



## Cultural Counseling Prototype Based on *Ruwatan* Values for Enhancing Community Well-Being Post-Flood Disaster

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 17 April 2025

Accepted 27 May 2025

Available online 15 June 2025

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#### DOI:

[10.18326/pamomong.v6i1.3888](https://doi.org/10.18326/pamomong.v6i1.3888)

#### How to cite:

Mahfud, A., Latifah, A., Lestari, I.,  
Muslikah, M., & Bishops, C.

(2025). Cultural Counseling  
Prototype Based on *Ruwatan*  
Values for Enhancing  
Community Well-Being Post-  
Flood Disaster. *Pamomong:  
Journal of Islamic Educational  
Counseling*, 6(1), 21–40.

<https://doi.org/10.18326/pamomong.v6i1.3888>

### ABSTRACT

Flood disasters inflict not only physical and economic damages but also profoundly affect community well-being, particularly in the psychological, social, and spiritual domains of students. A culturally grounded approach holds strategic promise for facilitating post-disaster recovery in Indonesia. This study aims to investigate the values embedded within the *ruwatan* tradition as a conceptual basis for developing a culturally relevant and adaptive counseling prototype designed to enhance the well-being of students impacted by floods in Central Java, Indonesia. Employing an exploratory qualitative methodology, the research engaged 20 purposively selected participants as data sources. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis of *ruwatan* practices within local communities. Thematic data analysis was performed through an interpretative lens using Nvivo software. Findings reveal that *ruwatan* values—comprising inner purification, social reconciliation, and transformation—can be synthesized into a three-stage cultural counseling prototype: contextual assessment, symbolic-narrative intervention, and reflective exploration of post-disaster life meaning. These outcomes suggest the importance for school counselors to integrate local wisdom values when fostering psychological well-being in disaster-affected populations.

**Keywords:** Counseling; Culture; *Ruwatan*; Well-Being; Disaster

### ABSTRAK

Bencana banjir tidak hanya menimbulkan kerusakan fisik dan ekonomi, tetapi juga berdampak serius terhadap *well-being* masyarakat, terutama dalam aspek psikologis, sosial, dan

spiritual pada siswa. Pendekatan berbasis budaya memiliki potensi strategis dalam mendukung pemulihan pascabencana di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi nilai-nilai dalam tradisi *ruwatan* sebagai landasan konseptual dalam merancang prototipe konseling budaya yang relevan dan adaptif untuk meningkatkan *well-being* pada siswa terdampak banjir di Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif dengan melibatkan 20 partisipan yang menjadi sumber data dan dipilih dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap praktik *ruwatan* di komunitas lokal. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik dengan pendekatan interpretatif menggunakan aplikasi *Nvivo*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai dalam *ruwatan* yang terdiri dari pemurnian batin, rekonsiliasi sosial, dan transformasi dapat diformulasikan ke dalam struktur prototipe konseling budaya yang terdiri atas tiga tahapan: asesmen kontekstual, intervensi berbasis simbolik-naratif, dan refleksi pemaknaan hidup pascabencana. Temuan ini merekomendasikan kepada konselor sekolah untuk memperhatikan nilai kearifan lokal dalam mengembangkan kesejahteraan psikologis.

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**Kata kunci:** Konseling; Budaya; Ruwatan; *Well-Being*; Bencana

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## INTRODUCTION

Floods represent one of the most frequent and catastrophic natural hazards worldwide, impacting millions annually and posing significant threats to public health and psychological well-being. Recent flood occurrences in countries such as Pakistan and Germany have resulted not only in extensive infrastructure damage but also in prolonged psychological trauma and social disruption, highlighting the global imperative to address the psychosocial aftermath of such events (Shah et al., 2025; Müller et al., 2025). Similarly, in Indonesia—particularly in Central Java—recurrent flooding episodes generate sustained stress, emotional distress, and impaired social functioning, especially among vulnerable populations with limited access to mental health services (BNPB, 2023).

Demak Regency, situated along the northern coast of Central Java, experiences a high frequency of flooding while maintaining strong adherence to local traditions such as *ruwatan*. According to data from the Central Java BPBD (2023), Demak has endured at least twelve significant flood events over the past five years, affecting more than 35,000 residents annually. The distinctive combination of ecological vulnerability and rich cultural

heritage renders this region a strategic setting for the development of counseling models grounded in indigenous values.

In post-disaster recovery efforts, prioritizing community well-being is as critical as addressing physical and economic damages. *Well-being* encompasses psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions that collectively contribute to life quality (Lalani et al., 2021). Research indicates that disaster survivors are susceptible to mental health disorders such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (*PTSD*), and diminished meaning in life (Bonanno et al., 2019). Moreover, social fragmentation ensuing from collective trauma adversely affects eudaimonic aspects of well-being, including connectedness and purpose (Ryff, 2024). Consequently, recovery strategies must extend beyond logistical or medical support to encompass psychosocial and cultural considerations, including culturally informed counseling interventions.

The World Health Organization (2022) underscores the necessity of tailoring mental health interventions to the sociocultural contexts of affected populations. Recognizing local customs and values not only preserves community identity but also enhances recovery efficacy. Supporting this perspective, recent studies demonstrate that incorporating indigenous cultural practices—such as traditional rituals, communal ceremonies, and healing systems—into post-disaster programs amplifies psychosocial service relevance while fostering social cohesion and empowerment (Rahmadi et al., 2025; Gim & Shin, 2022; Simard, 2020). Such cultural integration enables communities to mobilize inherent strengths, thereby promoting sustainable recovery outcomes.

The *ruwatan* tradition, a manifestation of Javanese local wisdom, encompasses symbolic and spiritual dimensions interpretable as processes of purification, release from inner burdens, and restoration of harmony among humans, nature, and divine forces. Embedded values including spirituality, social harmony, acceptance, and self-transformation resonate with contemporary counseling principles, particularly within logotherapy, narrative counseling, and existential frameworks (Park & Blake, 2020). Beyond its ritualistic facets, *ruwatan* serves as a vehicle for reconstructing collective identity and meaning following disasters.

Integrating cultural values into post-disaster psychosocial services holds particular promise in educational settings, especially for students in disaster-affected schools. Children

and adolescents constitute vulnerable groups frequently neglected in recovery programs despite enduring long-term psychosocial consequences that impair academic performance and mental health (Seddighi et al., 2022). Therefore, this study's findings aim to inform the design of culturally based psychoeducational programs for schools, supporting psychological resilience and well-being among disaster-impacted students.

To date, research systematically exploring the incorporation of *ruwatan* values into cultural counseling models remains scarce. Existing literature predominantly addresses anthropological and ritualistic dimensions, with limited focus on therapeutic applications for community mental health (Mujianti, 2020). Conversely, psychosocial interventions for disaster victims often neglect indigenous cultural values, resulting in contextual dissonance, reduced participation, and diminished intervention effectiveness (UNDRR, 2020).

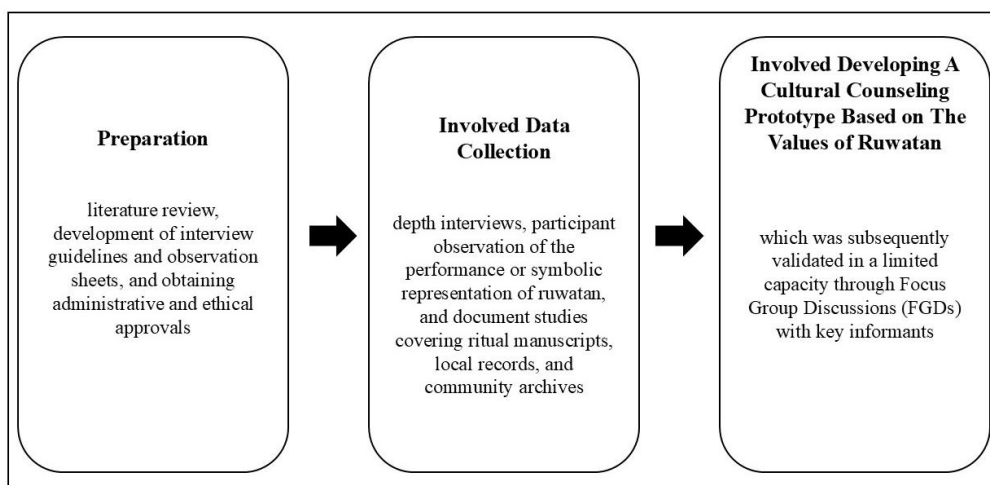
This study seeks to elucidate the fundamental values of the *ruwatan* tradition as a conceptual framework for developing a cultural counseling prototype tailored to flood-affected communities in Central Java. Additionally, it aspires to contribute to educational praxis by creating a psychoeducational model rooted in *ruwatan* values for students in disaster-impacted schools. The research questions guiding this inquiry are: (1) Which values inherent in *ruwatan* facilitate post-disaster well-being? and (2) How can a cultural counseling prototype integrating *ruwatan* values be designed? The outcomes are anticipated to offer an integrative approach combining local cultural wisdom with community-based counseling frameworks, thereby enhancing post-disaster recovery services and enriching cultural counseling practices in Indonesia, while advancing interventions to bolster psychological resilience among students in disaster-affected educational settings.

## **METHODS**

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative methodology utilizing an intrinsic case study design to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the values inherent in the *ruwatan* tradition and their integration into a cultural counseling framework for disaster-affected community recovery. As outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017), this approach is particularly suitable for examining complex, context-dependent cultural phenomena involving subjective meanings and the social construction of cultural practices.

The research was conducted over a four-month period (November 2024 to February 2025), encompassing instrument preparation, securing necessary permits, field data collection, and data analysis with validation. The procedural flow, depicted in Figure 1, comprises three main stages. The initial stage focused on preparation, including a literature review, development of interview protocols and observation checklists, and acquisition of administrative and ethical approvals. The second stage entailed data collection via in-depth interviews, participant observation of *ruwatan* performances or symbolic representations, and document analysis involving ritual manuscripts, local records, and community archives. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis. The final stage involved designing a cultural counseling prototype grounded in *ruwatan* values, which was then preliminarily validated through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected key informants.

The study was conducted in a district within Central Java province, selected purposively for its historical continuity of *ruwatan* practices and its susceptibility to seasonal flooding. This district exemplifies the Javanese cultural milieu and maintains an actively engaged community in the preservation of traditional customs. Participants comprised 20 individuals, including traditional figures such as puppeteers and elders, flood victims who had participated in *ruwatan* rituals, community extension workers, and village officials, as detailed in Table 1. Participant selection employed purposive sampling, prioritizing representativeness and informational depth (Ramanujan et al., 2022).



**Figure 1.** The Research Procedure

**Table 1.**

Demographic Data of Research Participants

Initial	Age	Social Position/Status	Description
D1	58	Puppeteer	Main Performer Of <i>Ruwatan</i> Ritual
D2	62	Puppeteer	Senior Cultural Elder
D3	55	Puppeteer	Family <i>Ruwatan</i> Performer
D4	60	Puppeteer	Local Cultural Leader
D5	57	Puppeteer	Cultural Practitioner
P1	38	Flood Survivor	Participant In A <i>Ruwatan</i> Ritual
P2	40	Flood Survivor	Participated With Family In <i>Ruwatan</i>
P3	36	Flood Survivor	Joined A Mass <i>Ruwatan</i>
P4	42	Flood Survivor	Active In Local Cultural Community
P5	35	Flood Survivor	Regularly Involved In <i>Ruwatan</i> Events
K1	46	Cultural Counselor Expert	Cultural Counselor Academic In Central Java
K2	49	Cultural Counselor Expert	Cultural Counselor Academic In Central Java
K3	44	Cultural Counselor Expert	Cultural Counselor Academic In Central Java
RT1	50	Neighborhood Head (RT)	Organizer Of Local <i>Ruwatan</i> Events
RW1	52	Community Head (RW)	Local Public Figure
KD1	55	Hamlet Head	Customary Authority Figure
KD1	55	Hamlet Head	Customary Authority Figure
KD2	65	Hamlet Head	Customary Authority Figure
SA1	63	Village Elder	Village Spiritual Guardian
SA2	60	Village Elder	Village Spiritual Advisor
SA3	58	Village Elder	Cultural Elder And Adviser

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic procedure: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. The qualitative data were organized and managed with the aid of Nvivo 14 software. Data validity was ensured through triangulation across sources, methods, and time, supplemented by member checking to verify findings with selected participants (Patton, 2019).

The study rigorously adhered to ethical guidelines for qualitative research as advocated by the World Health Organization (2022), encompassing informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants received comprehensive oral and written explanations regarding the study's objectives, their rights as participants, and potential risks. The research approach was sensitive to local cultural values and inclusive of vulnerable populations, including women, elderly individuals, and those with limited information access.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was carried out in three primary phases: preparation, data collection, and the development and preliminary validation of a cultural counseling prototype grounded in *ruwatan* values. During the preparation phase, a comprehensive literature review on the *ruwatan* concept was undertaken, alongside the formulation of in-depth interview protocols, observation checklists, and the acquisition of administrative and ethical research approvals. The deliverable from this phase included an interview guide encompassing questions related to the meaning of *ruwatan*, its embedded values, survivors' experiences, and the function of rituals in post-disaster recovery. Subsequently, the data collection phase involved conducting in-depth interviews, participatory observation of the *ruwatan* ritual, and examination of ritual manuscripts and local archival materials. The outcomes of the data collection are summarized in Table 2.

Based on the data analysis, the *ruwatan* tradition is perceived not only as a spiritual ritual but also as a collective mechanism for addressing crisis and suffering. Three principal values were identified. First, *Spiritual Cleansing*: community members regard *ruwatan* as a means to purify themselves from misfortune, suffering, or trauma. In disaster contexts, *ruwatan* symbolizes a process of releasing the "inner burden" resulting from loss and uncertainty (Groß, 2010; Rukiyah, 2017). Second, *Social Reconciliation*: this tradition engages the community collectively, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity vital for communal healing post-disaster (Sobhaninia, 2024). Third, *Transformation and Reinterpretation*: narratives surrounding fate and suffering are reframed within *ruwatan* as integral aspects of life's journey, facilitating acceptance and psychological resilience at both individual and societal levels (Susanti & Lestari, 2020). These core values reveal substantial potential as foundational elements for designing a cultural counseling model grounded in local wisdom. The study further explores the linkage between *ruwatan* values and *psychological well-being*, as detailed in Table 3. The final phase involved the development and validation of the cultural counseling prototype, grounded in the findings from the preceding stage. The prototype was constructed upon the *ruwatan* values identified in the study (detailed in Table 4).



**Table 2.**  
Results of Data Collection

Interview Findings	Observation Findings	Document Study Findings
Three main values of <i>ruwatan</i> were identified: <b>Spiritual Purification</b> "Ruwatan is not just a ritual; it is our way of cleansing inner burdens after a disaster." (D3, Puppeteer, 58 years old) <b>Social Reconciliation</b> "During <i>ruwatan</i> , everyone gathers. We help each other and strengthen one another." (P2, flood survivor, 40 years old) <b>Transformation and Reinterpretation of Life Meaning</b> "The puppeteer's stories teach us that disasters are a part of life, not a curse." (SA1, Traditional Elder, 63 years old)	The implementation of <i>ruwatan</i> began with the ritual of cutting <i>sukerta</i> , followed by the sprinkling of <i>tirta amerta</i> , and offerings. All layers of society participated without distinction of status. Observations indicated that the ritual served as a space for social reconciliation and collective healing.	Analysis of <i>ruwatan</i> scripts and <i>wayang</i> texts (story of puppets) revealed symbols of suffering as part of the <i>suluk</i> process, self-purification, and social reconciliation, which reinforced the results from the interviews and observations.

**Table 3.**  
Relation Between *Ruwatan* Values and Psychological Well-Being

<i>Ruwatan</i> Value	Aspect of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 2024)	Data Source
Spiritual Cleansing	Self-Acceptance, Emotional Regulation	Interview (D3), Observation
Social Reconciliation	Positive Relations with Others, Social Cohesion	Interview (P2), Observation
Transformation & Life Reinterpretation	Purpose in Life, Personal Growth	Interview (SA1), Document Analysis

Based on the exploratory findings, an initial prototype of the cultural counseling model was formulated, comprising three fundamental components that embody the integration of local wisdom into psychosocial interventions (see Figure 2). The first component, *Cultural Contextual Assessment*, encourages counselors to investigate clients' cultural backgrounds, including their connections to traditional values and indigenous expressions of trauma. This phase aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of clients' lived experiences and the influence of cultural context on their perceptions of the disaster and its psychological ramifications. The second component, *Ruwatan-Based Interventions*, employs symbolic and narrative methods derived from *wayang* tales, *ruwatan*



rituals, and ancestral myths. *Wayang* is a traditional Indonesian performing art that depicts stories through puppets (*wayang*) operated by a puppeteer (*dalang*), accompanied by gamelan music. These culturally salient metaphors function as therapeutic instruments, facilitating emotional articulation and enabling clients to interpret their trauma through a culturally congruent lens. The final component, *Reflection and Reinterpretation of Post-Disaster Experiences*, guides clients in contemplating their lives post-disaster, reinforcing their cultural identity and spirituality. This reflective process promotes resilience, restores meaning, and supports sustained emotional recovery. The model is designed to be adaptive, allowing for contextual modifications aligned with the specific cultural characteristics of each community.

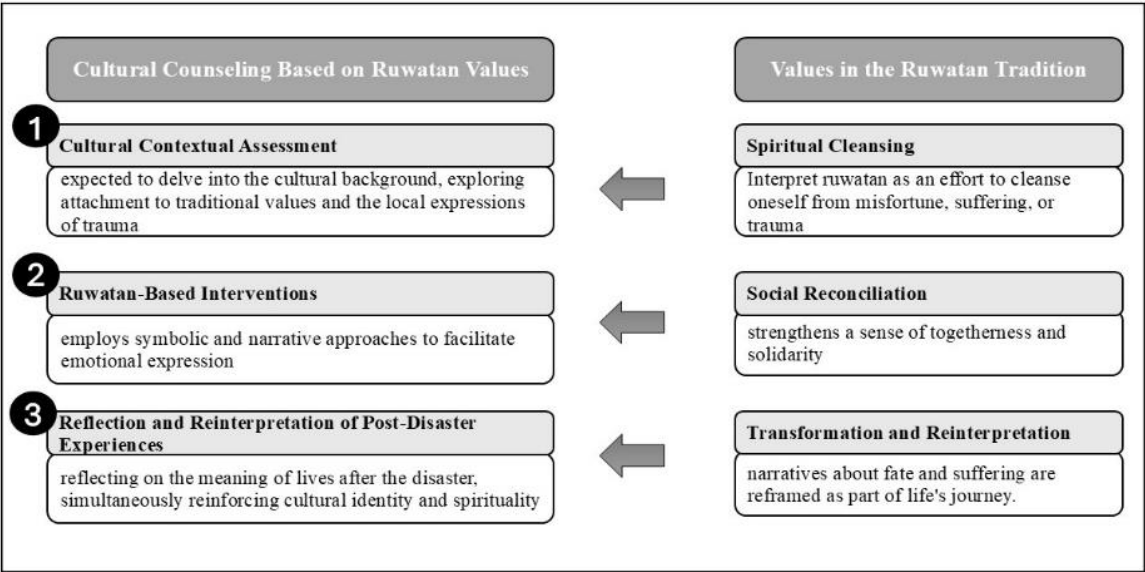
The prototype model was preliminarily evaluated through Focus Group Discussions (*FGDs*) involving community counseling practitioners, cultural leaders, and village officials. Feedback from the *FGDs* highlighted several key assessments of the model: (1) *Contextual*—the model is firmly rooted in local values familiar and practiced by the community, thereby ensuring relevance and resonance with participants; (2) *Inclusive*—it demonstrates the capability to engage diverse vulnerable groups, including the elderly and women, guaranteeing accessibility of the counseling process across community segments; and (3) *Transformational*—the model extends beyond individual healing to emphasize collective community recovery, underscoring social cohesion and mutual support as vital elements in disaster aftermath. Nonetheless, several participants recommended that implementation be accompanied by specialized training for local counselors to mitigate risks of cultural misinterpretation. Such training would equip counselors with the necessary cultural competence to adeptly manage nuanced cultural symbols and facilitate the counseling process effectively.

The findings of this study affirm that the integration of cultural values from the *ruwatan* tradition into culturally based counseling approaches effectively bridges the psychosocial and spiritual needs of disaster-affected communities. This counseling model positions local culture as the foundational basis for designing community-based mental health services. This aligns with prior research indicating that culturally grounded interventions are better received in traditional societies (Yudanagara et al., 2025; Hess et al., 2025), thereby strengthening those conclusions. Moreover, these findings corroborate

Gim and Shin (2022) evidence demonstrating that interventions incorporating local and spiritual values enhance meaning in life and psychological resilience among post-disaster populations.

**Table 4.**  
Development & Validation of the Prototype

Aspects Developed	Data Base	Source
Cultural Contextual Assessment	The results from the interviews and document analysis highlight the importance of understanding the cultural background and the symbolic meanings for everyone. This contextual assessment is crucial for tailoring interventions that resonate with the community's values and beliefs.	Interview D3, <i>Ruwatan</i> Documents
<i>Ruwatan</i> -Based Interventions	Symbolic rituals, such as <i>wayang</i> stories and narratives of suffering, are utilized to facilitate emotional expression. These elements serve as powerful tools for individuals to articulate their feelings and experiences, fostering a supportive environment for healing.	Source: <i>Ritual</i> Observations, Interview SA1
Post-Disaster Reflection and Reinterpretation	The prototype encourages survivors to reflect on their life experiences and reinterpret their suffering as part of their spiritual journey. This process of reflection is essential for personal growth and resilience, helping individuals find meaning in their challenges.	Interview P2, Document Study



**Figure 2.** Prototype of Cultural Counseling Based on Ruwatan Values

The spiritual cleansing value in *ruwatan*, interpreted as the symbolic release of inner burdens through ritual, closely parallels logotherapy and existential counseling, both emphasizing the significance of meaning-making in suffering (Park & Blake, 2020; Murni, 2024; Ryff, 2024). Such cultural practices transcend ceremonial functions, offering profound psychological resources adaptable to enrich recovery processes in culturally congruent ways. In communities that deeply adhere to traditional and spiritual values, *ruwatan* serves not merely as a symbolic ritual but as a reflective medium that enables individuals to confront inner wounds in a more personal and meaningful way. The spiritual experience within *ruwatan* can open a space for inner dialogue, where individuals not only release suffering but also rediscover direction and purpose in life after disaster. Thus, *ruwatan* becomes a pathway for healing that is not only emotional but also existential—reconnecting individuals with themselves, their surroundings, and a higher power.

In terms of social reconciliation, collective community participation in *ruwatan* rituals strengthens social networks and solidarity—key factors in post-disaster social healing where social support acts as a vital psychosocial protective element (Ntontis et al., 2020; Kusuma et al., 2024; İkican & Mor, 2023). Observations indicated that involvement of women, elders, and children substantially contributed to social cohesion and facilitated post-traumatic acceptance. The presence of all community members in this ritual highlights that recovery cannot be an individualistic process. The core strength of *ruwatan* lies in its communal participation, which reinforces a sense of togetherness, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and fosters mutual care. By sharing a spiritual and emotional space, the community is encouraged to listen to one another and provide mutual support, so psychological burdens are not borne individually but shared and healed collectively.

Furthermore, the transformative and reinterpetive aspects of suffering through *wayang* narratives and ritual symbols effectively assist survivors in reframing traumatic experiences. This aligns with prior research highlighting narrative and symbolic approaches as facilitators for reconstructing meaning and restoring personal identity among disaster victims (İkican & Mor, 2023; Sokang et al., 2024). In the Javanese context, *ruwatan* functions as a mechanism for spiritual solace and collective psychosocial recovery. The use of symbols and stories in *ruwatan* is not merely for entertainment or ritual completion; it possesses the power to touch the deepest dimensions of the human experience—awareness

of suffering, fear, and hope. When trauma is expressed through familiar and meaningful narratives, individuals are more able to process their painful experiences in a language they understand. This allows *ruwatan* not only to help heal old wounds but also to empower individuals to rebuild their identities and lives in a more holistic and meaningful way.

Utilizing Ryff's psychological well-being framework, updated by Ryff (2024), this study identified six critical dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The three core *ruwatan* values underpin several of these dimensions. Spiritual cleansing correlates strongly with self-acceptance and emotional regulation. Through symbolic acts such as holy water rituals, *potong sukerta* (ritual hair cutting), and offering ceremonies, disaster survivors learn to accept themselves post-trauma free from guilt and fear. Consistent with Sokang et al. (2024), spiritual rituals reduce post-disaster anxiety and foster inner peace, forming a foundation for self-acceptance and resilience. This is in line with Anitasari, B. (2024), who noted that ritualized spiritual therapy reduced anxiety levels in flood survivors.

The social reconciliation dimension enhances positive relations and social cohesion, as community-wide participation restores disrupted social ties. Ntontis et al. (2020), emphasized that quality social relationships post-disaster predict psychological resilience. while Kohrt et al. (2020) noted that spiritually grounded community interventions reduce social isolation and improve interpersonal relationships. Oflazoğlu and Dora (2024) further noted that cultural community rituals post-tsunami in Korea served as both grief processing and collective motivation platforms. Thus, *ruwatan* serves as a cultural-psychosocial platform for rebuilding social harmony after crises. More than just a symbolic tradition, *ruwatan* creates space for shared emotional processing, where collective pain is transformed into collective resilience. The communal atmosphere facilitates empathy and the renewal of trust among community members who may have experienced loss, displacement, or trauma. In this way, the ritual becomes a living process of reknitting the social fabric, with each participant contributing to the restoration of mutual support systems essential for long-term recovery.

The transformative value of reinterpreting suffering through *wayang* stories and ritual symbols promotes purpose in life and personal growth. Reframing trauma via cultural narratives enables survivors to view suffering as integral to a meaningful life journey. Ikican

and Mor (2023) found that narrative-symbolic interventions significantly improved well-being dimensions among disaster survivors in East Africa. The symbolic universe of *wayang* and *ruwatan* provides emotional relief and existential clarity, offering survivors culturally resonant frameworks to transform suffering into strength and crisis into growth. This transformation is not abstract, it is deeply internalized by survivors as they engage with the characters, plots, and moral lessons of *wayang* stories that mirror their own experiences. Through this symbolic mirroring, individuals begin to see their suffering as part of a larger moral and spiritual narrative, which instills a sense of dignity, endurance, and possibility. The ritual does not erase pain but reframes it as a source of wisdom, allowing survivors to reinterpret their identity in the light of resilience and renewed purpose.

Moreover, *ruwatan* functions as a spiritual recovery medium both individually and collectively, aligning with environmental mastery where individuals regain control with communal support. Gim and Shin (2022) demonstrated that community-based, culturally rooted interventions facilitate environmental control and psychosocial adaptation after disasters. Pohan et al (2025) affirm that environmental mastery is strengthened by community ritual involvement, enhancing place-based resilience. Consequently, *ruwatan* values substantially contribute to five of Ryff's (2024) six psychological well-being dimensions, underscoring the model's strength as a holistic, contextually grounded post-disaster psychosocial intervention that integrates cultural relevance, emotional depth, and communal resilience. In this context, *ruwatan* becomes more than a spiritual rite—it is a psychosocial anchor that allows individuals to re-establish a sense of familiarity and control over their physical and emotional environment. The ritual helps reorient displaced identities and fragmented community life, enabling people to reclaim their roles, spaces, and responsibilities with renewed confidence. Through shared participation, individuals do not feel powerless against disaster; instead, they become active agents in their recovery within a supportive cultural and social framework.

This culturally grounded approach also addresses critiques of conventional psychosocial models that often neglect local values. Prior studies have underscored the necessity of community-based approaches that respect indigenous belief systems and practices as effective disaster recovery strategies (Gim & Shin, 2022; Ali, et al., 2021). Willmot et al., (2023) emphasize that culturally embedded intervention increases both

compliance and long-term recovery potential. Therefore, this culturally based counseling prototype validates previous findings while offering an innovative, adaptive, and contextually relevant model bridging modern clinical approaches and the spiritual-social needs of local communities. By recognizing culture as an essential therapeutic medium, this model responds to people's actual lived experiences rather than imposing external frameworks. The integration of spirituality, symbolism, and collective ritual into counseling practice ensures that interventions resonate emotionally and spiritually. Rather than marginalizing indigenous wisdom, it is placed at the center of recovery, allowing individuals and communities to heal in ways that feel authentic, empowering, and sustainable.

From a spiritual perspective, this model meaningfully contributes to disaster survivors' well-being by positioning spirituality as a central source of mental resilience. Rather than a peripheral element, spirituality is integrated as a core mechanism for emotional recovery and meaning making. In traditional societies where spiritual beliefs permeate daily life, interventions recognizing and activating these beliefs foster inner stability and hope. Recent research confirms spirituality's crucial role in alleviating post-disaster stress and enhancing subjective well-being (Kohrt et al., 2020; Sokang et al., 2024). The cultural-spiritual practices embedded in *ruwatan* provide symbolic healing and a resilience framework congruent with community worldviews and existential orientations.

This study also demonstrates the substantial potential of local traditions like *ruwatan* to inform indigenous counseling models. Such approaches prioritize local customs, symbols, and cultural practices as foundations for relevant and accepted psychosocial interventions. Community acceptance is high, as *ruwatan* remains integral to Javanese spiritual culture, facilitating natural receptivity to counseling applications. This advantage aligns with assertions that *konseling adat* emphasizes cultural contextualization (Yudanagara et al., 2025; Hess et al., 2025). Ilhami (2020) suggest that including cultural experts in counseling design increases trust and intervention uptake among rural communities. Far beyond symbolic ritualism, *ruwatan* represents a living wisdom system capable of enriching counseling practice with authenticity, cultural depth, and community resonance.

Collective participation inherent in *ruwatan* rituals enhances social bonding and community resilience, consistent with findings by Ali et al. (2021) regarding the

effectiveness of indigenous counseling in fostering these attributes. The spiritual dimension in indigenous counseling, as reflected in *ruwatan*, plays a critical role in emotional regulation, self-acceptance, and meaning making (Sokang et al., 2024). Thus, *ruwatan* functions not only as cultural expression but also as a holistic therapeutic process integrating spiritual, emotional, and communal healing dimensions. This integration offers a culturally responsive healing pathway that is contextually grounded and psychologically transformative.

However, challenges remain in translating these findings into indigenous counseling development, notably counselors' limited cultural competence in interpreting symbolic meanings. The symbolic elements in *ruwatan* require nuanced contextual understanding; without specialized training, misinterpretations may adversely affect clients. Mental health professionals in multicultural settings often confront cultural incongruence when clinical paradigms conflict with clients' cultural worldviews, reducing intervention effectiveness (Kohrt et al., 2020; Sokang et al., 2024). Trott et al, (2024) argues for cultural co-learning processes in counselor training to bridge such gaps. Addressing this gap requires paradigm shifts in counselor education and practice, emphasizing cultural humility, reflexivity, and prioritizing clients' culturally and spiritually grounded meaning-making.

The contextual nature of indigenous counseling also poses challenges for standardization. A single cultural tradition cannot be universally applied across diverse communities. Similar barriers have been documented in Indigenous mental health programs in Canada and Australia, where spiritual and social diversity complicates adaptive framework development (Tay et al., 2019; Thorburn et al., 2023; Firestone et al., 2024). Addressing this gap requires paradigm shifts in counselor education and practice, emphasizing cultural humility, reflexivity, and prioritizing clients' culturally and spiritually grounded meaning-making. These shifts are not merely academic; they demand a reorientation of the counseling profession to genuinely listen to and learn from local epistemologies. Rather than seeking uniformity, counseling approaches must embrace pluralism, where diversity is not seen as a challenge to overcome, but as a resource to enrich therapeutic practice. The success of such counseling lies in the counselor's ability to enter the client's cultural world with openness, curiosity, and respect—an approach that builds



trust and allows healing to emerge organically within the client's own symbolic and spiritual frame of reference.

The advancement of indigenous counseling necessitates cultural competence training for counselors, locally adaptable intervention modules, and active community leader involvement in program design. Yet, most Indonesian studies on indigenous counseling remain descriptive, lacking rigorous impact evaluations. Tay et al. (2019) highlight that indigenous counseling initiatives in developing countries often lack outcome-based research, limiting academic recognition and integration into formal mental health systems. Progressing indigenous counseling in Indonesia thus demands dual commitments: preserving cultural integrity and establishing a robust empirical foundation within evidence-based practice. These two objectives must go together, cultural preservation ensures relevance and acceptance, while empirical validation provides credibility and scalability. Building this bridge between tradition and science will require collaborative frameworks where researchers, practitioners, and local communities co-create models that are both measurable and meaningful. Only then can indigenously counseling move beyond its current marginal position and claim its rightful place as a legitimate, impactful modality in the broader mental health landscape.

Schools located in disaster-prone areas have the potential to function as laboratories for indigenous counseling by implementing culturally based psychoeducational programs that provide both preventive and curative trauma management for affected children. This study proposes a novel culturally based post-disaster counseling prototype tailored to the unique sociocultural context of Indonesia. Furthermore, it establishes a foundational framework for advancing indigenous counseling as a holistic, inclusive, and spiritual-sociocultural community service within the Indonesian disaster management paradigm.

This study has limitations. Its focus on the *ruwatan* tradition within the Javanese context may limit generalizability to other ethnic or regional groups. The qualitative design provides depth but constrains quantification of psychological impact. Researcher bias in symbolic interpretation may have influenced findings despite triangulation. Future studies should adopt mixed method designs to evaluate culturally based counseling effectiveness on psychological well-being outcomes. Comparative cross-cultural research is recommended to assess indigenous counseling adaptability. Collaboration with mental

health professionals and cultural leaders is crucial for co-developing culturally competent training and scalable programs.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the *ruwatan* tradition in Javanese culture embodies not only symbolic and spiritual meanings but also psychosocial values that can be effectively integrated into a cultural counseling framework to facilitate well-being recovery for communities impacted by flood disasters. The developed cultural counseling prototype comprises three core stages: contextual assessment, symbolic-narrative intervention, and reflection on post-disaster meaning in life. This model addresses individual psychological needs while simultaneously reinforcing collective community recovery, consistent with a holistic approach to post-disaster rehabilitation. Initial validation suggests that the model is perceived as relevant, feasible, and acceptable by both local communities and practitioners. Future efforts should focus on large-scale implementation trials and capacity-building programs for community counselors to ensure sustainable and effective application across diverse disaster-prone regions in Indonesia. By empowering local counselors with culturally appropriate competencies, the model can be tailored to the distinct needs of various communities, thereby strengthening resilience and enhancing recovery outcomes for disaster-affected populations.

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