

[Research Article]



Geographies of Care Economy in Gendered Mobility: Narratives of Indonesian Women's Solo Travel

Inayah Hidayati*^{id}, Andry Mardian, Inka Winarni Mufdalifah, Rd. Deden Gumilar Nugraha^{id}

Directorate of Human Development, Demography, and Culture Policy, The National Research and Innovation Agency

*Correspondence: inay001@brin.go.id

Article Info:	Abstract
<p>Received: 25 August 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 24 September 2025</p> <p>Published: 26 September 2025</p> <p>Keywords: solo travel; population mobility; care economy; human geography; Indonesian women.</p>	<p>Women's mobility in urban spaces is often constrained by gender norms, yet solo travel creates opportunities to renegotiate care, identity, and everyday geographies across multiple scales of mobility. This study examines 25 cases of Indonesian women's international solo travel as an extension of the care economy, drawing on feminist epistemology and a narrative approach. Solo travel is a form of self-care that restores emotional balance, fosters resilience, and affirms women's right to time and space. It functions as a spatial negotiation of access to public space, mobility, and autonomy across multiple scales, from household constraints to transnational journeys. The Indonesian context adds distinctive dimensions where cultural and religious norms, expectations of modesty, and family negotiations intersect with urbanization, middle-class expansion, and global exposure to shape how women claim legitimacy in mobility. This study represents both a personal and spatial practice of resistance, enriching Global South debates on the care economy and Geography.</p>
Informasi Artikel:	Abstrak
<p>Diterima: 25 Agustus 2025</p> <p>Disetujui: 24 September 2025</p> <p>Dipublikasi: 26 September 2025</p> <p>Kata kunci: perjalanan solo; mobilitas penduduk; ekonomi perawatan; geografi manusia; perempuan Indonesia</p>	<p>Mobilitas perempuan di ruang perkotaan kerap dibatasi norma gender, namun perjalanan solo membuka ruang untuk menegosiasikan ulang kepedulian, identitas, dan Geografi sehari-hari lintas skala mobilitas. Studi ini menelaah 25 perjalanan solo internasional perempuan Indonesia sebagai perluasan ekonomi perawatan, dengan merujuk pada epistemologi feminis dan pendekatan naratif. Perjalanan solo adalah bentuk perawatan diri yang memulihkan keseimbangan emosional, membangun resiliensi, dan menegaskan hak perempuan atas waktu dan ruang. Aktivitas ini berfungsi sebagai negosiasi spasial atas akses terhadap ruang publik, mobilitas, dan otonomi pada berbagai skala, dari keterbatasan domestik hingga perjalanan transnasional. Konteks Indonesia memberi dimensi khas yaitu norma budaya dan religius, tuntutan kesopanan, serta negosiasi keluarga beririsan dengan urbanisasi, ekspansi kelas menengah, dan paparan global dalam membentuk legitimasi mobilitas perempuan. Studi ini menjadi praktik personal sekaligus spasial perlawanan, memperkaya perdebatan Global South tentang ekonomi perawatan dan Geografi.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Women's mobility experience reflects the increasing visibility of women's contributions to care practices beyond the traditional framework of family and domesticity. Amidst globalization and the transformation of social values, there is an urgent need to reconstruct the understanding of care work, no longer simply as an unpaid domestic activity, but as a tangible contribution to social and economic development. Previous studies have shown that care work, especially that performed by women, tends to be invisible and economically undervalued. Palm et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of recognizing and redistributing care labor, especially in marginalized sectors. Asriani et al. (2021) show that female informal workers face dual vulnerabilities, both economic and emotional, yet demonstrate resilience in maintaining social functioning, as the care burden borne by women significantly increases during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Changing social values influencing the division of care labor are also evident in cross-national studies, which suggest that differences in cultural values can shape gender disparities in care work (Power, 2020; Henau & Himmelweit, 2021). This finding is relevant for understanding the Indonesian context, which is undergoing a similar transformation.

Women's solo travel signifies more than personal autonomy or movement. However, it is regarded as a self-care strategy intimately associated with emotional rehabilitation, the quest for significance, and identity formation. This perspective expands the meaning of care economics to include elements of compassion and emotion, as developed by Nelson (2011) through the framework of care ethics in economics, which emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy as values underlying social well-being. Women's experiences of spatial mobility reflect informal and emotional care practices often overlooked within formal economic frameworks (Asriani et al., 2021).

Several approaches in feminist economics proposed by Tronto (2011) have begun to expand the meaning of care work as an activity that is not only relational but also includes regenerative and affective dimensions directed at the self. In Indonesia, this perspective resonates with the growing trend of women engaging in solo travel, supported by rising

education levels, increased participation of women in the workforce, and the spread of digital platforms that facilitate independent mobility. At the same time, cultural and religious norms continue to place strong expectations on women to prioritize family and collective obligations, creating a tension between autonomy and social conformity. This socio-economic and cultural landscape provides the backdrop against which Indonesian women's solo travel is emerging as both a lifestyle choice and a political practice. Within this context, self-care is understood as part of women's productive work, particularly as a response to social burdens, domestic pressures, and gender expectations. The experiences of Indonesian women as solo travelers provide a concrete foundation for understanding care work as a political and existential practice born of the need to manage emotions, restore balance in life, and reestablish personal autonomy. Study of solo women's mobility through spatial practices illuminates how these interactions are reshaping everyday geographies of care, influencing both personal agency and the socio-economic landscape. This ongoing transformation within the care economy serves not only as a reflection of women's capacity for autonomy but also as a discourse on the political dynamics surrounding gendered mobility.

This study explores how Indonesian women's international solo travel experiences can represent dimensions of agency and care work within a care economy framework. Focusing on women's narratives, the study aims to understand how self-care, emotional resilience, and identity formation occur within often masculinized and gender-insensitive mobility spaces of global mobility. While studies on the care economy and gendered mobility have expanded in recent years, research that situates these debates within the geographies of the Global South countries such as Indonesia remains minimal. This gap underscores the need to examine how place, space, and scale shape women's experiences of care and mobility in ways not fully captured by existing literature. By addressing this gap, the study combines gender analysis, mobility, and care economics within a single analytical framework grounded in the narratives of Indonesian women, thereby extending geographical debates on the care economy and gendered mobility beyond Global North focus.

METHOD

Twenty-five participants were recruited through purposive quota sampling, with the inclusion criteria of being Indonesian women who had undertaken international solo travel. Quotas were set to ensure diversity across age, occupation, marital status, and educational background. To further capture variation in experiences, destinations were also considered:

among the twenty-five participants, eleven had traveled within Southeast Asia, seven to East Asia, five to Europe, and two to the Americas, with several also visiting Oceania and North Africa. Data collection showed in Table 1 concluded at twenty-five participants, as thematic saturation and homogeneity were reached, and no substantially new insights were emerging from additional interviews.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Categories	n	Percentage (%)
Age	20-29	5	20
	30-34	4	16
	35-39	10	40
	40+	6	24
Marital status	Single	14	56
	Married	10	40
	Divorced	1	4
Education level	Undergraduate (S1)	14	56
	Graduate (S2/S3)	11	44
Children	0 children	16	64
	1-2 children	8	32
	3 children	1	4
Number of trips	1-2 trips	2	8
	3-5 trips	16	64
	6+ trips	7	28
Travel region	Southeast Asia	11	44
	East Asia	7	28
	Europe	5	20
	Americas	2	8
Longest solo travel	< 1 week	4	16
	1-2 weeks	15	60
	> 2 weeks	6	24
Experience level	Intermediate	11	44
	Advanced	13	52
	Not specified	1	4

Note: Some participants reported multiple destinations, including Oceania and North Africa, but the dominant regions were Southeast Asia, East Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

Source: Primary Data, 2023-2024.

The participants represented a broad socio-demographic spectrum. Most were in their thirties, with occupations ranging from government officers, lecturers, bankers, and teachers to private employees and entrepreneurs. Educational attainment was generally high, with many holding undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Marital status varied, with both single and married women represented, and some participants were mothers of one to three children. This diversity ensured that the study captured many experiences, challenges, and strategies among Indonesian women navigating international solo travel.

All interviews were conducted face-to-

face in an informal yet structured setting, guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. Each session lasted on average one to two hours, including probing questions and short breaks to ensure participants felt comfortable and not pressured. The conversations were held in Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to express themselves naturally. The interview guide explored demographic information (age, occupation, education, marital status, number of children), travel experiences (destinations, frequency, duration, preparedness), motivations for international solo travel, gender-specific challenges (safety, harassment, stereotypes), adaptation strategies (coping mechanisms, networking, technology use), and personal

reflections (identity formation, empowerment, self-care practices).

Respondents were informed about the study and gave their informed consent for participation and audio recording. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English for analysis. All transcripts were anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and identifying information was removed. The digital files, including recordings and transcripts, were securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

The qualitative approach used in this study is grounded in feminist epistemology with a narrative inquiry framework and Geography perspective. This approach places women's subjective experiences, often marginalized in conventional analytical frameworks, to be central to the production of meaning. To systematically interpret these experiences, the narratives were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, a method that emphasizes both the content of stories (what is told) and the structure of meaning-making (how it is told).

The analysis proceeded through iterative cycles of reading and re-reading the transcripts, followed by coding segments of text related to self-care practices, emotional resilience, gendered challenges, and spatial negotiations of mobility. These codes were then grouped and categorized into broader themes, allowing recurring patterns and contrasts across participants' accounts to emerge. By combining close attention to individual voices with thematic synthesis, the analysis not only highlighted the affective and reflective dimensions of international solo travel but also situated them within the geographical contexts of space, place, and scale.

This analysis ensured that the women's stories were treated as both personal narratives and as embodied geographies of mobility and care. By using narrative as a primary tool, this study not only opens space to explore the emotional, affective, and reflective dimensions of solo travel experiences as a form of care work, but also situates these experiences within the geographical dimensions of space, place, and lived mobility. In this way, narrative inquiry becomes a means of understanding how Indonesian women's solo travel trajectories are embedded in and shaped by everyday geographies, linking individual stories to

broader spatial and cultural contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Solo travel becomes a crucial arena for understanding how women negotiate freedom, security, and emotional needs within a personal and political framework of care. Previous studies have highlighted that women traveling not only act as travelers but also as active subjects managing multiple dimensions of their well-being. Khadijah (2024) illustrates the significance of social support and information technology in travel security, whereas Bianchi (2015) and Suroto et al. (2020) elucidate how women develop risk mitigation measures during the decision-making process prior to and during travel. This situation reinforces the understanding that care work in the travel context is not only relational but also closely linked to self-management, courage, and strengthening individual capacities.

While the themes we identify can travel across contexts, in Indonesia they are shaped by distinct religious-cultural expectations about femininity and protection, and by rapid social transformation accelerated urbanization, the rise of a globally connected middle class, and widespread access to digital platforms. These forces jointly configure the everyday geographies of Indonesian women's mobility and care in ways that are not fully captured by generic Global South accounts.

Solo Travel as Self-Care

Solo travel for Indonesian women is increasingly understood as a recreational activity and a form of self-care, closely linked to psychological recovery, release from role pressures, and the search for identity. In the context of 30s adult women, complex life dynamics, including domestic role pressures, professional workloads, and social expectations, often place women vulnerable to mental and emotional exhaustion. Solo travel provides an alternative space that allows women to escape these routines and provides space for reflection, healing, and self-transformation. One participant said:

"I experienced a turning point in my life when I turned 30 years old. I was tired from work, so I decided to take a trip and travel alone. I wanted to find my old self, and it turns out that traveling alone made me feel more whole as individual."

The answer reflects that solo travel is chosen as a healing strategy and a means to re-explore one's relationship with oneself. Research from Neluhena et al. (2023) and Hamid et al. (2021) showed that women who travel independently achieve greater self-awareness, personal empowerment, and emotional capacity development. In this process, travel becomes a geographical activity of moving from one place to another and an important platform for absorbing life experiences, facing fears of the unknown, and gradually building self-confidence.

The intrinsic motivation that drives women to travel alone is also closely related to the need for freedom and independence. Traveling to new places becomes an escape from restrictive routines and social expectations, and a way to reconnect with oneself. Another participant stated:

"Sometimes everything feels suffocating, especially for us as women—work, family, what people say. So, when I can travel alone, I feel free. I can listen to my inner voice without distraction."

This statement shows that traveling alone is a form of personal liberation that provides space to listen to inner needs that are often neglected in everyday life. Research by Bianchi (2021) emphasizes that women use traveling alone to free themselves from restrictive social structures and reflect on life more independently. Solo travel plays a role in managing stress within the realm of familial and societal care work for women. Women's drive for solo travel frequently arises from a psychological inclination to seek novel experiences unencumbered by family obligations and societal expectations (Teng et

al., 2023). This situation was strengthened when another participant expressed:

"I do not travel alone to project a fashionable image; rather, I need solitude to aid my recovery. It is as if my soul's battery is being recharged."

Solo travel is a form of self-care with a significant psychosocial component. It provides a platform for women to redefine their relationship with themselves through new, independent, emotional, and transformative experiences. For Indonesian women, solo travel constitutes a profound personal odyssey that promotes psychological and emotional well-being, healing, and empowerment. This perspective regards self-care as a holistic approach to self-healing, defined by significant and genuine life experiences rather than as a mere consumptive or hedonistic pursuit.

In the Indonesian setting, self-care through solo travel is commonly negotiated with parents and spouses within Islamic and local cultural norms. At the same time, metropolitan growth (Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung) and a widening middle class make discretionary time and income more available, while social media communities normalize solo travel as a respectable form of self-renewal. This combination renders "places of healing" legible and acceptable within Indonesian moral geographies.

Beyond its psychosocial benefits, solo travel also reconfigures *place* as a Geography of healing, shifting from the constrained domestic and workplace settings in Indonesia to new spaces abroad where women can temporarily detach from social obligations and reclaim autonomy.

Table 2. Themes Emerging from Indonesian Women's Solo Travel Experiences

Theme	Analytical Insights	Geographical Dimension	Illustrative Quotes
Solo travel as self-care in place	Solo travel functions as psychological recovery and identity exploration, providing space for reflection and self-healing.	Travel reconfigures <i>place</i> as a site of healing, shifting from domestic/workplace pressures to leisure geographies.	<i>"I experienced a turning point... traveling alone made me feel more whole as an individual."</i>
Empowerment and independence across scale	Builds decision-making capacity, autonomy, and resilience in unfamiliar contexts. Enhances women's ability to manage uncertainty.	Women negotiate <i>scales of mobility</i> from navigating local streets to transnational journeys demonstrating agency across multiple spatial levels.	<i>"When I travel alone... I am forced to think quickly, make my own decisions, and learn to trust my own feelings."</i>

Theme	Analytical Insights	Geographical Dimension	Illustrative Quotes
Gendered challenges in global public space	Experiences of harassment, insecurity, and stereotypes shape women's social interactions. Coping strategies are needed to maintain safety.	Public spaces are gendered and contested; women's presence requires constant negotiation of visibility, safety, and access.	<i>"In some places, I often receive unwanted attention... So I always have to be vigilant."</i>
Adaptive strategies and agency in space	Women employ social networking, assertive communication, and confident body language to maintain autonomy.	Women carve out <i>micro-spaces of safety and belonging</i> by reshaping interactions and asserting presence.	<i>"I have learned to speak firmly but politely... saying directly 'Please keep your distance.'"</i>
Reflection and identity formation through mobility	Solo travel fosters existential reflection, renegotiation of identity, and openness to cultural diversity.	Mobility itself becomes a <i>space of reflection and transformation</i> , linking embodied movement to identity-making.	<i>"This trip was a turning point for me... I realized that I can be independent, make decisions quickly, and be more resilient."</i>

Source: Primary Data, 2023-2024.

Based on Table 2 show Indonesian specificity emerges: religious/cultural values shape when and how women claim public space; urbanization produces new infrastructures and rhythms that enable time–space autonomy; and middle-class expansion together with global exposure (study/work/online imaginaries) reframes solo travel as a modern, self-improving practice rather than mere leisure.

Empowerment through Independent Experience

Solo travel has been shown to be an effective strategy for women to increase their resilience in the face of life's challenges, strengthen their decision-making skills, and develop independence. This experience goes beyond mere recreation and transforms into a personal and socially significant learning environment. The character, resilience, and self-confidence of women who travel solo are strongly influenced by the complex social dynamics and unexpected situations they encounter.

One key aspect emerging from solo travel experiences is an increased sense of independence. By having to rely on themselves in unfamiliar environments, women learn to trust their instincts and develop a sense of responsibility. One interviewee said:

"When I travel alone to a place I have never been before, I am forced to think quickly, make my own decisions, and learn to trust my own feelings. I found that I can do it."

This participant's response demonstrates how the experience of facing new and complex situations in unfamiliar places encourages women to act independently. This condition aligns with the findings of Yang et al. (2019), who showed that women who travel solo tend to develop more adaptive and confident decision-making skills as their exposure to unexpected situations increases.

The autonomy gained through travel is closely linked to increased self-confidence. Many women stated that after traveling alone, they felt more capable of navigating the challenges of everyday life, including professional and social interactions. Through repeated decision-making and challenges, women develop self-management skills and enhance their reflective capacity, thus increasing their confidence in navigating their lives. One participant commented:

"I used to be reluctant to make decisions, but after traveling alone several times, I became bolder and more confident in my choices."

For Indonesian participants, autonomy is often co-produced with religiously inflected notions of responsibility and modesty; women described preparing itineraries and safety routines to reassure families and communities. Urban professional lifestyles and middle-class consumption also matter: low-cost carriers, visa facilitation, and digital booking communities translate economic mobility into spatial autonomy across national and transnational.

Beyond independence, solo travel also facilitates the development of personal resilience. When women face uncertainty, limited resources, or even loneliness in unfamiliar cultural contexts, they are encouraged to build emotional resilience and effective coping strategies. One participant said:

"Traveling alone takes me out of my comfort zone. Every incident that initially made me panic actually becomes a lesson and makes me more resilient."

This experience reinforces the findings of Seow and Brown (2018), who stated that solo travel provides a forum for developing resilience through adaptation to unexpected circumstances, allowing individuals to learn to manage challenges without over-reliance on others.

The resilience gained through travel also has a positive impact on other aspects of life. Nelson et al. (2011) stated that women who have developed resilience through travel tend to be better prepared to cope with work, family, and social pressures. They are more able to manage stress, prioritize, and maintain emotional stability. In this sense, travel experiences act as a kind of "life simulation" that enhances their ability to navigate real-world dynamics. This resonates with Hanson's (2010) argument on gendered mobility, which highlights that mobility and gender are inseparable and mutually constitutive. Women's solo travel demonstrates how movement across places is not only about access but also about reshaping gendered identities and agency within specific social and cultural contexts.

Beyond personal aspects, solo travel also opens up opportunities for women to develop cross-cultural sensitivity. Women broaden their understanding of diverse perspectives through direct interaction with local communities and fellow travelers from diverse backgrounds. As one participant expressed:

"Talking with local people made me realize how vast life is. There are many different ways of seeing things and values, and it taught me to be more open and not judge people based on their outward appearance."

Cross-cultural experiences enrich empathy, interpersonal communication skills, and strengthen women's capabilities in a global context. Women with experience and understanding of cultural diversity often become more effective communicators and can become drivers of social change in their communities. Awareness of differences and the ability to navigate socio-cultural complexities are important assets in developing inclusive leadership that is responsive to social dynamics.

The solo travel experiences of Indonesian women significantly contribute to making them more resilient, independent, and open to diversity. Travel is not only a symbol of physical freedom but also an internal process that builds character and strengthens readiness for life on a broader scale. Therefore, tourism and social development policies must further support safe and inclusive spaces for women who wish to travel solo as part of an equity and empowerment-based development strategy. Women's empowerment unfolds not only at the individual level but also across *scales of mobility*: from navigating neighborhood streets to transnational journeys, their ability to make decisions and assert independence reflects how gendered agency is negotiated differently across local, national, and global spaces.

Gender Challenges in Global Public Space

Women's experiences traveling alone are closely tied to gender dynamics, often creating barriers in global public spaces. Many women face structural and cultural challenges when traveling alone abroad, often hindering their freedom and empowerment. Most participants in this study reported experiencing uncomfortable situations, ranging from verbal harassment to social pressure stemming from local stereotypes about women traveling alone. One participant said:

"In some places, I often receive unwanted attention, sometimes to the point of feeling uncomfortable... So, I always have to be vigilant and follow my own instincts."

This experience reflects that feelings of insecurity and the potential for sexual harassment are a constant reality for women travelers, ultimately impacting how they interact with and experience public spaces.

Sexual harassment is one of the most serious issues women face when navigating unfamiliar spaces. Spaccatini et al. (2019) emphasize that harassment directly impacts women's physical and mental health and limits their freedom to use public spaces equally. When their sense of safety is compromised, women are often forced to develop coping strategies, such as limiting nighttime activities, choosing certain clothing, or avoiding overly public social interactions. A study by McAndrews et al. (2022) revealed that women actively adjust their appearance and behavior to avoid potential risks, highlighting that public spaces have not fully accepted women as equal users. In context, solo travel requires emotional and strategic preparation that is not always afforded to male travelers.

In addition to insecurity, gender stereotypes also pose a significant social barrier for women traveling alone. Conservative cultural norms often view solo female travelers as "deviants" from traditional gender roles. One participant shared:

"There was an older man there who looked at me strangely as if he thought a woman was walking alone to the back of the village... However, after we talked, he started to understand and even helped me."

This story demonstrates that women face prejudice and must negotiate their social position through sensitive interactions. Research by Bianchi (2015) confirms that stereotypes against women travelers contribute to feelings of alienation or marginalization during travel, especially in regions with patriarchal social structures. Hosseini et al. (2021) also argue that women traveling solo often face a dual dilemma: they must prove their competence and worth in the global public sphere while facing doubtful or suspicious views about their existence. To respond to this situation, many women leverage social connections within local communities as an adaptive strategy to soften stereotypes and construct alternative narratives about women as independent, empowered individuals open to cross-cultural dialogue.

These challenges are refracted through Indonesian cultural scripts: travelling alone may be read as deviant from expectations of *perempuan* "*pantas/bermartabat*," prompting women to constantly negotiate visibility and

legitimacy. Participants therefore mobilized Indonesia-specific moral vocabularies to de-escalate encounters while asserting their right to public space abroad.

Female solo travel in the global public sphere is an ambiguous experience; it offers opportunities for liberation and growth, yet it is also fraught with risks, prejudices, and complex adaptation demands. These barriers, while gender-specific, serve as crucial points highlighting the need for structural change in the global tourism system. Therefore, policymakers, tourism industry players, and local communities must build a travel ecosystem that is safe, inclusive, and responsive to women's needs. Interventions such as providing gender-based information, cultural sensitivity training for service providers, and effective harassment reporting mechanisms can be a first step towards equitable travel for all travelers, especially women. These experiences underscore that public space is never neutral but deeply gendered, and the contrast between Indonesian domestic spaces and global urban environments reveals how safety, visibility, and legitimacy are spatially contingent.

Adaptation Strategies and Agency

While solo travel is often perceived as a form of freedom and liberation for women, these experiences do not always occur in gender-neutral spaces. Harassment, social stereotypes, and the challenge of adapting to local norms are realities faced by many women as they navigate the global public sphere. In these circumstances, women are not passive but develop a variety of adaptive strategies that reflect agency, resilience, and the invisible emotional labor. These strategies are crucial to how women navigate the world of travel in ways that enable them to survive and empower themselves and others.

One strategy that emerged was building strong social networks while traveling. Interacting with fellow travelers and local communities provided a sense of security and emotional support for many women. One participant said:

"When I talk to and get to know the locals, they understand that I am not a threat. They help me and provide a lot of very useful information."

These relationships create a space for solidarity and the exchange of experiences, allowing women to strengthen each other and share coping strategies. Social networks increase trust between actors in the social space and serve as a crucial tool in navigating critical situations on the ground.

Many women also practice assertive communication to set boundaries in social interactions. This communication is not aggressive but conveys a clear and firm message, helping to avoid unwanted situations. One participant shared her experience:

"I have learned to speak firmly but politely. For example, saying directly, 'Excuse me, I need to be alone,' or 'Please keep your distance.' This condition makes people think twice before bothering you."

In this context, assertive communication becomes an important form of agency because it gives women control over social interactions while ensuring their safety and comfort during travel. In addition to verbal strategies, projecting confidence through body language is also a form of adaptation widely used by women. Awareness of how they appear, walk, and react to their surroundings is part of their emotional work to maintain self-esteem. One participant said:

"When I walk confidently, look people in the eye, and show that I know where I am going, people become hesitant. It is like having an invisible shield."

These attitudes and gestures shape others' perceptions and strengthen internal confidence, which is crucial for women in unfamiliar spaces. Many strategies draw on Indonesian social capital: appealing to diasporic/Indonesian student groups, using Bahasa Indonesia networks on messaging apps, and leveraging mosque or community hubs as safe micro-spaces. Such culturally anchored practices convert unfamiliar environments into temporarily "Indonesian" places of care and protection.

These strategies social networking, assertive communication, and projecting confidence demonstrate that women are not simply travelers at risk, but also active actors who reflectively and strategically manage their

spaces, relationships, and identities during travel. The agency demonstrated in these processes represents a form of resistance to social structures that limit women's mobility, while also providing an alternative narrative that women can create their own safe spaces, even in contexts that are not always gender-friendly. Therefore, the tourism sector and policymakers should focus not only on promotion and accessibility, but also on providing concrete support for adaptive strategies developed by women. The action includes providing gender-based information, cultural sensitivity training for service providers, and creating spaces that promote safety, inclusion, and empowerment for all travelers, without exception. The strategies women employ illustrate how they actively carve out *micro-spaces of safety and belonging* within unfamiliar environments, transforming contested geographies into temporary places of care and control.

Reflection and the Formation of a New Identity

Reflections expressed by participants regarding their solo travel experiences indicate that this activity is not simply a form of physical mobility, but rather an existential journey that profoundly influences the formation of their identity and perspective on life. Many women stated that traveling alone provided a crucial space for reevaluating their position in life, developing self-confidence, and reimagining their direction and meaning. This reflection is shown in our participant statement:

"This trip was a turning point for me. While traveling alone, I learned a lot about myself. I realized that I can be independent, make decisions quickly, and be more resilient than I thought."

These experiences provided a powerful platform for personal growth and character development. Far from their comfort zones, women have to make decisions, face unexpected challenges, and adapt quickly to changing environments. Research by Neluhena et al. (2023) suggests that this process encouraged women to renegotiate their roles and identities and internalize values of independence that may not have emerged in their daily lives, which are filled with social roles. Another participant explained:

"Every time I face a challenge while traveling, I feel like I have grown. I used to be hesitant and afraid, but now I am more confident. It is as if a new version of myself has emerged after this trip."

In addition to fostering independence, solo travel also broadens perspectives on different ways of life. Women who travel abroad or to places with different cultural values often experience a shift in their worldview. Exposure to diverse values and customs fosters openness and breaks down stereotypes:

"Meeting people from different cultures was truly eye-opening. I learned to be less judgmental, more accepting of differences, and more appreciative of others' lives,".

This condition aligns with the findings of Yang et al. (2019) and Bianchi (2021), who emphasize that cross-cultural experiences during travel can increase tolerance, deepen understanding of humanity, and encourage women to become more reflective and inclusive individuals.

The process of reflection is a crucial element of this journey. In solitude and confinement, women are given an inner space rarely found amidst the distractions of everyday life. This contemplative process allowed them to ask existential questions and consciously rethink their life purpose.

"Initially, I just wanted to escape from the routine for a while, but it turned out to be a moment that made me understand myself better. It gave me much time to think, to ask myself: where is this life really taking me?"

This condition was expressed by one participant who felt that solo travel helped her reinterpret her life's direction. In the context of transformative learning theory, intense new experiences like solo travel can shake up old frameworks and pave the way for the formation of new, more personal and authentic perspectives (Yang, 2020). This process changes how we see ourselves and our relationships with the world and others. One participant explained:

"Solo travel makes me brave. It is not just about going alone, but also about listening to my

heart, making my own decisions, and believing that I can live, even alone."

Through these narratives, it becomes clear that solo travel for women is a crucial space for reflection for personal growth, strengthening identity, and developing social and cultural awareness. At the same time, solo travel is not only a personal practice but also a spatial one: it repositions women within multiple geographies between domestic expectations in Indonesia and the global public spaces they encounter abroad. These shifts highlight how place, scale, and spatial attachments shape women's sense of self, producing everyday geographies of mobility that reveal the gendered nature of access, freedom, and identity formation. It is about exploring new places and rediscovering yourself with new courage, awareness, and hope.

Reflective gains are also tethered to Indonesia's social transformation: exposure to plural urban and transnational places allows participants to compare home norms with global worlds, renegotiating identities that balance piety/respectability with modern, mobile womanhood. In this sense, solo travel becomes a laboratory for composing an Indonesian middle-class femininity that is both locally anchored and globally literate. Reflection is therefore not only existential but also geographical: moving across places and scales enables Indonesian women to compare home norms with global contexts, renegotiating their sense of self within the broader geographies of gendered mobility.

Contribution to the Conceptual Development of the Care Economy

Grounding care in Indonesia illustrates how religious-cultural expectations and rapid urban change re-scale care from the household to the city and the transnational itinerary. For example, women's mobility is negotiated within strong Islamic and cultural norms that emphasize modesty, family obligations, and collective responsibilities, while at the same time, processes of urbanization, the rise of an educated middle class, and global exposure through digital platforms are expanding opportunities for independent travel. Recognizing this Indonesian configuration extends the care-economy lens beyond domesticity toward mobile, place-based

practices that are negotiated within specific moral geographies.

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant paradigm shift in understanding the care economy, particularly in relation to women's experiences. The care economy has generally been understood narrowly, limited to domestic activities such as childcare, caring for elderly parents, and managing the household; historically associated with women's traditional roles. However, the findings of this study highlight the importance of broadening the definition of care work by recognizing women's practices, such as self-care, one of which is through the experience of solo travel.

Recognizing self-care as a legitimate form of care work is an important step in challenging traditional gender norms that tend to neglect women's emotional needs and self-development. In this context, solo travel becomes an intentional geographical space for personal healing, where women reclaim their time and space from the pressures of restrictive social and domestic roles. In Indonesia, this practice is deeply shaped by cultural-religious debates over whether traveling alone is compatible with feminine virtue and family responsibilities, making the act of solo travel both personally restorative and socially contested. This perspective aligns with Fraser's (Khadijah, 2024) concept of "care as transformative practice," which emphasizes the recognition of diverse forms of care, including self-directed care.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that solo travel triggers emotional regeneration and the development of mental resilience. This experience enables women to confront structural pressures stemming from patriarchal norms and gender expectations more consciously and reflectively. Solo travel creates space for contemplation, self-discovery, and identity strengthening, often neglected in the demands of daily life. Research by Seow and Brown (2018) and Yang et al. (2019) reinforces these findings by highlighting the importance of self-care practices in addressing the psychological impact of social pressures and domestic roles, as well as in enhancing emotional well-being and resilience.

The agency aspect of care work through solo travel is a key point in this discussion. Women who travel do not simply escape burdens but actively choose and design their

experiences as a form of meaningful creation. This approach aligns with Giddens' theory of modernity and self-identity (Pitanatri et al., 2025), which states that individuals can reflectively shape their life trajectories. In this context, women demonstrate that they are not passive subjects within social structures, but rather active agents who care for themselves with full awareness and a clear sense of purpose. This resonates strongly with Indonesia's contemporary social transformation, where increasing education, women's workforce participation, and exposure to global discourses on gender equality intersect with persistent patriarchal traditions.

The care work women undertake through solo travel also responds to systemic structural pressures. Women often face dual demands from the domestic sphere and social expectations that limit their mobility and autonomy. Therefore, women's engagement in solo travel can be understood as a form of resistance to these constraints. It is a symbolic resistance strategy that allows women to liberate themselves from structural constraints and renegotiate their living spaces. Tansley and Newell (Osman et al., 2019) emphasize the importance of understanding the relationship between individual agency and structural constraints to understand the dynamics of care work in women's lives.

Care work encompasses domestic or relational activities, as well as spiritual, reflective, and mobility aspects related to empowerment and personal autonomy. Solo travel provides a concrete example of how the emotional and existential dimensions of self-care play a role in maintaining women's well-being. By broadening the scope of care work in this direction, policy and academic studies are likely to be more sensitive and adaptive to the diversity of women's experiences. Moving forward, further exploration of care practices is needed. Self-care, such as solo travel, will enrich our understanding of the care economy and meet the increasingly diverse needs of women in a changing society.

This study contributes to the conceptual development of the care economy by expanding the scope of care work to encompass affective and regenerative dimensions, particularly through the experience of self-care during solo travel. It demonstrates that care work is both domestic and relational, and encompasses

women's active efforts to restore, strengthen, and reshape their identities within global mobility. By grounding the analysis in Indonesia, the study underscores how religious–cultural norms, alongside urbanization, middle-class expansion, and global exposure, configure women's mobility in distinctive ways. By grounding the analysis in Indonesia, the study fills a gap in care economy research, which has largely been dominated by Global North perspectives. Indonesian women's experiences show how care work is shaped not only by individual agency but also by cultural, religious, and patriarchal pressures that configure everyday geographies of mobility in the Global South. These findings enrich care economy theory by presenting perspectives of women in the Global South that have been largely overlooked in the mainstream literature. In doing so, the study challenges the long-standing dichotomy between productivity and emotionality in work. It asserts that self-care practices can be both an arena for resistance and meaningful personal development.

CONCLUSION

Solo travel by Indonesian women represents an important expansion of the understanding of the care economy, which has historically focused too heavily on domestic and relational labor. Through self-care and personal mobility, women not only escape social burdens and structural pressures but also actively build emotional resilience, independence, and reflective capacity as part of previously unrecognized care work. In this context, solo travel is not simply a recreational activity, but a conscious act that restores the body and soul, while affirming women's right to their own time and space. This practice has significant political and economic implications, directly challenging gender norms that restrict women's movement in public and domestic spaces.

The findings of this study have strategic relevance in formulating gender-responsive and inclusive development policies for emotional labor. First, it is necessary to develop policies on self-care leave or emotional respite for women workers, which are not yet accommodated in the formal employment system. Second, improving infrastructure and protection for female travelers is a priority to create safe and equal mobility spaces. Third, the government and tourism industry need to facilitate support for the female

traveler community whether through sharing platforms, advocacy, or digital solidarity. It is crucial to integrate a care economy perspective into gender development and cross-border mobility policy frameworks to better address the complex needs of women in an increasingly connected but unequal world.

Finally, recognizing solo travel as care work expands the boundaries of how care is understood and valued. It reframes mobility not as privilege but as necessity, deeply tied to women's well-being and agency. By legitimizing these practices, societies can move closer toward equitable systems that acknowledge the diverse forms of labor sustaining both individuals and communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research would never have been possible without the cooperation and enthusiasm of the participants in every interview session. Research on women would be impossible without the true spirit of women supporting women. The lengthy interview process throughout 2023 and 2024 turned into a beautiful journey, as each encounter yielded new stories from remarkable women who dared to liberate themselves through solo travel. To them, we not only data but also inspiration. Each story shared is a guiding light for this research, reminding us that even knowledge can be born from the powerful experiences of women, as well as the reviewers and editors of the *Journal of Geographical Sciences and Education* who helped improve the quality of the manuscript.

REFERENCE

- Asriani, D., Fatimah, D., Mardhiyyah, M., & Zubaedah, A. (2021). The Changes in the Daily Activities Cycle of Women Informal Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Vulnerability and Resilience. *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 16(1), 19–42.
<https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v16i1.7112>
- Bianchi, C. (2015). Solo Holiday Travellers: Motivators and Drivers of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(2), 197–208.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2049>
- Bianchi, C. (2021). Antecedents of Tourists' Solo Travel Intentions. *Tourism Review*, 77(3), 780–795.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-12-2020-0611>

- Hamid, S., Ali, R., Azhar, M., & Khan, S. (2021). Solo Travel and Well-Being Amongst Women: An Exploratory Study. *Indonesian Journal of Tourism and Leisure*, 2(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.36256/ijtl.v2i1.125>
- Hanson, S. (2010). Gender and Mobility: New Approaches for Informing Sustainability. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17(1), 5-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690903498225>
- Henau, J., & Himmelweit, S. (2021). A Care-Led Recovery from COVID-19: Investing in High-Quality Care to Stimulate and Rebalance the Economy. *Feminist Economics*, 27(1-2), 453-469. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1845390>
- Hosseini, S., Macías, R., & Almeida-García, F. (2021). The Exploration of Iranian Solo Female Travellers' Experiences. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 256-269. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2498>
- Khadijah, S. A. R. (2024). Perkembangan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi di Industri Perjalanan Wisata dan Dampaknya kepada Solo Traveler Perempuan di Indonesia. *Journal of Research on Business and Tourism*, 4(2), 82. <https://doi.org/10.37535/104004220241>
- McAndrews, C., Schneider, R., Yang, Y., Kohn, G., Schmitz, A., Elliott, F., Pittner, J., & Purisch, H. (2022). Toward a Gender-Inclusive Complete Streets Movement. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 38(1), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08854122221087472>
- Nelson, J. A. (2011). *Care Ethics and Markets: A View from Feminist Economics*. In M. Sander-Staudt & M. Hamington (Eds.), *Applying Care Ethics to Business* (pp. 35-53). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1619938>
- Neluhena, M., Chandralal, L., & Dahanayake, T. (2023). Female Solo Travels to South Asian Destinations and Sustaining Loneliness. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 24(4), 577-587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231173508>
- Osman, H., Brown, L., & Phung, T. (2019). The Travel Motivations and Experiences of Female Vietnamese Solo Travellers. *Tourist Studies*, 20(2), 248-267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797619878307>
- Palm, J., Lazoroska, D., Valencia, M., Bocken, N., & Södergren, K. (2024). A Gender Perspective on the Circular Economy: A Literature Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 28(6), 1670-1683. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13554>
- Pitanatri, P., Adnyani, N., Kartini, L., & Valeri, M. (2025). Travel Motivations, Preferences, and Characteristics of Women Solo Travelers in Bali. *Journal of Applied Sciences in Travel and Hospitality*, 8(1), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.31940/jasth.v8i1.63-78>
- Power, K. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic has Increased the Care Burden of Women and Families. *Sustainability Science Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561>
- Seow, D. & Brown, L. (2018). The Solo Female Asian Tourist. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(10), 1187-1206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2017.1423283>
- Spaccatini, F., Pacilli, M., Giovannelli, I., Roccato, M., & Penone, G. (2019). Sexualized Victims of Stranger Harassment and Victim Blaming: The Moderating Role of Right-Wing Authoritarianism. *Sexuality & Culture*, 23(3), 811-825. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-019-09592-9>
- Suroto, P., Sampe, M., & Dewantara, M. (2020). Eksplorasi Pengalaman Terhadap Risiko Berwisata pada Konsumen Wisata Perempuan di Indonesia. *Journal of Tourism Destination and Attraction*, 8(2), 127-136. <https://doi.org/10.35814/tourism.v8i2.1649>
- Teng, Y., Wu, K., & Lee, Y. (2023). Do Personal Values and Motivation Affect Women's Solo Travel Intentions in Taiwan?. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-12.

- <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01499-5>
- Tronto, J. (2011). A Feminist Democratic Ethics of Care and Global Care Workers: Citizenship and Responsibility. *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*, 162-177.
- Yang, E. (2020). What Motivates and Hinders People from Travelling Alone? A Study of Solo and Non-Solo Travellers. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(17), 2458-2471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1839025>
- Yang, E., Yang, M., & Khoo-Lattimore, C. (2019). The Meanings of Solo Travel for Asian Women. *Tourism Review*, 74(5), 1047-1057. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-10-2018-0150>



Copyright (c) 2025 by the authors. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).