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## **ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY OF LIFE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MALAYSIAN MARRIED COUPLES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The increase of living cost due to rapid global economic changes forced husband and wife go out to work and spent less time for families, consequently cause the decline in marital happiness and quality of life. This paper investigates factors that influence couples' marital satisfaction on their quality of life. A total of 603 married couples participated in this study by completing the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) and Quality of Life instruments. The results found that age, gender, duration of marriage, family income, number of children contributed to marital dissatisfaction and low quality of life. Multivariate analysis revealed that the increase in marital quality will lead to decrease in QOL. The implication of this study suggested that all stake holders and government agency should focus on the policy to improving quality of life and happiness.

**Keywords:** Marital satisfaction, Quality of life, Psychological well-being

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last two decades, the number of dual-career couples continues to rise. Two sources of family income is now become necessary to face with higher living cost. Two income would provide greater economic stability and greater protection against financial problems, relieve husbands from the heavy responsibility of being so leprovider for the family, and provide wives with satisfaction from work outside of the home. However, conflict over work-family demands may impact both satisfaction withone's career as well as happiness with one's marital role. Study showed that 83% of working mothers and 72% of working fathers reported experiencing conflict between their job demands and their desire to spend more time with their families (Galinsky, Johnson & Friedman, 1993).

It is the fact that work-family balance is one of the major challenges facing employees and employers living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Grzywacz, J.G., & Bass, 2003). Conflict between work and family responsibilities has been related to in adequate performance in the workplace (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997), poor mental health (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003), family function (Coltrane, 2000), burnout (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991), decreased family and occupational well-being (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), and dissatisfaction with employment and life (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996). Marital dissatisfaction can affect individual well being usually exhibited through an individual's higher levels of depression and distress (Himsel & Goldberg, 2003).

In Malaysian the structure of a family has gradually changed due to rapid global economic changes and the increase of living standards. Majority of wives are working and dedicate a large amount of time to their work, thus spend less time for families. Work-family conflict start to develops when the demands of one domain conflicts with the demands of another. When women began to share the provide role by moving into the paid work of the market place, men were forced by necessity to assume more responsibility for the work of the family. In turn, this roles shift created the necessity for balance between workplace demands and family demands. Conflict between the demands of work and family was an inevitable result as both men and women struggled to fulfill the responsibilities of these two, often-competing roles. This phenomenon indirectly brought about an increasing number of divorce cases and low marital quality. According to Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) statistics of divorce cases among Muslims couple increased significantly. For example in the year 2000 divorce cases were reported at much as 13,605 cases however in 2008 the cases increased 80% to (22,289 cases). There are many factors that contribute to this situations, one of the factor is marital dissatisfaction.

In the literature of marriage, marital quality has been research extensively, however not much studies focusing on the relationship between marital satisfaction and quality of life and well-being of the couples. Study by Easterlin (2003) on individual happiness of female samples aged between 18-19 and 28-29, found that marriage (and remarriage) has a positive and lasting consequence on happiness and marital dissolution. Most women and men who have not married by the age of 18-19 years old recorded a mean happiness of around 2.1. Over the next ten years, as about 50% or more of the cohort becomes married, they reported an increased mean happiness of around 2.2 to 2.3, while mean of happiness among those who have never married remained at about 2.1. Proulx et al., (2007) conducted a meta-analysis examining 93 studies of marital quality and individual well-being. They found that marital quality and psychological well-being were related positively with greater individual well-being. Hollist et al., (2007) in the study involved 99 Brazilian women found that marital dissatisfaction was a strong predictor of depression and also related to co-occurring depression among Brazilian women. Dush et al. (2008) found that marital happiness was associated with subsequent changes in both life happiness and depressive symptoms. All respondents experienced a decrease in life happiness between certain times in their marriage, but respondents in the high marital happiness experienced the smallest decline in depression.

Based on the past literature, it is still unclear to what extent age, marriage duration, number of children and monthly income affect marital satisfaction as well as their quality of life. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between marital satisfactions and quality of life of Malaysian couples. It is also to determine the effects of socio-demographic variables and marital satisfaction on their quality of life.

## **METHOD**

### **Data Collection and Sample**

The data of this study was extracted from a larger survey on well-being of Malaysian. Data collection was conducted between November 2010-April 2011 involving 603 samples of married couples covering four main zones of Peninsular Malaysia (North, South, Central and East Coast). A purposive sampling technique was utilized to identify the respondents who met two criteria namely married and residing in Malaysia. Selected respondents were interviewed face-to-face at their convenient time using standardized questionnaire.

## Measures

In this study the ENRICH (Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication, and Happiness) Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) and the Quality of Life Instrument(QOL)wereused.These standardized instruments were translated into Malay language and validated by professional translator (using back to back translation) and then verified by two professional psychologists.

The *ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS)* is a brief measure of marital quality for married adults developed by Fowers& Olson (1993).This instrument covers several aspects of relationshipincluding communication, conflict resolution, roles, financial concerns, leisure time, sexual relationship, parenting, family and friends as well as religion. It may assessed by obtain dyadic and individual scores. It consisted of 10 items measure 10 domains of marital quality and the remaining 5 items constitute a marital conventionalization scale to correct for the tendency to endorse unrealistically positive descriptions of the marriage. Another measure the *Self-rated Health, Wellness and Quality of Life Instrument (QOL)* is an instrument that assesses the impact of care on health and wellness (Woodruff and Conway, 1992). There are five domains (subscales) assessing different domains of quality of life: physical, emotion, stress, life enjoyment and overall quality of life.

## RESULTS

The average age of the respondent was 40 years (Mean=40.4, SD=1.8 years), with ranging from 18 to 83 years. Majority of participants were female (55.8%) and Malay (81.6%). The average marriage duration is 15 years and majority has 2-3 children (Mean=2.73). Their average monthly income is RM1747 (USD=600 per-month) and average monthly income of their spouse is RM1512 (USD=560 per-month).

Participants' response on the ENRICH EMS and QOL instrument was analyzed using frequency distributions and measures of central tendency. Results of reliability test of all measures are presented in Table 1. Each of the scale indicates good reliability coefficients. Results demonstrated that overall respondents scored moderate level on marital satisfaction (39.61), scored high on idealistic distortion (Mean=19.61). Mean score of four QOL domains (physical, stress, emotion and life enjoyment) also reported at the moderate level.

Table 1.Summary of Descriptive Analyses of Study Variables

Measure	Mean	SD	Possible Range	Observed Range	Cronbach Alpha
Enrich Distortion Scale	19.61	3.335	5-25	6-25	0.733
Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale	39.61	6.355	10-50	16-50	0.842
Physical QOL	21.7061	5.43248	10-50	10-43	0.819

Emotion QOL	22.4936	6.39321	10-50	10-45	0.876
Stress QOL	23.6129	7.02240	10-50	10-50	0.891
Life Enjoyment QOL	42.6196	6.93824	11-55	19-60	0.876
Overall QOL	74.7416	13.20980	14-98	21-98	0.947

### Relationship between Marital satisfaction and Quality of life:

A Person Correlation analysis was performed to test the hypothesis of correlation between marital satisfaction scales and QOL subscales. The results of matrix correlation of all variables are presented in Table 2. Variables age, marriage duration, number of children and monthly income showed no significant correlation with marital satisfaction.

However a significant positive correlation was found between marital satisfaction and quality of life ( $r=.48, p<0.1$ ). A significant positive correlation were also found between QOL subscales; emotional ( $r=.36, p<0.01$ ), stress ( $r=.40, p<0.01$ ) and enjoyment ( $r=.28, p<0.01$ ).

Table 2. Matrix Correlation of Study Variables

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
(1) Age	.853* *	.575* *	-.032	.073	-.053	.108* *	- .085*	.048	-.071	-.039
(2) Marriage Duration	-	.624* *	.090*	.016	-.023	- .092*	.116* *	.017	-.072	-.042
(3) Number of Children	-	-	.003	.047	- .094*	.107* *	.111* *	.046	-.057	-.032
(4) Monthly income	-	-	-	.011	.021	.054	.038	.027	.005	-.005
(5) Physical QOL	-	-	-	-	.658* *	.423* *	- .196* *	- .397**	- .254**	- .363**
(6) Emotion QOL	-	-	-	-	-	.498* *	- .253* *	- .406**	- .269**	- .400**
(7) Stress QOL	-	-	-	-	-	-	.126* *	- .329**	- .206**	- .278**
(8) Enjoyment QOL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.502**	.472**	.474**
(9) Overall QOL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.566**	.610**
(10) EDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.762**
(11) EMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Summary of Multivariate Tests on the effect of selected variables on QOL

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.562	138.767 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.000	.562
Enrich (marital satisfaction)	Pillai's Trace	.355	59.514 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.000	.355
Age	Pillai's Trace	.015	1.617 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.154	.015
Number of Children	Pillai's Trace	.036	4.022 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.001	.036
Monthly Income	Pillai's Trace	.032	3.517 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.004	.032
Marriage Duration	Pillai's Trace	.010	1.040 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.393	.010
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.027	2.973 <sup>a</sup>	5.000	540.000	.012	.027
Ethnic	Pillai's Trace	.083	3.087	15.000	1626.000	.000	.028
Place of Living	Pillai's Trace	.019	.674	15.000	1626.000	.813	.006
Gender * Ethnic	Pillai's Trace	.014	.785	10.000	1082.000	.644	.007
Gender * Place of Living	Pillai's Trace	.035	1.952	10.000	1082.000	.035	.018
Ethnic * Place of Living	Pillai's Trace	.053	1.166	25.000	2720.000	.259	.011
Gender * Ethnic * Place of Living	Pillai's Trace	.047	1.299	20.000	2172.000	.168	.012

Further analysis was carried out in order to examine the effect of the above variables on quality of life. Multivariate analysis (GLM procedure) was performed and the results of multivariate analysis are presented in Table 3. The results discovered significant effect of marital satisfaction ( $F(5, 540) = 59.514, p < 0.001$ ), number of children ( $F(5, 540) = 4.022, p < 0.05$ ), monthly income ( $F(5, 540) = 3.517, p < 0.01$ ), gender ( $F(5, 540) = 2.973, p < 0.01$ ) and significant interaction between gender and place of living on quality of life ( $F(10, 1082) = 1.952, p < 0.05$ ).

The *Test of Between-Subject* for each dependent variable showed that Enrich Marital Satisfaction was significantly associated to all domains of Quality of Life; physical ( $F(1,544) = 58.36, p < 0.001$ ), emotion ( $F(1,544) = 105.19, p < 0.001$ ), stress ( $F(1,544) = 33.02, p < 0.001$ ), life enjoyment ( $F(1,584) = 112.13, p < 0.001$ ) and overall QOL ( $F(1,544) = 255.13, p < 0.001$ ). Number of children was also significantly associated to all QOL domains; physical ( $F(1,544) = 1.25, p < 0.01$ ), emotion ( $F(1,544) = 9.49, p < 0.01$ ), stress ( $F(1,544) = .74, p < 0.01$ ), life enjoyment ( $F(1,544) = 4.63, p < 0.01$ ), and overall ( $F(1,544) = 1.67, p < 0.01$ ).

Another covariate that are significantly associated to all domains of QOL are monthly income and physical ( $F(1,544) = 0.99, p < 0.01$ ), emotion ( $F(1,544) = 3.12, p < 0.01$ ), stress

( $F(1,544)=3.29, p<0.01$ ), life enjoyment ( $F(1,544)=8.45, p<0.01$ ), and overall. ( $F(1,544)=4.15, p<0.01$ ). Gender also significantly associated to all domains of quality of life; physical ( $F(1,544)=3.26, p<0.01$ ), emotion ( $F(1,544)=0.86, p<0.01$ ), stress ( $F(1,544)=0.16, p<0.01$ ), life enjoyment ( $F(1,544)=9.67, p<0.01$ ), and overall. ( $F(1,544)=2.81, p<0.01$ ). The interaction between gender and place of living was also significantly associated to all domains of quality of life; physical ( $F(1,544)=0.024, p<0.01$ ), emotion ( $F(1,544)=3.05, p<0.01$ ), stress ( $F(1,544)=1.45, p<0.01$ ), life enjoyment ( $F(1,544)=0.98, p<0.01$ ), and overall ( $F(1,544)=0.39, p<0.01$ ).

*Parameter Estimates* on the relationship between EMS and each domain of QOL revealed negative association for physical domain ( $b=-0.281$ ), which means that each 1-point increase in EMS was associated to a 0.281-point decrease in physical domain. A negative effect of EMS on emotion domain of ( $b=-0.436$ ), suggesting that each 1-point increase in EMS was associated to a 0.436-point decrease in emotion domain of QOL. EMS also had a negative effect on stress domain ( $b=-0.280$ ), meaning that each 1-point increase in EMS was associated to a 0.280 point decrease in stress domain.

However the relationship between EMS and life enjoyment domain of QOL were positive ( $b=0.465$ ), suggesting that each 1-point increase in EMS was associated to a 0.465-point increase in life enjoyment QOL. The overall QOL also positively associated to EMS ( $b=1.112$ ), suggesting that each 1-point increase in EMS lead to increase 1.112-point in overall QOL.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study confirmed previous findings concerning the effects of marital satisfaction and quality of life (Menaghan, (1991); Bryant et al., (2008); Proulx, et al., (2007); Hollist at al., (2007); Dush, et al., (2008). Marital satisfaction also found to be significantly associated to all domains of QOL; physical, emotion, stress life enjoyment and overall QOL. Beside marital satisfaction, gender, number of children and monthly income were found to effect on emotional stress and life enjoyment. Number of children was significantly associated only to emotion domain of QOL. Overall, gender, in particular, displayed an interesting pattern of relationships indicating several differences in the correlates of marital satisfaction for Malaysian men and women. Study on gender differences suggests that the lower status and power possessed by women insociety are mirrored in the marital relationship. This differential in power and status may increase women's vulnerability to negative circumstances that affect the marriage, which, in turn, exacerbates the impact of negative circumstances on their marital satisfaction (Menaghan, 1991). This is consistent with previous research on marital distress experience black American (Bryant et al., 2008) and previous findings on the relation between QOL and marital distress (Proulx, et al., (2007), Dush, et al., (2008). The persistence of these relationships was also found across different professional groups including engineer and accountants, as well as across different occupations (Parasuraman, et al., 1989).

Results of parameter estimates of the effects of EMS on each domain of QOL revealed negative relationship for physical, emotion and stress domain. The plausible reasons for this is that having marital problems or marital dissatisfaction not only effecting emotion but also physical health of individuals. There is evidence showed that poorly functioning marriages can negatively impact both the emotional and the physical well-being of couples and their children (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Wife especially, who experienced marital problem are unable to cope-up with stress. Thus, present finding supports the notion that marital dissatisfaction leads to emotional stress (Bryant et al., 2008; Waite & Gallagher, (2000). As the evidence above shows, the negative impact of marital satisfaction, gender differences,

number of children and monthly income on quality of life are very significant in real life. Distress husbands and wives are unable to devote energy to parenting, and that their children's wellbeing should be affected as a result. Result also found the negative impact of monthly income (economy hardship) on individuals QOL. Couple's monthly income may not be a direct result of the original stress but is linked to a mediating effect but disruption of the couple relationship.

This study also found positive effect of marital satisfaction on life enjoyment domain and on overall QOL, suggesting that an increased in marital satisfaction will led to increase individual's life enjoyment and quality of life. The main reason for this positive significant relationship may be due to the fact that enjoyment domain of QOL, as distinct from general quality of life, is conceptualized as those aspects of life quality. Many researchers argued that those who excellent in marital satisfactions are associated with greater well-being and vice verse. Although the study may have some limitations such as the sample may be small and not represent all subgroups in Malaysia, thus generalization of this finding is limited. However, the results also suggest that more research needs to be done on the role of marital satisfaction in promoting quality of life.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Malaysian population generally showed a moderate level of marital satisfaction and quality of life. Couples who have more children tend to report lower marital satisfaction as compared to couples who have one or two children. Individuals who report high marital satisfaction tend to report low in physical and emotional health. This finding may have direct implication for Malaysian families. Throughout the life course, the marital relationship is a critical resource for social and emotional support and confers several financial, legal, and material advantages. For example, the likelihood of living in poverty increases for mothers and children as a result of divorce and economy hardship. Poorly functioning marriages can negatively impact both the emotional and the physical well-being of couples. Ongoing basic and policy research is needed to examine marital relationships and the factors associated with the health and good quality of life of such relationship.

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