



e-Journal of Media & Society

THE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN LATE MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

This research will discuss about the perceptions of women in late marriage in Malaysia. This research was also aimed to study the factors of late marriage that commonly happens nowadays, to identify the effects and challenges faced by those who married late, and to determine on how those who married late deal with their surroundings. This research uses a qualitative method which includes a number of seven respondents that aged among 30 and above which is experiencing or has experienced late marriage. The researchers found that it is quite hard for these women to live in this society as they always get negative perceptions from them. In this study, researchers found that there are women who did not get married because of factors that related to their parents, financial, past life and others. According to the informants, most of them did not get married because of their elderly as they have to take responsibilities to take care of them. Therefore, they have all sort of difficulties such as hard to find the right soulmates, infertilities and so on. Some of them also having hard time in dealing with their surroundings because of the stereotyping among the societies regarding this issue.

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, back when the era of our ancestors, women were expected to get marry early right out of high school or even earlier and begin a family soon after. However, today, women are increasingly exploring other options for themselves which is marriage is no longer the only one. What is the meaning of late marriage or delaying marriage? Late marriage means pushing the age at marriage into the late 20s and higher which is an increasing trend in Malaysia today.

Late marriage topics are always been ignored by many people these days. There are people that thinks there are many other important things and reasons that made to pursue in late marriage which also has the pros and cons for this action. Some researches stated that the later marriages fare very well in survival but rather poorly in quality. The greatest indicated likelihood of being in an intact marriage of the highest quality is among those who married at ages 22–25, net of the estimated effects of time since first marriage and several variables that might commonly affect age at marriage and marital outcomes (Glenn, Robert, Love, 2010).

As we all know, late marriage has a lot of consequences either towards the person itself or to the surrounding. In Malaysia, there is statistics that show that the number of people marry earlier decreases. According to Muhammad (2018), it was stated that in 2017, the number of marriages slightly dropped compared to the previous year. Mohd Uzir (2018) gives a statement that the percent dropped was from 6.3 percent to 5.9 percent. On the other hand, this research also revealed that women have larger amount of late marriage.

There are people who might be scared in having commitments with their life partners which cause them to avoid marriage. It is true that marriage can be very scary sometimes when there are so many divorced cases all around the world. This research is conducted to know the perceptions of women that choose to marry at the age of 28 and above. Although there are so many pros in early marriage, there are women that remain single. Moreover, age is a very important criterion for women, especially for conception. Some researches even thought that delayed age greatly affects the fertility of a woman, reducing the possibility of conception. According to the study of Advanced Fertility Center, Chicago, 1 in every 4 women is infertile by the age of 35. Based on the study, the rate of pregnancy declines gradually in the 30's and is more substantial during the late 30's and 40's. Very few women stay fertile at the age of 45 (Binson, 2014).

In Malaysian aspects, there are three main reasons for why people in Malaysia choose to delay their marriage especially women. According to Abdullah (2016), there are 86.8% people in Malaysia have desire to get married and 31 years old is the mean age to get married. The same researcher also stated that the age of late marriage for women is 33 years old. The three main reasons for Malaysian in choosing to delay their marriage is financial difficulty, no suitable partner, and career advancement. The highest percentage among those three reasons for women is no suitable partner which is 35.7% (Abdullah, 2016).

Quoting data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia, they highlight that there is higher percentage of single women in our country and mostly of these women married after 30. One of the matters is this group of women choose to prioritize their careers and earning more money than having a romantic life. Oppenheimer (1988) also suggests that as women's earnings increase, their desirability as marriage partners may extend across more years of their lives. The situation might have a potential to state that the person's position is one on the highest in the hierarchy of an organization. Then, instead of getting married, they preferred to stay single and have a luxurious life.

Apart from that, there is statement said by early researches that married individuals are healthier and live longer than unmarried ones and this statement was first documented by British epidemiologist William Farr more than 150 years ago that has been established by many studies since then (Guner, Liull, 2018). Therefore, with all the cons of late marriage, their reasons for choosing to delay their marriage sparks the curiosity that need to be entangled.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

As the era changes, most women prefer late marriage because of several reasons that has been stated before. However, other main problems must be solved in order to prevent problems that already occurred today.

Nowadays, women expecting too much in their own love lives stating that if they wait a bit longer, a prince charming will come and fulfil their demands. What made them expect too much is because the power of social media. Edge (2017), said that the usage of social media has become a way of life and personal activities that are made public. Regarding this statement, social media are known as a favourite medium for everyone to surf. As social media

show a lot of sweet couple video like in fantasy, this give effect to the women who is single and make them to expect too much to have a perfect man and to wait for that imagination man. In addition, some media and influencers also show some advice told that it is okay to married late. For example, there are few influencers on social media said that it is fine to choose late marriage if you are happy. In addition, there are also bloggers that stated the same way which make the people who admire the influencers and who love to read blogs influenced to married late as they feel like they are not alone.

However, the world is not as beautiful as they thought. They might be good in imagining their ideal types of guys, and they cannot put 100% trust in the media. Eventually, they will learn to think that everything is not perfect as in their imaginations and thoughts. The weakness in this kind of practice is their ages will be older. So, instead of waiting for a prince charming with an unexpected future, they better stop imagining and daydreaming about their unpredictable future. Therefore, all the women should start preparing and planning their own life and need to settle down at the most suited ages.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the factors of late marriage that commonly happens nowadays.
2. To identify the effects and challenges faced by those who married late.
3. To determine on how those who married late deal with their surroundings.

FACTORS OF LATE MARRIAGE

People nowadays like to be materialistic where everybody is struggling for getting more assets in order to have better live standards. They are also afraid of losing their social and economic freedom which reasonably is a part of getting married. Achieving high social status is one of the major factors in late marriages. Today's living generation are tending towards luxurious life. For gathering this demand, they spend most of their time in making money even they ignore one of the most important social institution of life. Certain of the major causes behind delayed marriages are cultural, economic, social and educational factors. One of the changing trends for delaying marriage is closely associated with "rise in educational attainment" (Caldwell, et al. 1982). The cause of delayed of marriage is related to the changed role and traditional status of women (Sathar and Kiyani 1998).

The most important thing is likely to occur as the result of growing age at marriage of women is changing their status. Most of the womem in Malaysia tend to achieve higher

educational qualification before thinking about their married life. Therefore, it is important to encourage women to bring their skills to the workforce because closer gender gaps could bring Malaysia into high income status (Yeoh, 2014). In addition, the dependent women have good financial support for their family. Women of all educational backgrounds have delayed marriages and most of them are among the more highly educated ones (Isen and Stevenson 2010).

In addition, it is custom to take care of their parents when they are old. Thus, for delay married individuals, one of their concerns stand up over old age care. Other than that, singleness is perceived as a social change that challenges long-accepted norms of universal marriage among the Malays. Traditionally, roles of women are defined according to their lifecycle beginning from being a daughter and later a wife, mother and grandmother. Then, they feel that their responsibilities to their parents is not accomplished. In traditional times having an unmarried daughter is regarded as a shame to the parents because they are afraid that their daughters might get involved in extramarital sexual activities. Career advancement is defined by Newman (Subramaniam & Arumugam, 2013) as the consequences of socio-psychological, human capital and systematic factor. (Swanson & Woitke,1997) said barrier can be described as the conflict between the ability of women and their achievement, the barrier also could explain the inhibition of women's career advancement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Research Design

Research design is defined as a framework of methods and techniques chosen by researchers to combine various components in a reasonably logical manner.

The researchers conducted a qualitative research. It is a scientific research method of gathering non-numerical data. The data is then evaluated for its trustworthiness which is credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability. (Lincoln and Cuba, 1985).

Data Collection Strategies

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information.

Interviews

The researchers decided to use interviews as a method for their research.

Interviews are designed to collect a richer source of information from a small number of people about attributes, behaviour, preferences, feelings, attitudes, opinions, and knowledge.

Interviews can be done using multiple ways including face-to-face, phone conversations and online communications such as Skype. Interviews are most effective for qualitative research as they help the researchers to explain, understand, and explore research subjects' opinion, behaviour, and experiences. Interview questions are normally open-ended questions to make sure that in-depth information is collected.

The researchers are determined to gather information from female informants aged 30 and above and remain single. The researchers made the decision as they thought that women are more familiar and suitable to the topic discussed.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the entity that frames what being analysed in a study, whether the entity is studied as a whole, within which most factors of causality and change exist.

Individuals

Individual unit of analysis is the most typical units of analysis used by researchers. The individuals may be characterized in terms of their membership in social groupings or categorization on psychological attributes.

The researchers gather data regarding late marriage from individual women aged 30 and above, and then classify them into a group consists of single women in their 30's.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

RQ 1: WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT CAUSE YOU TO MARRY LATE?

- **TAKING CARE OF THEIR PARENTS**

Most of the informants said that their priorities are their parents. Four out of seven respondents said that their parents are one of the reasons why they married late. One of the respondents, Miss Zarina Binti Mahmoud, 37, said that the most important reason in choosing late marriage is that she needs to take care of her parents since the other siblings are already married and stay far away from home.

There are also other informants who thinks the same way. Miss Nurul Amni Binti Misri, 30, said that the factors why she chooses to marry late is because families are her priorities.

She told that whatever happens, her families' happiness is the most important matter in her life. Miss Ayu Binti Ahmad Sabron, 32, also stated that, she must take care of her parents and her thinking about marriage.

Next, the fourth informants which is Miss Hamidah Shaedon, 46, said that one of the factors of her late marriage is she keeps the importance of her family and career more than thinking about having a partner. She added that once the group of late marriage people become older, they will never think about getting a soul mate anymore.

- **PRIORITIZE THEIR CARRIER**

Other than taking care of their parents, both Miss Amni and Miss Ayu agree that they want to prioritize their career first. They want to prioritize their career to gain money to support their families and their selves because nowadays money is very important as well as a career. To them a career is important so that they can make their parents proud and they can gain social status among the societies. Miss Hamidah also states the same thing about prioritize their career as a career is quite important in this era.

- **TO STABILIZE THEIR FINANCIAL**

There is only one informant that thought about stabilizing her financial before getting married which is Miss Amni. Miss Amni thinks that marriage is not just about romantic and lovey-dovey life with your partner. A true couple should know how to survive through difficulties together and that is why she thinks that stable financial is very important in married life. Besides, she still has other things to settle such as her study financial debts, cars, house and many more. Therefore, she has to make sure her financial is quite stable before thinking about marriage.

- **MEDIA INFLUENCE**

There are two informants that influenced by the media regarding the rapid changing era. Nowadays, a successful woman is portrayed as someone that has big career which affected the women in our societies through media. Miss Siti Halijah Binti Mohamad, 33, said that media influence her to marry late as she used to watch movies about women who have big careers and enjoying their lives until 30 and above.

Meanwhile, there are one informant that was influenced by the negative side of the media regarding marriage abuse cases. Miss Ayu said that she is influenced by the media regarding cases and telemovies about husbands abuse their wives after marriage. Because of this influence from media, she is a bit scared to go to move forward to that level.

- **STILL NOT READY TO CARRY RESPONSIBILITIES OF A WIFE**

Miss Zarina claims that she does not ready yet to carry responsibilities as a wife. She said that she is still not ready to take the responsibilities as a wife, a mother or as a daughter in-law. She also admits that she has received some marriage proposals before, however, she rejected all of them. Besides, marriage is not something that we can take lightly as it is one of the biggest steps in our lives.

- **NOT HAVING A SUITABLE PARTNER**

Madam Nurul Fariyah, 35, one of our informants who gets married at the age of 30 said that she has no suitable partner which the cause of her staying unmarried for a long time. She has experienced several relationships before, but it did not turn out well until she met her husband and get married at the age of 30.

There are other informants who is having the same problems. Miss Rohashimi Razak, 46, answered that the main factor of her late marriage is she ended up with not having a life mate. She had involved in some relationships back then but the chemistry between them didn't last long. She added that they may not be a good match between them.

- **OTHER MINORITY REASONS**

There is one informant that is too choosy and has a very high taste. Miss Siti Halijah admit that she has a very high taste when it comes to choosing her partner. This happen to be one of the reasons she stays single until now. Miss Siti Halijah also stated that she still wants to enjoy her freedom life with her friends rather than getting married because when we get married, it will decrease the possibility to hang out with your friends as you have other responsibilities.

Other than that, one of the informants which is Miss Zarina claims that she does not need any man in her life. This is because she's gotten too used of being single and handling everything by herself. Thus, she has many dependable brothers and brother-in-law. For the time being, she does not have the desire to get married yet.

Finally, one informant has refused to develop a relationship because of her past life. "I did develop a relationship once back then. Unfortunately, it didn't end up well which led me into frustration", said Miss Hamidah. Once she gave up with love, there will no second time for her as her painful past made her that way, she added.

- **CONCLUSION REMARKS**

Based on the interview session, most of the informants stated that taking care of their parents are their priorities. Thus, they delayed their marriage to take care of their parents. As cited by (Subramaniam & Arumugam, 2013), It is quite ordinary for women to take care of their parents when they have no other commitments. It is custom to take care of their parents when they are old. Thus, for delay married individuals, one of their concerns stand up over old age care. Other than that, there are informants that thinks their career as their priority. The most important thing is likely to occur as the result of growing age at marriage of women is changing their status. Most of women in Malaysia tend to achieve higher educational qualification before thinking of a married life (Yeoh, 2014). Therefore, women of all educational backgrounds have delayed marriages and most of them are among the more highly educated ones (Isen and Stevenson 2010). This conclude that female in this era has change their perceptions about marriage. They tend to delay their marriage because of their career unlike our ancestors before who thinks marriage is much more important than any other matters. This means, women nowadays have been shaped through societies and media. Other than that, the rest of the informants also stated other reasons such as to stabilize their financial, still not ready to carry responsibilities of a wife, not having a suitable partner and other minority reasons

RQ 2: WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES YOU GO THROUGH WHEN YOU MARRIED LATE?

- **DEALING WITH PEOPLE AROUND THEM**

Four of the seven informants have troubles when dealing with people around them. One of the respondents gives her opinions regarding this obstacle. "Just like other girls' problem, people will always talk about you when you're in your 30s and remain unmarried. Being labelled as 'andartu' is not easy, either for me or my family. That was the hardest part." Miss Zarina stated. However, she is now able to ignore them and live her life to the fullest.

Miss Amni who also face the same situation said that the most people around her always ask sensitive questions such as when she is going to settle down, have you found a partner yet and so on. She said that random questions about reasons of her late marriage is the hardest challenge because sometimes the people around her just freely ask in front of the public without aware of her feelings and they did not know the struggle in finding the most suitable partner.

Same goes to Miss Hamidah here, she said that one of the main challenges regarding this matter is the elders' mouth on talking about her not getting married. There is a lot, but she doesn't give a care about it. She added that living as a single person doesn't mean that she is failing in her life and living with a partner doesn't mean they will live happily ever after.

- **THE FEELING OF LONELINESS**

Miss Rohashimi admit that sometimes, she feels the loneliness whenever she looks parents get along with their children. She also feels eager to have the same happiness that could be shared between themselves as a family. There is also a moment when she asked herself of why she wasted her life on not getting a soulmate to accompany her whole life.

- **HARD TO FIND THE RIGHT SOULMATE**

One of the seven informants said that when you married late, it is hard to find the right soulmate which is stated by Miss Nurul Farihah. This problem probably happens because of most of the people in her surrounding that is around her age have already found their partner which is one of the challenges of Miss Nurul Farihah to find the right person. When everyone around her has settled down, it is quite hard for her because of lack of choices.

- **LOW FERTILITY AND HARD TO GET BABIES**

Miss Siti Halijah thinks that late marriage can cause low fertility and hard to get babies. It has been stated by former researchers that late marriage can cause such things. Miss Siti Halijah thinks that way as her own opinions, however, she never experienced it. She just heard from others who married late having troubles with pregnancies. She said that, this is one of the negative effects of late marriage especially for women. Because of health reasons, women should avoid late marriage even though it is hard.

As for Miss Hamida, she also said that she will not have children like others. Sometimes she has a desire to live a happy life like other parents too. Unfortunately, that kind of life isn't exist for her as she is getting old and having babies is quite unforeseen to her. For her age, it is quite difficult to find a partner too. Then, a good prayer for others is enough for her.

- **IT IS EASIER TO LIVE ALONE**

For this reasons, Miss Zarina stated the effects in a positive way regarding this matter. She says one of the positive effects is that she can live her life the way she wants. Let's take the preparation of Hari Raya Aidilfitri as an example, she only needs to think of her outfits. "I also do not have to think of who's turn it is for Hari Raya this year, because most couple always

have to fight regarding this matter, whether it is their turn or their partner's turn. Every year!" she added.

Moreover, she can focus more on her work and taking care of her parents. Since she does not have any other responsibilities or commitments, she is able to get her work done without any distractions. Furthermore, she gets to spend more time with her parents as they are both old and sick.

- **CONCLUSION REMARKS**

Some of the answers did match the research that have been made by researchers. Some of the informants stated that it is hard to get pregnant when delaying their marriage. As being said by the former researchers, Haralambos. M & Holborn. M, 2013, delaying marriage automatically reduces their fertile years and efforts at the beginning may become problematic thus making the birth of their children becomes fewer or most likely making the couple to become infertile. There are also informants who said that it is hard to find the right soulmates. As cited by Muzaffar, 2013, at a moment, this group of women need to realize that the result of waiting does not always worth it. They could dream about a charming prince with a good manner, but the reality is not as beautiful as they thought. In addition, one of the serious most issues in our community is the rising perception of "euphoria of idealism", as individuals are in search of "perfect" being in their life. The fact that higher expectations make them wait eventually takes a really long period of time until most of the good-looking men became other women's properties. Meanwhile, other informants also having trouble in dealing with people around them, experience the feeling of loneliness and some of them also thought that it is easier to live alone.

RQ 3: HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

- **IGNORE THE NEGATIVE COMMENTS**

Half of the informants just ignore the bad and negative perceptions. One of the respondents said that if people starts saying bad things about her or even called her 'andartu', she just ignores them and keep herself busy so that she doesn't even have to think about what other people said about her. To her that is one of the best ways to avoid conflicts.

Miss Siti Halijah is no exception. She is always being called 'andartu' too. However, she just ignored those negative perceptions. Despites of that, there people who sees her as

a person that only wants to enjoy with her friends and gain more money rather than thinking about marriage and once again, Miss Siti Halijah just ignored them all.

Miss Ayu which is one of the informants also gets questions that cannot be answered directly. She said that when they ask her about marriage, she just smiles and ignore the questions or changing the topics.

- **RESPOND THEM POLITELY**

There are informants that is very well mannered and answer those who ask them sensitive questions politely without hurting each other. For example, Miss Zarina said that when people ask her regarding marriage, she just smile and say that she leaves it all to Allah SWT and that she believed that He has better plans for her.

Miss Nurul Fariyah also stated that when she gets those questions from her family members, she just asks them to pray for her so that good fortune will follow her including her marriage matters. Same goes to Miss Amni, she just thinks positive and asks them to pray for her when someone ask her about this kind of topic. Because this people just want answers and the only answer is to pray and think positive, she adds.

- **SURROUND THEMSELVES WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE**

Miss Zarina said that she manages to face those challenges because she surrounds herself with positive people. These people understand her thoroughly and rarely ask her about her personal problems that is considered sensitive, she said. "By surrounding myself with positive people, they show that we should respect each other and think positives about others", she said.

- **ALWAYS BE POSITIVE**

Being positive is one of the most effective ways in dealing this matter. Miss Hamidah stated that her life must go on no matter what will happen next. She repeated the statement which is living as a single person isn't a bad choice after all. In addition, she needs to always think positive about everything that happens around her. A happy life doesn't come with only having a partner. Sometimes, when her married friends have crisis that couldn't be solved by themselves, she becomes one of the persons who solves the problem for them.

Likewise, for Miss Rohashimi, she directly answered the question that life must go on. Stay as a single person doesn't mean her life becomes worsen. She stated that she is currently

living a happy and comfortable life. In addition, each word came out from others' mouth don't give even a single impact in her life which means she ignored all the negative perceptions.

- **CONCLUSION REMARKS**

As a result, most of the informants deal with their surroundings very well. One of them just ignore all the bad comments and some of them are able to respond to those of their surroundings politely. There are also informants who chose to surround their self with positive people and tend to make themselves more positive. Some of the informants confessed that they have being called 'andartu'. This finding can be explained by Saili, J., & Saili, A. R., 2018, which stated that in Malay society, the people around them mostly label single women who married late as 'andartu' or 'old virgin'. The fact that she is old but still a virgin often calls for cynical remarks such as 'what a pity', 'she has not experience it (sex) yet', and 'she's not sellable ('tak laku)'. All these names came out because of the unnecessary perception by the people around them and most women are having hard times in dealing with the problems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **CONCLUSIONS**

As a conclusion, late marriage has both its own positive and negative impacts that affect those who practicing it in their life. Late marriage can give chance to women to take a better care of themselves and their parents. It would also stabilize their careers for some reasons. Despite all the positive effects can be obtained if we marry late, there are also positive effects that can be obtained if we marry earlier, such as we have partner to take care of us and be with us during our old days. Other than that, we would also not feel lonely and always feel secured.

As we all know, the media is also one of the factors that cause women to choose late marriage due to the image that is being portrayed where men are always fail in playing their role as a husband and tend to abuse their wives. In order to prevent late marriage, media needs to reduce this kind of movies so that it would not affect the women perceptions and so that the children would not have this kind of thoughts in their minds.

Late marriage has both the pros and cons, but it would bring so many positive impacts if we marry early and produced children to help the society and make Malaysia a better world. In order to make Malaysia a better country and more developed, more children are needed so that they would make a change to the country.

- **RECOMMENDATION**

Marriage is a good thing in Islam to prevent sexual immorality or bad thing. By practicing early marriage, people can spread da'wah and enliven more Muslims all around the world. Marriage should be promoted as it helps to attract women to get marry. Physical development also represents mental growth as successful marriage requires mutual help emotionally, financially and others. Besides that, the authorities should take an action to organize campaigns related to marriage such as the beneficial of marriage. Later, marriage can also be favourable as it relates to early pregnancy that would increase the population of Muslims in the world.

In addition, Narrated Umar bin Al-Khattab: I heard Allah's Apostle saying, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So, whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for." (Sahih Al-Bukhari). So, clearly that Islam is very encouraging Muslim to get married because it can give many advantages to Muslims.

Finally, in science perspective, married people being better off and having better health than single. It is because, when people get married it will help to lower stress level, live for longer life and have better sleep at night.

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