



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF UNWED PROFESSIONAL MALAY
WOMEN: EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL CULTURAL ISSUES**

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Bachelor of Psychology (Honours)

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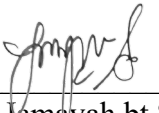
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Abstract

This study explores the psychological well-being of unwed professional Malay women and examines the psychosocial and cultural issues affecting their lives. Eight professional Malay women from Kuching and Samarahan, Sarawak, were recruited for semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes related to societal expectations, cultural stigmas, and personal challenges. The findings reveal significant stressors, including the fear of stigma and rejection, difficulty finding partners due to cultural perceptions of late marriage, and balancing professional commitments. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were rigorously upheld. This research provides insights into the unique struggles faced by this demographic, contributing to a deeper understanding of their psychological and social well-being.

Abstrak

Kajian ini meneroka kesejahteraan psikologi wanita profesional Melayu yang belum berkahwin dan meneliti isu-isu psikososial serta budaya yang mempengaruhi kehidupan harian. Lapan wanita dari Kuching dan Samarahan, Sarawak, telah direkrut untuk ditemubual. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik, mengenal pasti tema utama berkaitan dengan jangkaan masyarakat, stigma budaya, dan cabaran peribadi. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan stres yang signifikan, termasuk kegelisahan terhadap stigma dan pemuluan, kesukaran mencari pasangan disebabkan persepsi budaya terhadap perkahwinan lewat, dan keseimbangan komitmen profesional. Kerahsian dan informasi peserta yang telah ditemubual akan disimpan secara ketat. Penyelidikan ini memberikan persefahaman dan perspektif baharu tentang cabaran yang dihadapi oleh wanita Melayu. Penyelidikan ini juga boleh digunakan untuk memahami kesihatan psikologi wanita.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of Research	1
1.2 Problem Statement	2
1.3 Research Objectives.....	3
1.3.1 General Objective	3
1.3.2 Specific Objectives	3
1.4 Research Questions	3
1.5 Research Framework	4
1.6 Significance of Study	4
1.7 Definitions of Terms	5
1.7.1 Singlehood	5
1.7.2 Professional Malay Woman.....	5
1.7.3 Hopes and Needs.....	5
2.0 Introduction.....	6
2.1 Concept of Singlehood in Global Context.....	6
2.2 Singlehood in Malaysian Context.....	8
2.3 Psychological Well-Being of Single Women	10
2.4 Importance of Marriage Among Malays.....	13
2.5 Global Trend of Non-Marriage	14
2.6 Trend of Non-Married Malay Women.....	16
2.7 Impact of Professional Occupation on Marriage	17
3.0 Introduction.....	19
3.1 Research Design.....	19
3.2 Participants & Sampling Procedure	20
3.2.1 Participants.....	20
3.2.2 Sampling Procedure	21
3.3 Instruments.....	21
3.4 Pilot Study.....	22
3.5 Data Collection	22
3.6 Data Analysis Procedure.....	23
3.7 Ethical Issue	25
3.7.1 Informed Consent.....	25

3.7.2 Confidentiality	25
4.0 Introduction.....	26
4.1 Participants Demographic and Profile	26
4.2 Main Findings	27
4.2.1 Theme 1: Perception of Singlehood.....	28
4.2.2 Theme 2: Cultural and Family Expectations	31
4.2.4 Theme 3: Personal Needs and Hopes.....	32
5.0 Introduction.....	35
5.1 Discussion	35
5.1 Perception of Singlehood & Career	35
5.2 Cultural and Family Expectations.....	37
5.3 Personal Needs and Hopes.....	39
5.4 Recommendation	40
5.5 Limitations	40
5.6 Conclusion	41
References.....	42
Appendix A.....	47
Appendix B	48
Appendix C	49
Appendix D.....	50

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will include background of study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of study and definition of terms that will be used throughout the research.

1.1 Background of Research

Marriage is a universal cultural custom which is still being practiced in modern society. In Malaysia, there is a variety of cultural marriage due to the multicultural background of the citizens. Hence, marriages can often happen in early, middle, and late stages of adulthood. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), most Malaysian female opted to marry within the 25-29 years old range. In addition to that, the number of marriages in Malaysia had increased by 15.4% from 2020 to 2021. However, globally the rate of marriage has been on a decline with a higher rate of late marriages being recorded (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). By comparing both global and Malaysian statistics, it can be surmise that more people are going through singlehood and may marry at a later stage of life.

Singlehood can be defined as the state of unmarried in the absence of intimate romantic relationship (Kislev, 2023). This state can be further categorized into voluntary and involuntary singlehood which are often temporary. Factors and reasoning for one's singlehood are different due to gender, values, religion and even culture. According to a study conducted in Germany by Ochnik & Slonim (2020), gender and culture are detrimental factors in the concept of singlehood in which more women are satisfied in being single due to the feeling of independence as well as satisfaction with life. However, the study mostly focuses on the gender differences factor while culture is less emphasized.

However, the state of singlehood can also impact one's psychological well-being negatively. According to a study in Pakistan by Sultana et al. (2021) unmarried girls suffer discrimination and loneliness due to their single state being seen as unwanted. This coupled by negative comments from family members causes distress and feelings of dejection. However, the research did not emphasize on the effect of culture or career in the negative implication of singlehood and focuses on the surface level information. Hence, this study aims to explore the psychosocial cultural issue of Malay women that is career oriented. This also allows the researcher to discover cultural related challenges towards singlehood and their needs as a Malay woman.

1.2 Problem Statement

Studies regarding singlehood has been conducted in the past due to the global trend in co-habitation and preferences to either delay marriage or stay single (eg, Kislev, 2023; Ochnik & Slonim, 2020; Ang et al., 2020). However, these studies are mostly conducted outside of Malaysia which does not emphasize on the cultural practices and cultural values. The psychological well-being of professional Malay women is often understudied and ignored which causes stigmatism in their daily lives. Hence, this study will mainly be focusing on the psychosocial cultural issues such as effect Malay culture, hopes and needs as well as effect of career in their singlehood.

Other than that, most past studies were done quantitatively in which they used questionnaire and surveys to collect data (eg, Raymo et al., 2021; Himawan, 2018; Apostolou et al., 2020). This causes the data to be less detailed in description and quality as the questionnaires and surveys have a fixed answer. However, this study will be using a qualitative approach to interview participants in order to obtain in-depth answers through guided

questionnaire which allows for a better understanding of the struggles of professional unwed Malay women.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective for this study is to explore the psychosocial cultural issues related to singlehood among professional Malay women in Sarawak.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- a) To explore the meaning of being single and unmarried among professional Malay women.
- b) To discover the factors and causes of their singleness.
- c) To determine the hopes and needs of professional Malay women.

1.4 Research Questions

- a) What is their interpretation of being single and unwed?
- b) What are their personal factors and causes which influenced their choice in being single?
- c) Do their hopes and needs influence their singleness?
- d) Do cultural practices influence their singleness?

1.5 Research Framework

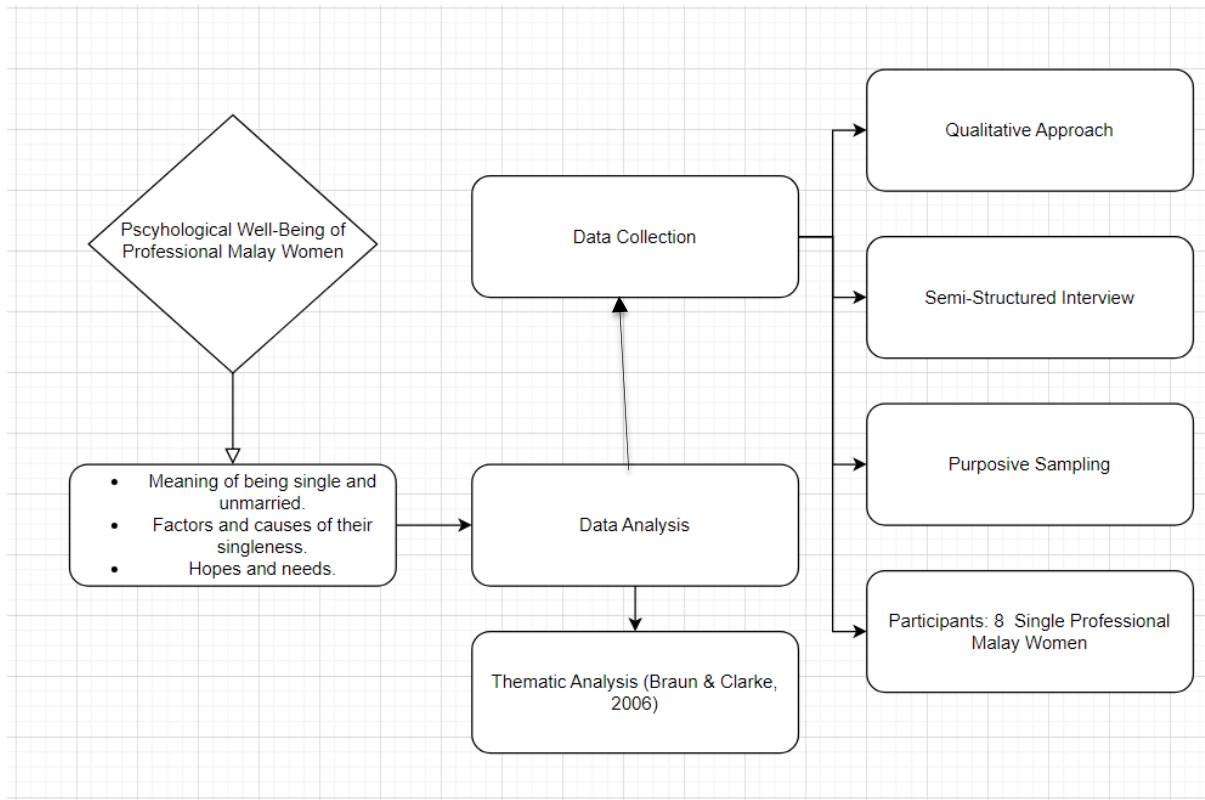


Figure 1: Research Framework

1.6 Significance of Study

This study will provide an insight and exploration towards the struggles of professional unwed Malay women with their psychological well-being due to cultural issues and stigmatization. Such insight can provide a better understanding of the need to destigmatize singlehood which can improve women psychological well-being. In addition to that, this can increase public awareness of the unnecessary negative connotation towards singles to reduce discrimination in family or workplace setting in an Asian setting.

It is also worth noting that, this study can serve as the baseline in discovering new information regarding psychological well-being of professional unwed women as well as its relation to other culture and races or even the effect of religion on the topic. The researcher

may discover new significant areas or factors that previous studies did not emphasize on such as Malay culture's effect on singlehood. Hence, this study is significant to the future research and researcher themselves.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

1.7.1 Singlehood

Conceptual definition: Singlehood is defined as the state of unmarried individual without a romantic partner.

Operational definition: For this study, singlehood is defined as unmarried individual who are either in a romantic relationship or fully single.

1.7.2 Professional Malay Woman

- 2 Conceptual definition: Professional Malay woman is defined as Malay woman who is holding a job that requires higher level of education or specific training.
- 3 Operational definition: For this study, professional Malay woman is a Malay woman that has completed tertiary education or training to work in a high-status occupation.

1.7.3 Hopes and Needs

- 4 Conceptual definition: Hopes and needs can be defined as an individual's future vision as well as basic needs that is essential for survival.
- 5 Operational definition: For this study, hopes and needs are defined as Malay women's future vision of themselves and their current needs in terms of economic growth, relationships as well as intimacy.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will be discussing the previous research that is relevant to aspects of women's lives encompassing their psychological well-being and the dynamics of singlehood as well as the importance of marriage in both global and Malaysian context. The researcher will also be delving into the aspects of professional occupation in both global and Malaysian context as well as the importance of culture in marriage.

2.1 Concept of Singlehood in Global Context

According to a study conducted in United States of America by Apostolou et al. (2020), several factors was found to be impactful in their choices of singlehood most notably inadequate flirting skills, freedom, fear of getting hurt, different priorities and extreme pickiness. It is noted that the study presented significant differences in sex and age in which women are more likely to pursue singlehood to avoid emotional distress and perceive themselves as an undesirable mate due to their physical appearance. They argued that failed past relationship may have affected their perception of the participants in which they lack confidence and is fearful of the emotional pain that may come from future relationship. In terms of physical appearance, media often portrays an unrealistic expectation of a perfect appearance which became a social standard for women. This creates a barrier for women who were deemed below average such as being overweight to be viewed as ugly as well as undesirable. In addition to that, younger people are more likely to be single due to the lack of flirting skills and having different priorities which differs from the older participants. Younger participants were more likely to focus on improving themselves in terms of career and status in order to attract a higher value mate while their older counterparts were yearning for freedom for themselves to explore their interests due to already fulfilling the needs to advance their career and status.

In another study conducted in Beijing and Singapore by Ang et al. (2020), similar findings can be related as well. In this study, six Chinese women were chosen to be interviewed from both countries of which are dominated by Chinese culture. The researcher of this study noted that due to deep acceptance of culture, stigmatization occurred towards women who are unmarried after the age of 30 years old. This is due to the fact that women are often viewed devalued after a certain age causing them to be discriminated. The results of the study have also mentioned several factors which influenced their singlehood such as biological factors in which they feel unattractive due to their physical appearance and age. This evolves into a form of self-deprecation that further lowers their self-confidence in finding a mate. Other than that, commitment to their career has also become an important factor in singlehood. The expectations of Chinese men towards women to do house chores and provide warm meals become a challenge as some of them are required to travel for their job. This creates a barrier for them to pursue family building for which they would not be able to commit. It is also noted that, their inability to meet an individual which possess a desirable trait to them also become an important factor. Finding a suitable mate is a challenge due to their own status and hierarchy in their social class which prevents them from settling down.

In addition to the factors, the study also presents the experience of singlehood of the participants. The participants all agree that singlehood causes them to have a sense of freedom in pursuing their interest in work or avoiding emotional distress from relationships. However, due to lack of intimate relationship the participants also felt loneliness and vulnerability as their friends gradually build their own families and become more distant. This distant feeling is further worsened by their cultural background in which they are expected to marry early in order to fit their societal standard as being a good housewife.

A study done in Indonesia, Jakarta conducted by Rizqi Amalia (2021) delve deeper into the singlehood of highly educated Indonesian women which presents similar information. 6

participants with the age above 30 years old were interviewed for their experiences and thoughts on singlehood. The study emphasizes on the effect of modernization on women who experienced singlehood due to the social transformation that occurred. Gender equality is more upheld causing women to be able to further their education and pursue a higher paying job. In the interviews conducted, the women expresses that their lifestyle has changed as they travel outside of their countries. These experiences cause their perception of life to change into being independent and wanting to improve themselves first. The ideology of men being the provider was discarded as the believe that women can also become the provider due to their high self-efficacy in their own career. Due to having their perception changed, the women also had shifted their personal values in accordance with their priorities. They would prioritise their career and freedom than marriage as it will restrain them. However, this also causes family issues as they are not as intimate with their family members due to difference in values. Cultural practices of family members cause them to be misunderstood forcing them to seek comfort in their friends.

2.2 Singlehood in Malaysian Context

Singlehood of women in Malaysian context are often understudied due to the lack of awareness. According to a study conducted in Malaysia by (Saili & Shanat, 2018) regarding experiences of single professional Malay women, cultural and religious norms have an adverse impact of singlehood. This is due to the concept of traditional womanhood of being married to fulfil ones' duty towards their parents and religion. It is noted that Islam is the core of Malay culture in Malaysia which emphasizes the obligation of fulfilling their religious needs. In both context of religion and Malay culture marriage is viewed as the end goal of a woman which as it allows for family building to maintain family honour as well as reputation. The study presented data from the interview in which the participants express their negative experience in singlehood due to cultural background and societal standard of women. Loneliness and

feeling inadequate often accompany single Malay women who desires companionship but is restricted due to the cultural age limit of being desirable for marriage. In addition to that, pressure from family members for them to search for a mate has evolve into harassment which inadvertently becomes a humiliating experience. Thus, creating a sense of imperfect due to their priority and inability to successfully settle down. Having a professional career has also create a barrier or them in prioritising settling down which raises feelings of regret. However, despite the negative connotations professional Malay women are still compelled to pursue marriage as form of self needs fulfilment.

In another study done by Saili & Saili (2018) regarding the stigmatisation of singlehood of professional Malay women in Malaysia also supports the facts of singlehood being viewed as negative due to cultural norms. This is due to the stigmatisation of being undesirable to men which affects other's perception of single women. This negative perception creates a sense of unworthiness and places them in a position to be treated poorly by others. The researchers noted that discrimination happens in the context of family, workplace and by the public. The common themes in the study are single Malay women are often taken advantage of by others due to being perceived as lacking in commitment in having a family to care for. This forces them to exert themselves in taking care of their parents or sibling financially or physical care. In terms of workplace, they are often burdened with more work than their married counterpart due to having less responsibilities outside of work. Thus, increasing their stress as they feel obligated to go out of their way for others. Publicly, single Malay women are belittled for their inability to settle down and seen as deviant considering they are not faithfully practicing the cultural norms. The discrimination creates a disparity of in life satisfaction as they are surrounded by negative stereotypes.

These are further supported by a study done by Alwi & Lourdunathan (2020) which discusses the challenges and well-being of single women in Malaysia. Similarly, participants

of this study express their experience in living with negative stereotype and connotations of being single. Due to the judgemental attitudes of others in Malaysia it creates a stereotype of these single women being unlucky and often coupled with the feelings of being insulted. Thus, creating an environment of mistreatment and insecurity as they struggle with self-acceptance. Their mistreatment is also due to the perception single Women lacking in responsibilities and commitment which is taken advantage of. In addition to that, the study also emphasizes on the factors that could increase single Women's well-being. It is noted that by having a realistic and clear meaning to oneself they are able to find their own strength in achieving freedom and independence. Followed by effective coping strategies which can be implemented through their own personal needs through positive affirmations and surrounding themselves with strong social and emotional support.

2.3 Psychological Well-Being of Single Women

Psychological well-being (PWB) refers to living a fulfilling life while nurturing own's development and self-actualization (Ryff, 1989 as Cited in Matud et al., 2019). The theory of psychological well-being was first developed by Ryff (1989) to reflect on an individual's well-being. The theory itself was developed into a measurement tool of six dimensions consisting of: (1) Autonomy (one's self determination); (2) Environmental mastery (ability to control own life and environment); (3) Personal growth (feeling of own's growth and potential); (4) Positive relations with others (warm and deep connection with others); (5) Purpose in life (feeling the purpose of one's life); (6) Self-acceptance (being accepting of one's strengths and weaknesses) (Manchiraju, 2020).

A study conducted by Alias et al. (2022) regarding the differences in psychological well-being of single and working women has revealed that married women scored higher in psychological well-being test compared to single women. This study implemented the usage

of Ryff's psychological well-being scale to measure the six dimensions of psychological construct. The researchers noted that the feeling of unacceptance and inadequacy of single women may have been affected by stigma surrounding them which could explain the lower score. Married couples are often seen as normal within their culture which nurture the feeling of better life satisfaction in general. In addition to that, single women scored lower in the dimension of purpose in life which can be attributed to the undefined meaning of their lives. Since marriage is seen as the goal of life for an adult woman in Malaysia, their inability to reach such goal might have caused their low self esteem and self-acceptance. Moreover, marital status of being single is often seen as a temporary stage which develops pressure towards the single women to search for a mate. Thus, creating an environment of anxiety and uncertain future ahead.

In Iran, a study was conducted by Sharak et al. (2021) to discover the needs of single women. The researcher states that women who experiences stigma and social isolation are more likely to develop mental illnesses that can affect their daily lives. This is due to their needs not being met while living in a toxic environment. In the study, the researcher emphasizes several needs that is necessary for single women which comprises the companionship, and sexual needs. Due to the nature of loneliness that accompanies single women, the longing for companionship is often unmet as they are unable to settle down. This causes the lack of emotional support which is detrimental for their mental health. In addition to that, unmet sexual needs of single women are also one of the factors that worsen their psychological well-being. For single women in Iran, cultural norms and religious obligation of Islam are still heavily practised which emphasizes on negative connotations of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Hence, due to their cultural background most single women would need to ignore their sexual needs in order to be reduce negative judgement of others. The researchers also emphasize on the constant suffering of single women in Iran that is often overlooked by many due to it being

the acceptable norm. Many single Iranian women would be ridden with guilt for failure in settling down early and inability to fulfil their “duty” as a woman in their society.

Another study conducted in South Korea by Jo et al. (2018) on the mental health status of unwed mothers in shelter homes has revealed that due to public stigma unwed mothers often neglect themselves and refuse to seek help regarding their mental health. Similar findings regarding the tendency for single women to develop mental health due to discrimination of others. In the study, unwed mothers living in the home shelter has experienced sexual assault, physical abuse, social bullying, and suicide which may have impacted their psychological well-being. The researcher also stated that due to staying in a home shelter, most unwed mothers have a non-supportive family relationship which further enhances the loneliness feeling. This causes them to develop more mood disorders such as depression, persistent depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder. However, due to these single women being a mother it causes employment issues as well as they would usually not be able to manage a job. Although they are able to work, they might also face discrimination for being unwed and having a child. This provides a different insight between a single unwed woman who possess not children and an unwed mother who has commitment in fostering.

A similar study was conducted in Malaysia by Nordin et al. (2018) regarding the psychological well-being of unwed mothers living in KEWAJA home shelter. The study emphasizes on determining the state of psychological well-being of the residents which revealed that majority of unwed mothers are experiencing moderate to high levels of stability. This can be related to the study done by Jo et al. (2018) which indicates that unwed mothers are more likely to develop mental illnesses due to the lack of social support but by living in a home shelter, it creates a healthier environment for them to live. Residents of KEWAJA home shelter reports that their needs are met by being surrounded by supportive relationship which explains the high state of psychological well-being.

2.4 Importance of Marriage Among Malays

Malaysia is a multiracial and multireligious country in which cultures are often intertwined due to interracial marriages. Malay culture is one of the prominent cultures and is inseparable from the religion of Islam. In the research conducted by Noor et al. (2019) on the marital well-being indicator among Malay couple, the researcher found that important factors in choosing a partner are religion, characteristics, mannerism, and race. In Malaysia, most Malay are Muslim (Ali, 2022) which could explain why religion is one of the deciding factors. Marriage in Islam requires both individual to be a Muslim in order for the marriage to be valid. Hence, choosing a partner of different faith may cause an issue for both families which are usually avoided. The researchers also stated characteristics of an individual which refers to their responsibility in a sense that they are just and dependable. In Malay Muslim marriage, men are often viewed as the head of the family which needs the characteristics to be responsible and are able to lead the family. Hence, the need for a responsible characteristic when single Malay women when choosing their partners. Mannerism was also stated to be an important factor as it is related to a healthy communication between partners. However, it is also noted that financial stability in providing a shelter and satisfying basic needs such as nourishments are also an important factor in supporting a family.

Another study done by Abidin (2020) regarding Malay couples' conception of a satisfying marriage showed similar result in choosing a partner. This study emphasizes on the experience and needs in nurturing a successful marriage. The participants have expressed their need of a spouse with respectable attitude which is important for the foundation of respect. Respectable attitudes also serve as a role model for the children who closely follow their family's norm. Hence, a well-mannered spouse is valuable to foster a happy family. Other than that, the participants have also expressed the need for a spouse that can maintain good relationships with others. This creates a smooth communication between spouses and their

children as well as their in laws which are usually sought for when building a family. Career and financial literacy are also valuable as being able to manage a family's financial situation will provide a better understanding of spouses on priorities and career growth that is suitable for their needs. Similar to Noor et al. (2019), religion is an impactful factor since marrying an individual of the same faith is needed for Malay Muslim couples. However, Abidin (2020) emphasized more on Islam as the foundation and its' practises to be uphold in order to fulfil their obligation.

2.5 Global Trend of Non-Marriage

According to Himawan (2018) regarding marriage attitudes of Indonesian singles, most participants were inclined in pursuing marriage as a form of fulfilment and growth despite the pressure given by their surroundings. The researcher of this study emphasizes the factor of delaying their marriage to several factors such as unreadiness to commit. In the study, 33% of the participants expresses that they have yet to consider a serious relationship due to other priorities such as career which becomes a motivation to delay marriage. This is related to 8.3% of the participants whose motivation to delay marriage was for personal enjoyment in which they would like to pursue their own interest first before settling down with a spouse. Another 33.3% of the participants expressed their interest in waiting for a suitable partner which are seen as equal in footing to them. This is due to the fact that marrying an equal partner ensures the communication and level of understanding to be equal. Another motivation for delaying marriage is traumatic past relationship in which the participants express their fear to yet again be in a toxic relationship. This is further supported by Forth et al. (2021) in which toxic relationships can cause an individual to develop trauma and fear of relationship which could lead to development of mental illnesses.

In another study conducted in Japan by Raymo et al. (2021) regarding the reason of late marriages in Japan revealed that it is due to unrealized marriage desires which is affected by economic uncertainty and difficulty in finding a partner. Japan's cultural norm is a respectable one in which most citizens would be giving their best effort in their daily lives. Hence, maintaining a career while trying to build a family might be difficult. The researcher also emphasized on the comfort of single life which are often sought for before committing to lifelong relationship which is similar to previous research. Late marriage in Japan can also be attributed to the economic independence of women and their ability to not conform to social norms of becoming a housewife. Hence, Japanese women would be mainly focusing on self-growth and career-oriented goals instead of prioritising the pursue of marriage. However, the statistics presented in the study also reveals the difference in desire to marry in different employment or professional career. Japanese citizens who are working in a regular employment shows a higher tendency to pursue marriage than their professional counterpart which demands more commitment.

A similar study conducted in Pakistan by Ghazal et al. (2022) which also delve deeper into the factors of late marriages has given more insight into this issue. Personal factor of an individual is one of the factors which refers to their educational level which are viewed as compulsory in their culture. Expectations of meeting a partner with the same standards becomes a barrier for young women as they are expected to be independent while maintaining a good career. It is also mentioned that duration of higher education might also contribute to delaying marriage as couples would usually marry after they have graduated or even after pursuing their intended career. This relates to the factor of demographic as highly educated women would take longer to get into the workforce causing them to inadvertently delay marriage. Financial stability is also sought after in Pakistan in which individuals would first attain financial freedom by committing to a career which gives them wealth and higher status.

Thus, creating a preference or expectation towards an individual before considering marriage. Unrealistic expectations of marriage could also be attribute to media and social comparison in which a perfect standard was deemed necessary. This all or nothing thinking causes individuals to become choosy of their partner which becomes a challenge in finding a perfect spouse.

2.6 Trend of Non-Married Malay Women

In Malaysian context, factors of late marriages are similar to those from overseas. According to Mohd Isa et al. (2020), Malaysian women are often expected to marry early due to fertility issues and for the sake of family building in maintaining honour. However, several factors were considered my modern Malaysian women to delay their marriage due to different priorities. One of the biggest factors is prioritising their parents in which they become the caregiver of their parents due to their siblings having other commitment and living far or are already married. This is related to the Malay culture which emphasizes on the deep interpersonal relationship between family members. Similarly, to previous study, Malaysian women would also delay their marriage due to seeking financial stability and prioritising career growth. This is due rising of education level of women in the country which motivates women to become independent on their own. Hence, committing more towards themselves instead of searching for a partner. Another factor is the unreadiness of becoming a wife which was expressed by one of the participants. Marriage in Malaysia is considered a huge step for most people as it involves the unity of families that is accompanied by new responsibilities. Gender role in Malaysia is heavily influenced by the rich culture which creates a sense of fear towards the failure in handling their respective responsibilities.

Another study was conducted by Abdullah et al. (2021) which focuses on the consequences of delayed marriage in Malaysia. The study found that delayed marriage has adverse effects on reproductive health of women. This is due to the decrease of hormone such

as oestrogen and progesterone which affects the functionality of ovary in women (Banke-Thomas, 2020). Both studies can be related as the trend of increasing age of marriage can be observed in the findings of Abdullah et al. (2021). In addition to that this may cause infertility in older women that affects the overall population growth. However, due to delayed marriage women empowerment are also affected in a positive way. Higher education women are most likely to pursue their career of interest which promotes self-growth of decision making and maturity. This in turn contribute into the involvement of women in the economic growth of the country as they are more likely to be engaged in a more professional setting than women who married early.

2.7 Impact of Professional Occupation on Marriage

Malay women who are working in a professional occupation will often prioritize their career rather than actively seeking family building. This is due to the difference in value as they possess different level of knowledge after completing tertiary education, in which they will be focusing in self-growth. Professional occupation is regarded as an important factor in Malay women's singlehood. Professional occupation requires outmost commitment from individuals which can be especially hard amongst married couples or singles who are pursuing both career as well as marriage. According to Perez (2019), a professional are individuals who are trained to acquire specific skill set that are needed for standard practice. Hence occupation which requires tertiary education or specific training that requires commitment can be referred to as professional occupation.

According to Keldal & Seker (2021) marriage planning are usually included in their life plan despite pursuing a professional career. The study emphasises the on the readiness of young adults in marital efficacy which are usually related to financial stability. Majority of the participants agree that prioritising their career planning to growth is more essential than

pursuing marriage as they are unready for the commitment. Readiness to marry is one of the factors that determine the planning of their future although it may be affected by self-gains from personal achievements. It is noted that, for individuals who are not ready to marry, they would opt to delay their pursuit of marriage in order to reach their ideals first. Thus, motivating them to cohabit with their partners instead as it allows freedom for singles to pursue their interest.

Another study conducted by Kin et al. (2018) on the negative impact professional career on women in medical setting revealed work-related stressors would severely impact their parenthood. This is related to the long work hours during their medical training which requires them to be on site for more than 12 hours (Jarrar et al., 2022) and the limited financial compensation towards trainees. In the study, both men and women trainees were recruited but women express more concern regarding parenthood as they are expected to become the primary caregiver of their child in the case of pregnancy. Work-life balance becomes difficult due to the time constraint of work creates a discrepancy with their male counterparts as they would be expected to handle more responsibilities.

It is also noted that several other stressors could contribute to the negative connotations of marriage and pregnancy in a medical setting such as unpredictable work schedule for trainees or staffs that is on call duty. Although medical institutions implemented on-site childcare it will still be difficult for the parents to juggle caregiving and career. This can cause singles to delay marriage or pursue singlehood to reduce the stressors.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology that is used by the researcher in conducting this study in order for it to be researchable and replicable. This chapter will consist of research design, participants & sampling procedure, instruments, pilot study, data collection, data analysis procedure, and ethical issue.

3.1 Research Design

This study was designed to fit qualitative research. Qualitative research is defined by its method of relying on description of cases and understanding of meaning via words as well as observation (Adler, 2022). In qualitative research, the researcher will not be analysing numerical data but will be interviewing and observing the phenomenon that interest the researcher. The researcher will also be utilising interviews, journal article, and past studies to analyse data. According to Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative research can be conducted in several approach such as document study, observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group. For this research, semi-structured interviews will mainly be used to gather data from 8 unwed professional Malay women. Semi-structured interview is a data collection method that focuses on predetermined open-ended questionnaire and additional follow up questions by the researcher (Ahlin, 2019). The nature of the open-ended questionnaire allows the researcher to understand the deeper experience and meaning of the participants which is not possible via quantitative research methods. This allows the researcher to procure an in-depth analysis of data through words.

This study focuses on the psychological well-being of professional unwed Malay woman which required a qualitative approach such as semi-structured interview to understand the deeper context of being unwed as a culturally bound woman. By using a semi structured

interview, the researcher can discover their struggles and challenges while exploring their own interpretation of singlehood. According to Dejonckheere & Vaughn (2019), the usage of semi-structured interview allows the researcher to explore participant's thoughts, emotions, and sensitive issues. Hence, by adopting qualitative research approach the researcher can delve deeper in the topic.

3.2 Participants & Sampling Procedure

3.2.1 Participants

For this study, 8 participants of professional single Malay women were interviewed. According to Hennink & Kaiser (2022), saturated results can be achieved with 9-17 participants using interview approach in qualitative research. Although only 8 participants were interviewed, the researcher have been given an approval by the supervisor to proceed with the study.

For this study, the participants were chosen through specific criteria. Participants were determined by:

- Single and Unmarried status.
- Be Female and Malay.
- Is currently working in a professional setting that requires tertiary education.
- Be 28 years and above.
- Is currently single and not in a relationship.
- Willing to participate in the interview and has given consent to be recorded.

3.2.2 Sampling Procedure

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to acquire data and recruit participants. Purposive sampling technique is a form of non-probability sampling which allows the researcher to identify and select participants that is related to their interest of study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Nonprobability sampling is used to remove unnecessary data and trait as the researcher will be specifying the criteria for participants to be chosen. This allows the researcher to analyse information rich data that is relevant to the study. According to Ames et al. (2019), purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to eliminate the need for large quantities of data which can diminish the result and analysis of the researchers. Hence, acquiring manageable data with rich amounts of information is crucial in order to present results of the study properly.

For the purpose of this study specific conditions must be met at the cost of losing additional information which may be useful in a more general study by using random probability sampling.

3.3 Instruments

For this study, the researcher acted as the instrument itself. The researcher can function as part of the instrument in measuring data as they will collect, analyse, and interpret data (Haven & van Grootel, 2019). The data collection was conducted via interview session with 8 participants as specified the sampling criteria. The interview was conducted in following the guideline of a semi-structured interview. The researcher had also created an interview guideline (Appendix A) which contains 4 sections: Demographics, Singlehood, Factors & Causes and Hopes & Needs. Each section contains questions that will be asked towards the participants in order to procure data that satisfy the objectives. It is noted that although there is a guideline, the researcher will be probing follow-up questions to the

participants for additional information. Additional information will be transcribed and added into the results.

3.4 Pilot Study

The researcher has conducted a pilot study towards the guided questionnaire in order to ensure its feasibility and reliability. Pilot study is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the research instrument in order to eliminate unnecessary factor which may affect the results (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Hence, conducting a pilot study is important in order to satisfy the objectives of the study. In addition to that, a pilot study also provides the potential challenges in recruiting participants as each participant will need to fulfil a specific list of criteria.

In order to perform a pilot study, the researcher has chosen one participant which fulfil the criteria to participate in a mock semi-structured interview. The data of the mock interview will be analysed in terms of clarity of question, meaningfulness of answer, and its capability to satisfy the objectives. This allows for improvements towards the questionnaire as there may be issues which arises after the mock interview is conducted.

3.5 Data Collection

For this study, data will be collected via the semi-structure interview conducted by the researcher. The process of interview will start by recruiting participants who fulfils the criteria of selection: A Malay woman with a professional occupation. This will be repeated until 8 participants are recruited for the study. The interview itself was conducted physically in Sarawak around areas of Kuching and Samarahan to ease the researcher in commuting for a physical meetup in a location that is suitable.

During the interview, participants were given the information sheet (Appendix B) and informed consent form (Appendix C) for them to fill up. This allows the researcher to brief the participants on the study and answer additional queries. The informed consent form will ensure

that the participants willingly agree in being interviewed and recorded for data. It is noted that this study adopts the usage of a semi-structured questionnaire in which the researcher will be prompted to ask additional question when the need arises. Appendix A was used as guideline throughout the interview.

After 8 participants has been interviewed the data written notes and recorded audio will be transcribed for each of the participants. The usage of written notes and audio recording is to ensure that no data is lost to the researcher when transcribing and compiling the data before analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, the researcher adopted the thematic analysis derived from Braun & Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis can be defined as a systematic analysis of data by identifying, organizing, and describes data based on its trend or theme. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to pinpoint crucial information from the data collection period and organize it into meaningful information. There are 6 phases in thematic analysis that were used in this study. The phases are:

- **Phase 1: Familiarize yourself with the data.**

The researcher will transcribe data and re-read the data to identify initial ideas or patterns with them. It is noted that, the researcher will also write down or highlight crucial information that is related to the study.

- **Phase 2: Generating initial codes.**

In this phase the researcher will generate specific codes or keyword for each of the participants data in order to associate them with each other. This allows the researcher to collate the data to create a theme.

- **Phase 3: Search for themes.**

After creating the keywords or code, the researcher will create a theme based on the highlighted keywords that are similar. For keywords or code that does not fit any themes, they are placed under miscellaneous theme which may be useful for the researcher.

- **Phase 4: Reviewing themes.**

In this phase the researcher will organize the themes and choose the most relevant and reliable theme to be discussed according to the research objectives and questions. This is to ensure that the themes chosen are meaningful and reliable for results to be procured.

- **Phase 5: Define and naming themes.**

This phase involves in defining the themes and naming it in order to further refine the data. By refining the data, the researcher can extract the concept and create a structure that can show the importance of the selected data.

- **Phase 6: Producing Report.**

Finally, the researcher will produce a written report of their findings and discuss how each theme correlates with the research objectives and research questions. Usage of examples such as the participants opinion or words can be used to showcase its importance for a better understanding of the results.

3.7 Ethical Issue

3.7.1 Informed Consent

For the purpose of research, participants were given informed consent and participation information sheet. The informed consent form was used to acquire the participants consent in participating the study and its condition. Information sheet provided the participants with the procedures and objectives of the study. It is noted that participants have the right to inquire more about the study and has the right to withdraw at any time.

3.7.2 Confidentiality

The confidentiality of information of the participants which includes their identity will be remain confidential to the researcher and the supervisor only. The name of the participants will also be changed into a pseudonym and the researcher will not disclose their information to others. Information from the interview session will be transcribed with their pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will highlight and include the results and finding of research such as participant's demographic, themes and general information collected from the semi-structured interview.

4.1 Participants Demographic and Profile

For this research 8 participants were recruited, and a semi-structured interview was conducted individually for each participant. All participants were recruited based on the selection criteria and the interview was done physically. Table below shows the participants general information.

Name	Age	Race	Employment Status	Education Level
Safwah	29	Malay	Data Analyst	Master's
Nurul	29	Malay	Software Developer	Bachelor's Degree
Aida	34	Malay	Automation Engineer	Master's
Syahin	35	Malay	Training Manager	Bachelor's Degree
Emma	33	Malay	Sales Consultant	Master's
Nur	31	Malay	Multimedia Designer	Bachelor's Degree

Raza	31	Malay	Business Executive	Master's
Khaliya	35	Malay	Motion-Graphic Designer	Bachelor's Degree

4.2 Main Findings

For this research, 4 themes identified through data analysis derived from Braun & Clarke (2006). Below are the table for the identified themes.

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
Perception of Singlehood & Career	-Commitment issues -Marital Readiness -Effects to Well-being -Economic status	-Self-perception -Fear of abuse or negative experience -Financial readiness -Partner compatibility -Happiness of singlehood -Independent behaviour -Professional aspiration
Cultural and Family Expectations	-Stigma -Social pressure	-Negative perception in marrying late. -Traditional gender role -Societal norms

Personal Needs and Hopes	-Longing of companionship -Hope to Marry	-Feeling of loneliness -Needs of being loved intimately -Family building value -Balance traditional role with modern standard
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4.2.1 Theme 1: Perception of Singlehood

Commitment Issues

Commitment issues are one of the strong subthemes which can be regarded as fear or avoidance of emotional or romantic commitment. It can also be regarded as difference in priority in terms commitment such as commitment to work or family or self-improvement. One of the categories for this subtheme is the self-perception of professional Malay women on themselves and their value. Most participants reported that they appreciate and enjoy their freedom in singlehood when ask whether being single is good. For example:

“Because now I just want to enjoy by myself and friends? I can go anywhere I want at anytime to lepak-lepak you know. If I have someone maybe they control me” (Nurul)

Moreover, self-perception can also be attributed to their wants in stability and believing they deserve equal partner. For example, RZ expresses that marriage is a huge commitment for her and would rather be able to retain her commitment less state in order to explore the world or enjoy being single more.

“Hm I don’t know because for me marriage is like a big thing and I am not ready for a big commitment like that” (Raza).

Other than that, fear of abuse or negative experience is also one of the categories for this subtheme. Some participants expressed their fear in relationship turning toxic or marrying the wrong abusive individual which influences their choice in committing to someone.

“Hm it is mostly because the person before was a bit controlling and scary? Like I am afraid of men who are too controlling because they can be toxic” (Emma)

As stated by AA who fears marrying an abusive partner and having to go to court for divorce purposes if it becomes too toxic.

“I guess because what if I marry someone who hit me and only use me? If I were to cerai then it would bring sham and long process to mahkamah and like I don’t even know if can” (Aida).

Marital Readiness

Marital readiness is also one of the strong subthemes that were often mentioned by most participants. One of the main categories would be financial stability which are often sought after due to the need of income to secure a safe and stable life. Raza expresses that she would avoid marrying before attaining financial stability due to the fear of building a struggling family because of her past experiences.

“Ya something like that, because growing up like my family isn’t rich so I don’t want to raise a child the same way I did. But only if I marry la because right now I feel stable with money so I can enjoy” (Raza).

The next category that can be associated with marital readiness is partner compatibility. Most participants mention that finding a partner is challenging due to incompatibility in values or interest which causes their singlehood to be longer. This can also be attributed to compatibility in terms of religion as most Malay women are also Muslim. Nur expresses:

“If I want to marry the person needs to be um how to say ah beriman so he can lead the family” (Nur).

Some participants also expressed their need to find someone that can lead them as a pious husband in the case of marriage.

“Like as you know being a Muslim as well getting closer to Allah is one of the things we need to do as part of iman which is why I want to learn more. I believe that He is the best planner for all and that I can have a proper marriage later. If I want to marry the person needs to be um how to say ah beriman so he can lead the family” (Nur).

Effects to Well-Being

Singlehood has their own advantages according to the participants in which their well-being is often seen as healthy and good with the existence of good support systems or coping mechanisms. The category of happiness in singlehood is seen as one of the advantages in singlehood due to self-freedom and self-discovery without emotional commitment to another individual. However, most of the participants mentions that without a good support system they would often feel lonely and miserable due to their surrounding as well as stigma from family or friends. As reported by Aida:

“I remember feeling sad as I do not have a partner who treats me special. There was a time I kept crying because I feel lonely” (Aida).

Some participants fear for the future in which they would not be able to find a partner in time due to their age. Hence impacting their mental state negatively. Emma has also expressed:

“I guess sad and scared? Like I takut I really cannot find anyone because of my looks or because of age because who would want an old woman right” (Emma).

Economic Status.

Since all of the participants are working women in a professional setting all 8 agree with the importance of being independent and committed to their career as well as the importance of financial stability. A strong subtheme will be their economic status which is one of their main focuses as a professional in their field. This can be further categorized into their innate independent behaviour or personality. Most participants agree with the idea that they want to be independent in order to not pose as a burden for others as well as being able to provide for themselves or own family.

“I want to be able to be independent, so I don’t overly rely or burden someone else” (Emma).

However, some participants also agree with being independent despite living with their family as they would not want to be viewed as a burden.

“I feel like I need to be able to make my own money and effort through life. Like I don’t want to be a burden to my husband” (Safwah).

Other than that, economic status subtheme can also be categorized into professional aspiration. All participants are working professionals who aspires to move further and improve their own career path. For example:

“Because obviously I need to work and I don’t have much time for puppy love but I also want to focus more and do better so I can get higher position. Better pay and more benefits I guess” (Nur).

From the interview, all participants also share the same goal of having less stress due to being promoted or attaining a better job position.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Cultural and Family Expectations

Stigma

Throughout the interview most of the participants reported the existence of stigma related to singlehood which indicated a strong subtheme.

One of the most prominent categories associated with this subtheme is the negative perception in marrying late among Malay culture especially for a woman. Most participants reported similar experience in being viewed negatively or had received negative comments from their family or friends in relation to their single status. From the interview it is mostly due to the traditional view of marriage in Malay culture. From the interview AA mentioned that:

“I seen some people compare us like anak dara tua kind of thing or even ugly”.

Such labelling is often associated with Malay women who marry late or are single currently due to their inability to find a partner to settle down or even marry early.

Another category that is related to the subtheme stigma is the traditional gender role in Malay culture. This is due to the masculine and feminine trait of men and women. Some participants also reported to be seen or acknowledged by their reproductive ability which causes distress as they are sometimes negatives. For example, EM reported that:

“recently during raya one of my aunty asked kau asal tak kawin lagi badan engkau tu makin tua nanti susah kau nak beranak which made me mad a little bit because I feel like they only see me as someone that give birth. All my achievements and success were looked over because I am a woman”

Social Pressure

The second common subtheme is social pressure from their surroundings at work or at a social event. Most participants reported that they feel pressured to marry due to their peers having done so. As stated by Safwah:

“I have a friend who is a bit older than me in the office and she sometimes complain about being forced to marry. We are not close la but I feel like I can relate to the feeling of being forced or expectations on being married” (Safwah).

It is worth noting that the societal norm in Malaysia revolves around early family building despite the difference in culture which increases the pressure to marry.

4.2.4 Theme 3: Personal Needs and Hopes

Longing of Companionship

For this theme, a strong agreement and need for companionship or a partner from the participants were obtained through the interview when asked regarding their personal needs and future hope.

One of the main categories that can be associated with this subtheme is the feeling of loneliness. Most of the participants reported that they feel a sense of loneliness due to being

single despite their enjoyment of less commitment and freedom. Although they still have friendship with others but the fact that most of their friends are married makes them feel unwanted or ugly as they are single. As stated by Khaliyah:

“Even if I hang out with my friends, I still feel lonely because I have no one to share my struggles with” (Khaliyah).

Additionally, cultural perceptions and commitments make it hard for them to find a partner, which increases their loneliness.

The next category for this subtheme is the need of being loved intimately. Some participants report that they wanted to be treated special by others intimately with love and care. Syahin stated that:

“Yes because I want loved and care by other people also. When I compare myself to others who are married I feel like “why I cannot have that” and I feel a bit lonely” (Syahin).

Other participants also showed their need for intimacy when asked if their needs for companionship and intimacy were met. Intimacy in terms of sexual needs were also an obstacle as Islam prohibits sexual intercourse outside of marriage which is considered a sin.

The next category that can be associated with this subtheme is family building value from their culture. Malay culture prioritizes family building as a part of union between communities. As stated by Nur when asked for her reasoning for marriage:

“My culture encourages us women to get married in order to fulfil our duties” (Nur).

From the interview, most participants agree that they would consider marriage in the future as they value family building in their life despite being single or having trouble finding a partner. Most participants still want to settle down and marry as stated by Safwah who also considers resigning and becoming a housewife if the husband demands it.

“But if I have to resign because of my duties as a wife then I would terpaksa la” (Safwah).

As stated by Emma when asked if she would consider marriage:

“I would consider marriage because I want to build my own family and have my own children in the future” (Emma).

However, one participant, Khaliyah denies the tradition of marriage due to her sexual preference in female instead and same sex marriage is forbidden in Islam as well as in Malaysia.

“I feel like I am a failure for being single and not into men which make me not be able to marry you know. I sometimes hate myself for not being able to find them attractive because I didn’t ask to be like this. Then even if I want to marry I just can’t because it goes against the law and religion here so no one would accept me” (Khaliyah).

Lastly the category that can be related to this subtheme is to balance traditional role with modern standard. Most participants agree that although they would get married, they still want to play a role in supporting the family by maintaining their career. As stated by Emma:

“I still want to work and find the right person” (Emma).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION, LIMITATION AND CONCLUSION.

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, discussions of the findings from the previous will be made which will serve as the basis to conclude this research. The recommendation for future research as well as primary research limitations will be discussed thoroughly in this chapter.

5.1 Discussion

The discussion will be focusing on the 3 master theme and 8 sub-themes from the previous chapter while relating it to previous studies from literature review which mainly emphasizes on the concept of singlehood, global trend of non-marriage, importance of marriage among Malays and impact of professional occupation on singlehood. Hence, discussion will be examining the relevance of findings in this study.

5.1 Perception of Singlehood & Career

Based on the findings of this study, singlehood is often seen as a journey before marrying among Malay women in which they face stigma from others. Issues including commitment issues, marital readiness, effects to well-being and economic status plays a huge role in shaping each individual's perception of own singlehood.

In terms of commitment issues, current research shows evidence of participants expressing their avoidance in committing to a romantic relationship due to their own self-perception of wanting stability as well as believing they deserve an equal partner. It is also worth mentioning that avoidance in committing to a romantic relationship can also be attribute to existing commitment to their job and family or self-improvement. This creates a barrier or a sense of dilemma as enjoying their singlehood which poses less emotional commitment to be more favourable. This present research is consistent with Ang et al. (2020) which emphasizes

the barrier of pursuing family building due to commitment to their job and appreciating their own personal freedom from emotional distress from relationships. Marrying an equal partner also ensures a level-headed communication and understanding between both parties which enhances their relationship.

Moreover, some participants express avoiding relationships due to past trauma in toxic or abusive situation. The fear of settling down with a wrong individual also creates a dilemma due to the problematic and long journey of stress that may happen if a divorce in court were to occur. Similar statement can be seen from Forth et al. (2021) in which toxic relationships causes individuals to develop trauma which left untreated spirals into the development of mental illness. Fearing for their future becomes apparent as they age as they are constantly pressure by their environment to settle down which increases the amount of stress they go through as well.

In terms of marital readiness, most participants emphasize the importance of readying themselves in with needed knowledge or experience before they marry. One of which financial stability for security and stable life. Similarly, Abidin (2020) stated that career and financial literacy can lead to financial stability which promotes better understanding between spouses in priorities and growth. Hence, the need for professional Malay women to seek financial stability as a stable foundation before marriage would serve them for the long run. However, based on the current study, marital readiness can also be attributed to partner compatibility which is related to marrying an equal individual. Most participants delay their marriage in hope to look for a man which fits their cultural and religious needs as it is needed for a stable marriage. This is parallel with Noor et al. (2019) who stated that in religion is one of the most important factors in choosing a partner for Malay couple. Hence, partner compatibility among professional Malay women can be seen as a deciding factor in marriage and leaving their singlehood.

Effects to well-being also plays a crucial role in professional Malay women's perception of singlehood. Due to their freedom and advantages in singlehood most of the participants agree that being single is beneficial. However, without a good support system singlehood also poses a problem in which their single status is often viewed negatively. Due to the lack of outlet to vent their feelings, their emotions become repressed and bottled up leading to sense of loneliness and intrusive fear. This coupled by their aging leads to fear of missing out which impacted their mental health. Sultana et al. (2021) mentions that unmarried girls are viewed as unwanted which causes distress and dejection amongst them. Relating the findings of this study, it shows that professional Malay women experience the same situation which causes more harm due to their surroundings.

In this study, evidence of economic status being held in high regard can also be seen as all participants worked in a professional field. This can be attributed to their sense of independent behaviour in being self-sufficient. Due to the advancement of gender equality, women's lifestyle has changed from simply being a caregiver into a working woman to improve themselves as they want to be seen as equal to their male counterpart (Rizqi Amalia, 2021). Moreover, being independent and self-efficient also helps in attaining financial stability to consider marriage. It is also worth noting that from this study, their professional aspiration can be attributed to the importance of financial status in which they worked hard to attain a higher position or status in their company. This provides more benefit and less stress due to workload as well as personal satisfaction in their efforts.

5.2 Cultural and Family Expectations

Malay culture is an important factor in the singlehood among the professional Malay women. The findings of this study report the existent of stigma related to the status of being single. It is worth mentioning that the stigma is often associated with Malay women who are older and is still single. Marrying late in Malay culture is often seen as negative as it is viewed

as being unable to settle down or find a man. This creates a negative stereotype of single older Malay women which harms them as they are seen as undesirable and miserable. This is consistent with Sali & Sali (2018) which emphasized that the negative perception of singlehood leads to a sense of unworthiness and being treated poorly by others. Such feelings can lead to them being stressed and pressured to marry considering the perception is there due to them being single.

This can be related to the traditional gender role in Malay culture that places key role in women being the caregiver. Marriage in Malay is considered to be sacred and as a form of obligation to their religion (Abidin, 2020). Although that is the case, modern Malay women would pursue higher education and have a professional occupation which differs from the traditional view of women staying at home and men being the sole breadwinner. This causes them to have more commitment and role to fill as an individual which helps their self-growth. However, findings of this study reported that due Malay women are usually seen for their reproductive ability and feminine capacity. This undermines their effort to grow in supportive role of society instead of appreciating and treating them as equal to man.

The same can be said for the social pressure on the older professional Malay women to marry and to just settle down. From this study, Malay women feel pressured to marry due to their surrounding of friends and relatives being married. This causes anxiousness from wanting to fit in with others while juggling other commitment such as their job. It is worth mentioning that this is due to the societal norm of Malaysia and Malay culture that emphasizes the value of family building.

5.3 Personal Needs and Hopes

The findings of this study also reveal that there is a sense of agreement in terms of companionship due to the feeling of loneliness they experienced. Despite being able to enjoy their own sense of freedom they reported wanting to have a partner or have a close intimate relationship with someone. Although they agree the feelings of loneliness can be mediated by having close relationship with friends, they still experience some form of loneliness when they are alone considering their friends were already married. This is consistent with Sharak et al. (2021) that emphasized the importance of companionship for single women as it serves as an emotional support for them as well as their mental health stability. The lack of such need can cause harm to their psychological well-being. However, for a country that is predominantly Muslim, having a relationship outside of marriage is also seen negative due to the rules of religion leading to restrictive solution. This also pressures them to settle down with anyone to have a sense of intimacy through marriage placing them in an uncomfortable position. Similarly, findings of this study also report the need to be loved intimately by others. This can be attributed to the lack of support system professional Malay women have while dealing with the negative connotation of being single.

Next is the hope to marry that was reported by the participants which is heavily influenced by the cultural and religious norms. As mentioned before marriage is considered sacred and viewed as an obligation of faith which influences their needs in life. Hence, family building value is often deeply integrated into Malay women despite moving forward with the modern role of a woman. Although they experience stigma of being married and fear of uncertainty in their security of marriage, they would still choose to actively find a partner or at least consider marriage for the future. This is further supported by Saili & Shanat (2018) which stated despite the negative stigma of being single for older Malay women they would still pursue marriage as a sense of self needs fulfilment.

5.4 Recommendation

Future recommendations for study conducted in the same topic or field will enhance the data collection and findings. As such, the first recommendation would be to conduct the study in a different state such as the peninsular. This allows the researcher to cross reference similar experiences and struggles of professional Malay women which helps in analysing accurate data. Moreover, if similar results are obtained it can also be used for education of Malaysian in handling stigma of singlehood in the future.

Next recommendation is to delve deeper into the impact of stigma as well as their personal coping mechanism. This helps determine the effect of stigma physically and mentally in which this research lacks considering this study has different objectives. The effect of stigma can also be used as basis to discover coping mechanisms of professional Malay women when dealing with the stress or anxiety that comes from the perceived negative state of singlehood.

Lastly, is to promote awareness regarding the psychological well-being of professional Malay women who experienced stigma due to being single. Reflecting on the findings of this study, the negative connotations occurring may be caused due to the lack of understanding of others towards these women. This can be attributed to the difference in gender roles or extreme implementation of cultural understanding which undermines woman's worth. Hence, by increasing the awareness of the impact of stigma, crucial steps such as providing support network can be establish for individuals with similar struggles to heal. Not only does this promote a healthy environment but leads to a more productive lifestyle of Malaysian.

5.5 Limitations

In terms of limitations for this research, there mainly 2 which may have impacted the findings or applicability. Firstly, it would be geographical limitations. It is worth noting that Sarawakian Malay may report different experiences due to the difference in environment such

as diversity of different culture and value than peninsular Malay. Hence, the results of future studies conducted on said place may differ in terms of experience or stigma.

Next is limitation in terms of the focus of study. This study only focuses on Malay women with a professional job which requires tertiary education. The results of this study may be richer or more accurate with Malay women from different job status as well. Although the difference in data may or may not differ the weight of other Malay women's experience are also as important.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the experiences of single professional Malay women in navigating their careers and personal lives within a culturally and socially complex environment. The findings reveal a significant interplay between professional aspirations, cultural and familial expectations, and personal needs and hopes. The participants demonstrated resilience and a strong sense of autonomy in their professional endeavours while grappling with societal and familial pressures regarding marriage and traditional gender roles. Their experiences highlight the need for greater societal acceptance and support for diverse life choices among women.

To better support professional Malay women, it is crucial to promote awareness and education about their diverse experiences, establish robust support networks, advocate for supportive workplace policies, and provide family counselling to address traditional expectations. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample, explore the experiences of women in different geographic and cultural contexts, and utilize mixed methods to enhance the depth and generalizability of the findings. By addressing these areas, society can move towards greater acceptance and support for the varied paths that professional women may choose, fostering an environment where they can thrive both personally and professionally.

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Appendix A

1. Demographic

- How old are you?
- May I know your education background?
- How is the relationship between you and your family?
- How would you describe your physical and mental health as of now?
- In general, do you still practice any Malay culture customs?
- Were you brought up and taught Malay culture deeply?

2. Singlehood

- What is your understanding and interpretation of singlehood and unmarried?
- Is marriage an option you would consider in the future?
- Are you voluntarily single?
- Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

3. Factors and Causes

- What is the explanation for your singlehood?
- In your opinion, do you think your career hinders you from getting married?
- What is your perception of others in singlehood?
- Do you think your culture and others stigmatize your singlehood?

4. Hopes & Needs

- Are you delaying marriage or staying single?
- Is advancing your career and economic status your main focus now?
- Are your basic needs fulfilled as of now?
- Do you think being single has any effect on your needs?
- Based on your personal experience, what are your own interpretation of personal needs and hopes?

Appendix B



Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

Please take some time to read through the following information.

Research Title

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF UNWED PROFESSIONAL MALAY WOMEN: EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL CULTURAL ISSUES

Research Purpose

I am from the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). I am interested to study about singlehood. Therefore, I would like to invite you to take part in this study and share your experiences, that you think is relevant regarding this matter.

Your Role

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be involved in an interview session that may take 1 to 2 hours of your time. However, the time allocated for the interview depends on you and we can set the time and place according to your liking.

Participation Agreement

Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw yourself from the study anytime you want. I will be recording the interview session and once it has been transcribed, the information will be destroyed. I will not disclose your name or any other private information that can reveal your identity in any records and information that we will use in this study.

Confidentiality

All your information is guaranteed confidentiality and I am the only one to know your participation in the study. I will be using your information for the study's findings, report, and presentation. However, I will make sure that the information used will not reveal your name and it stays confidential. This includes extracts written in the article and during the presentation.

If at any point you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher, Mohammad Firdaus or contact us at +60128030688 or email me at 80108@siswa.unimas.my. You can also contact the supervisor of this study, Dr Jamayah Sali at 584507 or email her at sjamayah@unimas.my.

I highly welcome your cooperation and participation in this study and appreciate your sharing of experiences. Thank you.

Appendix C



Informed Consent Form

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF UNWED PROFESSIONAL MALAY WOMEN: EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL CULTURAL ISSUES

Please ensure that you have consented to the followings before being interviewed:

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study
- I was given the participant information sheet beforehand
- I understand that my participation is voluntary
- I understand that my name, address, and other private information will not be used
- I understand that my answers and reactions will be kept confidential
- I agree and consented to be a part of this study
- I agree and consented for my interview session to be recorded for the use of this study

Signature : _____

Date : _____

Appendix D

Participant 1

Safwah: I would say yes. Sometimes I don't do chores la due to being really busy with work you know. But I try to be a good daughter to the family.

Firdaus: Okay then, right now I will be moving on to the next aspect of singlehood okay. So currently based on your own understanding, what is your interpretation of being single and unmarried?

Safwah: Hm, for single I see it as not being in a relationship with others? Like they are free and not committed to anyone. For unmarried, they might be in a relationship with others and waiting to get married or they like have no one. Yes.

Firdaus: Okay so you view single people to be free and uncommitted right? Is that like a good thing or like bad for you?

Safwah: Haha, for me it is like a good thing la because they are free to do anything they want without being controlled. Like if I have a partner, I will need to give them attention or update them whenever like that. Marriage is also um hard because I would need to be fully committed to my husband.

Firdaus: Okay that is understandable ya. So like right now do you consider marriage as an option for the future?

Safwah: I don't know actually. I don't think about marriage often because I have other things to do. But maybe when I am ready?

Firdaus: Can you elaborate more on the other things that you need to do?

Safwah: Like I am busy with my job and clients right so I don't think I can commit yet. I also have my duty as a daughter to take care of my father who is currently sick.

Firdaus: So, like external things la mostly that is causing you to not think about it.

Safwah: Yeah, even if I would like to get married, I would find someone who is like "*setaraf*" like that.

Firdaus: Oh okay. You also mentioned that you might marry when you are ready right? Can you tell me what do you mean by ready?

Participant 2

Nurul: Hm maybe? I am not sure if can find someone now.

Firdaus: Is there any reason for that?

Nurul: Because now I just want to enjoy by myself and friends? I can go anywhere I want at anytime to *lepak-lepak* you know. If I have someone maybe they control me.

Firdaus: Are there any other factors besides those by the way?

Nurul: Maybe also I only started working before so I want to focus on making money first. I think if I have promotion or more money I can consider.

Firdaus: Okay then, moving on I can assume that you are voluntarily single right now *la kan* and not in a romantic relationship?

Nurul: Yes.

Firdaus: Also, what is your family's perception on your single status?

Nurul: They say it is normal but sometimes they ask if I found someone.

Firdaus: Oh, do they ever like complain or compare you with anyone else?

Nurul: Sometimes. I have 2 older siblings that married already so they would say *kakak dah kawin bila kitak nak kawin gik*.

Firdaus: Personally, how does these comparison or things they say make you feel?

Nurul: Usually I don't care *la* but sometimes I feel not enough to make them happy.

Firdaus: Hm that is understandable *ya*. Do they even make you feel that you are going against their wishes or culture?

Nurul: Maybe? My sibling all girls so I think they expect all of us to marry already. My parents a bit traditional also since they old so I think its understandable also.

Firdaus: Would you consider yourself traditional like them also?

Nurul: No ahaha they said I culture shock and too modern.

Participant 3

Firdaus: Okay what about others? Like friends or relatives that you know?

Aida: Hm I wouldn't say friend *la* but I heard someone from office say I am not pretty enough because I keep changing partner and no one take me serious to marry even though usually I'm the one always leaving ahaha. Even sometimes they would say that I am just a trial pack for people to come and go.

Firdaus: Ah that's a bit harsh to be honest. Have you ever heard of anyone saying something else about like older women or like women who are working not marrying yet?

Aida: Yeah I seen some people like to compare us like *bug dara tua* kind of thing or even to like ugly so no one want.

Firdaus: These comparison are a bit harsh *la* from my perspective. So like personally how does these comments make you feel?

Aida: Sometimes I don't care *la* since I am not looking for marriage but like I feel attacked also? If they say I am ugly until no one wants me it feels hurtful you know even though to me marriage is not an option I am scared that people see me as unwanted and like it makes me feel lonely.

Firdaus: What do you think about others who are single but looking for marriage?

Aida: I think they would be more hurt because us women are like sensitive to critic especially if they say we ugly or not enough confirm *nangis* like I can imagine feeling heartbroken being called extras that others can just throw away.

Firdaus: Yeah anyone would be feel hurt if someone say that to them which is sad. Would you say that the stigmatization that comes from Malay culture to single individuals are like too much?

Aida: Hm I don't know if its too much because I already used to it now and like other people also but for me saying something like that to people you don't know is like dumb also because its not like you know what they are going through.

Participant 4

Syahin: Maybe but you never know what Allah has for me right so I stay hopeful.

Firdaus: Okay, if that's the case what is your perception of others who are also going through singlehood d?

Syahin: Um like their condition?

Firdaus: Hm yes and like what do you think about them?

Syahin: Hm maybe they also want to focus on themselves or maybe they are just waiting to get married also.

Firdaus: Would you say there are others who have similar experience to you?

Syahin: Hm maybe? Maybe there are girls who are struggling more because they have family problem or they not looking to marry at all.

Firdaus: Do you think it's a good idea for some to not look forward to marry?

Syahin: I am not sure also because different people they have different goals.

Firdaus: Okay um I will be moving into on a question that relate to Malay culture and singlehood okay.

Syahin: Oh ok.

Firdaus: Okay so do you think your culture stigmatize your singlehood status? Like do they view it negatively or say anything negative especially when you are older?

Syahin: Ah um yes.

Firdaus: Can you tell me your experience or like elaborate more?

Syahin: Sometimes um my mom would always ask when I am getting married and like um say "why did you reject him before, look at him now he already have a child and they happy already".

Firdaus: Is she referring to the person you rejected?

Participant 5

Emma: Yes ahaha but you know I need to find it fast because I don't want to marry too late.

Firdaus: Would you say that it is difficult finding men around your age or the one that is *sekufu* with you?

Emma: Hm maybe a little bit *la* but not impossible. But if I like keep not finding or wait longer then maybe become harder.

Firdaus: Is there any reason for it to be harder?

Emma: Well most men above 30 are usually married already and even if they are not I think they would prefer younger women you know because they a lot prettier. I also feel like the older the woman is the less attractive they get you know and like their health for carrying babies also decline when they older.

Firdaus: Ahh that is understandable. Then if that's the case right since you are also working right now, would you say that your career also hinders you from getting married or also finding a partner?

Emma: Hm I don't know actually because I never think about that.

Firdaus: Ah if that's the case then would you say that you are extremely busy and committed to you job to the point that you don't have any time to deal with relationships at time? Like you are so stressed out that you just don't want to add more commitment kind of thing/

Emma: Hm I feel like everyone would feel that but personally maybe at time I do? I work to consult company's client at time so sometimes I would need to travel also so I guess maybe no time to like have that much fun. But it never occurred during any serious relationship *la* so I don't know if it affect. But if it happens I think *ya kot* because I no have time to check phone and even at night I would be tired so just straight away sleep haha.

Firdaus: Hm okay that is good to know. So I would like to ask about your perception of others that are also single. Like what do you think their lifestyle would be or like would you say they are enjoying it right now?

Emma: Oh um like I said before they are probably less committed and like they focusing on different thing.

Participant 6

Firdaus: Can you explain more regarding the um how to say like what are the signs for when you are ready? Do you understand what I am saying

Nur: Oh okay don't worry I understand, for me like when I am ready to get more commitment like commitment in probably taking care of a child and like to take care of husband and do duty as a wife.

Firdaus: Ah okay I understand. So like right now are you single or in any romantic relationship?

Nur: Right now I not in any relationship.

Firdaus: Okay, I will be moving into the section which covers factors and causes of singlehood right now. So like you said before you are single right? Are there any explanation for your single status?

Nur: What do you mean?

Firdaus: Oh um like uh are you still searching for someone or are you focusing on like work like that?

Nur: Oh okay-okay right now I am just still searching *la* like going through Tinder or Bumble to look for someone that suits my preference.

Firdaus: Ah that is understandable using dating apps which is quite convenient nowadays. So like based on your experience with using those apps right, is it hard to find someone or the one?

Nur: Ahaha I guess a bit hard also because the people sometimes are like catfishing using someone else's photo or like they only there to hook up for sex which is annoying.

Firdaus: Ah the people who misuse the app. Then if that's the case would you say that you are choosy when it comes to getting a partner?

Nur: Choosy not really *la* its mostly just um I want to find someone who is stable also like I don't want to be the sole provider like that. But it would be nice to have someone tall and goodlooking ahaha.

Participant 7

Raza: I feel like I still want to explore the world on my own first and have fun before having a family or maybe a child like that.

Firdaus: So marriage for you would be like an obstacle for freedom to have fun and enjoy?

Raza: For me like if I have a family we would need to focus more on like building it? Like find a better home and *jaga anak* if I were to give birth *kan* so for me its like a bit hard. I know I can still enjoy but its not same as with friends? I don't know how to explain ahaha.

Firdaus: Oh I see. Also before this you say that you weren't ready to marry or settle down like that right so can you also elaborate more on what you see as being ready for you?

Raza: Hm for me being ready is like when I feel satisfied? Like when I feel like I am ready to move on from being single and committed *la*. When I have enough money also because I don't want to build family that um struggle everyday.

Firdaus: Okay that is understandable. So in order for you to marry you would like need a strong foundation and support for yourself?

Raza: *Ya* something like that, because growing up like my family isn't rich so I don't want to raise a child the same way I did. But only if I marry *la* because right now I feel stable with money so I can enjoy.

Firdaus: Okay. So I will be moving into the next section which we will be talking about factors and causes of singlehood okay.

Raza: Alright.

Participant 8

Khaliyah: Hm I guess so because sometime I am very busy and I don't have time to just go look for someone. For reputation maybe also? Because lesbian relationship isn't look good here so I am scared to lose my job also in case someone find out.

Firdaus: Okay then that's understandable. So what is your perception of others who are single? For both straight and gay um individual?

Khaliyah: I think maybe they also like me like they find it hard to find someone also probably because they busy or they don't have much option. They also probably struggle mentally if they feel very lonely right so um maybe sometimes bad to be single for too long.

Firdaus: Okay then so I will be going into the next question about culture. So do you think that your culture stigmatize your single status?

Khaliyah: I guess maybe? From my experience I feel like being single is often look bad when being older because in my culture women are supposed to marry a man and usually it happens early. But for my case I don't like men so I feel even more looked down for that.

Firdaus: Is there any instance where you are given negative comments or even treated badly because you are single?

Khaliyah: Hm my parents would usually say that being a lesbian is *haram* and that I am miserable and always sad. Even my dad sometimes would just be angry at me for not finding a man to settle down with after knowing my previous relationships.

Firdaus: It is unfortunate. What about other people maybe like friends or even random people?

Khaliyah: Hm sometimes I see on the Facebook page that the men would always be rude to women who are single saying they are ugly or even too choosy to settle down.