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Family and Interpersonal Communication Resilience Model in Facing Love Scam Manipulation: A Qualitative Study in a Low Income Urban Settlement in Medan City

Sigit Hardiyanto¹, Abrar Adhani², Yan Hendra³, Yofiendi Indah Indainanto⁴

¹²³Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, North Sumatra, Indonesia, ⁴Universitas Diponegoro, Central Java, Indonesia

Correspondence: sigithardianto@umsu.ac.id¹

Abstract

High social media use combined with limited digital literacy is associated with heightened vulnerability among residents of low-income urban settlements in Medan City to romance or love scams. This study aims to develop a model of family and interpersonal communication resilience that explains how families detect, respond to, and support recovery from the emotional manipulation involved in love scams. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological orientation, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected informants, comprising love scam victims, parents or family caregivers, and community or religious leader(s) who supported affected families, in a densely populated, low-income settlement area in Medan City. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman and Saldana, combined with a phenomenological reading aimed at uncovering the subjective meaning of informants' experiences. Findings show that emotional manipulation in love scams tends to unfold through five recurring, non-linear stages initiating contact, intensifying attention, cultivating emotional dependency, isolating communication, and exploitation. In response, family communication resilience emerged through seven interrelated practices, synthesized into the LINDUNG Model, an acronym for Lacak (Trace), Inisiasi (Initiate), Normalisasi (Normalize), Deteksi (Detect), Upaya Pemutusan (Severing Efforts), Navigasi (Navigate), and Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation). The model conceptualizes resilience not as an individual capacity of the victim alone, but as a collective communication process involving the victim, the family, and the surrounding social environment. As an exploratory, context-bound qualitative study, the proposed model requires further validation, for example through member checking or expert review, before broader application.

KEYWORDS

communication resilience, family communication, interpersonal communication, romance scam, low income urban settlement.

Introduction

In this article, the terms love scamming, love scam, and romance scam are used interchangeably to refer to a form of online fraud in which a perpetrator builds a fabricated romantic relationship with a victim in order to obtain financial or other gain, following the convention used in the cited literature (Aborisade et al., 2024; Coluccia et al., 2020; Wang & Topalli, 2024). Advancements in information and communication technology have transformed how people build social connections, including the formation of interpersonal relationships via digital media. Easy access to various social media platforms, instant messaging apps, and online dating services allows individuals to communicate without the constraints of time or space. Alongside these benefits,

however, the digital realm also harbours various forms of cybercrime that exploit human psychology and emotion, one such instance being love scamming. Love scamming is a type of fraud that exploits the emotional bond between the perpetrator and the victim to secure financial or other gains. This phenomenon is driven by a combination of psychological, social, cultural, and technological factors, with specific gender-based vulnerabilities affecting women and non-binary individuals (Napitupulu & Meliala, 2025). Several studies report a reported increase in love scamming cases in Indonesia, particularly among users of social media applications, although comprehensive national prevalence data remain limited (Malik & Hapsoro, 2025).

Economic vulnerability is one of several contextual factors associated with romance fraud risk reported in the literature (Tao, 2022); it is treated here as one factor among several, not as a determining cause. Perpetrators typically employ strategies that involve showcasing their residence, occupation, and lifestyle to extract financial gain through romantic relationships (Wulan et al., 2026). They subsequently deepen intimacy by fostering interaction and constructing scenarios to solicit money, eventually leading to a breakup or the revelation of secrets before abruptly disappearing (Kumalasari et al., 2024). Social and cultural factors are associated with heightened vulnerability among unmarried women in some studies (Thumboo & Mukherjee, 2024). Perpetrators often fabricate identities and craft touching life narratives, gradually earning the victim's trust through intensive communication. Once an emotional bond is established, the perpetrator begins to employ psychological manipulation to solicit assistance in the form of money, personal data, or access to the victim's assets. Perpetrators of romance scams carry out their schemes by, for instance, borrowing large sums of money from the victim ostensibly for business capital or family medical expenses, or repeatedly borrowing the victim's vehicle, eventually causing it to be lost (Nomleni, 2023).

Reported cases indicate that love scam victims span a range of age groups, from adolescents to older adults, although age-disaggregated prevalence data specific to Indonesia remain limited. High-intensity social media usage and low digital literacy among segments of the population are factors associated with heightened risk of this crime occurring (Bilz et al., 2023; Cross et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2023; Wang, 2026) (Yosiandra & Sakariah, 2025). Beyond financial loss, love scamming is associated with psychological distress, diminished self-confidence, and strain on family relationships. Some studies describe a compounding psychosocial burden involving grief, anger, low self-esteem, and depression, and in certain documented cases this distress has been linked to suicidal ideation (Niman et al., 2023); such associations should be interpreted with caution given the observational nature of the underlying evidence.

From a communication studies perspective, love scamming is understood not merely as a technology-based crime but as a systematic process of persuasive communication. The dynamics and characteristics of interactions between victims and perpetrators who meet online drive the risk associated with this phenomenon (Aborisade et al., 2024; Coluccia et al., 2020). Perpetrators leverage their ability to craft messages, select communication channels, manage their self-image, and identify the victim's emotional needs. Manipulation unfolds gradually through interpersonal communication designed to foster a sense of security, empathy, dependency, and trust.

The success of love scammers relies heavily on their ability to manage intensive interpersonal communication. They employ strategies such as self-disclosure, consistent displays of attention, romantic language, and the fabrication of conflicts that prompt the victim to provide assistance.

These communication strategies demonstrate that the deception process relies more on emotional management than on direct threats or coercion. Emotional manipulation lies at the heart of "love scamming" practices; perpetrators deliberately cultivate relationships that make victims feel loved, valued, and understood, thereby forging a strong emotional bond. As the relationship deepens, victims tend to overlook warning signs because their decisions are driven more by emotion than by rational judgment. Perpetrators lure potential victims by sharing details about their residence, hobbies, or lavish lifestyles, as well as posting information regarding their employment and vague personal details designed to pique curiosity (Wulan et al., 2026).

For the purposes of this study, the research setting is operationally defined as a densely populated, low income urban settlement, classified as such under the relevant official criteria of the Medan City government and the National Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik), including population density per square kilometre, building quality, and access to sanitation and clean water. Structural conditions such as limited economic resources, lower average educational attainment, and constrained access to information are treated in this study as separate, empirically documented variables rather than as uniform characteristics assumed to apply to every resident of the area. In the realm of cyber social reality, the spatial dimension gives rise to perspectives on the construction or reconstruction of social reality, a process involving simultaneous user interaction (Nasrullah, 2021). The need for emotional support stemming from the pressures of daily life can, in some cases, be exploited by perpetrators to establish a sense of closeness with potential victims. This is particularly relevant given that, in the context of modern knowledge exchange, smartphones act as a resource enabling parents to resolve everyday issues (Kaur & Singh, 2023).

In the current era, characterized by increasing internet penetration and gadget usage, residents of Medan City actively utilize social media for communication, entertainment, and building new relationships. This landscape creates both opportunities and risks regarding the emergence of various forms of digital crime. Risk factors and resilience are closely linked to issues of mental health, well-being, and depression within the family unit (Daniel et al., 2026). Yet, the family serves as the primary social institution responsible for providing protection, education, and supervision for its members. Through open family communication, members can share experiences, exchange information, and identify potential threats arising from the digital environment. Consequently, family communication plays a strategic role in preventing emotional manipulation associated with "love scams."

Effective family communication is characterized not merely by the intensity of interaction, but also by the quality of relationships built upon openness, empathy, mutual trust, and conflict-resolution skills. Empathy plays a crucial role in shaping interpersonal relationships and offers valuable insights for enhancing relationship satisfaction and stability (Kota & Saxena, 2025; Main et al., 2017). Establishing family communication practices that counter the emotional manipulation associated with love scams involves prioritizing social and moral values as symbols of adherence to norms. These values enable family members to secure emotional support, thereby reducing the likelihood of seeking affection from strangers with whom they lack a genuine connection. Thus, social and moral values serve as strategic instruments, establishing standards of conduct through communicative interaction (Pranawukir et al., 2026). Beyond family communication, interpersonal communication competence, defined here as an individual's capacity to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues, evaluate a communicator's credibility, listen actively, and set relational boundaries (Suwatno & Arviana, 2023), is treated in this study as a distinct construct that

complements family level resilience. Individuals with stronger interpersonal communication competence are better equipped to detect message inconsistencies, understand the motives of their interlocutors, and maintain healthy relational boundaries. Such capabilities serve as essential assets in navigating various forms of emotional manipulation in the digital realm. Understanding social interactions and behaviours is crucial for prevention and serves as a safeguard against love scams (Wang & Topalli, 2024). Communication resilience is defined in this study, following prior scholarship, as the capacity of individuals and families to maintain communication quality when facing stress, threats, or crises (Hakikoh et al., 2025). Individual level resilience refers to a person's own communicative and cognitive coping capacity, while family-level resilience refers to the collective communicative processes, such as mutual support, information verification, and joint decision-making, through which a family unit adapts to a shared threat. In the context of love scams, family level resilience is demonstrated through family members' ability to support one another, share and verify information, and make rational decisions when confronted with potentially risky situations.

Communication serves as a fundamental basis for building parental and family resilience to face various challenges, as well as for strengthening independence, quality of life, and sustainability (Hakikoh et al., 2025). The family communication resilience model is significant because it explains how communication processes can build social resilience against digital threats. Such resilience is fostered not only by providing information about the dangers of "love scamming" but also by cultivating a family communication culture that is open, critical, participatory, and trust-based. Interpersonal communication also underpins individual resilience the ability to listen actively, think critically about information, interpret non-verbal cues, and evaluate a communicator's credibility constitutes a set of communication competencies that can reduce the risk of falling victim to emotional manipulation. Furthermore, interpersonal communication helps individuals establish and maintain behavioural norms acting as a guide for expected conduct to meet their communication needs (Suwatno & Arviana, 2023).

Prior studies on love scamming have generally examined the phenomenon from the standpoint of cybersecurity, victim psychology, or digital literacy (Bilz et al., 2023; Coluccia et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2023). Comparatively fewer studies have examined family communication and interpersonal communication together as an integrated resilience process, and fewer still have done so in the context of low-income urban settlements, where structural constraints intersect with communicative practice in ways that remain under-documented. This study addresses that specific gap by examining how family and interpersonal communication jointly function as a resilience mechanism across detection, prevention, and recovery, rather than focusing on any single stage in isolation. This study proceeds from the premise that the family is not merely a setting for daily interaction but also a social protection system capable of fostering adaptive capabilities among family members in the face of external threats. When family communication is healthy, members have the space to discuss various issues they encounter, including experiences interacting with strangers in the digital realm.

It is proposed, as a research proposition to be examined empirically rather than as an established fact, that family communication in some households within low income urban settlements may face additional constraints such as economic pressure, time limitations, and lower average levels of formal education, alongside considerable variation and existing communicative strengths across households (Daniel et al., 2026). This study does not assume that settlement

status determines family communication quality. Rather, it investigates how specific communicative practices, whatever their context, function to build or undermine resilience against love scam manipulation. Consequently, prevention efforts cannot rely solely on enhancing digital literacy they also require strengthening interpersonal and family communication.

From a communication perspective, resilience is built through a process of meaning exchange that enables individuals to obtain emotional support, social validation, and accurate information. Open communication allows family members to discuss various forms of digital threats without fear or shame. Such a communication culture enhances a family's ability to detect potential manipulation at an early stage. The research site a densely populated residential area in Medan City comprising the Medan Petisah and Medan Belawan districts was purposively selected based on measurable criteria. These included population density, official classification as an area with inadequate services, and documented indicators of socio economic vulnerability alongside high levels of daily digital media usage. This context makes it a relevant setting for examining communication resilience in the face of the threat of romance scams (love scamming).

This research also takes into account the shift in urban communication patterns from face-to-face interaction to digital communication. This transition has consequences for how interpersonal relationships are formed, making them increasingly dependent on media. Consequently, assessments of a person's character are often based solely on digital representations that are easily manipulated. Based on the foregoing, this study is guided by a conceptual framework linking five constructs, namely family communication, interpersonal communication competence, digital literacy, social support, and communication resilience encompassing detection, response, and recovery. The framework proposes that family communication and interpersonal communication competence jointly shape a family's capacity for early detection of manipulation, collective verification, and post-exploitation recovery, with the family's access to social support and its level of digital literacy treated not as tested moderators but as contextual conditions that, in informants' accounts, enabled or constrained these communicative processes. This study is guided by three research questions. First, how does emotional manipulation in love scams unfold within the communication experiences of informants in this study. Second, what family and interpersonal communication practices are associated with the detection, prevention, and disclosure of love scam manipulation. Third, how do families support victims' recovery following disengagement from a love scam relationship. Addressing these questions is expected to strengthen the family's role in providing a protective social buffer while enhancing the community's interpersonal communication competence, thereby enabling them to withstand the various forms of emotional manipulation that emerge in the digital era.

Several existing frameworks address parts of this problem, but none links the perpetrator's manipulation sequence to the communicative counter-responses of the victim's family. Qualitative modelling of risk and protective factors for romance scam victimization has taken the individual victim, rather than the family as a communicating unit, as its unit of analysis (Wang & Topalli, 2024). Criminological and domestic violence perspectives explain how perpetrators groom, isolate, and exploit victims, but they concentrate on the perpetrator victim dyad and do not examine how the people around the victim detect or interrupt that process (Carter, 2020; Cross et al., 2018). Reviews have synthesized the relational dynamics and the conceptual construction of romance scams, yet, as reviews, they do not offer an empirically derived model of family response (Coluccia et al., 2020; Wang, 2026). Indonesian studies have described manipulation strategies on social

media from the side of the victim or the scam message (Kumalasari et al., 2024)(Wulan et al., 2026), while digital-citizenship approaches locate protection mainly in individual knowledge and skills (Temcharoenkit & Rani, 2025). In communication resilience research, resilience communication has been examined in single-mother families as a means of strengthening family resilience, not as a response to a deliberate external manipulator (Hakikoh et al., 2025). Against this background, the novelty of the present study lies in a process level contribution: the LINDUNG Model maps specific family communicative practices (tracing behavioural change, initiating non judgmental dialogue, collective detection and verification, and severing efforts) onto the manipulation stages they counteract, most notably the isolation stage in which the perpetrator tries to remove the family as an alternative source of information. It extends the same communicative process into recovery and specifies the family climate and community values under which these practices become possible, situated within the communicative and economic context of a low income urban settlement in Indonesia.

Methods

Research Design and Analytical Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological orientation. Phenomenology was selected because the study seeks to understand the subjective meaning informants attach to their communication experiences during and after exposure to love scam manipulation, rather than to test predefined hypotheses (Kuswarno, 2026). The interactive analysis model (Miles et al., 2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, is used in this study as the data analysis technique within the phenomenological design, rather than as a separate or competing design, following an established combination in communication phenomenology research (Creswell, 2016; Kriyantono, 2020). This study aims to develop a preliminary, context-bound conceptual model explaining family and interpersonal communication resilience in facing the emotional manipulation involved in love scamming. As an exploratory qualitative study, it does not aim to statistically validate the proposed model; the procedures described below, namely independent coding by two coders followed by consensus discussion, a reflexive memo revisited during coding, and a deliberate search for disconfirming cases, were used to enhance the credibility of the analysis and do not constitute validation of the model. Member checking, formal triangulation across data sources, an external audit-trail review, and expert or stakeholder review of the model were not conducted in this study. Validation of the LINDUNG Model, for example through expert review, stakeholder consultation, or quantitative testing, is therefore identified as a direction for future research.

Research Ethics Statement

This research has been reviewed and approved by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara under approval number 227/II.3-AU/UMSU-LP2M/F/2026, dated September 29, 2026. Prior to data collection, all informants including victims and family members were informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and they provided informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained by masking all identifying details and using pseudonyms for the informants; audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the research team established a protocol

for managing emotional distress, allowing interviews to be paused or terminated at the informant's request, and provided informants with information regarding relevant psychosocial support services and victim assistance.

Research Site and Informants

The study was conducted in densely populated, low income urban settlements within the Medan Petisah and Medan Belawan districts of Medan City. These locations were purposively selected based on measurable criteria such as population density, official classification as densely populated settlements or areas with minimal public services, and documented indicators of socioeconomic vulnerability and high daily digital media usage. Informants were selected using purposive sampling. Three groups were established: (a) individuals who had personally experienced a romance scam within the past year; (b) parents or caregiving family members directly involved in the family's response to the incident; and (c) community or religious leaders whose support was sought by the affected families included because family accounts highlighted their roles as part of the family's response. Exclusion criteria included: being over 18 years of age at the time of the interview; maintaining active contact with the perpetrator at the time of recruitment; and experiencing acute emotional distress during the screening stage. Recruitment followed specific steps. First, local neighborhood heads and community or religious leaders in both areas were informed about the study and asked to distribute information sheets to households known to be affected. Second, only individuals who contacted the research team or who consented to be contacted were approached. Third, participant eligibility was verified through a brief screening conversation covering inclusion and exclusion criteria before informed consent was requested. The lead author had previously conducted community based research in these settlements (Hardiyanto, Adhani, et al., 2026; Hardiyanto, Gunawan, et al., 2022), and a number of informants were already known through that work; to minimize undue influence, these informants were interviewed by other team members and reminded that participation was voluntary. The researchers had no close ties let alone prior personal relationships with any of the informants. In total, the participating informants comprised such as two victims (coded V1–V2), two parents or family caregivers (FM1–FM2), and one community or religious leader (CL1). Table 1 presents the participant profiles using the concept of information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The research aim was specific,

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Informant group	Gender	Relationship to the victim	Interview (month; duration)
V1	Victim (first-hand account)	F	Victim self	April 2026; (46) min
V2	Victim (first-hand account)	F	Victim self	April 2026; (57) min
FM1	Parent / family caregiver	M	Mother of V1	April 2026; (49) min
FM2	Parent / family caregiver	F	Mother of V	April 2026; (51) min
CL1	Community or religious leader	M	Not related family	April 2026; (56) min

Note. Codes: V = victim; FM = family member (parent or caregiver); CL = community or religious leader. Ages are reported in ranges to protect anonymity. Accounts given by FM informants about a victim's inner experience are treated as proxy accounts.

informants possessed distinct firsthand experience or direct involvement, and the interviews yielded information-rich accounts. The recruitment process concluded when the final two interviews failed to generate new codes relevant to the three research questions.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, in depth interviews, which constitute the dataset for analysis in this study. Informal field notes taken during visits to the settlements served only to describe the research setting and provide context for the interview accounts; these notes were not coded as a separate data source, and neither formal participant observation nor document analysis was conducted. Consequently, all claims regarding family practices presented in the results section are based on the informants' interview accounts. Fieldwork was carried out from April 1, 2026, to July 1, 2026. Each informant participated in a single interview session lasting approximately 45–90 minutes; brief follow-up conversations were held with some informants to clarify specific points, as indicated in the data display in Table 1 (participant profiles). Interviews took place at the informants' homes or other private locations of their choosing and were conducted in Indonesian to facilitate understanding; the excerpts included in this article were subsequently translated into English by the author. With the informants' consent, the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were cross checked against the original recordings to ensure accuracy. The interview guide covered four domains directly related to the research questions such as communication experiences prior to and during the romantic scam relationship, forms of emotional manipulation experienced or observed, family decision making and detection or verification practices and communication strategies employed during the processes of relationship termination and recovery. The guide was pilot tested prior to the main data collection and refined for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model (Miles et al., 2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This process was conducted iteratively and continuously from the onset of data collection through the study's conclusion. Coding was performed by two coders working independently before comparing results any disagreements were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. Subsequently, a phenomenological approach was applied to the condensed data to uncover the deep meaning of the informants' experiences, guided by researcher reflexivity. Prior to analysis, the research team documented their assumptions regarding "love scamming" and low-income settlements in a reflexive memo. This memo was revisited during the coding process to minimize the risk of imposing initial interpretations onto the data. The coding process integrated both deductive and inductive elements such as deductive codes were derived from the initial conceptual framework covering family communication, interpersonal communication, digital literacy, social support, and communication resilience while inductive codes emerged directly from recurring patterns in the informants' narratives that were not anticipated by the initial framework. These included a specific five-stage manipulation sequence and several practices that were later synthesized into the LINDUNG Model. Research findings were categorized into six major themes family communication, interpersonal communication, risk factors, protective factors, resilience strategies, and coping mechanisms before being synthesized into a communicative resilience model through iterative team

discussions. During the synthesis phase, the research team deliberately sought out negative cases or those inconsistent with initial hypotheses (disconfirming cases) such as informants who maintained intense family communication yet still fell victim to refine and clarify the model's components, rather than forcing every case into a uniform pattern. The resulting trail from raw accounts to codes, categories, and final model elements, including disconfirming cases, is shown in Table 2 in the results and discussion section.

Result and Discussion

This study involved informants from a low-income urban settlement in Medan, consisting of love scam victims who described their own experiences directly and parents or family caregivers who described their role in the family's response. Where an informant's account describes another family member's internal experience rather than their own, this is treated as a proxy account and is flagged as such rather than presented as direct evidence of that person's emotions or motivations. Data collected through semi-structured interviews indicate that, among the study's informants, vulnerability to romance scams is linked to limited digital literacy as well as a need for emotional acceptance, economic pressure, loneliness, family conflict, and limited access to protection mechanisms and victim support, these connections emerged in the accounts of several informants though not all during the coding process, specifically regarding the themes of family and interpersonal communication resilience in the face of love scam manipulation.

These associations are drawn from informants' own accounts and are not presented as generalizable to all residents of similar settlements. In such contexts, an individual appearing on social media and showing deep concern can be perceived as a source of emotional support. Perpetrators exploit this situation by fostering intimacy, promising a serious relationship, and making the victim feel special such as consequently, the victim fails to recognize the perpetrator's communication as a manipulative tactic designed to engineer the emotional bond characteristic of love scams, ultimately leading to fraud. These findings are consistent with prior research describing online romance scams as constructed through the development of romantic connections, the establishment of trust, the exploitation of emotional needs, and the conditioning of victims to comply with the perpetrator's demands (Coluccia et al., 2020(Wang, 2026) the present findings extend this literature by situating these mechanisms within the communicative and economic context of a low-income urban settlement.

Based on the coding and categorization of interview data, the emotional manipulation experienced by the informants unfolds in five stages: opening communication channels, intensifying attention, fostering emotional dependency, isolating communication, and exploiting the victim. These five stages describe the scam process itself, as reconstructed from informants' accounts, and are analytically distinct from the seven component LINDUNG model of family response introduced later in this section; the former describes what perpetrators did, the latter describes how families responded. This process does not always proceed linearly instead, stages may recur depending on the victim's reactions and interventions by family members. In the initial stage, the perpetrator establishes contact via social media platforms among those cited by informants, WhatsApp and Instagram are the most frequently mentioned, alongside various dating apps in some instances. The perpetrator presents an appealing and trustworthy persona, tailoring their profile, communication style, occupation, social status, and life story to meet the psychological needs that captivate the victim. Subsequently,

the perpetrator offers consistent attention through greetings, compliments, personal inquiries, and expressions of empathy to foster a closer, more intense connection with the victim. Such interactions make the victim feel seen and valued, particularly when they lack similar attention within their own family environment. The following account, from a family caregiver informant, illustrates how the first stage was described in this study. It reflects this individual informant's own interpretation of the local social context and is presented here as one perspective rather than as a verified characterization of the community. It should not be read as a factual claim about education levels or lifestyle in the settlement:

"From what I've seen, it usually starts with a connection on WhatsApp; they come across as friendly and humble, and they're the ones who initiate the conversation. Plus, they show a level of attentiveness that makes it feel like a new marriage. That's the kind of thing we see a lot here, and the perpetrators usually use impressive profile photos and claim to have respectable jobs, and so on" (Informant FM1, April 2026).

The second stage is marked by an increase in communication intensity. The perpetrator repeatedly contacts the victim, uses romantic endearments, makes promises of marriage, and constructs a vision of a shared future. The high frequency of messaging creates a perception of closeness, even though the relationship exists solely through digital media. In this context, communication intensity is not synonymous with relationship quality rather, it serves as a strategy to monopolize the victim's attention, time, and judgment. Findings from this study indicate that frequent interaction was one of the main means, among several described by informants, by which perpetrators appeared to control information and cultivate the victim's trust. Perpetrators curate the information they share, conceal their true identities, and present stories that are difficult to verify. These emotional manipulation tactics are employed to craft a positive self-image that aligns with the victim's ideal partner archetype, thereby fostering the love and emotional dependency that bind the victim to the scammer (Irmayanti & Zuroidah, 2024; Kumalasari et al., 2024; Kumalasari & Wijaya, 2024).

The third stage involves the development of emotional dependency, wherein the victim begins to rely on the perpetrator as a confidant, a source of perspective, and a provider of emotional support. Whether a relationship is close or distant, the betrayal of trust inherent in such crimes can exacerbate the victim's psychological trauma (Kadir, 2025). During this phase, the perpetrator enacts the scam through behaviours such as excessive attention, flattery, promises, and interactions designed to instil a sense of security. This dependency compels the victim to maintain the relationship, even when inconsistencies in the perpetrator's narrative begin to appear. A minority of informants in this study described noticing lies or suspicious signals at this stage, and among them, this awareness did not always lead to ending the relationship; other informants reported no such early suspicion. Rather than framing this as a failure of the victim to detect the scam, the pattern observed here points to the perpetrator's sustained emotional engineering and to the difficulty, documented in the wider literature, of severing a bond that has been deliberately and systematically cultivated. Even where victims harboured suspicions and attempted to verify the situation, the detection process unfolded within the context of the intense emotional, social, and relational ties established between the perpetrator and the victim. The informant quoted below also voiced a generalization about women's susceptibility to flattery. This reflects a socially circulating belief that the informant drew on to explain their own experience; it is reproduced here to preserve the

informant's authentic voice, not as an endorsement of that generalization, which the authors note is itself a form of victim-blaming discourse worth critical attention in future work:

"At first, they pretend to know you from social media; the conversation starts casually, then gradually shifts to joking and laughter, eventually leading to displays of affection and flattery. You know how it is, women are susceptible to flattery; it goes to their heads, and those words keep echoing, creating a positive impression. Because of this process, over time, they might ask for money to buy a data package, claiming, for instance, that they are in a remote village where it's hard to purchase one. You might agree once or twice, but if it happens repeatedly, you eventually start to get suspicious, right?" (Informant V1, April 2026).

The fourth stage is communication isolation, characterized by attempts to limit family involvement; the perpetrator might ask the victim to keep the relationship secret, claim the family fails to understand the bond between them, or accuse the family of trying to sabotage the victim's happiness. Perpetrators of love scamming demand secrecy from their victims to preserve the relationship and ensure its continuity (Carter, 2020). Perpetrators also instigate conflict between the victim and their family if the family seeks detailed information about the perpetrator's identity. Communication isolation becomes dangerous when it eliminates the family as a source of comparison against the information provided by the perpetrator. When the victim relies solely on the perpetrator's explanations, the reality of the relationship is shaped unilaterally between the two. This pattern of secrecy demands and isolation from family shares some surface features with coercive control as defined in the domestic violence literature, namely the restriction of a person's access to alternative sources of information and support (Cross et al., 2018). However, this study did not systematically assess the fuller set of criteria associated with coercive control, such as sustained physical proximity or explicit threats, and the comparison here is offered as a partial analogy rather than a claim of equivalence. The quotation below was obtained from a victim informant under the confidentiality and distress protocols described in the Research Ethics Statement above:

"This was my experience; looking back, I feel so foolish, it was as if I were hypnotized, to the point where I was told I had to keep the relationship a secret from my family. If the intentions were good, they should have wanted me to introduce them to my family that would have been the right thing to do. Even if a face to face meeting wasn't possible, social media could have served as a way to show the relationship was serious" (Informant V1, April 2026).

The fifth stage is exploitation, once trust and dependency have been established, the perpetrator will cite various reasons to obtain money such as emergencies, travel issues, healthcare needs, administrative costs, gift shipments, investments, or legal matters requiring funds. The initial request is usually for an amount deemed manageable for the victim to provide; subsequent requests escalate, justified by the claim that the previous assistance failed to resolve the issue. Perpetrators employ love scamming, a form of emotional manipulation that can cause severe emotional and financial damage, often incorporating grooming tactics (Carter, 2020). Among informants in this study, even financial losses that might seem modest compared to other cases had significant consequences given limited household resources, including the loss of savings, the need to borrow money or sell possessions, and the deferral of payments for basic necessities, thereby creating new problems, including family conflict.

"In the end, once we're close, they ask for money claiming they need to buy a data package, purchase items like clothes, or buy food because they haven't been paid yet; basically, there are so many excuses. Because we're close, it feels awkward not to help, so we end up giving the money, even

when we're barely scraping by ourselves" (Informant V1, April 2026).

Beyond the descriptive account of the manipulation process above, informants further described how family attentiveness could function as an early warning mechanism; this is reported here as a pattern observed among informants, and the framing of it as a broader recommendation for other families is the authors' interpretation rather than a directly validated finding. Families described taking action by recognizing behavioural changes in the victim, such as increased mobile phone usage, secretive communication, altered sleep patterns, withdrawal from family activities, anxiety when messages go unanswered, and unexplained requests for money. Although parents or family members may not always know the specific content of the victim's communications, they described recognizing changes in the victim's habits and emotional responses as a basis for initiating dialogue. This kind of attentiveness carries a genuine risk of tipping into surveillance, loss of privacy, or excessive family control informants in this study did not report experiencing it that way, but the study did not systematically probe for such concerns, and the distinction likely depends on the victim's age, autonomy, and consent, and on whether the response stays proportionate to the observed risk rather than becoming punitive or coercive.

"We try to recognize changes in our family members' behaviour, such as how they communicate with us, or whether they are becoming easily angered or aggressive. We can observe this not only through their words but also through their actions and mannerisms, for instance, whether they are withdrawn or open, and the nature of their communication with us. I believe these are the things we can look for to monitor our family members" (Informant FM2, April 2026).

Informants who described more frequent family interaction also tended to report noticing changes sooner, while informants who described limited communication more often reported discovering the fraud only after the victim had already suffered a loss; this pattern was noted across accounts rather than established through systematic case by case comparison. Frequency of contact alone is unlikely to be protective: informants' accounts suggest that what mattered was frequency accompanied by openness, attentiveness, and the opportunity to discuss issues without fear of blame, rather than contact frequency as such. Consistent, pervasive communication grounded in parental example and religious norms acting as a form of social control is one strategy for fostering healthy behaviour described in related research (Hardiyanto, Adhani, et al., 2026).

Family communication grounded in acceptance rather than negative labelling serves as a protective foundation, demonstrating that a family's initial response determines a victim's willingness to disclose information. When a family responds with blame, feelings of shame become a barrier to seeking help. Conversely, victims are more open when the family listens to the full story, avoids interruptions, and does not immediately demand the termination of the relationship. This type of communication allows victims to acknowledge their doubts without losing their self esteem. Strategies should focus on bolstering psychological resilience to alleviate the fears of love scamming victims (Alam et al., 2026). In this process, the family does not condone the perpetrator's actions but distinguishes their judgment of the crime from their judgment of the victim.

"I once faced a situation like this myself. As leaders, we should prioritize a sense of belonging and responsibility; if someone is facing a problem, it is our duty to find the root cause. We shouldn't place blame, as that only adds to their stress; they are already distressed from being deceived, and facing pressure from their family would only make it

worse. Embracing them is, I believe, the solution, or at least a necessary first step" (Informant CL1, community or religious leader, April 2026).

This approach is crucial because love scamming results in layered victimization; victims suffer not only from emotional betrayal, financial loss, shame, and a loss of self confidence but also face potential social rejection. Observations of love scamming in Medan's low-income settlements reveal that the phenomenon causes psychological and financial strain, while social stigma which often holds victims responsible for their own actions exacerbates their condition and discourages reporting. Such perspectives overlook the fact that perpetrators employ calculated strategies involving communication tactics, identity concealment, emotional manipulation, and psychological exploitation. Blaming the victim undermines protective mechanisms, as victims may conceal their experiences and become reluctant to seek assistance. Integrating social education and digital literacy is crucial for providing psychosocial support to victims of emotional manipulation via "love scams" (Temcharoenkit & Rani, 2025).

A lack of parental support in resolving these situations can lead to negative long term consequences stemming from the love scam phenomenon (Amirkhani et al., 2026). Another measure described by informants for addressing love scam manipulation involves families performing collective verification of the perpetrator's identity and information once the victim agrees to open a dialogue. This verification process, as described in interview accounts rather than through formal participant observation, entails searching for photos, checking for narrative consistency, making video calls, investigating social media accounts, verifying phone numbers, and consulting individuals with technical expertise. In several of the reviewed reports, family members described their efforts to have the victim cross-check information provided by the perpetrator against other sources or test the perpetrator's responses through specific questions. This verification process was considered more effective when carried out collaboratively than by forcibly taking the phone. Some of these steps, particularly those involving financial accounts, evidence preservation, or suspected fraud, fall outside what informal family verification can safely accomplish where financial loss or ongoing fraud is suspected, families are better served by also contacting their bank, the relevant platform's safety team, or the appropriate law enforcement or cybercrime reporting channel, in addition to any informal verification conducted at home. Maintaining harmonious family relationships involves making time for communication amidst daily activities, discussing topics that foster self reflection, and respecting one another's opinions (Carella & Haq, 2025).

Severing ties and implementing protective measures to support a victim's recovery involves ceasing communication, blocking accounts and phone numbers, changing passwords, securing financial accounts, and preserving conversation histories; these measures generally align with recognized cybersecurity practices for romance scam cases such as those recommended by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) including cutting off contact with the perpetrator, changing passwords, and enabling authentication if account credentials were disclosed to the perpetrator. This process requires family support, as victims may experience hesitation, a sense of loss, or an urge to re-establish contact with the perpetrator. Victims may undergo a grieving process similar to the end of a real world relationship, mourning the loss of a figure who had provided attention and served as a confidant. If these emotional needs are not met through healthy family support, the victim risks resuming contact with the perpetrator or falling prey to similar scams.

Family communication resilience encompasses not only the successful thwarting of a scam but also the victim's recovery process. According to the informants in this study, this recovery

Table 2. Coding to Model Matrix: From Informants Accounts to The LINDUNG Model

Evidence (Quotation or Summarized Account Source)	Initial Codes	Category/Theme	Analytic Decision	Final Model Element
"it usually starts with a connection on WhatsApp; they come across as friendly and humble, and they're the ones who initiate the conversation" (FM1)	first contact via messaging app; friendly persona; perpetrator initiates	Opening communication channels	Perpetrator action, so placed in the manipulation sequence rather than in the family response	Stage 1: Initiating contact
"the conversation starts casually, then gradually shifts to joking and laughter, eventually leading to displays of affection and flattery" (V1)	escalating contact; flattery; affection	Intensifying attention	Separated from Stage 3 because it describes message behaviour, not the victim's reliance	Stage 2: Intensifying attention
"Because we're close, it feels awkward not to help" (V1)	felt obligation; reliance on the relationship	Emotional dependency	Coded as the victim's experience that makes later exploitation possible	Stage 3: Cultivating emotional dependency
"I was told I had to keep the relationship a secret from my family" (V1)	demand for secrecy; exclusion of family	Restricting family access	Perpetrator action; identified as the point at which family practices were most needed, which guided the mapping of Inisiasi and Deteksi onto this stage	Stage 4: Isolating communication
"they ask for money claiming they need to buy a data package ... or buy food" (V1); similar account by V1	repeated small requests; escalating pretexts	Financial exploitation	Perpetrator action	Stage 5: Exploitation
"We try to recognize changes in our family members' behaviour ... whether they are withdrawn or open" (FM2)	noticing withdrawal; observing mood and interaction	Recognizing behavioural change	A family practice that precedes dialogue; kept separate from verification	L – Lacak (core practice)
Summarized family accounts: listening to the full story, avoiding interruptions, not immediately demanding that the relationship end	non-judgmental questioning; listening	Opening dialogue safe	A concrete communicative act, so distinguished from the family climate (Normalisasi)	I – Inisiasi (core practice)
Summarized family accounts: searching photos, requesting video calls, checking social media accounts and phone numbers, consulting people with technical expertise	photo search; video-call request; cross-checking; asking others	Collective detection and verification	Coded as a joint practice that restores the family as an alternative information source during isolation	D – Deteksi (core practice)
Summarized family accounts: ceasing communication, blocking accounts, changing passwords, preserving conversation histories	blocking; securing accounts; preserving evidence	Disengagement and protection	Grouped as the practice that ends exploitation	U – Upaya Pemutusan (core practice)
Summarized accounts: grief after the relationship ended, rebuilding trust, losses affecting food, education, and housing	grief; repairing trust; managing losses	Recovery in three dimensions	Follows disengagement, so modelled as a process rather than a single step	N – Navigasi (recovery process)
"We shouldn't place blame ... Embracing them is ... a necessary first step" (CL1); family accounts that blame produced shame and silence	non-blaming stance; acceptance; shame as a barrier	Non-stigmatizing climate	Not a step in the sequence but a condition that made disclosure possible; reclassified as an enabling condition	N – Normalisasi (enabling condition)
"As leaders, we should prioritize a sense of belonging and responsibility" (CL1)	shared responsibility; community support	Community involvement	A value located outside the family sequence	G – Gotong Royong (contextual value)
Disconfirming case: informants who maintained intense family communication yet still fell victim	frequent contact without openness	Frequency versus openness	Showed that frequency alone was not protective, so the model specifies openness and non-judgmental dialogue rather than contact frequency	Refined I – Inisiasi and N – Normalisasi
Disconfirming case: a minority of victims noticed suspicious signals but did not end the relationship	recognition without disengagement	Detection is not sufficient	Supported keeping detection (D) and severing efforts (U) as separate practices	Refined D and U

appears to involve three interconnected dimensions emotional, relational, and economic with a recurring emphasis on face to face dialogic communication. Such dialogic communication, which entails offering advice on various activities by weighing the pros and cons of specific actions, aims to determine the appropriate stance or response (Hardiyanto, Gunawan, et al., 2022). Based on field research findings, the model for family and interpersonal communication resilience in the face of emotional manipulation via love scams is grounded in the LINDUNG framework, an acronym for Lacak (Trace), Inisiasi (Initiate), Normalisasi (Normalize), Deteksi (Detect), Upaya Pemutusan (Severing Efforts), Navigasi (Navigate), and Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation). The process of deriving these seven components from the coded data moving from open codes to categories and finally to the final model is summarized in Table 2, which links representative quotations or summarized accounts to initial codes, categories, analytic decisions, and final model elements, including disconfirming cases. It is this process rather than merely the resulting acronym that forms the basis for evaluating the model.

This model views resilience not merely as an individual victim's capacity to become stronger, but as a collective communication process involving the victim, their family, and their social environment. The LINDUNG Model comprises seven components organized at three analytically distinct levels (see Figure 1 and the explanation that follows it): four core communicative practices, one recovery process, and two enabling conditions or contextual values. The first is tracing changes in the victim's behaviour and communication patterns, whereby the family identifies shifts in mobile phone usage intensity, sleep patterns, social activities, emotional state, financial needs, and openness in communication. Monitoring is intended as an expression of care rather than repressive surveillance; whether a given instance of monitoring stays within that boundary depends on factors such as the victim's consent, age, autonomy, and the proportionality of the family's response to the actual level of risk, and this study did not evaluate those safeguards directly (see the discussion of this tension above). Second, initiating a safe dialogue by opening conversations with non judgmental questions prioritizing safe dialogue allows victims to speak without fear of being scolded or shamed by other family members. Engaging in dialogue involves connecting with others in four ways being present and attuned to what

the other person is saying, maintaining congruence (alignment), demonstrating positive regard, and showing empathy (Morissan, 2013).

Third, normalizing the act of seeking help and removing stigma (an enabling condition rather than a sequential step); framing the family as a protective unit entitled to assistance and viewing this as a shared responsibility helps normalize help seeking, reduces shame, and encourages victims of love scams to disclose information. Fourth, collective detection and verification by the family, involving the scrutiny of the perpetrator's identity, photos, phone numbers, stories, social media accounts, requests for money, and communication consistency. Collective verification combines family members' digital skills acting as a safeguard for the victim with an understanding of the emotional state of love scam victims. Fifth, efforts to sever contact and ensure safety through continuous support for the victim, including halting communication, blocking accounts, securing personal and financial data, preserving evidence, and reporting the case. These measures ensure that cutting ties is done systematically to prevent the victim from re-establishing contact with the perpetrator. Sixth, navigating multidimensional recovery by fostering a supportive family attitude to facilitate emotional, relational, social, and economic recovery.

This process involves giving the victim space to grieve, rebuild self esteem, mend family relationships, and plan steps for economic recovery. Seventh, a collaborative approach (a contextual value at community level) focusing on prevention through family learning rather than exposing identities or shaming victims can be adopted; this includes establishing digital safety rules, holding regular discussions, and building connections with community groups or complaint services. Given that the LINDUNG Model has not yet been tested for acceptability, feasibility, effectiveness, or applicability beyond this single research site. Its use in family and community education programs is proposed here as a direction for future efforts rather than a recommendation ready for immediate implementation realizing this proposal requires a phased process that includes pilot testing, co-design with prospective stakeholders such as neighborhood volunteers, women's groups, youth organizations, religious assemblies, schools, sub district authorities, and victim protection communities and the establishment of outcome benchmarks for evaluation prior to wider implementation.

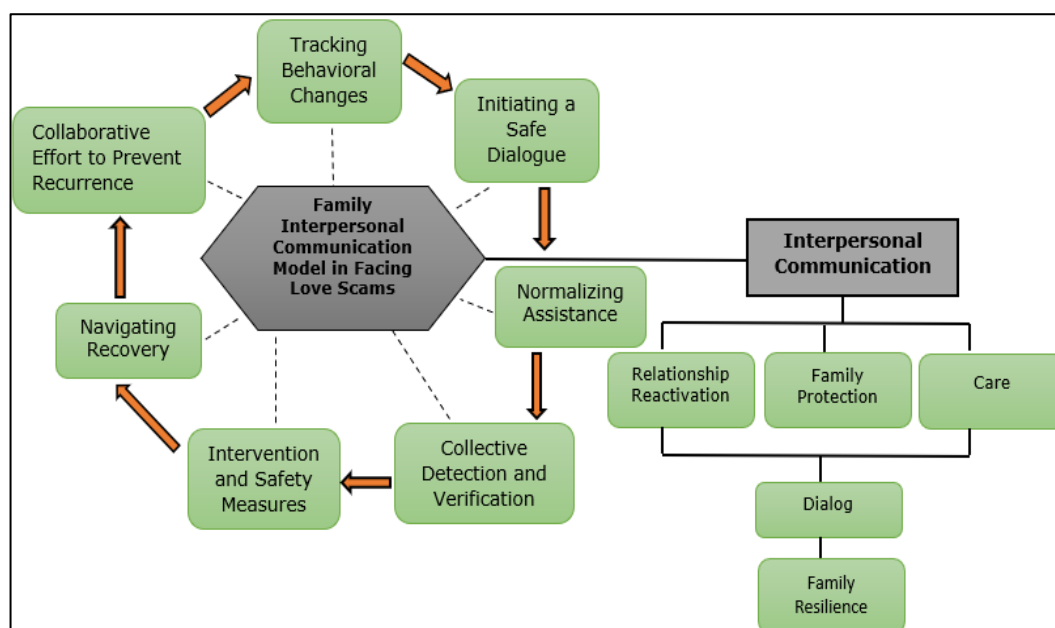


Figure 1. Preliminary LINDUNG Model of Family and Interpersonal Communication Resilience in Facing Love Scam Manipulation.

To avoid presenting components of different conceptual levels as equivalent, the LINDUNG Model is organized into three analytically distinct levels. Level 1 comprises the core communicative practices, *Lacak* (Trace), *Inisiasi* (Initiate), *Deteksi* (Detect), and *Upaya Pemutusan* (Severing Efforts). These are concrete family actions reported by informants, and each is aligned with the manipulation stage(s) it counteracts: tracing behavioural change responds to intensified attention and emerging emotional dependency (Stages 2–3) initiating a safe dialogue addresses emotional dependency and communication isolation (Stages 3–4); collective detection and verification counteracts isolation (Stage 4) by restoring the family as an alternative source of information and severing efforts respond to exploitation (Stage 5). Level 2 is the recovery process, *Navigasi* (Navigate), which follows disengagement and spans emotional, relational, and economic recovery. Level 3 contains the enabling conditions and contextual values, *Normalisasi* (Normalize), a non stigmatizing family climate that makes disclosure possible, and *Gotong Royong* (Mutual Cooperation), a community level value of shared responsibility. They are not steps in the sequence; they shape whether, and how readily, the core practices can take place. Interpersonal communication competence operates at the individual level as a resource that family members draw on when carrying out the core practices. The acronym is retained as a mnemonic the order of its letters does not imply a fixed sequence or equal conceptual status. This model is preliminary, derived from the coding and synthesis processes described in the data analysis subsection, and has not yet undergone external or stakeholder validation. Building communication resilience to cope with the emotional manipulation of love scams involves a recovery process for the victim. Emotional recovery entails giving the victim the opportunity to share their experiences, express their grief, and understand the perpetrator's manipulation strategies. Families can help alleviate the victim's guilt by emphasizing that the scam was a calculated act by the perpetrator. During this stage, families should avoid making accusatory remarks such as we warned you, as these can prolong the victim's sense of shame. Beyond emotional recovery, relational recovery is crucial for rebuilding trust between the victim and their family. During the scam, the victim may have lied, concealed transactions, or rejected family advice; conversely, family members might have used harsh language upon discovering the deception. Therefore, both parties need to improve their communication patterns rather than simply demanding change from the victim. Economic recovery involves assessing financial losses, halting the accumulation of new debt, restructuring household expenses, and seeking realistic forms of assistance. Among informants in this study, financial losses could directly impact access to food, education, housing, and healthcare. Thus, economic recovery must be treated as an integral component of communication resilience rather than a separate issue.

Although the family plays a protective role, there are several internal barriers that can hinder the response to "love scams" these factors emerged as patterns in the informants' accounts rather than as findings established through systematic cross case comparison or an analysis of negative cases experienced by the informants. First, family communication tends to be reactive dialogue often arises only after a problem has occurred, whereas conversations regarding social media usage, online relationships, and scam risks have not yet become a family habit. Second, there is an intergenerational digital literacy gap while parents may understand the general risks, they often lack the technical proficiency to identify fake accounts, manipulated images, or fraudulent digital identities. Third, norms surrounding personal relationships make family members reluctant to ask questions, as doing so is often perceived as an invasion of

privacy. Consequently, communication often occurs only after the victim shows specific, observable changes described by informants, such as withdrawal, increased secrecy, or changes in mood and sleep, rather than any behaviour framed here as clinically abnormal, a label this study did not assess and does not intend to imply. Families thus face a dilemma whether to respect the privacy of a victim considered mature enough in terms of age, or to act out of concern as part of their familial responsibility. Fourth, family responses remain influenced by a victim blaming culture, leading to perceptions that the victim was overly trusting or chose a partner inappropriately this pattern was described by some informants and is not presented as characteristic of every family in this study.

Conclusion

This study suggests that, among the informants interviewed, love scamming unfolded as a staged process of communicative manipulation, moving from initiating contact and intensifying attention toward cultivating emotional dependency, isolating communication, and exploitation, though not always in strict linear order. In response, family communication appeared to function through concrete, evidence-supported practices, namely recognizing behavioural changes, initiating non-judgmental dialogue, and jointly verifying the perpetrator's identity and claims, rather than through a general disposition such as patience or steadfastness. In this process, the family acts as a source of early detection, counter communication, information verification, protection, and victim recovery. However, the family's effectiveness hinges on its ability to foster non judgmental communication prohibitions, anger, and negative labelling can inadvertently reinforce the perpetrator's control. As this sequence was identified within a single, context bound sample, it is proposed as a preliminary pattern that requires testing in other populations and settings rather than as an established stage model.

Based on these findings, this study proposes the LINDUNG Model as a preliminary communication resilience framework encompassing change tracking, dialogue initiation, the normalization of seeking help alongside active stigma reduction, collective detection, protective measures, recovery navigation, and collaborative prevention efforts. The model suggests that resilience against emotional manipulation cannot be the sole responsibility of the victim; rather, it may need to be cultivated as a communicative capacity within families and communities, one capable of recognizing, halting, and recovering from the impacts of love scams. Whether this capacity can be sustained over time, and under what social, organizational, and resource conditions, was not evaluated in this study and is identified as a direction for future longitudinal research.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, as an exploratory qualitative study conducted in a single research setting, the findings are context-bound and should not be generalized to all low income urban settlements or all love scam cases. Second, the sample was purposive and small (informants), and part of the evidence consists of proxy accounts in which parents or family caregivers described a victim's experience; claims about victims' internal states therefore rest partly on indirect evidence. Third, sample sufficiency was judged using information power rather than demonstrated data saturation, so patterns beyond those identified here may exist. Fourth, the reliance on retrospective interviews introduces the possibility of recall bias. Fifth, because love scams involve shame and financial loss, informants may have presented their own or their family's responses favourably (social desirability bias). Sixth,

interviews were conducted in Indonesian and quotations were translated into English by the authors, so some nuance of local expressions may have been lost. Seventh, prior research conducted by the lead author in the settlement may have influenced access, information disclosure, and interpretation while the use of reflective memos could mitigate this influence, it could not entirely eliminate it. Eighth, the analysis relied solely on interview data informal field notes served as context, but formal observations and document analysis were not conducted, precluding cross-source triangulation. Finally, the proposed model has not undergone external validation, as member checking, expert review, and stakeholder consultation were not performed. Future research should aim to test the LINDUNG Model through member checking with a broader group of informants, expert reviews by specialists in communication and family resilience, and quantitative validation across various locations. Consequently, the conclusions drawn here are limited to describing patterns within the analyzed narratives and proposing rather than definitively establishing a model of family communication resilience.

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Author Contribution

Sigit Hardiyanto (SH) worked conceptualization, methodology, investigation (field data collection). Abrar Adhani (AA) worked formal analysis, writing original draft. Yofiendi Indah Indainanto (YI) worked investigation (interviews), writing review & editing. Yan Hendra (YH) worked project administration, writing review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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