problems, indicating intergenerational effects.

In response, the intervention devoted specific attention to community reintegration and social support activation. Individual counseling helped participants grieve irretrievable social losses, recalibrate expectations, and develop strategies for navigating gossip and stigma without complete withdrawal. Social skills work included context-sensitive communication strategies and the ability to shift between overseas-acquired and local interaction styles. Group sessions created rare spaces where returnees could share experiences without judgment, building peer networks that many described as their first genuine sense of post-return belonging.

The program encouraged engagement in social contexts where returnee experiences were more likely to be valued, such as certain religious study circles, women's groups, or community initiatives. It also incorporated empowerment elements that challenged internalized stigma and reframed migration as a source of resilience and expanded horizons. Limited community outreach sessions with local leaders and organizations sought to raise awareness of reintegration challenges and reduce negative stereotyping. Pilot results showed significant reductions in loneliness and improved social integration, though participants emphasized that longstanding community attitudes change slowly and require broader, sustained community-level strategies.

Integrated Framework: Multidimensional Reverse Culture Shock and Intervention Requirements

Taken together, the findings portray reverse culture shock not as a single psychological syndrome but as a multidimensional, mutually reinforcing system of identity disruption, family strain, economic vulnerability, and social alienation. Statistical modeling indicated that identity fragmentation predicted greater family conflict, social exclusion, and economic difficulty, and that these domains, in turn, fed back into identity confusion. Economic insecurity emerged as a particularly powerful driver, exerting direct effects on family relationships, social participation, and psychological distress.

Mediational analyses highlighted the buffering role of family quality and social support in attenuating the impact of identity challenges and stigma on mental health. Qualitative integration further clarified temporal patterns: an initial period of euphoria following return tended to give way, within months, to a disillusionment phase marked by escalating conflict, financial strain, and social discomfort; without intervention, this often hardened into a chronic strain phase characterized by entrenched problems, hopelessness, and strong impulses to re-migrate.

Risk and protective factors operated across multiple levels. Individually, low education, limited financial literacy, pre-existing psychological vulnerability, and rigid thinking patterns heightened risk, while higher education, flexible coping, and spiritual resources offered protection. Relationally, high dependency burdens, pre-existing marital strain, and weak attachment bonds undermined adjustment, whereas supportive spouses, strong parent-child connections maintained through communication, and peer networks of other returnees functioned as buffers. Structurally, limited employment opportunities, exploitative financial practices, inadequate reintegration programs, and discriminatory attitudes contributed to vulnerability, while accessible reintegration services, fair financial products, and inclusive community initiatives improved prospects.

The 10-week *Personal-Social Adjustment Counseling* Program was designed directly in response to this integrated understanding. Grounded in personal-social adjustment theory, acculturation and family systems perspectives, and empowerment-oriented counseling, the model systematically addresses interconnected domains rather than treating issues in isolation. The progression from psychoeducation and normalization, through identity reconstruction, family strengthening, community integration, and economic planning, to coping consolidation allows participants to build capacities in a coherent sequence while recognizing that progress in one domain reinforces others. Culturally adapted cognitive, narrative, systemic,

and solution-focused techniques are embedded throughout, along with respect for Indonesian cultural norms and, where relevant, religious frameworks. Pilot results showed large improvements in identity integration and psychological distress, and moderate to large gains in family, social, and economic domains, alongside high participant satisfaction and strong perceptions of cultural fit.

These findings have far-reaching implications. At the policy level, they underscore that protection of migrant workers cannot be limited to pre-departure and overseas phases; reintegration support, including psychosocial services, must become a core pillar of migration governance. In practice, the results affirm the importance of holistic, culturally grounded counseling that engages not only individuals but also families, peer groups, and community structures. At the research level, they indicate the value of longitudinal, multi-method studies and rigorous trials of integrated interventions.

Although the current study is constrained by cross-sectional design elements, limited geographic coverage, self-report data, and a non-randomized pilot, it nonetheless provides an empirically grounded framework and an intervention prototype that can be refined and tested in future research. Collectively, the evidence suggests that with timely, context-sensitive, and multi-level support, reverse culture shock can be transformed from a chronic, cyclical source of suffering into a navigable transition, allowing Indonesian migrant workers to reintegrate with dignity and to contribute fully to their families and communities.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the critical gap in reintegration support for Indonesian migrant workers experiencing reverse culture shock by developing and validating a comprehensive, culturally responsive personal-social adjustment counseling model. Using explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research reveals reverse culture shock as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing identity fragmentation, family relationship strain, economic vulnerability, and social alienation, operating as self-reinforcing cycles that undermine sustainable reintegration. The study advances theory by extending personal-social adjustment concepts to return migration contexts and empirically confirming how Indonesian cultural values, gender norms, and community expectations shape reintegration challenges.

Future research should employ longitudinal randomized controlled trials to establish definitive intervention efficacy and examine mechanisms of change. Policymakers must prioritize psychosocial reintegration support as

essential component of migrant worker protection through sustained funding and accessible services. Counseling practitioners should implement holistic, culturally adapted interventions addressing identity, family, economic, and social adjustment simultaneously while incorporating family systems and peer support. As global labor migration expands, evidence-based, context-sensitive psychosocial interventions become increasingly critical for ensuring migration contributes to sustainable development and human flourishing rather than reinforcing precarity and exploitation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors express profound gratitude to all Indonesian migrant workers who generously shared their experiences, challenges, and insights during the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews that formed the foundation of this research. Their courage in discussing deeply personal struggles with identity reconstruction, family relationships, economic insecurity, and social reintegration made this study possible and ensures that future intervention efforts will be grounded in authentic lived experiences rather than external assumptions. We extend sincere appreciation to the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI), provincial and village-level migrant worker service posts in East Java, Central Java, and West Nusa Tenggara, and migrant worker advocacy organizations whose collaboration facilitated participant recruitment and provided essential contextual knowledge that enhanced research design and implementation.

Special thanks are due to the trained research assistants who conducted surveys and interviews with cultural sensitivity and linguistic competence, ensuring that participants felt respected and understood throughout data collection processes. We acknowledge the counseling experts, mental health professionals, and community leaders who contributed their expertise during intervention development through consultation sessions that enriched the theoretical grounding and practical applicability of the Personal-Social Adjustment Counseling Program. Gratitude is extended to the 30 pilot participants who engaged wholeheartedly in the intervention testing phase, providing honest feedback that refined program content and delivery approaches to better serve returnee populations.

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