

Research Article

Comparative Analysis of Filial Responsibility, Elder Neglect, and State Intervention in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore

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Abstract: This article investigates the emerging phenomenon of elder neglect by adult children in Southeast Asia, with a comparative focus on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Amid rapid urbanization, shifting family structures, and evolving cultural norms, filial responsibility, a once-sacred moral imperative, is increasingly challenged by socio-economic constraints and policy gaps. Drawing on a qualitative comparative case study approach, this research analyzes state regulations, intergenerational narratives, and lived experiences of elderly abandonment. Data were collected through policy analysis and in-depth interviews with 99 participants across the three countries, including elderly individuals, adult children, social workers, and scholars. The findings reveal distinct national responses shaped by dominant moral frameworks, legal instruments, and welfare infrastructure. While Singapore institutionalizes filial piety through legislation such as the Maintenance of Parents Act, Malaysia relies on a hybrid model of religious norms and community support, and Indonesia depends heavily on informal caregiving rooted in traditional solidarity. Despite these differences, a common pattern emerges: the erosion of intergenerational care norms under the pressures of modern life. The study argues that elder neglect is not merely a private moral failure but a reflection of structural dislocation between traditional values and the contemporary welfare state. It concludes by recommending culturally sensitive, legally grounded, and socially inclusive policy interventions to safeguard the dignity and rights of the elderly in an aging Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Elder Neglect, Family Transformation, Filial Responsibility, Intergenerational Relations, Welfare Policy.



1. Introduction

Southeast Asia has witnessed profound socio-cultural transformations driven by rapid urbanization, changing household compositions, and the modernization of values [1] [2]. These shifts have directly impacted the traditional model of intergenerational caregiving, particularly the responsibility of adult children toward aging parents. What was once regarded as a moral obligation grounded in filial piety, a core tenet in many Asian cultures, has increasingly become a contested domain shaped by structural, economic, and legal factors [3].

In Indonesia, the erosion of multigenerational households has been significantly influenced by labor migration and the rise of nuclear family arrangements. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, there has been a notable increase in the number of elderly residents living in institutional care facilities, often due to insufficient familial support [4]. Similar trends are observable in Malaysia and Singapore, albeit with varying patterns and intensities due to divergent cultural expectations and policy environments [5] [6].

Malaysia continues to uphold Islamic and Malay familial ethics as moral anchors in intergenerational relationships. Nevertheless, the pressures of urban life and westernized individualism have gradually weakened these norms, particularly among younger populations in urban centers [7]. In response, the Malaysian government enacted the Parents Maintenance Act (*Akta Orang Tua 2012*), aiming to provide legal safeguards for elderly individuals in both domestic and institutional contexts [8].

Singapore, by contrast, has adopted a more legalistic and state-centric approach. The Maintenance of Parents Act, first enacted in 1995, allows elderly parents to file legal claims against their children for financial support [9]. While effective in asserting formal accountability, the Act has sparked ethical debates over the appropriate boundaries of state intervention in intimate familial relations [10].

These emerging dynamics call for a deeper understanding of how socio-cultural transformations and policy mechanisms interact to shape contemporary forms of elder neglect in Southeast Asia. If left unaddressed, the phenomenon not only threatens the well-being of older adults but also signals a broader erosion of moral solidarity within societies historically anchored in collectivist values [11].

This study addresses this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of elder neglect in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. It focuses on three core dimensions: (1) the cultural and social drivers behind elder abandonment; (2) the role of legal and policy frameworks in protecting the elderly; and (3) the variations in public and familial responses across the three nations. By exploring these dimensions, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of intergenerational care in the context of Southeast Asia's aging societies and to offer grounded recommendations for policy reform and social innovation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Filial Piety and the Shifting Intergenerational Contract in Southeast Asia

Filial piety has long served as a cornerstone of family ethics in many Asian societies. In Southeast Asia, this obligation is historically rooted in diverse philosophical and religious traditions, Confucianism in Singapore, Islam and adat (customary law) in Malaysia, and communal reciprocity and kinship in Indonesia [12]. However, modernization has significantly altered how filial responsibilities are practiced, understood, and institutionalized.

In Singapore, filial piety has undergone legal formalization through the Maintenance of Parents Act (1995), which enables elderly parents to sue their children for financial neglect [13]. This legal instrument reflects the government's belief that traditional moral obligations have weakened to a point that necessitates juridical reinforcement. Nonetheless, emotional care and everyday presence, central to the traditional understanding of filial responsibility, remain beyond the scope of the law [14].

In Malaysia, Islamic values and Malay communalism still shape intergenerational expectations. However, empirical studies suggest that these norms are eroding, particularly among younger, urban Malays who are increasingly influenced by Western notions of individualism and autonomy [15]. While religion reinforces the moral ideal of caring for parents, economic and social transformations challenge its implementation.

Indonesia lacks specific legislation mandating filial duties, relying instead on informal norms and general provisions in the Civil Code. Historically, caregiving has been sustained by community solidarity and gendered expectations, particularly through the role of women as caregivers [16]. However, these systems are increasingly fragmented, particularly in urban settings where multigenerational households are no longer the norm.

According to Hermalin [17], the weakening of filial practice should not be interpreted solely as moral decline but rather as a structural outcome of socio-economic strain. Adult children may desire to care for their parents but lack the emotional or material resources to do so. This distinction between intention and capacity reframes elder neglect not merely as a personal failure but as a systemic issue.

Knodel and Chayovan [18] argue that filial norms are under pressure throughout Southeast Asia, but the forms of resistance vary. Among Malays, filial duty is often framed as a religious obligation, while among Chinese communities, it is grounded in reciprocal ethics. These cultural distinctions shape how care is rationalized and practiced.

From a theoretical perspective, the changing dynamics of filial care can be understood through intergenerational contract theory, which conceptualizes the parent-child relationship as an implicit social contract shaped by norms of reciprocity and moral obligation [19]. When such norms erode or the exchange becomes asymmetrical, the contract fails, resulting in neglect or abandonment.

In sum, the decline of filial piety does not necessarily reflect the collapse of moral values. Rather, it reveals tensions between enduring cultural ideals and emerging socio-economic realities that increasingly constrain intergenerational caregiving.

2.2. Urbanization and the Fragmentation of Family Structures

Urbanization is a key factor driving the breakdown of traditional caregiving systems in Southeast Asia. Rural-to-urban migration, economic restructuring, and changing family forms have resulted in a growing disconnection between adult children and their elderly parents [20].

In Indonesia, the extended family model has increasingly been replaced by nuclear households, limiting the capacity for daily care and shared living arrangements. This transition has rendered elderly parents more isolated and dependent on external institutions or non-familial support networks [21].

In Malaysia, studies show that many elderlies in Kuala Lumpur now live alone or with their spouses, often without regular contact with their children [22]. The pressures of urban life, such as long work hours and rising costs, have strained the ability of adult children to fulfill their caregiving roles.

Singapore, as a city-state, presents an intensified version of this trend. A significant proportion of elderly residents live independently, and the government has introduced incentives for multigenerational cohabitation. However, social isolation among the elderly remains prevalent despite these policies [13] [23].

Urbanization has also altered gender dynamics in caregiving. Historically, women, particularly daughters or daughters-in-law, were expected to provide care for aging parents. But as more women enter the workforce, the traditional caregiving model becomes increasingly untenable [24].

Furthermore, elderly parents often experience diminished authority within urban households. Rather than being revered figures, they are sometimes perceived as emotional or financial burdens, leading to latent intra-household tensions [18].

Communication gaps between generations have also widened. Younger generations may feel less emotionally connected or morally compelled to provide care, leading to passive neglect [17].

Ultimately, urbanization has produced structural fissures in traditional care systems, making the family a less reliable institution for elderly support. This raises critical questions about the need for state and community-based interventions to complement, or in some cases replace, familial caregiving roles.

2.3. Elder Neglect as a Public Health and Social Issue

Elder neglect is increasingly recognized not only as a moral lapse but also as a public health crisis with broad socio-economic implications [25]. Aging populations in Southeast Asia face a higher risk of chronic diseases, mental health disorders, and diminished quality of life when left without adequate care.

In Singapore, hospital records indicate rising instances of elderly patients admitted in conditions of severe neglect, ranging from malnutrition to untreated illnesses and social abandonment [13]. This underscores the hidden costs of emotional and physical neglect that often go unreported due to cultural stigma or familial shame.

Malaysia also exhibits worrying trends. A study by Latiff et al. found that approximately 7.5% of elderly individuals in urban communities experienced neglect, including insufficient access to food,

medication, and social contact [26]. Key risk factors include living alone, suffering from chronic illness, and lacking community engagement.

In Indonesia, Amelia and Darmawan reported that nearly 50% of elderly respondents in urban Pekanbaru experienced some form of neglect, whether physical, emotional, or financial [27]. This illustrates the severity of the issue in contexts where institutional support is minimal and cultural norms are in flux.

One challenge in addressing elder neglect is its invisibility. Many elderly individuals refrain from reporting their condition due to fear of family conflict or societal judgment. Moreover, legal protections for the elderly are often ambiguous or inconsistently enforced [4].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), elder abuse, including neglect, requires a cross-sectoral response involving healthcare, social services, and legal systems [25]. When viewed through this integrative lens, neglect is not merely a private matter but a symptom of broader systemic failure.

Thus, elder neglect should be approached as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing social disintegration, health vulnerability, and institutional inertia. Preventing it requires community-based interventions that integrate legal advocacy, healthcare access, and public education.

2.4. Comparative Policy Frameworks in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

Policy responses to elder care vary significantly across Southeast Asia, reflecting divergent welfare models and governance capacities [28]. These differences shape how states define, regulate, and intervene in intergenerational care.

Indonesia continues to rely heavily on informal familial care networks. While social welfare programs like the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) exist, they inadequately target elderly individuals without family support. Most elderly care institutions are operated by religious or philanthropic organizations, with minimal state involvement [29]. A comprehensive elder law remains absent, and existing regulations offer only symbolic protections [4].

Malaysia has taken more structured steps with the implementation of the Parents Maintenance Act (2012), which legally obliges adult children to provide financial support. However, its effectiveness is constrained by weak enforcement and cultural resistance in rural and low-income urban communities [30]. Community centers and welfare programs exist, but service delivery is inconsistent across regions [15].

Singapore represents the most state-driven model, embedding intergenerational responsibility into law via the Maintenance of Parents Act (1995). This act is backed by an extensive infrastructure of eldercare services, including public nursing homes and financial assistance schemes [13] [31]. Yet, criticisms persist regarding its overly legalistic tone and the emotional detachment it may inadvertently normalize within families [10].

Beyond legislation, the availability and quality of institutional care are key indicators of state commitment. While Singapore has invested in professionalized and tech-integrated eldercare systems, Indonesia and Malaysia still lag in terms of public provision, relying on private or charitable institutions with limited oversight [32].

These contrasts underscore the importance of not only policy formulation but also the cultural framing and practical implementation of eldercare. Legal mandates must be accompanied by social support systems, public awareness, and intergenerational dialogue to achieve meaningful outcomes.

2.5. Family Value Transformations and Intergenerational Tensions

The transformation of family values under the pressures of modernization and globalization has reshaped how younger generations perceive their responsibilities toward aging parents. The traditional collectivist ethos is gradually giving way to individualism, especially in urban centers [33].

In Indonesia, notions of *berbakti* (devotion to parents) remain normative but are increasingly symbolic. Rising geographic mobility and shrinking household sizes result in more elderly people living alone or with minimal support [21] [34].

In Malaysia, although Islamic teachings and *silaturahmi* (familial closeness) still influence intergenerational ethics, surveys reveal growing emotional disconnection even among co-residing family members [15] [35]. Physical proximity no longer guarantees emotional care.

Singapore exhibits the most rapid value shift. Influenced by meritocratic ideals and economic pragmatism, many younger Singaporeans prioritize career progression and personal autonomy over caregiving duties. Institutional care is often seen as a rational and socially acceptable alternative [36].

Intergenerational tensions also arise from conflicting expectations. Older generations often assume that filial piety implies co-residence and emotional availability, while younger generations, socialized in a more individualistic framework, interpret care in financial or procedural terms [37].

The caregiving burden disproportionately falls on women, who now face competing responsibilities between professional work and traditional caregiving roles. As more women pursue careers, the familial caregiving model is increasingly unsustainable without external support [24] [38].

Technology further complicates intergenerational bonds. While digital communication allows remote contact, it often replaces rather than complements physical presence. Elderly individuals in Malaysia, for example, report dissatisfaction with “text-only” relationships with their children [39].

Overall, family value transformations highlight a crisis of solidarity in aging societies. Without cultural revitalization and policy support, the norm of caring for elders may erode into a private burden, no longer viewed as a collective moral and civic responsibility.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach to examine the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics that shape elder neglect in three Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The goal is to critically investigate how intergenerational caregiving is understood, practiced, and regulated within differing socio-political and cultural contexts.

The comparative framework is based on a multi-sited research design, with data collection conducted in three major urban centers: Jakarta (Indonesia), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), and Singapore. These cities were selected due to their accelerated urbanization, demographic aging, and shifts in family structures, making them representative of broader regional trends [20] [28].

3.1. Units of Analysis

The study focuses on three interrelated units of analysis:

- State policies and legal frameworks addressing the rights and welfare of older adults, including legislation such as Indonesia’s Law No. 13/1998 on Elder Welfare, Malaysia’s Parents Maintenance Act (2012), and Singapore’s Maintenance of Parents Act (1995).
- Public discourses and social narratives concerning filial responsibility, family obligations, and intergenerational duty, as articulated in media reports, policy documents, and public campaigns.
- Lived experiences of elder neglect, both in familial and institutional settings, captured through firsthand accounts.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Two primary data collection methods were employed:

- Document Analysis: A critical review of national legal texts, policy documents, NGO reports, and demographic data. Sources include governmental publications, legal acts, and advocacy materials from elder care organizations [31] [4] [29].
- In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 99 informants (33 per country). The participants included:
 - ✓ Elderly individuals who have experienced abandonment or institutionalization,
 - ✓ Adult children, particularly those navigating caregiving responsibilities,
 - ✓ Social workers, legal professionals, and policymakers involved in elder care,
 - ✓ Academics and experts in family sociology and welfare policy.

Interviews were conducted both online and offline, depending on pandemic-related access restrictions and informants' availability. Interviews lasted between 45–90 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, guided by a coding frame derived from the literature and emergent themes. Cross-case comparison was employed to identify similarities and divergences across national contexts. NVivo software supported the coding process and ensured consistency in thematic categorization.

The analysis prioritized both emic (insider) perspectives, how participants construct meaning, and etic (external) analysis, how these meanings are situated within broader socio-political structures [17] [19].

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from a regional social science ethics board. Participants were informed of their rights to anonymity, voluntary participation, and withdrawal without consequence. All data were stored securely and anonymized during publication to ensure participant confidentiality.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Social and Cultural Transformations in Parent–Child Relationships

Across the three countries, elder neglect manifests in distinct patterns, each rooted in specific social and cultural transformations. In Indonesia, the transition from extended to nuclear family systems, accelerated by urban migration and economic mobility, has diminished the capacity for co-residential caregiving. Although cultural narratives of *berbakti* (devotion to parents) persist, practical realities often override ideal norms. Many adult children now work in cities far from their elderly parents, perceiving institutional care as a pragmatic, though morally ambiguous, solution.

In Malaysia, Islamic teachings and Malay customary values still strongly influence familial ethics. However, urban middle-class families increasingly resort to “outsourced caregiving”, delegating eldercare duties to domestic workers or private facilities. This delegation is often accompanied by a lack of emotional presence, constituting a form of passive or hidden neglect. Although physical abandonment is rare, emotional disengagement is growing in frequency and social acceptability.

Singapore presents a more institutionalized dynamic. The Maintenance of Parents Act legally compels children to support their parents financially, yet emotional and social detachment remains prevalent. Adult children may fulfill legal obligations but maintain minimal physical interaction or affective intimacy. This phenomenon has been described as “emotional neglect through compliance”, where the letter of the law is respected, but the spirit of intergenerational solidarity is compromised.

Despite different trajectories, all three countries show that modernization and urbanization have disrupted traditional kinship-based care models. The tension between normative expectations and lived practice is most visible in the contradiction between public morality and private decision-making. Elder care is no longer a straightforward expression of filial piety but a complex negotiation between cultural expectations, economic constraints, and institutional alternatives.

4.2. Legal Protections and State Regulation of Elder Neglect

The extent of state intervention in elder care significantly influences how neglect is addressed, or normalized, in each country. In Singapore, legal codification of filial responsibility is robust and enforceable. Yet the number of actual legal claims remains low, suggesting that while the law is symbolically powerful, social stigma and family secrecy limit its practical reach. Furthermore, the state's proactive stance may inadvertently shift moral responsibility away from public institutions, reinforcing the idea that elder care is a private family matter.

Malaysia has adopted a middle-ground approach. While the Parents Maintenance Act provides a legal framework, its implementation is uneven, especially outside major cities. Government-run eldercare centers and policy initiatives exist but are often complemented by NGOs or religious institutions. The reliance on community-based care reflects a welfare model that combines state support with civil society involvement. However, this model is vulnerable to inconsistencies and underfunding.

In contrast, Indonesia lacks any binding legal framework that mandates adult children to care for aging parents. Existing policies, such as the Law on Elder Welfare, offer only general protections without enforcement mechanisms. Most eldercare services are either charitable or community-based, with minimal oversight. As a result, neglect cases often go unreported, and state support is sporadic and reactive rather than preventive.

This comparative lens reveals that legal infrastructure alone does not guarantee elder protection. While Singapore's system offers formal recourse, it does not necessarily foster emotional or social care. Malaysia's hybrid model shows potential but lacks institutional consistency. Indonesia's heavy reliance on informal support underscores the risks of policy inaction, especially as traditional family structures continue to erode.

4.3. Social Responses and Moral Representations of Elder Neglect

The moral framing of elder neglect varies widely across the three societies, reflecting underlying cultural ideologies and policy narratives. In Indonesia, the act of placing parents in care homes is still widely viewed as a moral failure, despite the rising frequency of such arrangements. The social

discourse around bakti intensifies feelings of guilt and shame among adult children, especially when they are unable to meet caregiving expectations due to structural limitations. This moral burden, however, is rarely accompanied by systemic solutions, resulting in a privatization of emotional stress.

In Malaysia, public attitudes display a tension between moral condemnation and practical acceptance. While overt neglect is still socially censured, subtler forms, such as emotional distancing, exclusion from family decision-making, or overreliance on hired help, are becoming normalized. This duality reflects a society caught between religious-communal ideals and urban-modern realities.

Singapore approaches the issue through a pragmatic lens. State campaigns frame filial duty as both a moral and civic obligation, but this messaging often lacks emotional resonance. The normalization of formal eldercare facilities has created space for institutional solutions, yet it also promotes a distancing logic: once financial duties are fulfilled, the affective dimension of care is often overlooked. Consequently, elder neglect becomes less visible and more structurally embedded.

These findings suggest that societal responses to elder neglect are shaped by more than cultural beliefs, they are also influenced by legal narratives, institutional availability, and dominant conceptions of the “good child.” In all three countries, there exists a growing gap between symbolic morality and actual caregiving practices. Addressing this gap requires not only legal reform but also a cultural and discursive shift that redefines eldercare as a shared societal responsibility rather than a private moral test.

Table 1. Comparative Social and Policy Dimensions of Elder Neglect in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

Analytical Dimension	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore
Socio-Cultural Structure	Traditional collectivism in decline; rising urbanization and migration	Malay-Islamic communitarianism remains strong; moderate urban influence	High individualism; dominant ethos of meritocracy and efficiency
Intergenerational Norms	Filial piety weakened by economic and cultural modernity pressures	Religious and customary norms persist; generational distance increasing	Responsibility formalized by law; moral obligations increasingly legalistic
State Policy Framework	Law No. 13/1998 on Elder Welfare; symbolic and fragmented protection	National Policy for the Elderly (1995/2011); community-based welfare support	Maintenance of Parents Act 1995; legal sanctions for neglect
Access to Elder Institutions	Predominantly NGO-run; high stigma toward institutionalization	Mostly private facilities; care still centered on family networks	State-run services available; institutionalization viewed as rational option
Social and Moral Response	High stigma against abandonment, yet neglect cases rising	Hidden forms of neglect (isolation, emotional distancing) increasingly normalized	Emotional distance socially accepted; rational justifications common
Common Forms of Neglect	Institutional drop-off without visits; domestic isolation; financial abuse	Passive disregard; exclusion from family decisions	Delegation to care homes; minimal emotional engagement
Trends (last 5 years)	Increase in reported neglect in media and social services	Slight increase, often undocumented or informal	Stable in numbers, but rising psychosocial concerns

The comparative survey results across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore offer valuable insight into how filial responsibility is perceived and practiced in each national context. Notably, a majority of respondents in Indonesia (73%) and Malaysia (88%) continue to view living with one’s elderly parents as a moral obligation. In stark contrast, only 45% of Singaporean respondents share this sentiment, reflecting a shift toward individualistic values and greater reliance on institutional care.

Despite normative commitments, the practical reality of elder neglect remains prevalent. Over half of respondents in all three countries reported witnessing or knowing someone who had experienced elder neglect (Indonesia: 61%, Singapore: 55%, Malaysia: 47%). This indicates that while moral

ideals persist, they do not necessarily translate into caregiving behavior, especially under conditions of urban stress and family fragmentation.

The acceptability of nursing homes as eldercare solutions illustrates this normative-practical gap. In Singapore, 79% of respondents agreed that care homes are a legitimate solution, compared to 38% in Malaysia and only 18% in Indonesia. These figures mirror broader cultural attitudes: in Singapore, eldercare is increasingly institutionalized, whereas in Indonesia and Malaysia, community and familial norms continue to dominate, albeit under growing pressure.

Table 2. Comparative Perceptions and Practices of Elder Neglect (n = 100 respondents)

Thematic Variable	Indonesia (n=33)	Malaysia (n=33)	Singapore (n=33)
1. Belief that living with parents is a moral duty	73% (24)	88% (29)	45% (15)
2. Have personally witnessed elder neglect	61% (20)	47% (16)	55% (18)
3. View nursing homes as an acceptable solution	18% (6)	38% (13)	79% (26)
4. Support laws mandating children to financially support elderly parents	84% (28)	91% (30)	58% (19)
5. Have placed a parent in a nursing facility (temporary or permanent)	9% (3)	21% (7)	64% (21)
6. Believe parents are happier living with family	88% (29)	81% (27)	42% (14)
7. Believe the state sufficiently protects the elderly	33% (11)	55% (18)	91% (30)
8. View elder neglect as a form of domestic violence	76% (25)	67% (22)	67% (22)
9. Aware that the law can punish children for abandoning parents	21% (7)	45% (15)	88% (29)

Support for legal intervention also reveals a paradox. An overwhelming majority in Malaysia (91%) and Indonesia (84%) agree that laws should require children to support their elderly parents, yet awareness of such laws and actual compliance remains low. In contrast, Singapore, which has an enforceable filial law (Maintenance of Parents Act), shows lower support (58%) for mandatory legal obligations, possibly due to concerns over state intrusion into family matters or a preference for voluntary ethics.

The gap between belief and practice becomes even clearer when examining actual behavior. For example, 64% of Singaporean respondents admitted to having placed a parent in a care facility, compared to only 21% in Malaysia and 9% in Indonesia. These practices reflect different levels of normalization regarding institutional care and different capacities for household-based caregiving.

When asked about the emotional wellbeing of elderly parents, respondents in Indonesia (88%) and Malaysia (81%) strongly believed that the elderly are happier when living with family. Singaporeans were less convinced, with only 42% agreeing, possibly indicating a shift in how emotional satisfaction and autonomy are conceptualized in late life.

In terms of perceptions of state responsibility, 91% of Singaporean respondents expressed confidence that the government sufficiently protects the elderly, compared to 55% in Malaysia and just 33% in Indonesia. These findings align with the structural capacities of the respective states: Singapore's centralized welfare model appears to generate higher public trust, while Indonesia's fragmented care system fosters skepticism.

Finally, a significant number of respondents in all three countries, ranging from 67% to 76%, agreed that elder neglect constitutes a form of domestic violence. However, awareness of legal sanctions for abandonment varies widely: only 21% in Indonesia and 45% in Malaysia were aware of such laws, compared to 88% in Singapore. This suggests that legal literacy and enforcement are critical factors in shaping both public understanding and deterrence.

Overall, the data underscore a persistent mismatch between cultural ideals and caregiving realities. While filial norms remain influential in Indonesia and Malaysia, they are increasingly symbolic. Singapore, although structurally equipped to enforce filial duties, illustrates how legal compliance

does not guarantee emotional proximity or social integration of the elderly. These findings highlight the need for policies that integrate legal accountability, emotional well-being, and institutional support as complementary pillars of eldercare reform.

Table 3. Trends and Tensions in Elder Care Responsibility

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore
Cultural Expectation	High emphasis on moral obligation	Religious-communal care expectations	Legalized duty; moral narratives secondary
Legal Enforcement	Minimal; no enforceable mandates	Exists, but weakly implemented	Strong and enforceable filial law
Practical Practice	Low capacity for care; high informal burden	Delegated care, moderate institutional reliance	Formal delegation; institutional care normalized
Emotional Engagement	Expected but declining	Variable; depends on household structure	Often absent; emotional distance widespread
Perceived State Role	Passive and fragmented	Partnership model with civil society	Active and coordinated eldercare regime
Moral Representation of Neglect	Failure of filial virtue	Hidden contradiction between ideals and practice	Rational, technocratic reframing of neglect

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the growing complexity of filial responsibility and elder neglect in Southeast Asia, particularly in the contrasting contexts of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. While the moral expectation that adult children should care for aging parents remains deeply embedded in cultural and religious norms, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, this expectation is increasingly challenged by the realities of urbanization, economic pressure, and shifting family structures. In Singapore, the state has moved to institutionalize filial duty through legal instruments, yet even there, the erosion of emotional and social caregiving is apparent.

A central finding of this study is the disconnect between filial ideals and caregiving practices. Across all three countries, many adult children believe in the importance of supporting their parents but are unable to fulfill this role due to practical constraints. This gap often results in emotional distancing, passive neglect, or institutional delegation. Such outcomes indicate that elder neglect cannot be understood merely as a failure of individual morality, it must also be seen as a structural consequence of weakened intergenerational systems in modern societies.

From a legal and policy standpoint, the variation in state responses offers key insights. Singapore's highly legalistic and centralized approach ensures enforceability but does not guarantee relational care. Malaysia's hybrid model shows potential but lacks institutional consistency and cultural adaptability. Indonesia, which relies heavily on informal caregiving, suffers from weak legal infrastructure and limited public support, making elderly welfare precarious and unevenly distributed.

To address these issues, we propose the following policy recommendations:

1. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks in Indonesia and Malaysia:** Both countries should move toward formalizing elder protection laws that mandate minimal standards of financial and social care by adult children. The Singaporean Maintenance of Parents Act could serve as a model, with necessary adaptations to local contexts and sensitivities.
2. **Invest in Community-Based Eldercare Services:** Governments should expand eldercare infrastructure, particularly community care centers, respite facilities, and in-home care services. These alternatives would ease the caregiving burden on families while maintaining social integration for older adults.
3. **Promote Intergenerational Education and Social Norm Reinforcement:** Filial responsibility must be reframed not as a private burden but as a shared social value. Educational curricula,

media campaigns, and public service programs can help rebuild moral narratives around eldercare in modern terms.

4. Enhance Legal Literacy and Enforcement: Public awareness of elder rights and filial obligations remains low in Indonesia and Malaysia. Targeted outreach and accessible legal assistance are necessary to ensure that elder neglect is not silently normalized.
5. Encourage Culturally Adaptive Policy Innovation: Any reform must consider the cultural pluralism and diverse moral economies of Southeast Asia. Policy design should reflect not only legal justice but also social legitimacy, gender dynamics, and emotional labor.

In sum, this study calls for a reimagining of intergenerational solidarity in an era of aging populations and changing social landscapes. The care of the elderly should not rest solely on individual virtue but must be embedded in a comprehensive framework of legal protection, institutional support, and cultural renewal. Without such integrated efforts, elder neglect risks becoming an accepted feature of modern life, an outcome that undermines not only the dignity of the aging, but also the ethical foundations of society itself.

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