

Deciding to Marry: Factors Influencing Marriage Decisions Among Young Malaysian Men

Saranya Devi Nair Pavithran, Mathumita N Suresh, Anisah Abdul Gafar, Jiang Ke, Vivian Chia, Faizah Mohd Fakhruddin

Faculty of Management, University Technology Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia

Faculty of Civil Engineering, University Technology Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is one of life's most important decisions as it creates a foundational partnership that can provide emotional support, shared purpose, and lasting companionship throughout life's challenges and joys. The objective of this study is to explore the factors that influence marriage decisions among young Malaysian men aged 23 to 30. This study employed a qualitative approach and a case study design involving semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five informants from diverse ethnic, religious, and professional backgrounds. The research findings reveal three major themes that influence marital decision-making, including social, economic, and psychological factors. Social factors include family influence, peer influence, media influence, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. Economic factors focus particularly on financial stability. Psychological factors such as attitudes toward marriage and self-confidence strongly influence the decision to delay or participate in marriage. This research offers valuable insights into the factors that influence marriage decisions among young men in Malaysia. The limitation of this study is that it is based on only five interviews. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all young men in Malaysia. Future research should include a large number of representative samples and incorporate quantitative methods for a more detailed analysis. This study recommends public awareness programs to help young men make informed decisions about marriage and family.

Keywords: marriage decision making, young Malaysian men, social factors, economic factors, psychological factors.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has always been important in society because it helps build families and maintain community cohesion. Marriage is a legal agreement where a man and a woman live together as partners (Wejak, 2020). However, marriage patterns have changed over the past decades (Azmawati et al., 2015). Globalization, economic uncertainty, and shifting cultural values are prompting young people worldwide to reassess the purpose and timing of marriage. In Malaysia, marriage rates remain relatively low, reflecting shifting attitudes toward the decision-making process around marriage (Mustaffa et al., 2021). People now marry for various reasons, including religious beliefs, cultural expectations, personal commitment, and practical needs (Manap et al., 2013). These changes have led to delays in marriage worldwide, with many men showing more hesitation to commit. This trend is also becoming evident in Malaysia, underscoring the need to understand the factors that influence young men's views on marriage.

Statement Of the Problem

In recent years, it can be observed that marriage rates have decreased globally. Marriage rates have declined by about 25% in 35 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries as of 2021 (OECD, 2024). Likewise, in Malaysia, the marriage rate has reportedly decreased by 12.5% from 2022 to 2023 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024),

Malaysian women have a slightly higher marriage rate (40.5 per 1,000) compared to Malaysian men (38.2 per 1,000). The difference in percentage highlights the potential for a study on the factors influencing marriage decisions, specifically whether to marry or not, among young Malaysian men. Understanding and exposure to these dynamics is important for policymakers, families, and community leaders to create supportive frameworks and environments that respect individual choices while addressing social challenges and hesitations. Therefore, this study will also benefit future academicians who wish to conduct similar studies in the social sciences to understand Malaysian society's cultural norms and values.

Research Objective

The study aims to achieve the following objective:

To explore the factors that influence marriage decisions among young Malaysian men.

Significance of the Research

This study contributes to several key areas, providing insights and exposure. In the academic setting, a notable gap exists in the existing literature regarding factors influencing marriage decisions among young Malaysian men. Most studies conducted in Malaysia have focused on women and the factors influencing late marriages, as well as the possible implications (Yazid et al., 2025; El-Mubarak & Ogunbad, 2017; Karamat, 2016). The factors affecting young men from Malaysia have yet to be studied; most researchers tend to focus on women, while a few focus on both genders, but without equal proportions. Therefore, exploring the factors influencing marriage decisions among young Malaysian men will provide in-depth insight into their respective perspectives on expectations, reality, and individual priorities. This study may serve as a valuable reference for future researchers, addressing the existing literature gap on Malaysian young men's marriage decisions. It also contributes to the sociology of family by examining how cultural, social, and economic expectations of marriage shape individual decision-making.

Secondly, the findings of this study will help policymakers understand the perspective of young men and contribute to beneficial strategies for managing the factors that deter young men from deciding to marry. With Malaysia's demographic shift, along with its declining fertility rate and ageing population (Chukari et al., 2024), this study may help policymakers develop policies that encourage marriage decisions among young men and promote long-term population sustainability. Furthermore, for community leaders, this study will provide insight into the way young men think and possible factors that may influence their desire to get married. By gaining a better understanding of the potential factors, community leaders can develop workshops or community programs to provide more information on marital topics.

Lastly, this study will benefit families by providing a unique perspective on unmarried young men in the current era. This study will provide a rough idea of how young men perceive each internal and external factor when deciding to get married. The findings will provide an answer to the assumption families have on young men. Therefore, families will be able to understand and provide better emotional support to young men, helping to reduce unnecessary pressure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Influence

Tan (2023) emphasized that parents often discuss the importance of marriage with their children and share their thoughts and beliefs. As a result, the family has a strong influence on young people's decisions about getting married. Family values, particularly those related to religion and emotional support, have a positive impact on young men's readiness and willingness to get married. Family economic stability and parental approval are key facilitators that provide the necessary material and emotional resources for premarital preparation (Wang & Gong, 2023).

Peer Influence

Peer influence plays a significant role in the life decisions of young adults. Studies in Ethiopia on adolescent girls in rural settings reveal that their decision to marry is highly influenced by peers (Tewahido et al., 2022). For instance, they got married at an early age because most of their friends were getting married. In addition, according to Silalahi et al. (2023), students who receive better support from peers are comparatively more successful in developing a clear and focused future orientation marriage. Findings show that men make riskier decisions when their peers accompany them (Spohn et al., 2022); however, advice from peers differs from what an individual believes “they should do” (Thorsteinson et al., 2020), which calls for a clarification of young men’s decision in marriage from peer behalf. Apart from that, Adamopoulou’s (2012) study indicates that having a larger number of married friends affects a young adult’s decision to get married.

Media Influence

Media largely influences the perceptions and decisions of young people about marriage, particularly in shaping idealized images of marital life. Zhong (2022) notes that interactions on social media and the popularity of South Korean dramas foster romantic fantasies about marriage, ultimately leading to a postponement of marriage and childbearing among young individuals. A recent study by Odejide et al. (2023) investigated the influence of celebrity marriage content on Instagram on university students' perceptions of marriage. The findings indicate that students regularly exposed to such content are more inclined to view marriage as a marker of social success, thereby heightening the pressure of social comparison in their decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the media's idealized image of marriage may lead young individuals to prioritize external factors, such as appearance and social status, over personal growth and self-fulfillment in their marital decisions. Moreover, Rahman et al. (2024) highlighted that social media has altered how people communicate, share ideas, and think about aspects such as marriage. Apps like Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok enable people to showcase who they are and what they believe, allowing them to share thoughts about marriage at any time and from anywhere through pictures, videos, or words.

Religious Belief

Malaysia comprises four major religions, i.e., Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024), Muslims comprise 63.5% of the Malaysian population, making them the majority. Therefore, religious beliefs are highly prioritized in this country. Religious beliefs shape marriage decisions among Malaysians in various ways. A study has found that Malay couples prioritize religion, responsible character, good manners, and race in selecting a spouse over physical appearance and occupation (Noor et al., 2022). Similarly, in Iran, marriage is closely tied to Islamic teachings. It is viewed as a sacred bond that fulfils a person’s religious obligations (Sadeghian et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, Hindus believe that marriage is a sacred bond between two souls that lasts for seven lifetimes, a connection that remains strong through seven rebirths (Shafi & Rani, 2021). In Hinduism, marriage is considered a fundamental aspect of life. Women are believed to be born to become mothers, and men to become fathers (Sharma et al., 2013). It is not just a social contract but also a spiritual duty that upholds family and societal values.

Cultural and Traditions Influence

Research findings based in Bangladesh state that early marriage among young males is heavily influenced by cultural factors (Biswas et al., 2020). The study adds that cultural norms also shape the desire for sexual fulfilment. Similarly, in Indonesia, early marriages are influenced by cultural factors, including family ties and sexual control (Nabila et al., 2022). In the Malaysian context, the families believe that wedding traditions from their own culture should be observed. They view these customs as essential for the couple’s future happiness and peace. This way of thinking is common among Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities (Thani & Hei, 2017).

Financial Stability

Financial stability is a crucial factor in marriage decisions, as it provides a sense of security and ultimately helps couples build strong and lasting relationships. Financial stability refers to a financial system's ability to support the economy and recover from financial difficulties (Schinasi, 2004). In South Korea, a study found that many people delayed marriage due to unstable economic conditions (Choi et al., 2024). For young Malaysians considering marriage and starting a family, debt can be a significant concern. Koe and Yeoh (2021) highlighted that from the viewpoint of financial stability, financial knowledge, careful preparation, and self-restraint can help partners create a solid foundation, leading to happy and lasting marriages.

Attitude Toward Marriage

Attitude towards marriage is the overall evaluation of the worth and significance of marriage, including both emotional and logical aspects. Within the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude is considered a fundamental component influencing marital intentions. Studies have shown that individuals who view marriage as a source of companionship, happiness, or practical support are more likely to develop a firm intention to marry (Xie & Hong, 2022). Attitude is the most significant predictor of marital intention when compared with subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Koçak & Mouratidis, 2024).

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in their abilities, which plays a crucial role in their success (Bandura, 1997). In the context of marriage, young men will evaluate their preparedness for marriage by considering their self-confidence to marry. For example, a study found that masculine identities among young men in Malaysia are primarily shaped by attributes such as self-confidence, independence, and responsibility, which directly affect their readiness for marriage (Fazli Khalaf et al., 2013). Another study conducted to explore marital readiness among Generation Z in Malaysia found that psychological preparedness, including self-confidence, is one of the significant factors that influence marriage decisions among the participants (Herawati et al., 2023). The participants in the study highlighted that the ability to handle marital responsibilities, financial stability, and career plans will increase their self-confidence in deciding to marry. These findings suggest that self-confidence plays a vital role in influencing young men's marriage decisions. Young men are likely to delay or avoid marriage when they lack control over these important areas, which makes them feel less confident about getting married.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the factors influencing the marriage decision-making of young Malaysian men. In a culturally and ethnically diverse society like Malaysia, qualitative research methods enable participants to fully express their experiences and views, thereby facilitating the exploration of complex social structures and perceptions of marriage. Additionally, this study employed a case study design to understand the multifaceted issues informants encounter in various contexts.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In this qualitative study exploring marriage decision-making among young men, purposive sampling was employed to deliberately select participants who could provide rich, in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This sampling technique was justified due to the study's focus on capturing diverse cultural perspectives from a specific demographic of young men from Malay, Chinese, and Indian backgrounds. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to intentionally include one Malay, two Chinese, and two Indian informants, ensuring representation of these ethnic groups while maintaining a manageable sample size for detailed qualitative analysis. Similarly, criterion sampling was deemed suitable because the study required participants to meet specific criteria, i.e., young men aged 18 to 30 who are actively contemplating or have recently made decisions about marriage. This technique ensured that the informants

possessed relevant experiences and characteristics aligned with the research objective, enabling a focused exploration of their decision-making processes within their cultural contexts.

The sample for this study represents five informants (one Malay, two Chinese, and two Indians). The final sample size was determined by saturation, which is the point at which the interviews no longer disclose any new concepts or themes (Hennink et al., 2017). Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which were conducted online, thereby ensuring that a diverse and extensive group of participants could participate.

Table I Demographic Profile of the Informants

Informants' Demography	Anand	Bala	Chaoxiang	Darwish	Elijah
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	25	27	30	23	27
State of origin	Johor	Selangor	Johor	Johor	Johor
State of residence	Selangor	Selangor	Johor	Johor	Selangor
Ethnic group	Indian	Indian	Chinese	Malay	Chinese
Religion	Hinduism	Hinduism	Buddhism	Islam	-
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Malaysian Certificate of Education	Bachelor's degree
Field of expertise	Economics	Engineering	Management	Mechanical Engineering	Engineering
Current occupation	Human resource officer	Engineer	Full time post graduate student	Full time under graduate student	Engineer
Years of service	2 years	3 years	-	-	3 years
Sector	Private	Private	-	-	Private
Range of income per month	MYR4,851 - MYR10,970	MYR4,851 - MYR10,970	-	-	MYR4,851 - MYR10,970

Table I presents the demographic profile of the five informants, revealing a group of young adult males from diverse ethnic, religious, educational, and professional backgrounds. All five informants are males aged between 23 and 30 years. The youngest informant, Darwish, is 23 years old, while the oldest, Chaoxiang, is 30 years old. Their places of origin span several regions in Malaysia, i.e., four are from Johor (Anand, Chaoxiang, Darwish, and Elijah) and one from Selangor (Bala). In terms of current residence, three of them now live in Selangor (Anand, Bala, and Elijah). Chaoxiang and Darwish remain in their hometown in Johor.

The group is ethnically and religiously diverse. Two informants are of Indian ethnicity (Anand and Bala), both practicing Hinduism. Two are Chinese (Chaoxiang, who is Buddhist, and Elijah, whose religion is unspecified), and one is Malay (Darwish), who practices Islam. Educationally, the majority of the informants hold a bachelor's degree. Three hold bachelor's degrees in Economics (Anand) and Engineering (Bala and Elijah), while Chaoxiang is currently a full-time Master's student in Management. Darwish, on the other hand, holds a

Malaysian Certificate of Education, and he is currently a full-time undergraduate student in the field of Mechanical Engineering.

Professionally, three informants are employed in the private sector. Anand works as a human resources officer and has two years of experience in the field. Both Bala and Elijah are engineers with three years of experience. The remaining two informants, Chaoxiang and Darwish, are currently students and have not yet entered the workforce. The employed informants (Anand, Bala, and Elijah) earn a monthly income ranging from MYR 4,851 to MYR 10,970, indicating they belong to the middle-income group. On the other hand, full-time students like Chaoxiang and Darwish are not classified into any income group since they are not working yet.

Data Collection Procedure

The informants were given the flexibility to choose the date and time of the interviews based on their availability. Since they were unable to attend in person, all interviews were conducted online via Webex. Before each session, the researchers provided the informants with an information sheet and a consent form to ensure they clearly understood the purpose, scope, and objectives of the study. This also helped them prepare for the discussion. Informants were assured that all information would remain confidential, be used solely for academic purposes and that their participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time.

The interview protocol focused on exploring the factors influencing marriage-related decision-making among young men. It included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to gather demographic details, including gender, age, place of origin and residence, ethnicity, religion, educational background, field of expertise, current occupation, years of service, work sector, and income range. Meanwhile, open-ended questions encouraged informants to provide more detailed responses related to the study's objectives, particularly the reasons behind their views and decisions about marriage.

With the informants' consent, audio recorders were used to document key information shared during the sessions. Fortunately, all informants agreed to be recorded. To support natural expression and richer responses, the interviews were conducted in both English and the informants' native languages. On average, each interview lasted about one hour.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, the researchers transcribed the recorded interviews, capturing every spoken word exactly as it was said to preserve the authenticity of the data. This process resulted in a total of 96 pages of transcripts from five informants. Manual coding and thematic analysis were employed to analyze the data. Through careful, step-by-step analysis, themes and sub-themes were identified, which enabled the researchers to explore the factors influencing marriage decisions among young men in Malaysia.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



Fig. 1 Factors influencing marriage decisions

According to Figure 1, the research findings revealed three key themes that influenced marriage decisions among the informants. These themes are social, economic, and psychological factors. The sub-themes for social factors are family influence, peer influence, media influence, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. The sub-theme for economic factors is financial stability. Finally, the sub-themes for psychological factors are attitude toward marriage and self-confidence.

Social Factors

Social factors, including family influence, peer influence, media influence, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions, largely shape men's perspectives on marriage and their decision-making related to marriage. These issues will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Family Influence: Family influence plays a pivotal role in shaping the informants' decisions about marriage. The family continues to have a substantial impact on whom they choose to marry and when they do so. While many desire the freedom to make their own choices, their families' values and expectations often guide their thinking. Some feel a deep sense of responsibility to fulfil their family's wishes, such as marrying within the same culture, achieving financial stability first, or settling down by a certain age. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), a 25-year-old, shared his experience of being in such a situation and narrated the following:

"My family plays a vital role in my decisions about marriage. For example, my parents often remind me that it is better to settle down before the age of 30. Whenever I told them that I was dating someone, they would ask questions like, 'Do they come from a good family?' or 'Are they serious about marriage?' Even if I do not always agree, their opinions stay with me. It is like their voices are always in the back of my head when I think about who and when to marry."

Another informant, Bala (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

"My family has always strongly influenced how I view marriage. They believe in adhering to tradition, such as marrying someone from a similar cultural background, and often bring it up during family gatherings. I remember once, during a wedding we attended, my father leaned over and said, 'This is the kind of match we hope for you too.' It was not pushy, but it stuck with me. They want me to have a stable life and a partner who shares our values. I understand their perspective, but at the same time, I want to make sure I am marrying for the right reasons because I feel ready, not just because it is expected."

Another informant, Elijah (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

"My parents have a big influence on how I think about marriage. Since I was young, I saw how important marriage was to them. They always told me that finding the right partner, having a stable life, and being financially ready is really important before starting a family. I know they want the best for me, and I respect that. However, sometimes, I feel like I have to meet their expectations. It is not like they force me, but the pressure is still there. I often ask myself am I thinking about marriage because I am ready or because I do not want to disappoint them."

Based on the informants' narratives, their marriage decisions are influenced by their family, particularly their parents. The findings align with the research conducted by Tan (2023) and Wang and Gong (2023), which emphasizes that parents often discuss the importance of marriage with their children and share their thoughts and beliefs, potentially influencing marriage decisions among youngsters.

Peer Influence: Friends and social circles can remarkably influence how young men perceive marriage. When they see their peers getting married, discussing relationships, or sharing their views, it can influence their own opinions and decisions. Peer pressure or support can either encourage or delay their plans to get married, depending on what those around them are doing or saying. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged 25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

"Their experiences affect how I think about marriage. When my best friend, Suresh, is happy and doing well in his marriage, it fills me with hope and positivity. For example, Suresh once told me how he and his wife solved

a big problem by talking and listening to each other. Hearing that made me believe that love can help people get through hard times. Seeing him happy makes me more open and excited about marriage. However, when he talks about the hard times, such as arguments or when things do not feel right, it makes me more careful and thoughtful. I started to think about how marriage is not always easy and needs patience and effort. His struggles remind me that marriage can be difficult and that it takes work to keep it strong. So, watching his marriage journey, both the good and bad moments, makes me feel hopeful but also more careful.”

Another informant, Bala (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

“Well, in this case, my friends keep it real. Some share their marriage struggles (“The freedom is gone!”), while others hype the perks (“My wife cooks better than fine dining!”). Their experiences make me weigh the pros and cons of marriage.”

Another informant, Elijah (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

“My friends have influenced my views quite a bit. They share their experiences, which helps me think about what I want in a marriage. Some have been married, and their experiences provide useful insights into what works and what does not. Both have shaped my expectations. The positive experiences give me hope that marriage can be fulfilling, while the negative ones make me more cautious and aware of the challenges that come with it.”

Based on the informants’ narratives, peer influence on marriage decisions is noteworthy, primarily through peers’ real-life experiences. The findings align with previous research by Tewahido et al. (2022) and Adamopoulou (2012), which have also found that peers can directly influence an individual’s thoughts and choices about marriage.

Media Influence: The media plays a vital role in shaping the informants’ views about marriage by portraying idealized relationships and social expectations. For example, movies, TV shows, and social media often form ideas about what a perfect marriage looks like, which can affect decisions and timing for marriage. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged 25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

“I see a lot of couple content these days, such as weddings with emotional vows, simple daily routines like cooking together, and romantic dates that look nice. Sometimes, it feels genuine, like when they surprise each other or share a laugh. After the wedding, shows like Kalyanam to Kadhal showcase how couples navigate real-life problems and grow closer over time. Honestly, watching all this makes me more open to the idea of marriage. I can picture having those moments myself, and that feels comforting.”

Another informant, Darwish (pseudonym), aged 23 years old, narrated as follows:

“The platform I use the most is TikTok, and the marriage-related content that aligns with my algorithm is primarily focused on how to manage the finances after getting married, living below our means, and taking care of wives and families. They are mostly concerned with responsibilities and finances. It is affecting my perspective on marriage.”

Another informant, Elijah (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

“I would say the media influences my expectations, especially when it comes to things like romantic gestures or the idea of a perfect wedding. Shows like The Bachelor makes me think that marriage is all about big moments and excitement. However, I also know those shows are staged for entertainment, so I try not to take them too seriously. It does shape how I think some people view marriage.”

Based on the informants’ narratives, their marriage decisions appear to be influenced by the media. The findings align with previous research conducted by Zhong (2022), Odejide (2023), and Rahman et al. (2024), which highlighted that the media has changed how people communicate, share ideas, and think about aspects such as marriage.

Religious Beliefs: Religious beliefs play an important role in shaping how young people perceive marriage. Religious beliefs often shape how individuals perceive the purpose and importance of marriage. Many religions view marriage as a sacred bond that should adhere to specific rules, religious ceremonies, and customs. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged 25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

“In Hinduism, marriage is a sacred and lifelong commitment. The idea of ‘oruvanuku oruthi’ really stands out to me. It means one man for one woman, and it reflects the belief that the husband and wife are meant to walk through life together, supporting each other in every way. Marriage is not just a personal choice; it is also a spiritual journey and a duty. My religious belief plays a big role in shaping how I view marriage, and I can strongly say it affects my marriage decisions. It guides me to look for a partner who shares the same values, respect for family, and commitment to a meaningful life.”

Another informant, Darwish (pseudonym), aged 23 years old, narrated as follows:

“As a Muslim, my religion has taught me the deep importance of marriage. According to a hadith, “When a servant marries, he has completed half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half.” I truly follow my religion’s guidance in this matter because marriage is not just about being with someone. It is a sacred bond that Allah has created. My religious beliefs play a big role in how I make decisions about marriage.”

Based on the informants' narratives, their religious beliefs influence their decision-making in marriage. The findings align with those of the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024), which indicate that Muslims comprise 63.5% of the Malaysian population, making them the majority. As a result, religious beliefs are highly prioritized in the country. A study by Noor et al. (2022) found that Malay couples place greater importance on religion, responsible character, good manners, and race when choosing a spouse rather than focusing on physical appearance or occupation. Similarly, a Hindu wedding is rich in customs, values, and traditions that are followed by the family and community (Gupta & Singh, 2019). Therefore, Hindus carefully adhere to these traditions and values, and they play an important role in shaping their marriage decisions.

Cultural Traditions Influence: Cultural traditions play a vital role in shaping how people live, think, and celebrate special events, such as marriage. Each culture has its customs and beliefs that are passed down through generations. These traditions influence how people behave in society and how they follow important life events. One of the informants, Bala (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, has gone through such a circumstance and narrated the following:

“Indian culture has taught me that marriage is a sacred bond between two families. It is like welcoming a new member into the family forever—someone you never replace, no matter what. We have meaningful traditions, such as temple rituals, Parusam (engagement), Nalungu (a three-day ritual of applying turmeric, sandalwood, and oil to the bride and groom to purify, bless, and prepare them for married life), and Kalyanam (wedding), that keep me connected to my roots. These practices are not overly rigid, but they are held in great respect and value. They have shaped how I view marriage as something spiritual, respectful, and lasting.”

Another informant, Darwish (pseudonym), aged 23 years old, narrated as follows:

“From a Malay cultural and traditional standpoint, marriage is considered an essential step. A great deal of value is placed on settling down and starting a family. Things like mas kahwin (dowry), adat (customs), and ceremonies are highly emphasized, and it is instilled in us at a young age that marriage is a crucial milestone. So, I think that affected my decision to get married.”

Another informant, Elijah (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

“My cultural background has strongly shaped how I see marriage. In Chinese culture, marriage is viewed as a fundamental life goal, and there is an expectation to marry at a certain age. Family approval plays a vital role, where parents’ blessings are not only respected but often expected. We have meaningful traditions, such as the tea ceremony, where we serve tea to our elders to show respect and receive their blessings. There is also the

guo da li (betrothal gift exchange), which shows the groom's sincerity. On the wedding day, we wear red for good luck and set off firecrackers to drive away bad spirits. All of these customs influence how we make decisions about marriage. It is not just about love between two people. It is also about timing, meeting family expectations, and honoring long-standing traditions."

Based on the informants' narratives, their cultural traditions influence their decisions to get married. The findings align with research conducted by Biswas et al. (2020), which states that cultural factors and traditions heavily influence early marriage among young males. This indicates that cultural traditions can influence expectations regarding the ideal time and reasons for marriage. Many Malaysian families believe that adhering to their cultural wedding traditions is crucial for ensuring a happy and peaceful future for the couple. These practices vary across Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities, including differences in wedding card designs that are influenced by culture, religion, and region (Thani & Hei, 2017). The authors highlighted that the crescent moon represents Malay culture, as it symbolizes Islam. Red is strongly linked to Chinese culture, and Indian culture is reflected through the use of many bright colors in their festivals.

Economic Factor

Economic factors, such as financial stability, play a vital role in influencing marriage decisions among young men, as many prefer to achieve financial security before assuming marital responsibilities. This is because financial readiness is often seen as a foundation for providing stability, fulfilling family obligations, and ensuring a smoother transition into married life. The following paragraphs will discuss such issues in detail.

Financial Stability: Financial stability is often a key factor in marriage decisions, as it creates a sense of security and reduces stress, thereby helping couples build a strong and lasting relationship. According to a previous study, financial factors such as money-related problems and perceptions of financial management can help explain marital satisfaction (Kerkmann et al., 2000). One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged 25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

"One of the main things I always think about before getting into marriage is financial stability. I believe that if my future family ever faces a financial crisis, my stable income can provide us with security and reduce stress. It can help keep our married life happy and peaceful. So yeah, until I am financially stable, I will not get married!"

Another informant, Bala (pseudonym), aged 27 years old, narrated as follows:

"Yes, financial stability is essential before getting married. Even though I am doing okay now, I still need a stronger financial foundation. Marriage comes with many responsibilities, and I do not want to enter it if I cannot handle things like rent, bills, or plans with confidence."

Based on the informants' narratives, financial stability appears to be a crucial factor in deciding whether to get married. Financial stability refers to a financial system's ability to function effectively and recover from financial challenges such as economic downturns (Schinasi, 2004). This definition aligns with the informants' responses, as many emphasized the need for financial security and preparedness before entering into marriage, particularly to manage future uncertainties or responsibilities. Having a low income can lead to delays in getting married, as people may perceive financial difficulties as a barrier to starting a family (Cansunar, 2021). In addition, money plays a vital role in marriage decisions, demonstrating how people consider their finances and long-term stability when entering into marriage (Badaruddin et al., 2022).

Psychological Factors

Marriage decisions among young Malaysian men are influenced by psychological factors, such as attitudes toward marriage and self-confidence, as these factors shape an individual's readiness and confidence in entering married life. The following paragraphs will discuss these issues in detail.

1) Attitude towards marriage: Attitude towards marriage is the overall evaluation of the worth and importance of marriage, including both emotional and logical aspects. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged

25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

"I see marriage as something meaningful but also serious. It is not just about love but also about responsibility and compromise. It can be a beautiful journey with the right person to share companionship, but it should not be rushed. When I see my parents together, it gives me a good feeling about marriage."

Another informant, Darwish (pseudonym), aged 23 years old, narrated as follows:

"I would like to point out that the idea of marriage is a good thing because we can have companionship when we get old to take care of one another."

Based on the informants' narratives, a positive attitude toward marriage is crucial in making informed decisions about marriage. Studies have shown that individuals who view marriage as a source of companionship, happiness, or practical support are more likely to develop a firm intention to marry (Koçak & Mouratidis, 2024; Xie & Hong, 2022).

1) *Self-Confidence*: In the context of marriage, young men will evaluate their preparedness for marriage by considering factors such as their self-confidence in marrying. One of the informants, Anand (pseudonym), aged 25 years old and has gone through such a circumstance, narrated the following:

"Even though I had a stable job and was in a serious relationship, I started to realize that being financially secure alone is not enough. At first, I thought I was ready. However, when I sit down and think about the financial pressure, emotional readiness, and whether we are truly compatible for the long term, I do not feel confident enough to get married. That was when my sense of control started to change. I realized I was not fully prepared to handle the responsibilities that come with marriage. It is not just about love; it is about being ready in all aspects."

One of the informants, Chaoxiang (pseudonym), aged 30 years old, narrated as follows:

"At this point in my life, I do not feel I have enough control over my situation to get married. I am still a student, unemployed, and I do not have a stable income yet. I do not feel financially or personally ready to handle the responsibilities of marriage. Maybe after I secure a job and feel more stable, my confidence and readiness will improve."

Based on the informants' responses, self-confidence plays a key role in influencing the decision to get married. This finding is supported by a study that found masculine identity among young Malaysian men is powerfully shaped by traits such as self-confidence, independence, and a sense of responsibility, which are factors that directly impact their readiness for marriage (Fazli Khalaf et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study aims to explore the factors that influence marriage decisions among young men in Malaysia. Based on the findings, three main themes were identified, including social, economic, and psychological factors that have a vital influence on their decision-making process. Social factors, including family influence, peer influence, media influence, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions, strongly shaped how young men in Malaysia viewed marriage. Economically, financial stability played a crucial role, as most informants expressed the need for a secure income before considering marriage. Psychologically, attitudes toward marriage and self-confidence also primarily affect their marriage decisions. Overall, the study reveals that marriage is not merely a personal choice but is also influenced by the people around them, their financial situation, and their level of readiness. Therefore, these insights suggest the importance of developing a supportive family and community to guide young men in making marriage decisions for a better Malaysian society.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendations of this study suggest that the impact of sociocultural factors, such as family expectations

and religious influences, on the marriage choices of young Malaysian men warrants further investigation. The government can introduce supportive policies to help young Malaysian men make more informed and confident decisions about marriage. These include financial education programs in schools, free financial counselling services, and nationwide awareness campaigns to improve money management skills and highlight the benefits and challenges of marriage.

To support emotional readiness, policies can provide free or subsidized pre-marital counselling programs that help young men understand their emotional needs, build healthy communication skills, and manage relationship challenges. Mental health workshops and support groups can also promote emotional well-being. Additionally, family support policies, such as parenting workshops and counselling services, can strengthen family relationships. Together, these policies can create a strong foundation for informed and responsible marriage decisions.

Moreover, future studies should consider using quantitative or mixed-method approaches. This can help confirm the study's findings and provide deeper insights. By collecting data from a larger group, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the patterns and factors that influence marriage decisions among young men in Malaysia. In summary, addressing financial issues such as job security and economic stability can alleviate the pressure young men face when considering marriage.

Limitation

While this qualitative study provides meaningful insights into the factors influencing marriage decisions among young unmarried Malaysian men, several limitations should be acknowledged to guide the interpretation of the findings. The study is based on only five interviews, which limits the sample size and reduces the generalizability of the results. As the participants were selected purposively, there is a risk of selection bias, as those who were more articulate or interested in the topic may have been overrepresented. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study, while offering depth and contextual understanding, does not allow for statistical inference or broader population-level conclusions. Researchers' subjectivity in the coding and interpretation process may also influence the development of themes despite efforts to ensure accuracy and consistency. Moreover, due to time constraints, each interview lasted only about 50 minutes to an hour. This may not have provided participants sufficient time to reflect deeply on their experiences and opinions, potentially limiting the richness and depth of the data collected. As a result, some important themes may have been underexplored or overlooked.

These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution. Future studies should include a larger and more diverse group of participants across different regions, age groups, and socio-cultural backgrounds to enhance representativeness. Employing quantitative or mixed-method approaches could help validate and expand upon the findings. Comparative studies that examine differences across demographic groups, such as between married and unmarried men or among different ethnicities, would also offer broader insights. To enhance data depth, future qualitative research should consider conducting longer or multiple interviews and incorporate strategies such as intercoder reliability or participant validation to mitigate potential biases.

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