

A survey of lasting marriages among husbands and wives in Malaysia

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Abstract

Recent statistics have shown the increasing trend of divorce cases among Malay Muslims in Malaysia. Past research has focused on marriage satisfaction and the quality of the relationship in marriages. However, there is limited research on the factors that contribute significantly to a long-lasting marriage, particularly among the Malay Muslim community. This paper aims to share the initial findings to explore the strength of relationships in a lasting marriage among Muslim Malay couples in Malaysia. This paper adopts a qualitative approach. The study conducts an extensive literature review to find out some of the causes of divorce and factors that improve a long marriage. The findings indicate that three main considerations in the choice of a spouse are religion, responsible character good mannerisms and race. Age, looks and job are the least considered factors that account for the sustenance of marriage.

Keywords: Counselling; lasting marriage; love marriage; personality.

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1. Introduction

Marriage is a life partnership between two human individuals that results from a bond of love and affection either voluntarily or by being met by others. Referring to the general definition, marriage is a legal union between a man and a woman as a married couple (Zainol, Johar, Rosman, Khan, & Mahmud, 2022). From an Islamic perspective, marriage refers to an agreement to unite a man and a woman to legalise sexual relations, intending to achieve lasting happiness according to the guidelines set by the Shariah law. Islam also emphasises the factor of continuation of halal offspring as the main purpose of marriage.

Research shows that the relationship between husband and wife in marriage can be measured through the quality of marriage which is also influenced by the interaction and communication process of married couples (Rozumah, Siti, Abdullah, Maznah, & Aida, 1999). The interaction between couples has implications for the happiness and harmony of the household, which can lead to the well-being of a family institution (Rozumah et al., 1999). In other words, good marital communication and low marital conflict will improve the quality of marriage between couples. This situation indirectly strengthens and brings closer the relationship between husband and wife. A good couple relationship will certainly strengthen the foundation of the family that will be led. Therefore, ineffective interaction and communication processes are often linked to divorce issues among married couples in Malaysia.

Many studies have shown that married couples today are less satisfied with their marriage than in years past. According to Abreu-Afonso, Ramos, Queiroz-Garcia, and Leal (2022), there are three levels of satisfaction in marriage, namely satisfaction with the partner, satisfaction with family life and life satisfaction.

2. Results

2.1. Quality marriage

The quality of marriage is very important in increasing the integrity of the family institution. Pietromonaco and Overall (2021) found that the cause of family problems arises when married couples do not have an understanding and do not communicate effectively. Several studies have focused on and taken into account the level of satisfaction in marriage, which according to studies (Nadolu, Runcan, & Bahnaru, 2020) examines stability factors in marital satisfaction, equity factors and marital satisfaction.

Couples who fulfil each other's needs usually certify that their marriage is of good quality. The needs between husband and wife are psychological (love, warmth, recognition and strengthening of roles), social (friendship, friends and new experiences), physical and psychic sexual needs, and material needs, such as housing, food, clothing and services also need to be met to ensure the well-being of the marriage. As a result of the study by Hart (2018), researchers predict that only 25% of the couples will remain happy after 10 years of marriage. Couples express satisfaction with each other's contributions in their marriage bond where the expectations of marriage are met with mutual needs. There are many studies identifying the characteristics that make a marriage quality. Most of the background factors as motivating factors for couples improve the quality of marriage.

In addition, the study of Rice (1999) examined the findings of previous studies and classified factors related to the quality of marriage into 12 characteristics, namely i) commitment; ii) recognition, mutual respect and honesty; iii) responsibility; iv) adaptation, tolerance and tolerance; v) selflessness; vi) communication; vii) empathy and sensitivity; viii) love and warmth; ix) life companion; x) ability to manage crisis; xi) conflict and stress; and xii) religious values.

So, every couple who always wants the quality of the marriage includes various factors that are decisive for the stability of the marriage, expectations, meeting each other's needs and marital satisfaction.

2.2. Factors contributing to maintaining the marriage relationship of husbands and wives

The literature study shows that eight factors contribute to the maintenance of marital relationships between a husband and wife. The factors affecting it are as follows:

- i. Roles and responsibilities
- ii. Love and trust
- iii. Personality
- iv. Career
- v. Socio-economics/finance
- vi. Communication
- vii. Sexuality
- viii. Religion

2.2.1. Roles and responsibilities

Justice in fulfilling responsibilities and roles inside and outside the home by the couple and family members is an important element in a successful marriage. Couples who often respect each other and apply good values in themselves can create an attitude of cooperation between each other. The commitment that is highlighted between couples can make joint decisions better and often cooperate in providing ideas that can help each other and can create a sense of responsibility in marriage (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022).

Many studies are showing the cause and effect of being responsible for maintaining a marriage (Hart, 2018). However, there are too few studies that describe how responsibility can affect the maintenance of a marriage. This is because of the lack of clinical and scientific observational studies that have indirectly also hindered clinical and empirical research in marriage. In a marriage, the husband will try to earn a living while the wife will take care of household affairs. A happy and peaceful household will be built as a result of the combination of the bravery of a husband and the tenderness of a wife. A happy household will not exist if only the husband is brave or if the wife is only gentle.

Researchers such as Ningrum and Mas'udah (2021) explain that in the traditional family model the husband acts as the breadwinner, while the wife acts as the household manager. However, this role does not disappear, but more and more women decide to leave the family and work even though they are married. Some women go out to work because of economic pressure to help their husbands in developing the family economy together. The research also found that a husband's income that is always positive can maintain the quality of the marriage relationship. This study is in line with the traditional history of the Malay community in terms of leadership, management and family economics under the responsibility of the husband. Therefore, the role and responsibility of the husband as the breadwinner to support the family should be enhanced so that the marriage can be maintained.

2.2.2. Love and trust

A happy marriage is decorated with physical and verbal expressions of love and trust. The unique need for this way of expressing love is different from individual to individual. Based on the study by Huston, McHale, and Crouter (2021), it was found that the euphoric love experience (romantic love) experienced by most newly married couples will change to a more committed love experience (best

friend love) after marriage. This is because an individual who is married may perceive himself to be experiencing a decline in love. As a result, the decline in love experienced by married couples will result in unhappiness in the marriage, which will ultimately have a negative effect and will also affect the individual's well-being.

Various factors contribute to the selection of a partner. In general, this individual may choose a partner because of feelings of love. The results of the study show that the meaning of love has been given more specifically when compared to the meaning of love given by the love triangle theory (Sternberg, 1986), which is that intimacy is generally defined as a feeling that includes 'feelings of closeness, interconnectedness and connection', sensuality consisting of 'romantic, physical attraction and having sex' and commitment, which is defined as 'a short-term decision in which the individual decides whether he loves the partner and a long-term decision whether he wants to maintain the love relationship he has experienced'.

2.2.3. Personality

The appearance of the candidate is an important but not critical aspect in the selection of a partner. Individuals will choose candidates who are equal or better in terms of appearance. Compatibility of personality, interests and values acts as a network in the selection of a partner. Many studies have shown that the similarity of personality between couples refers to the factors of intelligence, education, values, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status and physical attractiveness that can provide satisfaction in a relationship (Chelladurai, 2020; Uzunboylu & Altay, 2021).

Foon (2007) conducted a study on the relationship between self-esteem and marital relationships among nurses at Kuching General Hospital, Sarawak. This study also looked at the relationship between self-esteem and elements of marital relationships, namely communication, role achievement and task achievement, including the relationship between selected demographic factors, namely gender and length of the marriage. This study involved 82 nurses. The results show that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and marital relationships. Only selected demographic factors, such as gender and length of marriage, have a significant relationship with self-esteem.

In Bleidorn, Schwaba, Denissen, and Hopwood's (2021) study, it was found that there is a significant relationship between marriage and self-esteem. The results show that a person's confidence in performing daily tasks is also influenced by marital relationship factors. Therefore, they have suggested that those who want to maintain the marriage relationship by designing some related activities or programmes such as involving the entire family members of military personnel to foster more sense of belonging and tolerance because the couple has learned a little about the responsibilities of their spouse. Therefore, many studies in the field of psychology have explained that married couples who can understand and adapt to each other's personalities can maintain their marriage. This is because the influence of personality can be a strong influence on the positive feelings of each couple.

2.2.4. Career

Career is an important element in maintaining a marriage. In the past in a married couple only the husband worked, but nowadays many husbands and wives' work. Career conflict often occurs in a marriage when the husband and wife cannot balance their career focus with their role in their marriage. It often happens that one of the spouses perceives their job as very important and considers their spouse's career to be less important. This situation will happen so it often causes misunderstandings when one of the spouses has a career that can provide profit and internal satisfaction for a long time. It also often happens when couples continue to pursue their dreams and hopes in the career field (Akkaya, Burcu, & Metin, 2021; Nadolu et al., 2020).

According to Hart (2018), many women who choose to have a family will experience a decline in career achievement. This is because they do not take their work seriously, and do not add knowledge and skills to their career. Many young people believe that they must be completely financially independent and ready to get married. Most people think that marriage is something that happens automatically and comes with career achievements and financial stability. For them, delaying a relationship with a partner is not a factor in having strong finances and achieving career success. But it is something that needs to be learned to reach the professional level of one's career.

2.2.5. Socio-economics/finance

Marital well-being is also important when the institution acts as a catalyst for the quality of human capital produced. However, socio-economic disadvantage risks hurt the dynamics of marriage and the quality of parenting. The implication is what is the shape of the young generation brought up in the family? Can they become useful members of society and have good human capital for the country? (Omar, 2008; Soucy, 2022).

Marriage preparation includes spiritual, physical, sociocultural, socio-emotional and socio-economic aspects. Socio-economics is one of the factors that will affect the maintenance of marriage. Based on a study conducted by Abdullah and Hussin (2014) entitled Marriage and Divorce among the Malays in Terengganu between the 1950s–1970s, it has been clearly shown that the issues that occurred in the marriage and divorce affairs of the Terengganu Malay community around the 1950s–1970s were greatly influenced by the social and economic factors that exist in the society. These two factors have a big role not only in shaping the marriage rate but also in influencing the stability of a household. Couples need to prepare from the socio-economic aspect by providing physical facilities such as a place to live and financial security to support the family. The maintenance of the relationship between the couple will exist with the cooperative attitude between the couple, as well as support for the couple and financial stability in the family is also the most important factor in a marriage.

Zaimah et al. (2012) conducted research to determine the pattern of manufacturing decisions and financial family dual careers in Malaysia. A total of 84 respondents were involved in this survey. Three patterns of making a financial decision was highlighted in the findings, that is manufacturing decision by the husband, making a decision by the wife and making a financial decision by the husband and wife. The results of the study also found manufacturing decision finances by the husband involves expenses high and commitment high. Manufacturing the decision by the wife is more directed to expenses needs family, while manufacturing decision by husband and wife is inclined to related decisions by needs children.

Omar (2008) conducted a study on 420 women (mothers) from a low socio-economic background. The study aimed to identify the impact of socio-economics on the dynamics of marriage and the quality of parenting among Malay women. The results of the study show that socio-economic disadvantage has a significant impact on the dynamics of marriage and parenting. Poor socio-economic respondents have a low quality of marriage and parenting. This is because families with a low socio-economic status focus their daily activities on things that can bring and increase the family's income. So, when women (wives) focus more on working to generate income, efforts to build physical and emotional relationships will be neglected. Therefore, socio-economic or financial factors need to be improved by men (husbands) so that women (wives) have space and time to carry out activities capable of maintaining the marriage relationship.

2.2.6. Communication

Effective communication can help in conversations between couples where unrewarding issues are avoided or not discussed (Abdullahi, 2020; Beneteau et al., 2019). This is very important in the process of allowing couples to create a safe space to communicate on social media. In the context of marriage, communication involves the exchange of information that takes place in a friendly, polite and respectful manner. Intonation and the type of words used, facial expressions, body posture, physical distance and touch in communication between couples. Sometimes couples have a unique, specific and personal communication code to be understood only by them.

The study of Supramaniam and Singaravelloo (2021) has proposed a model of effective communication involving emotional levels and how to respond positively or diplomatically. A study by Ariffin (2013), titled *Persuasion Strategy in Marriage: Perceptions and Experiences of Malay Men in the Context of Interpersonal Communication in Marriage*, found that of the eight informants interviewed, four of them were the dominant husbands in the family. Meanwhile, the other four consist of husbands who practice tolerance with their respective wives. The findings of this study show that husbands do not express love through words and do not express love through actions. In this study, the study participants also admitted that giving gifts, remembering birthdays and wedding anniversary gifts and going out together can make their marriage better.

2.2.7. Sexuality

Satisfying sexual satisfaction is the most important and complex aspect of an intimate relationship. Li and Fung (2011) state that marriage has many aspects that can be seen, such as communication aspects, parenting aspects and others, but sexual relations also have various ways when they exist in improving sexual relations or they can also be an obstacle to in satisfaction marriage. Sexual satisfaction can be seen as a benefit in marriage but the level of importance and the extent to which the level of satisfaction is levelled by age and gender is unknown.

In the history of human civilisation, the bond between a man and a woman is burdened through marriage and Islam permits sexual relations between men and women after marriage (Elci & Kuloglu, 2019; Zolfaghari, Moradi, Ahmadian, & Shams Alizadeh, 2021). Through marriage, sex between a man and a woman can be done without any restrictions except for things that are forbidden in Islam, such as fornication and sex when the woman is menstruating, both of which are harmful to health. So, the sexual relationship becomes a strong bond in addition to strengthening the relationship between the two of them.

Sexual intimacy is very important in a household and for us humans this relationship of sexuality gives many benefits (Rad & Ferdosipour, 2020; Zolfaghari et al., 2021). Studies show that couples who are married and enjoy a stimulating sexual relationship have a longer life expectancy than those who are not married. Sexual relations in marriage are more committed than sexual relations outside of marriage. Sex in marriage brings happiness to both partners, increases health and strength from illness, prevents stress and infectious diseases that are commonly associated with promiscuous sex, sexual intimacy promotes the blood of the body, relieves stress, relieves the body and makes it easier for both – two couples sleep and strengthen the ‘bonding’ or bond of friendship between couples.

2.2.8. Religion

Researchers in the west in studies since the 1970s purport that religion or religiosity is often described as a dimension of a healthy marriage and the function of a family (Asayesh, Hoseinzei, & Golpasha, 2021; Lakatos & Martos, 2019). Religion and behaviour are usually described in terms of attending church, praying, reading scriptures and trying to live a moral life. However, religion is an

interaction in marriage and family life such as communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, commitment, sexuality and parenting.

Studies show that husband and wife with a high marital satisfaction score have a high intrinsic level of religious motivation or maturity in religion. A low score indicates that marital satisfaction is associated with extrinsic religious motivation or the use of religion for social purposes. The spiritual well-being scale was used to assess the relationship with God, religious well-being and the direction of life and the purpose of existence of well-being, while the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to measure marital satisfaction. In general, wives show a stronger relationship between overall spiritual well-being and marital adjustment while husbands have the strongest relationship between marital adjustment and the existence of well-being. Significant differences at the life cycle stage (Sundararajan et al., 2019; Torfi Amidpour, Charkhabi, Hayati, & Paola, 2021). The strong relationship in spiritual well-being and marital adjustment for married wives is from the age of 10 to 19 years and for married husbands is from the age of 20 to 29 years.

Religiosity was measured and marital satisfaction was found between the wife's satisfaction and agreement on the importance of religious beliefs in their lives by visiting the church. Religion is a positive influence and makes married couples more tolerant, helping them to be more assertive, loving, forgiving, respectful and flexible. Religiosity operates indirectly to the satisfaction relationship through the intervening variable of emotional intimacy (Boz, 2018; Sundararajan et al., 2019).

3. Conclusion

Several studies have shown that couples today report lower levels of satisfaction with their marriages than they did in the past. Commitment, recognition of mutual respect and honesty, responsibility, adaptation to each other's personality, tolerance, selflessness, communication, empathy and sensitivity, love and warmth, ability to manage a crisis, conflict, stress and religious values are some of the factors that influence marriage. For a marriage to succeed, both parties must fulfil their responsibilities inside and outside the home.

In marriages where love has waned, unhappiness results, which negatively affects the well-being of the couple. It has been shown in psychology studies that couples who can understand and adapt to each other's personalities can keep their marriages. Careers also play a key role in maintaining marriages. The social and economic factors should be improved by husbands for wives to be able to maintain a marriage relationship. Marriage and family life involve communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, commitment, sexuality and parenting.

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