

From Personal Wound To Professional Resilience: A Phenomenological Study Of Working Women's Career Resilience After Relational Betrayal

Epsilandri Septyarini

Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya

*epsilandri-s.mng-doc25@ukwms.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how working women develop career resilience after experiencing relational betrayal in marriage. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four working women from different professional backgrounds, including a lecturer, a communication professional, a teacher, and an employee of a state-owned enterprise. The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by the Gioia data structure, consisting of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. The findings reveal that relational betrayal becomes a critical life event that disrupts emotional stability, trust, self-perception, and professional functioning. However, work serves as a survival space, a source of self-worth, and an anchor for rebuilding professional identity. Six main dimensions emerged from the analysis: emotional disruption, professional survival, reclaiming professional identity, supportive recovery environment, women empowerment, and career resilience. This study contributes to human resource management literature by showing that career resilience is shaped not only by organizational pressures, but also by personal crises that affect employees' psychological resources and work functioning.

Keyword: *relational betrayal, career resilience, working women, phenomenology, human resource management*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Working women today do not only perform professional roles, but also carry domestic, caregiving, and emotional responsibilities within the family. These multiple roles make personal life events difficult to separate from work



life. From a work-home interface perspective, work and family domains are interconnected, meaning that experiences in one domain may influence individuals' psychological conditions and functioning in another domain (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). In this sense, employees should not be understood merely as productive resources, but also as individuals who bring psychological conditions, relational experiences, emotional burdens, and social responsibilities into the workplace. This perspective is increasingly relevant in human resource management, particularly as organizations are required to develop more adaptive and human-centered approaches to managing employees in complex work environments (Lisan & Anshori, 2024; Hosnaidah & Anshori, 2024).

One personal experience that may significantly disrupt psychological stability is relational betrayal in marriage. Relational betrayal refers to an experience in which trust, commitment, and emotional safety in an intimate relationship are violated by a partner. This experience is not merely an interpersonal conflict, but may become a critical life event because it involves the collapse of trust, loss of emotional security, and deep psychological distress. Lonergan et al. (2021) explain that romantic partner betrayal can be understood as an interpersonal traumatic experience because it involves a violation of trust and intense emotional distress. Similarly, Stavrova et al. (2023) show that infidelity is closely related to personal and relational well-being, indicating that betrayal may influence not only intimate relationships but also the individual's broader psychological and social functioning.

In the context of working women, relational betrayal becomes more complex because women are still expected to perform their professional responsibilities while dealing with personal crises. Women who experience relational betrayal may face emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, declining motivation, loss of self-confidence, and changes in how they perceive themselves and their future. At the same time, many of them continue to work, care for their children, maintain social roles, and rebuild their sense of strength. This situation indicates that personal crises may influence professional



functioning and career continuity, especially when women must negotiate between emotional pain, work demands, motherhood, and self-recovery.

Career resilience is therefore a relevant concept for understanding how working women continue to function professionally after experiencing relational betrayal. Career resilience refers to an individual's ability to survive, adapt, and continue developing in their career despite pressure, disruption, or life challenges. Han et al. (2021) show that career resilience is associated with subjective well-being, career success, job satisfaction, salary, and work stress. Mishra and McDonald (2017) also emphasize that career resilience is an important construct in human resource development because it reflects an individual's capacity to respond to career-related challenges and sustain career functioning. In this sense, career resilience is not only related to professional achievement, but also to well-being, self-recovery, and the ability to reconstruct life direction after a disruptive personal experience.

Although studies on infidelity, betrayal trauma, psychological distress, and career resilience have developed, these topics are often discussed separately. Studies on relational betrayal are commonly situated within clinical psychology, counseling, or family relationship studies, while studies on career resilience are more frequently associated with career uncertainty, organizational change, work pressure, or career development in general (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Kodama, 2021). Limited research has specifically explored how working women make sense of relational betrayal in relation to their work life, professional identity, and the process of rebuilding career resilience. This gap is important because personal crises may not only affect emotional well-being, but also shape how women maintain professional functioning, reconstruct identity, and regain agency in their careers.

Based on this gap, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of working women after relational betrayal. This approach is considered appropriate because the study aims to explore meaning-making, emotional experiences, coping strategies, sources of support, and the recovery process from the perspective of the



participants. This study is guided by the following research questions: How do working women make sense of relational betrayal in relation to their work life and professional identity? How do working women develop career resilience and maintain professional functioning after relational betrayal? How do working women narrate their sources of support, recovery strategies, and process of becoming empowered after relational betrayal?

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of working women in dealing with relational betrayal and to understand how such experiences shape their work life, professional identity, and career resilience. Theoretically, this study contributes to human resource management literature by highlighting that career resilience is not only shaped by organizational pressures or labor market uncertainty, but also by personal crises that affect employees' psychological resources and professional functioning. Practically, this study provides insights for organizations to develop more empathetic, flexible, and human-centered human resource practices that support employees facing personal crises without violating their privacy. This practical relevance is aligned with the need for more adaptive performance management and employee support systems in contemporary organizations (Zayroni & Anshori, 2024).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conservation of Resources Theory

This study is grounded in Conservation of Resources Theory, which explains that individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and restore resources that they consider valuable (Hobfoll, 1989). These resources may include personal, psychological, social, material, and work-related resources. Stress occurs when individuals experience actual resource loss, face the threat of resource loss, or fail to regain resources after investing their existing resources. In the context of this study, relational betrayal is understood as a critical life event that may cause the loss of psychological and emotional resources among



working women, including trust, emotional security, self-worth, confidence, concentration, and future orientation.

Conservation of Resources Theory is relevant for understanding career resilience because resilience can be interpreted as a process of protecting, restoring, and rebuilding resources after disruption. Hobfoll et al. (2018) further emphasize that resources in organizational contexts have important consequences for stress, burnout, work engagement, and employee well-being. Therefore, work, family support, social support, spirituality, managerial empathy, work flexibility, and professional identity can be understood as resources that help working women survive and recover after experiencing relational betrayal.

Relational Betrayal as a Critical Life Event

Relational betrayal refers to an experience in which trust, commitment, and emotional safety in an intimate relationship are violated by a partner. In marriage, betrayal is not only related to infidelity, but also to the collapse of assumptions about loyalty, honesty, emotional support, and relational security. Lonergan et al. (2021) explain that romantic partner betrayal can be understood as an interpersonal traumatic experience because it involves a violation of trust, emotional distress, and a disruption of psychological safety.

Stavrova et al. (2023) also show that infidelity is related to personal and relational well-being. This indicates that relational betrayal should not be understood merely as a moral issue or marital conflict, but also as an experience that may influence psychological well-being, social relationships, and individual functioning. In this study, relational betrayal is positioned as a critical life event because it has the potential to change how working women perceive themselves, their relationships, their work, and their future.

Career Resilience in Human Resource Management

Career resilience refers to an individual's ability to survive, adapt, and continue developing in their career despite pressure, disruption, or life challenges. In human resource management, career resilience is important because employees do not work separately from their personal lives. Personal



crises may influence psychological energy, motivation, concentration, job involvement, and professional functioning.

Contemporary career studies suggest that careers are no longer always understood as linear paths within a single organization. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) introduced the concept of the boundaryless career, which emphasizes that careers may move beyond formal organizational boundaries and that individuals play an active role in managing their career paths. This concept is relevant to the present study because working women who experience relational crises do not only maintain employment as an organizational responsibility, but also manage their careers as part of personal identity, continuity, and future reconstruction.

Career resilience is also closely related to career adaptability. Bimrose and Hearne (2012) show that resilience and career adaptability complement each other in helping individuals deal with transition and uncertainty. Kodama (2021) further explains that career resilience helps employees face reality shock, particularly when individuals must adjust to difficult work and life realities. Mishra and McDonald (2017), through an integrated review of empirical literature, emphasize that career resilience is an important construct in human resource development because it has significant antecedents and consequences for individuals and organizations.

Career resilience can also be understood through career construction theory. Savickas (2013) explains that individuals construct their careers through meaning-making, adaptation, and identity reconstruction when facing life changes. In this study, working women who experience relational betrayal do not merely attempt to keep working; they also reconstruct meaning, rebuild professional identity, and redefine their future direction. Thus, career resilience is understood as an adaptive process that involves professional functioning, meaning recovery, and future-oriented reconstruction.

Han et al. (2021) explain that career resilience is associated with subjective well-being, career success, job satisfaction, salary, and work stress. This shows that career resilience is not merely an abstract personal quality, but



is closely related to work experience and individual well-being. In this study, resilience is not understood as a fixed personal trait that makes individuals constantly strong, but as an adaptive process formed through experience, support, and resource recovery. This view is consistent with Masten (2014), who explains resilience as an adaptive process that enables individuals to continue functioning and developing despite adversity.

Working Women, Professional Functioning, and Women Empowerment

Working women often stand at the intersection of professional responsibilities and domestic expectations. When facing a serious personal crisis, women may experience emotional distress while still being expected to perform family roles, maintain household stability, care for children, and demonstrate good work performance. Therefore, the experiences of working women need to be understood through the lenses of gender, professional functioning, and empowerment.

Work does not only have technical dimensions, but also relational and proactive dimensions. Grant and Parker (2009) explain that work design theory has developed toward relational and proactive perspectives, in which work is understood as a space for interaction, meaning, and individual initiative. In this study, work may function as a recovery space because it allows participants to experience social interaction, responsibility, recognition, and a sense of functioning.

Women empowerment in the workplace is also related to women's ability to face social and communicative barriers. Dorrance Hall and Gettings (2023) show that resilience processes can buffer the negative associations between marginalizing communication and women's career outcomes. Trinkenreich et al. (2022) also show that women in the workplace face challenges such as work-life balance, lack of recognition, glass ceiling, and maternal wall. Therefore, organizational support, flexibility, mentoring, recognition, equal opportunity, and women empowerment are important factors in sustaining women's careers.



In this study, women empowerment is not understood merely as women's position within organizational structures, but as a process through which women regain control, meaning, agency, and self-worth after experiencing a weakening life event. Relational betrayal may disrupt self-confidence and personal identity, but recovery may open space for women to rebuild boundaries, strengthen independence, set priorities, and understand work as a source of dignity, stability, and self-actualization.

Human Resource Management and Organizational Support

From a human resource management perspective, organizations need to develop more adaptive and human-centered approaches in managing employees. Lisan and Anshori (2024) emphasize the importance of human resource planning and development in preparing organizations for the Society 5.0 era. This is relevant to the present study because organizations increasingly need to respond not only to technological and structural changes, but also to the human side of work, including employees' emotional and psychological needs.

Performance management is also relevant in understanding how organizations support employees who experience personal crises. Hosnaidah and Anshori (2024) explain that performance management strategies in the VUCA era need to be adaptive, data-driven, and innovation-oriented. Zayroni and Anshori (2024) further emphasize that performance management plays a role in improving employee service quality. These studies support the argument that organizations need systems that help employees maintain performance without ignoring their psychological well-being and personal dignity.

Organizational support can also be linked to human resource innovation and administrative systems. Samudera (2025) shows that human resource management innovation may support occupational resilience and reduce turnover in the homecare sector. Although the context differs from the present study, the idea is relevant because it shows that resilience can be strengthened through organizational intervention. Wiriani (2024) also highlights the



importance of systematic management in general affairs and human resource functions. This reinforces the argument that employee support should not be treated as an informal or incidental practice, but as part of a professional and responsive human resource management system.

Conceptual Framework

Based on Conservation of Resources Theory, relational betrayal in this study is positioned as a critical life event that triggers resource loss among working women. This resource loss appears in the form of emotional disruption, such as feeling broken, losing trust, losing emotional security, and experiencing changes in self-perception. In the work context, this psychological resource loss may affect concentration, motivation, emotional regulation, and professional functioning.

However, working women do not remain only in the stage of loss. They attempt to maintain professional functioning through professional survival, which refers to the ability to keep working, regulate emotions, fulfill work responsibilities, and maintain professional roles despite personal distress. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory, this process shows that individuals are not passive in facing resource loss; they actively seek ways to protect and rebuild valuable resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Work may then function as a recovery resource. Through work, participants regain a sense of competence, usefulness, trust, and self-worth. This process is referred to as reclaiming professional identity. In addition, family support, social support, spirituality, work flexibility, and non-judgmental environments form a supportive recovery environment. These sources of support act as resource gains that help participants rebuild psychological and social stability.

At the same time, relational betrayal may also encourage women empowerment. In this study, women empowerment refers to the process through which working women rebuild agency, independence, boundaries,



decision-making capacity, and control over their future. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study explains that relational betrayal triggers emotional disruption, but through professional survival, reclaiming professional identity, supportive recovery environment, and women empowerment, working women may develop career resilience.

III. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with an interpretative phenomenological design. This design was selected because the study aims to understand the lived experiences of working women who experienced relational betrayal and how they make sense of this experience in relation to their work life, professional identity, and career resilience. The focus of this study is not to measure statistical relationships among variables, but to explore meaning-making, emotional experiences, coping strategies, sources of support, and the recovery process in depth.

An interpretative phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study because relational betrayal is a subjective, personal, and emotionally complex experience. Each participant may interpret the experience differently depending on her life background, family condition, work context, social support, spirituality, and understanding of herself as a working woman. Smith et al. (2009) explain that interpretative phenomenological analysis is used to understand how individuals make sense of significant life experiences. Therefore, this approach allows the researcher to capture the depth of participants' narratives and the meanings attached to their experiences.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants in this study were working women who had experienced relational betrayal in marriage and continued to perform their professional roles after the experience. Participants were selected using



purposive sampling, which allows researchers to identify individuals who have direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon being studied.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: women who were currently working or had active work experience; women who had experienced relational betrayal in marriage; women who continued to perform work-related activities after the experience; women who were willing to share their experiences reflectively; and women who agreed that their identities would be anonymized for ethical and confidentiality purposes.

This study involved four participants from different professional backgrounds. The participants consisted of a lecturer at a private university, a communication professional working as a voice over talent and master of ceremony, a high school teacher, and an employee of a state-owned enterprise. The number of participants was considered appropriate for a mini qualitative study because the purpose of the research was not statistical generalization, but depth of understanding and richness of experience. Guest et al. (2006) argue that the adequacy of interviews in qualitative research depends on the depth of information, the focus of the research question, and the relevance of participants' experiences to the phenomenon under investigation.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Age	Occupation	Work Experience	Number of Children	Description
P1	35 years old	Lecturer at a Private University	11 years	2	Continued performing academic responsibilities after experiencing a relational crisis.
P2	45 years old	Communication Professional (Voice-over Talent/MC)	28 years	1	Continued professional work while managing domestic responsibilities.
P3	42 years old	High School Teacher	12 years	2	Continued teaching and caregiving responsibilities after experiencing a personal crisis.
P4	42 years old	State-Owned Enterprise Employee	10 years	3	Continued working within a formal organizational structure despite experiencing relational distress.

Data Collection Technique



Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used because they provide a balance between research focus and flexibility. The researcher used an interview guide to maintain consistency across participants, while also allowing participants to narrate their experiences, emotions, reflections, and recovery processes in their own words.

The interview questions focused on several key areas: participants' work background, the experience of relational betrayal, the impact of the experience on work life, strategies for maintaining professional functioning, sources of support, recovery processes, women empowerment, and the meaning of career resilience. The interviews did not aim to explore sensational or overly private details of relational betrayal. Instead, the focus was placed on how participants interpreted the experience and how they rebuilt professional functioning and career resilience afterward.

Research Ethics

Because this study addresses a sensitive personal experience, ethical considerations were central throughout the research process. The identities of all participants were anonymized using codes P1, P2, P3, and P4. Names, institutions, spouses, workplaces, and other personal details that could reveal participants' identities were not included in the report.

Participation was voluntary. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the questions, and their right to refuse to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. Participants were also informed that they could stop the interview at any time. In presenting the findings, interview quotations were selected carefully to protect participants' dignity and privacy. The analysis focused on meaning-making, career resilience, professional functioning, and recovery, rather than moral judgment of participants' personal experiences.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it enables the



researcher to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning within participants' narratives. This method is suitable for exploring how participants make sense of emotional disruption, professional survival, support systems, women empowerment, and career resilience.

To strengthen analytical transparency, this study also adopted the Gioia data structure, which consists of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). First-order concepts were developed by staying close to the participants' own words and expressions. Second-order themes were formed by grouping related concepts into more abstract interpretative categories. Aggregate dimensions were then developed to explain the broader process of career resilience among working women after relational betrayal.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher read the interview transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Second, initial codes were generated based on meaningful statements from participants. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader themes. Fourth, the themes were interpreted and organized into aggregate dimensions. The final dimensions identified in this study were emotional disruption, professional survival, reclaiming professional identity, supportive recovery environment, women empowerment, and career resilience.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, this study applied the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was maintained by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, comparing participants' quotations with the emerging themes, and ensuring that the interpretations remained close to the participants' narratives. The use of direct quotations in the findings also helped demonstrate the connection between empirical data and analytical interpretation.

Transferability was supported by providing sufficient contextual descriptions of the participants, including age, occupation, work experience,



number of children, and professional background, without revealing personal identities. Dependability was maintained through a systematic analytical procedure, including data familiarization, first-order coding, second-order theme development, and aggregate dimension construction. Confirmability was supported by grounding the findings in participants' direct quotations, ensuring that the analysis was based on empirical data rather than solely on the researcher's assumptions.

The researcher also maintained reflexivity during the analytical process because relational betrayal is a sensitive and emotionally charged topic. Therefore, the analysis was carefully directed toward participants' work experiences, meaning-making processes, coping strategies, and career resilience, rather than toward judgment of their personal relationships.

IV. RESULTS

Overview of Findings

Based on interviews with four participants, relational betrayal was experienced as a critical life event that affected not only personal life, but also emotional stability, self-perception, social relationships, and professional functioning. The participants described feelings of emotional shock, loss of trust, sadness, reduced self-confidence, and uncertainty about the future. These experiences indicate that relational betrayal may create psychological resource loss, particularly in terms of emotional security, self-worth, trust, and future orientation.

However, the findings also show that work played an important role in the participants' survival and recovery process. For some participants, work remained a responsibility that had to be performed despite emotional instability. For others, work became a positive coping space, a source of self-worth, and a way to maintain a sense of control over life. For example, P2 stated that work became "a positive escape," "the third source of strength after her child and parents," and "a space to feel empowered and valuable." This shows



that work was not merely an economic activity, but also a psychological and professional resource that supported recovery.

The coding process identified six aggregate dimensions that explain how working women developed career resilience after relational betrayal: emotional disruption, professional survival, reclaiming professional identity, supportive recovery environment, women empowerment, and career resilience. These dimensions suggest that career resilience was not formed instantly, but through a gradual process involving emotional loss, survival efforts, social support, reconstruction of professional identity, empowerment, and future-oriented recovery.

This section contains the summarized data, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. Include whether the research findings support or contradict previous studies.

Gioia Data Structure

Table 2. Data Structure of Interview Findings

Interview Quotations	First-Order Concepts	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
"At first, I really felt broken. But I realized that I still had responsibilities that I had to carry out." (P1)	Feeling broken but still responsible	Emotional shock and responsibility awareness	Emotional disruption
"I became very quiet and cried every day." (P2)	Withdrawing and crying repeatedly	Emotional withdrawal and sadness	Emotional disruption
"The biggest change I felt was the loss of trust in other people, including family." (P2)	Losing trust in others	Loss of trust and emotional safety	Emotional disruption
"At first, it was difficult for me to focus on teaching, but when I stood in front of my students, I tried to control myself and continue my role as a teacher." (P3)	Continuing to teach despite emotional disturbance	Emotional regulation in teaching role	Professional survival

Interview Quotations	First-Order Concepts	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
"Work became a positive escape, the third source of strength after my child and parents, and a space where I could still feel empowered and valuable." (P2)	Work as a space for positive distraction and empowerment	Work as positive coping space	Professional survival
"At home, I felt like I failed as a woman, but when I worked, I felt that there was still a part of me that could function." (P1)	Work as a source of self-worth	Work as a source of self-worth	Reclaiming professional identity
"Working made me feel that I still had value. Although my household was in trouble, I could still complete my work and be trusted by the office." (P4)	Work maintaining a sense of value	Professional competence as self-worth	Reclaiming professional identity
"The people who helped me the most during that difficult time were my mother, my brother, and my child." (P2)	Core family support	Family as recovery support	Supportive recovery environment
"I did not need people to give me too much advice. I needed to be listened to without being blamed." (P1)	Need to be heard without judgment	Non-judgmental emotional support	Supportive recovery environment
"I did not tell everyone at school. I only chose one or two friends I trusted because I needed a safe place to talk." (P3)	Being selective in seeking support	Safe and selective support	Supportive recovery environment
"Now I feel more independent, more careful, and stronger than before." (P2)	Becoming more independent and cautious	Reconstructing personal agency	Women empowerment
"I learned to create boundaries. I no longer want all my life decisions to depend on my partner." (P4)	Building boundaries and independence	Boundary setting and self-protection	Women empowerment
"I have to stay strong, optimistic, and resilient, not to gain sympathy from others, but to prove to myself and to God that I still have hope." (P2)	Strength as survival and hope	Hope-based resilience	Career resilience
"Now I want to focus more on building myself and my future. I do not want this experience to destroy my career." (P1)	Reorganizing future career direction	Future-oriented career reconstruction	Career resilience
"I cannot change what has happened, but I can choose to keep working, raise my children, and protect my future." (P3)	Accepting the situation and remaining	Acceptance and career continuity	Career resilience



Interview Quotations	First-Order Concepts	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
	future-oriented		

Emotional Disruption

The first dimension is emotional disruption, which refers to the emotional disturbance experienced by participants after relational betrayal. The participants described feeling broken, sad, emotionally unstable, and unable to fully trust others. P2 stated that she became very quiet and cried every day. She also explained that the biggest change she experienced was the loss of trust in other people, including family. These narratives indicate that relational betrayal disrupted participants' emotional security, self-confidence, and sense of stability.

For P1, emotional disruption appeared in the feeling of being broken while still having to carry out responsibilities. For P3 and P4, emotional disruption was reflected in difficulty concentrating, emotional exhaustion, and the need to appear professionally stable in front of students, colleagues, or supervisors. This finding shows that relational betrayal is not merely a domestic or private issue, but may become a critical life event that affects psychological resources and professional functioning.

This finding supports Lonergan et al. (2021), who explain that romantic partner betrayal can be understood as an interpersonal traumatic experience. It is also consistent with Stavrova et al. (2023), who show that infidelity is related to changes in personal and relational well-being. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory, emotional disruption can be understood as a form of resource loss, in which individuals lose emotional security, trust, self-worth, emotional energy, and future orientation (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Professional Survival



The second dimension is professional survival, which refers to participants' efforts to continue performing work responsibilities despite emotional distress. All participants showed that they attempted to maintain their professional roles because of work responsibility, economic needs, caregiving demands, and the need to keep life structured. This process did not mean that the participants were not emotionally affected. Rather, it showed their effort to maintain minimum professional functioning while dealing with personal pain.

P2 explained that work became a positive distraction and a space where she could still feel empowered. She described work as "a positive escape," "a source of strength after her child and parents," and a place where she could still feel valuable. This indicates that work did not always function as an additional burden. In certain situations, work became a survival space that helped participants maintain routine, social functioning, and a sense of control. This finding is relevant to Han et al. (2021), who show that career resilience is associated with subjective well-being, career success, job satisfaction, and work stress. It also supports Mishra and McDonald (2017), who position career resilience as an important construct in human resource development because it reflects individuals' ability to respond to pressure and sustain career functioning.

Reclaiming Professional Identity

The third dimension is reclaiming professional identity, which refers to the process through which participants rebuilt their sense of worth through work and professional roles. When their personal identity as a wife, partner, or woman was disrupted, work became a space where they could still feel competent, useful, and valued. P1 stated that although she felt like she failed as a woman at home, work made her feel that there was still a part of herself that could function.

For P4, working within a formal organizational structure helped her feel that she was still trusted and capable of completing responsibilities. These findings show that professional identity is not only related to position or income, but also to self-worth, competence, and continuity of identity. Work



helped participants maintain a sense of personal value when their relational identity was shaken.

This finding is consistent with De Vos et al. (2020), who explain that sustainable careers are shaped by the interaction between person, context, and time. In this study, work was not merely an economic activity, but also a context that supported the reconstruction of professional identity. The finding can also be understood through career construction theory, which emphasizes that individuals construct career meaning and identity when facing life transitions and challenges (Savickas, 2013).

Supportive Recovery Environment

The fourth dimension is supportive recovery environment, which refers to the presence of safe, supportive, and non-judgmental relationships that help participants recover. The support needed by participants was not always advice or direct solutions. Instead, they needed people who could listen, strengthen them, and provide emotional safety. P2 stated that her mother, brother, and child were the most important sources of support during her difficult period. P1 also emphasized the need to be listened to without being blamed.

Support also appeared in the work context. P3 chose to share her condition only with one or two trusted colleagues because she needed a safe space to talk. This indicates that selective and safe support was important for protecting emotional dignity. In organizational contexts, support may take the form of work flexibility, empathetic communication, and opportunities to take personal leave without being forced to disclose sensitive details.

This finding supports Kossek and Lautsch (2018), who emphasize the importance of work-life flexibility in helping employees manage tensions between work and personal life. It is also relevant to Zayroni and Anshori (2024), who highlight the role of performance management in improving employee service quality. Employees experiencing personal crises still need



work systems that help them maintain performance without sacrificing psychological safety and dignity.

Women Empowerment

The fifth dimension is women empowerment, which refers to the process through which participants rebuilt agency, independence, boundaries, and control over their future. Although relational betrayal weakened the participants emotionally, it also encouraged them to become more aware of their needs and less dependent on their partners. P2 stated that she became more independent, more careful, and stronger in making decisions. P4 also stated that she learned to create boundaries and no longer wanted her life decisions to depend entirely on her partner.

For P1 and P4, empowerment appeared through the awareness of building boundaries, maintaining career continuity, and not allowing the betrayal experience to define their future. For P3, empowerment was reflected in the ability to continue teaching, raising children, and preserving self-dignity. Thus, women empowerment in this study is not understood merely as women's position in organizational structures, but as a process of regaining control over self, relationships, decisions, and career future.

This finding is consistent with Trinkenreich et al. (2022), who emphasize that women's career sustainability is influenced by support, flexibility, mentoring, recognition, and empowerment. It is also relevant to Dorrance Hall and Gettings (2023), who show that resilience processes can buffer the negative effects of marginalizing communication on women's career outcomes. In this study, empowerment emerged through personal recovery, boundary setting, independence, and the reconstruction of future orientation.

Career Resilience

The sixth dimension is career resilience, which refers to participants' ability to survive, recover, and reorganize their career future after a personal crisis. Career resilience did not appear instantly. It developed gradually through



emotional pain, survival efforts, social support, rebuilding self-worth, and future-oriented meaning-making. P2 described resilience as the willingness and ability to heal, rise again, and continue living despite limitations. She also stated that she needed to stay strong and optimistic not to gain sympathy, but to prove to herself and to God that she still had hope.

For P1, career resilience appeared in the desire to rebuild herself and her future without allowing the experience to destroy her career. For P3, resilience was reflected in her decision to continue working, raise her children, and protect her future. For P4, resilience was shown through the ability to continue working professionally within a formal organizational structure despite relational distress.

This finding supports Bimrose and Hearne (2012), who show that resilience and career adaptability help individuals face transitions and career uncertainty. It is also consistent with Kodama (2021), who explains that career resilience helps employees face reality shock. In this study, reality shock did not only come from the workplace, but also from relational crisis that affected psychological stability and professional identity. Therefore, career resilience is not only the ability to remain employed, but also the ability to rebuild meaning, maintain professional functioning, and reconstruct career direction after personal disruption.

Conceptual Model of Findings

Based on the analysis, the findings suggest that relational betrayal functions as a critical life event that triggers emotional disruption. This emotional disruption then leads participants into professional survival, in which they attempt to keep working, regulate emotions, fulfill responsibilities, and maintain professional functioning.

Work then becomes a space for reclaiming professional identity. Through work, participants regain a sense of competence, usefulness, trust, and self-worth. At the same time, family support, social support, spirituality, flexibility,



and non-judgmental environments form a supportive recovery environment. The experience also encourages women empowerment through independence, boundary setting, agency, and future-oriented decision-making. These processes eventually lead to career resilience, which refers to the ability of working women to survive, reinterpret their experiences, and rebuild their career future after relational betrayal.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of working women in developing career resilience after experiencing relational betrayal in marriage. Based on interviews with four participants, the findings show that relational betrayal can become a critical life event that disrupts emotional stability, self-perception, trust, and professional functioning. The experience did not only affect participants' personal lives, but also influenced their concentration, motivation, emotional regulation, social relationships, and the way they understood themselves as working women.

Using Conservation of Resources Theory as the theoretical foundation, this study shows that relational betrayal can be understood as a form of resource loss. The participants experienced the loss of psychological and emotional resources, such as emotional security, trust, self-worth, emotional energy, and future orientation. However, recovery began when participants rebuilt new resources through work, family support, social support, spirituality, independence, boundary setting, and professional meaning. In this context, career resilience was not simply the ability to remain strong, but a gradual process of restoring personal, social, and professional resources.

The findings identified six main dimensions in the formation of career resilience among working women after relational betrayal: emotional disruption, professional survival, reclaiming professional identity, supportive recovery environment, women empowerment, and career resilience. Emotional disruption appeared as the initial response to betrayal, while professional



survival reflected participants' efforts to continue working despite emotional distress. Reclaiming professional identity showed how work became a source of self-worth and competence. Supportive recovery environment reflected the importance of family, trusted friends, spirituality, and non-judgmental support. Women empowerment emerged through independence, boundary setting, and the reconstruction of agency. Finally, career resilience was reflected in participants' ability to survive, reinterpret their experiences, and rebuild their career future.

Theoretically, this study contributes to human resource management literature by extending the discussion of career resilience beyond organizational pressure, labor market uncertainty, or work-related challenges. The findings show that personal crises, particularly relational betrayal, may also shape employees' psychological resources, professional functioning, and career resilience. Practically, this study suggests that organizations need to develop more empathetic, flexible, and human-centered human resource practices. Organizational support does not require intrusion into employees' private lives, but can be provided through flexible work arrangements, personal leave, access to psychological support, empathetic communication from supervisors, and a non-judgmental work climate.

Suggestion

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited to four working women. Therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization, but for developing an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of working women after relational betrayal. Second, relational betrayal is a sensitive personal experience, so the depth of data depended on the participants' willingness and emotional readiness to share their stories. Third, although the participants came from different professional backgrounds, this study focused only on women's experiences. As a result, the findings mainly reflect women's emotional, relational, and professional meaning-making processes.



Future studies are recommended to involve a larger and more diverse group of participants from different occupations, organizational settings, and marital backgrounds. Further research may also include male participants who have experienced relational betrayal. This comparison could provide a richer understanding of whether emotional disruption, coping strategies, support-seeking behavior, professional functioning, and career resilience are experienced differently by men and women. Including male participants would not reduce the importance of women's experiences, but would help future studies develop a more comparative and gender-sensitive understanding of relational betrayal and career resilience.

Future research should also consider strengthening data triangulation. Since this study relied primarily on semi-structured interviews, subsequent studies may combine interviews with participant reflective notes, follow-up interviews, researcher field notes, or additional perspectives from trusted significant others, counselors, HR practitioners, or supervisors, as long as ethical boundaries and participant privacy are maintained. Triangulation would help strengthen the credibility of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how personal crises influence professional functioning and career resilience.

In addition, future studies may apply a longitudinal design to examine how career resilience develops over time. Relational betrayal and recovery are not single-moment experiences; they involve emotional shock, survival, reflection, boundary reconstruction, and future reorientation. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to understand how working individuals move from crisis to recovery and how professional identity changes across different stages of healing.

From a practical perspective, organizations are encouraged to develop human resource policies that are more responsive to employees experiencing personal crises. These policies may include flexible work arrangements, personal leave mechanisms, confidential counseling access, supportive supervisor communication, and psychologically safe work environments.



Organizations do not need to interfere with employees' private matters, but they need to recognize that employees' personal crises can affect emotional well-being and professional functioning. Therefore, a human-centered HRM approach is essential for supporting employee resilience while maintaining dignity, privacy, and professionalism.

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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