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Strength in Scarcity: A Diary-interview Study on the Lived Experiences of Malay Urban Low-income Working Mothers in Klang Valley, Malaysia

[Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities](#) • Article • *Open Access* • 2026 • DOI: 10.47836/pjssh.34.S1.01 

[Baharuddin, Najwa](#)^a  ; [Burhan, Nik Ahmad Sufian](#)^a  ; [Hussin, Ruhaya](#)^b  ; [Tajuddin, Azlin](#)^c  ; [Mokhtar, Farha Alia](#)^d  ; [+2 authors](#)

^a Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Serdang, 43400, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study explores how low-income working mothers in urban Malaysia nurture personal and spiritual growth amid economic and caregiving challenges. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research draws on diary narratives and in-depth interviews with eight participants to uncover their lived experiences. Findings showed that the mothers actively fostered personal development through spiritual and/or religious engagement, knowledge acquisition, and gratitude practices. They displayed great character traits like perseverance, optimism, and self-efficacy in the face of ongoing hardships. However, because not all participants found relief from practising gratitude, the study also emphasises the emotional complexity of this practice. These insights offer a more nuanced understanding of coping strategies among low-income working mothers and emphasise the importance of psychological and spiritual resources. The study calls for strength-based and culturally sensitive interventions to enhance the well-being of these women. Supporting their well-being is crucial not only for improving their quality of life but also for enabling their sustained participation in the workforce, ultimately contributing to an increase in the female labour force participation rate. © Universiti Putra Malaysia Press

Author keywords

Coping strategies; female labour force participation; interpretative phenomenological analysis; low-income working mothers; urban population

Corresponding authors

Corresponding author	N. Baharuddin
Affiliation	Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Serdang, 43400, Malaysia
Email address	nnajwa.baharuddin@newinti.edu.my

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Abstract

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