

A Systematic Literature Review on Marital Challenges in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the marital challenges in Malaysia using systematic literature review. The purpose of this study is to analyze the three main objectives of the study, include 1) methods and research design of studies related to marital challenges, 2) methods of collecting data of studies related to marital challenges, and 3) the main findings of studies on marital challenges. This study uses a meta-synthesis design and has been systematically analyzed with 21 articles from 2008 to 2021. The results for objective one indicate that 11 studies use qualitative methods using case study design, nine studies use quantitative methods with eight studies using survey and one study using experimental, and one study use mixed methods using case study and survey. The results for the objective two indicate that three methods for data collection are used in the studies on marital challenges involve 10 studies using questionnaire, 10 studies using interview and 5 studies using document analysis. The analysis for objective three on the main findings of studies on marital challenges identify four themes, namely marital satisfaction, marital conflict factors, causes of marital divorce and approaches to addressing marital divorce. For future research, this study suggests conducting an experimental research design and module development related to the marital challenges in Malaysia.

Keywords: Systematic review, literature, methodology, marital challenges.

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is often associated with marital happiness. In marriage, husbands and wives are facing various challenges that can cause to misunderstanding, crises, problem, stress, and conflict to obtain satisfaction in marriage. Marital satisfaction is closely related to the marital condition, harmony, and happiness of the individual (Thomas N. Bradbury, Frank D. Fincham, & Steven R. H. Beach, 2000). A healthy relationship between husband and wife is an important element as it contributes to marital satisfaction. According to Nurhanisah Hadigunawan and Raihanah Azahari (2016), disagreements and conflicts of opinion and planning wishes between husband and wife can cause conflicts in the marital harmony system. Elements such as feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and belief systems and value concepts are disrupted due to the conflicts. Haliza A. Shukor (2012) defines conflict or crisis as a situation of restlessness, restlessness, or instability in marital caused by various factors and that can lead to problems of abuse, violence, and divorce if the conflict continues.

The quality of the relationship between husband and wife is increasingly being tested for its integrity because there are flaws in the current trend in society. In Malaysia, the collapse of the family institution

is increasingly worrying and deteriorating because it has become a common phenomenon that divorce can easily occur in society. This is demonstrated by the report on statistics of marital and divorces in the country in 2020 presented by the Chief of Statistics Datuk Seri Dr. Mohd Uzir Mahidin explained that the number of divorces among Malaysians increased by 12% to 56,975 cases in 2019, in compared to 50,862 cases in the previous year. In particular, the divorce rate increased from 6.5 to 7.2 per thousand of the population of married men aged 18 years and over and a similar trend was also registered for women with an increase from 7.0 to 7.7 per thousand of the current population of married women (Harian Metro, 2020). This marital crisis is sometimes unsolvable, but the couple may not have the initiative to change in a more positive direction. In general, society does not realize that marital is the oldest and most important contract in the world that must be maintained despite the trials and storms that arise. Spouses who have already signed a contract should understand their respective responsibilities and roles.

2. Significance of the Study

A systematic literature review on marital challenges can disclose information and knowledge about marriage patterns in Malaysia. In addition, it is providing new and different experiences, as well as benefits in exploring causes in marital challenges. This study is well suited to assist the marriage and family counseling services of agencies handling problems in marital such as the Islamic Religious District Office, the Syariah Court, the National Population and Family Development Board, the Islamic Religious Council Counseling Center, and so on. In addition, it helps increase the knowledge and resilience of counselors, consultants, volunteers, speakers, psychologists, counselors, and social workers in the face of the marital challenges. Therefore, this study has the potential to provide information for marriage counseling and provide an intervention platform to help married couples manage marital. This study also complements to the need for future research as an effort to improve marital relationship problems in marriage.

3. Review of Related Studies

S. Suhariyati et al., (2019) conducted a systematic review on trends of early marriage in developing countries. This review summarizes the best available evidence for local policy makers and public health practitioners so then they can consider incorporating these findings into the development of intervention protocols for the prevention of early marriage. **Z. Pathan (2015)** conducted a sociological analysis on the adversities of marital conflict. The study shows that family counseling centers are mostly attended by educated class of people as most of the respondents are educated and there is less representation of the illiterate class. **Peng tao et al., (2012)** conducted study a systematic review of quantitative studies on investigating marital relationship in infertility. The results indicated male factor infertility did not have a negative marital impact. **Ubesechera D. M & Jiaojiang Luo (2008)** conducted study a literature review on marriage and family life satisfaction. Whole literature reviews are divided into two categories as Sri Lankan studies and foreign studies. Meanwhile aforesaid figure further shows that the basic scholarly works found in the field of marriage and family life background such as marriage form and family, marital interaction, changes of marriage and family, marital quality, attitudes on marriage and family, love and marriage, nuptial patterns and fertility and marriage delay and fertility.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the methods and research designs that have been used related to the marital challenges in Malaysia.
2. Identify the data collection methods that have been used in relation to the marital challenges in Malaysia.
3. Review the main findings of studies related to the marital challenges based on studies that have been conducted in Malaysia.

5. Methodology

This study uses a meta-synthesis research design related to the marital challenges in Malaysia that have been systematically analyzed using qualitative methods. Briefly, meta-synthesis is an analysis of other analyzes, it involves combining results from comparable studies and discovering key effects (**Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011**). The method used by **Webster and Watson (2002)** has been adapted in the selection of relevant articles for analysis. Therefore, articles related to the internal conflict in Malaysia have been systematically analyzed. Various subscribed databases such as Growing Science, Science Direct, ProQuest, ERIC, and Sage were used to find related articles. In addition, the search engines Google Scholar and Google Search, as well as the Malaysian public universities web database, are also used to ensure that a broader search can be performed. Articles related to this study published between 2008 and 2021 were downloaded for analysis. The keywords used to search for the article were "marital challenges", "marital conflict", "family conflict management", "husband and wife conflict management", "causes of divorce between husband and wife", "marital challenges", "factors of divorce between husband and wife", and "challenges to the relationship between husband and wife". Articles for analysis are studies in the field of family and marital counseling.

6. Findings and Discussions

A total of 21 articles were identified that met the established criteria. The article was systematically analyzed to answer the research questions posed. From the 21 articles obtained, this study is divided into three main sections depending on the objectives of the study.

6.1 Identify the methods and research design that have been used related to the marital challenges in Malaysia.

Table.1 The list of articles obtained showing the methods and research designs used.

No.	Method	Design	f	Researcher, Year
1.	Quantitative	a) Survey	8	1. Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2020 2. Rumaya Juhari et al., 2019 3. Rozmi Ismail et al., 2015 4. P.L. Rika Fatimah, 2012 5. Cai-Lian Tam et al., 2011 6. Tam Cai Lian & Lim Siew Geok, 2008 7. Siti Marziah Zakaria et al., 2008 8. Noralina Omar, 2008

		b) Experiment	1	Rosliza Ahmad & Siti Aishah Hassan, 2017
2.	Qualitative	Case study	11	1. Roslina Che Soh @ Yusof et al., 2021 2. Zainab Ismail et al., 2020 3. Asila Nur Adlynd & Siti Marziah Zakaria, 2019 4. Iqtidar Taufiq et al., 2018 5. Norizan Abdul Ghani et al., 2017 6. Siti Nubailah Mohd Yusof et al., 2017 7. Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017a 8. Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2017 9. Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017b 10. Noor Syaibah Shabuddin et al., 2016 11. Nurhanisah Hadigunawan & Raihanah Azahari, 2016
3.	Mixed methods	Survey and case study	1	Yunchao Cai et al., 2020

For the first objective, the results show that the study of marital challenges has been carried out in Malaysia using three methods, include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Nine articles used quantitative methods, include, eight articles used survey design, and one article used an experimental design. While there are 11 articles that have used qualitative methods with case study design and there is an article that uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods with survey design and case studies. Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it is found that most researchers choose qualitative research methods.

6.2 Identify the data collection methods that have been used in relation to the marital challenges in Malaysia.

Table 2. The data collection methods that have been used.

No.	Data Collection Method	<i>f</i>	Researchers, Years
1.	Questionnaire	10	1. Suzana Mohd Hoesni, 2020 2. *Yunchao Cai et al., 2020 3. Rumaya Juhari et al., 2019 4. Rosliza Ahmad & Siti Aishah Hassan, 2017 5. Rozmi Ismail et al., 2015 6. P.L. Rika Fatimah, 2012 7. Siti Marziah Zakaria, 2012 8. Cai-Lian Tam et al., 2011 9. Tam Cai Lian & Lim Siew Geok, 2008 10. Noralina Omar, 2008
2.	Interview	10	1. *Yunchao Cai et al., 2020 2. Asila Nur Adlynd Mohd Shukry & Siti Marziah

			<p>Zakaria, 2019</p> <p>3. *Norizan Abdul Ghani et al., 2017</p> <p>4. Siti Nubailah Mohd Yusof et al., 2017</p> <p>5. Iqtidar Taufiq et al., 2018</p> <p>6. Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2017</p> <p>7. *Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017a</p> <p>8. Nurhanisah Hadigunawan & Raihanah Azahari, 2016</p> <p>9. Noor Syaibah Shabuddin et al., 2016</p> <p>10. *Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017b</p>
3.	Document analysis	5	<p>1. *Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017a</p> <p>2. Roslina Che Soh @ Yusof et al., 2021</p> <p>3. Zainab Ismail et al., 2020</p> <p>4. *Norizan Abdul Ghani et al., 2017</p> <p>5. *Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017b</p> <p><i>*using more than one data collection method.</i></p>

For the second objective, the results show that the study of the marital challenges has been carried out in Malaysia using the methods of data collection, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Questionnaire and interview methods were used in 10 articles, while five articles used the document analysis method. The results show that a total of four articles have used more than one data collection method.

6.3. Review the main findings of studies related to the marital challenges in Malaysia.

Table 3. The topics and subtopics of the study findings.

No	Topics	Subtopics of the Study Findings	Researchers, Year
1)	Marital satisfaction	a) Family debt has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction.	Yunchao Cai et al., 2020
		b) The working wives showed a moderate level between satisfaction and commitment.	Rumaya Juhari et al., 2019
		c) Marital satisfaction has a positive relationship with mental health.	Iqtidar Taufiq et al., 2018
		d) Age, sex, length of the marriage, family income, number of children contribute to marital dissatisfaction and low quality of life.	Rozmi Ismail et al., 2015

		e) Marital relationship is the priority since this dimension has the lowest level of satisfaction, followed by marital intimacy then marital adjustment as the third priority needs to be improved.	P.L. Rika Fatimah, 2012
2)	Factors of marital conflicts	a) Couples experiencing stress and conflict is a problem of neglect of the responsibility to provide maintenance. The second most important problem is financial, followed by communication problems, family interference, cheating, polygamy, abuse/violence, and witchcraft.	Zainab Ismail et al., 2020
		b) Self-personality factors, sexuality problems, communication problems, third-party interference, drug abuse, lack of religious education, neglect of responsibilities and even abandonment of the partner.	Noor Syaibah Shabuddin et al., 2016.
		c) Negative partner attitudes such as short-tempered, stubborn, and difficult to argue	Nurhanisah Hadigunawan & Raihanah Azahari, 2016
		d) The fear of communication that occurs with the partner is an important factor.	Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2020
		e) Socioeconomic disadvantages have a significant impact on marital dynamics and the quality of parenting.	Noralina Omar, 2008
3)	Cause of divorce	a) Negligence of responsibilities between spouses is the most important factor contributing to divorce in Selangor.	Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017a
		b) The neglect of responsibilities between the spouses is the highest factor in the occurrence of divorces between married couples in the State of Selangor followed by communication factors, moral and social problems, interference from third parties, bad religious, economic, sexual, professional education, Lower health, and health factors are due to cultural differences.	Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin, 2017b
		c) The three main factors that contribute to divorce, namely, incomprehensible, irresponsible and irresponsible partner.	Norizan Abdul Ghani et al., 2017
4)	Approaches	a) Marriage education courses are important in	Siti Nubailah Mohd

to dealing with divorce	providing a platform for knowledge and skills of husband-and-wife relationships.	Yusof et al., 2017
	b) Adequacy of existing laws related to the protection of marriage and family institutions in Malaysia.	Roslina Che Soh @ Yusof, et al., 2021
	c) Quality of marriage: Tolerance between couples, mutual understanding, complementarity, mutual respect, and personal maturity.	Asila Nur Adlynd Mohd Shukry & Siti Marziah Zakaria, 2019
	d) Couples who had a better conflict tactics scale and more perceived social support tended to be in better health.	Tam Cai Lian & Lim Siew Geok, 2008
	e) An open communication style and lifestyle adjustment can be important elements in securing and maintaining a long-term marriage.	Siti Marziah Zakaria et al., 2012
	f) The Islamic psychospiritual approach that emphasizes spiritual practices and the elements of nafs (soul), aql (mind), qalb (heart), and ruh (spirit) helps improve communication for Muslim couples.	Rosliza Ahmad & Siti Aishah Hassan, 2017
	g) Couples who have better communication tactics and conflict skills have better mental health.	Cai-Lian Tam et al., 2011
	h) Face-to-face communication was found to be used to strengthen the relationship between married couples by joking, communicating positively, and resolving conflicts. Married people use communication technology to express love, communicate in a friendly way, share knowledge, and solve problems. Informants also reported that positive communication increased marriage satisfaction.	Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2017

The third objective shows the main theme of the marital challenges in Malaysia. The findings show four identified themes, include marital satisfaction, marital conflict factors, causes of marital divorce, and approaches to dealing with marital divorce.

a. Marital satisfaction

As a result of the marital satisfaction analysis carried out, the relationship of marital satisfaction with other variables is studied. Like the study by **Iqtidar Taufiq et al. (2018)**, who found that marital satisfaction has a positive relationship with mental health, while the study by **Rozmi Ismail et al. (2015)** also found that age, gender, length of the marriage, family income, number of children contribute to the dissatisfaction of marriage and low quality of life. However, a study by **Yunchao Cai et al. (2020)** found that family debt has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction. A study by

Rumaya Juhari et al. (2019) found that working wives showed moderate satisfaction and commitment. However, a study by **P.L. Rika Fatimah (2012)** found that the marital relationship is the priority since this dimension has the lowest level of satisfaction, followed by marital intimacy and then marital adjustment as the third priority that should be increased.

b. Factors of marital conflict

The thematic analysis of marital conflict factors shows that there are several marital conflict factors. A study by **Zainab Ismail et al. (2020)** found that the problem of neglect of responsibility for providing maintenance is the biggest problem followed by financial problems, followed by communication problems, family interference, cheating, polygamy, abuse or violence and witchcraft. While a study by **Noor Syaibah Shabuddin et al. (2016)** found that self-personality, sexuality problems, communication problems, third-party intervention, drug abuse, lack of religious education, neglect of responsibilities and even abandoned spouses are factors in marital conflict. The communication factors are supported by a study by **Nurhanisah Hadigunawan and Raihanah Azahari (2016)** that the negative attitude of couples such as short temper, stubbornness, and difficulty to argue is a factor of conflict in marriage. Their findings are also supported by **Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al. (2020)** who found that the fear of communication that occurs with the partner is an important factor in the occurrence of a marital conflict. While financial factors are supported by **Noralina Omar (2008)** who found that socioeconomic weaknesses have a significant impact on the dynamics of marital and the quality of parenting.

c. Cause of divorce

An analysis about the causes of marital divorce found that couples who do not fulfil their responsibilities well will contribute to the divorce. This is obtained from the study of **Mariam Abd. Majid & Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin (2017a)** that negligence of liability between spouses is the most important factor contributing to divorce in Selangor. This finding is supported by **Norizan Abdul Ghani et al. (2017)** that the top three factors contributing to divorce are unsympathetic, irresponsible, and irresponsible partners. Next, **Mariam Abd. Majid and Mohammad Syafirul Zarif Saleh Hudin (2017b)** also identified that the neglect of responsibilities between spouses is the most important factor in the occurrence of marital divorces between married couples in the state of Selangor, followed by communication, moral and social problems, third party interference, poor education, religion, economy, sexuality, career, health and the lower factors are due to cultural differences.

d. Approaches to dealing with divorce

There are several methods to address the issue of divorce between married couples. The methods studied help married couples deal with relationships in marriage. A study by **Siti Nubailah Mohd Yusof et al. (2017)** found that marital education courses are important in providing a platform for husband-wife relationship knowledge and skills. Although the legal aspect is also focused as a measure to face divorce as a study obtained by **Roslina Che Soh @ Yusof, et al. (2021)** found the adequacy of existing laws related to the protection of marriage and institutions relatives in Malaysia. There is also a study that analyzes the attitude change approach, namely **Asila Nur Adlynd Mohd Shukry and Siti Marziah Zakaria (2019)** who found that tolerance between couples, mutual understanding,

complementary, mutual respect, and maturity staff help quality marital relationships. While a study by **Tam Cai Lian** and **Lim Siew Geok (2008)** found that couples who have a better scale of conflict tactics and more social support are more likely to have better health. Their findings are supported by **Cai-Lian Tam et al. (2011)** couples with better communication tactics and conflict skills have better mental health. Some studies emphasize communication approaches when addressing divorce between married couples. A study by **Siti Marziah Zakaria et al. (2012)** found that open communication style and life adjustment can be important elements in securing and maintaining a long-term marriage. This finding is supported by **Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al. (2017)** it was found that face-to-face communication is used to strengthen the relationship of married couples by joking, communicating positively, and resolving conflicts. Married people use communication technology to express love, communicate in a friendly way, share knowledge, and solve problems. Informants also reported that positive communication increased marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the finding of a study by **Rosliza Ahmad** and **Siti Aishah Hassan (2017)** is an Islamic psychospiritual approach that emphasizes spiritual practices and the elements of nafs (soul), aql (mind), qalb (heart) and ruh (spirit) help improve communication for Muslim couples.

7. Recommendations

Future counselors and researchers can design appropriate modules to be applied and implemented in marital interventions to help with problems in marital. Additionally, this study is also important to counselors when it comes to issues raised by clients during marital counseling sessions because counselors may find that clients not only come to counseling sessions to share the problems experienced, but there are also clients who want information related to issues involving marital such as marital satisfaction, conflict factors, causes of divorce, and approaches to dealing with relationships. Therefore, counselors must be prepared with a variety of up-to-date information related to marital problems affecting the marital relationship. This study that has been implemented is expected to be a platform for future researchers to study in-depth and involve the entire subtopic of the study findings related to the marital challenges.

8. Conclusion

In this study, most marital studies use qualitative methods with case study design. This suggests that qualitative methods are appropriate because requires in-depth analysis and helps researchers understand the marital issues. The findings of this study also show that there are four themes of marital challenges, include marital satisfaction, marital conflict factors, causes of divorce, and approaches to dealing with divorce. Based on these findings, help identify problems that occur in marital and methods to overcome them. There are some limitations among which this study focuses more on published articles, while unpublished articles that are potentially relevant are not discussed. Furthermore, this study only focused on marital challenges related to satisfaction, conflict, and divorce only. As a result of the study findings, some suggestions or ideas related to marital challenges are presented. Such suggestions and ideas can be considered to improve and plan some action to be taken whether spouses, family members, and counselors, especially family counselors and future researchers.

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