

## **Exploring the Modern Malaysian Marriage: Understanding the Relationship of Gender Role Attitudes, Attitudes toward Childbearing, Family Functioning and Attitudes toward Marriage among Young Adults in Malaysia**

Choo May Yan \*  
Chloe Ng Chu Yin  
Claryce Cheong Yong Qing

Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

\*Corresponding e-mail: [choomayyan@gmail.com]

Malaysia is facing a change in the trend of marriage and family formation patterns with a significant decrease in marriage, birth and fertility rates and an increase in divorce rate over the years. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing, family functioning and attitudes toward marriage among Malaysian young adults. A quantitative cross-sectional study design with a purposive sampling method was conducted using an online survey. The data was collected using the General Attitudes towards Marriage Scale, Gender Role Attitudes Scale, Attitudes towards Fertility and Childbearing Scale, and McMaster Family Assessment Device – General Functioning Subscale. The online survey link was distributed on online social platforms and physically at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. 100 young adults aged 18 to 25 years participated in this study. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and simple linear regression were used to investigate the relationship between gender role attitudes, childbearing attitudes, family functioning and attitudes toward marriage. The results showed that only childbearing attitudes have a significant positive relationship and predictive effect on attitudes toward marriage. In conclusion, this finding provides insights to design interventions and awareness programs that aim to increase positive attitudes towards marriage.

*Keywords:* gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing, family functioning, attitudes towards marriage, young adult

Since the 1940s, many Asian countries including Malaysia, have undergone dramatic changes in marriage and family formation patterns. Traditionally, men were the breadwinners while women were responsible for housework and childcare. However, modern marriage has shifted towards an egalitarian approach, where household responsibilities and child rearing are increasingly shared between partners (Ogletree, 2014). According to the statistics provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM; 2021a, 2021b), there has been a decrease in the number of marriages, the crude birth rate, and the total fertility rate, along with an increase in the divorce rate. Other demographic changes such as the increase in singlehood (never married), non-marital birth and first marriage age have encouraged a variety of living and life course arrangement. Studies have reported young adults having two different attitudes toward marriage, one possesses non-traditional marital view (i.e., getting married at a young age); meanwhile, the other possesses interest in marrying at a younger age (“Marrying young? “Survey sees more youths”, 2021). These ambiguous young adults’ attitudes towards marriage caused by the shifted meaning of marriage have brought up the idea that it would be insightful and crucial to study young adults’ attitudes toward marriage as their attitudes on it might have changed and they are the population that will soon enter into marriage.

The change in the trend of marriage might turn Malaysia into an ageing nation (an increase of 300% of elderly by 2040) and there might be an increase in the feelings of loneliness among the Malaysian population. The trend of an ageing nation can bring several economic challenges (e.g., a decrease in labour productivity, an increase in inflation rate and a decline in the saving ratio) to the country (David, 2022; Petersen & López, 2019). Past studies have found that in middle aged adults and elderly, loneliness is associated with depression

(Isik, Başoğul & Yildirim, 2020), poor sleep quality (Haney et al., 2017), cardiovascular disease (Perissinotto, Cenzer & Covinsky, 2012), increased blood pressure (Hawkey, Thisted, Masi & Cacioppo, 2010), poor cognitive functioning (Zhong, Chen, Tu & Conwell, 2017), and increased mortality (Luo, Hawkey, Waite & Cacioppo, 2012).

Family functioning is one of the issues that will affect the marriage of an individual. Past studies indicated that there was a significant relationship between family functioning and attitude toward marriage (Abbasi & Hoseyni, 2019; Kim & Jung, 2015). According to Kivelä, Leppäkoski, Helminen and Paavilainen (2019), families with poor family functioning are likely to be involved in domestic violence. Additionally, the study has also found that there had been an increase in cases of domestic violence in Malaysia. This shows that toxic family functioning is increasing despite living in a modern era. Hence, it is important to study family functioning to ensure the effect on the young generation’s attitude towards marriage and the important aspect is focusing on improving the marriage and least of domestic violence.

Many studies stated that gender role beliefs could lead to attitudes towards gender roles and the outcome of one’s marriage. A past study stated that attitudes towards gender roles were negatively correlated with attitudes towards marriage (Kim & Ko, 2018). Feminism in the society of Malaysia was overlooked, therefore, it can be assumed that Malaysian society still holds the traditional view towards gender roles as the issue of gender roles was underrated and least discussed by the society of our country (Shahrin, 2022). Other than that, the patriarchal gender role believes an attitude will lead to intimate partner violence, which could affect the satisfaction of one towards marriage (McKinley, Lilly, Knipp & Liddell, 2021).

Malaysians tend to have low fertility and childbearing attitudes as there is a dramatic decrease in Malaysia's live birth rate, crude birth rate and total fertility rate lower than the replacement level which had brought up childbearing issues in Malaysia. These trends may contribute to some issues such as the increase in dependency ratio that may negatively influence the country economically and psychologically as it will cause a burden in taxation, social services and mental health.

### **Attitudes toward Marriage**

Attitudes towards marriage relate to how people perceive and value marriage. People who have positive attitudes toward marriage frequently express their strong support for marriage and anticipate getting married at some point in life (Fam, Yaacob, Juhari, Arshat & Mukhtar, 2017). Marriage is the act of how two individuals formally, permanently, and openly declare their relationship. The concept of marriage varies across the globe not only between cultures and religions but also throughout any one culture and religion (KanakYadav, 2018). Marriage is seen as a social requirement in Malaysian culture and being single is frequently seen as a failure in society. Evidently, singles are outcasts in society, and they are constantly pressured to get married (Himawan, Bambling & Edirippulige, 2018).

According to Goslin (2014), people's attitudes are formed through a range of experiences, such as messages from the media, friends, religious values, and family. Thus, as divorce has become a norm, it is shown that the young adults have developed mistrust towards marriage and are likely to divorce in the future (Ogunleye, 2014). Similarly, a comparative study in Belgium has shown that students have increased negative attitudes toward marriage in the year 2018 compared to the year 2002. A large share of respondents disagreed that children who are born in

marriage have higher security, and higher happiness, and are in need of both parents (De Coninck, Van Doren & Matthijs, 2021).

Not to mention, the outcomes of attitudes towards marriage are as follows. Marital attitudes can determine whether a person will have a happy or unhappy marriage and if they will get divorced. For example, the likelihood of happiness and success in a marriage is higher for those who have a more positive attitude towards marriage than for those who have a more negative attitude towards marriage (Karabacak & Ciftci, 2016). Positive attitudes toward marriage increase the possibility of marriage (Willoughby, 2014), benefit marriages by assisting partners in resolving disputes, preserve the stability and quality of their unions (Beyazit, Taşcıoğlu & Cirhinlioğlu, 2018), increase subjective happiness of an individual, and increase respectful behaviour towards a partner (Uğur, 2016). On the contrary, highly embedded negative attitudes toward marriage are associated with lower levels of commitment, poorer levels of contentment, and higher levels of conflict in existing relationships, along with lower levels of relationship success expectations and a higher desire for alternative romantic partners (Riggio & Weiser, 2008). Besides, negative attitudes about marriage held by young people may lead to a loss in their moral beliefs, harm their mental health and society's economy, as well as contributing the destruction of cultural and social structure (Karabacak & Ciftci, 2016).

Additionally, in the study of Kalate Sadati and Jiriaei (2022), the educational level has shown the highest prediction percentage of attitude towards marriage compared to other variables such as religious attitude and household dimension among university female students. Previous literature has found that educated women had a higher average age of marriage compared to women who were not educated (Aryal, 2007; Niraula & Morgan, 1996). Also, the

increase in education has given females the confidence to avoid early marriage (Mishra, 2012). According to Halkola (2019), females may have the opportunity to experience educational opportunities and achievements by delaying marriage in which married women may not experience. Thus, females may develop fears and doubts about marriage and delay their marital age due to the hindrance to their education.

### **Gender Role Attitudes**

The traditional gender roles attitudes, wherein the male and female were assigned distinct duties in society to obey, for example, the individual would have a general belief that the male will be the family's primary provider, while the female will be classified as the homemaker (van der Horst, 2014). Meanwhile, the individual who adopts modern gender role attitudes believes that men and women can both be responsible for being a breadwinner or a homemaker (van der Horst, 2014).

According to McKinley et al. (2021), traditional gender role attitudes are similar to patriarchal gender role beliefs, but those who hold patriarchal gender role beliefs value men's power over women are frequently associate men with authority, dominance, and violence. The research has proven that IPV is more likely to be committed when attitudes toward gender roles are more patriarchal; conversely, IPV is less likely to be committed when attitudes toward gender roles are more egalitarian.

Other than that, two overseas studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between gender role attitudes and attitudes towards marriage. Based on Kim & Ko (2018), their studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between the two variables which indicates that the higher an individual adapts the gender role attitude, the more negative their attitudes towards marriage. However, a study by Turkey

proves that the feminine gender role is positively associated with the marital attitude (Keldal & Atli, 2018).

However, women who achieve economic independence gain self-confidence, and social respectability, and improve the status of their family members (Ozturk, Akman, Bektas & Yildirim, 2021; van der Horst, 2014). According to the research, women with low wages and educational levels are more likely to be housewives (Ozturk et al., 2021).

Despite that it was claimed that the traditional attitude toward gender roles has diminished, the finding indicates that even with modernization, men and women to this day retain gender-specific expectations. Even if women have a dependable source of income and support the family financially, they were still expected to care for the house and raising children were still seen as their duties (Ali, McGarry & Maqsood, 2020).

### **Attitudes toward Childbearing**

Attitudes toward childbearing are individuals' sentiments, beliefs and the values placed on having children (Neal, Groat & Wicks, 1989). The attitude towards childbearing has been clustered into four categories in two past studies: (a) indifference; (b) pro-children/rewards; (c) anti-children/regrets; (d) ambivalence (Groat, Giordano, Cernkovich, Pugh & Swinford, 1997; Neal et al., 1989). The placement in these four categories is based on two dimensions: one's perceived advantages or rewards (e.g., viewed children as necessary for spiritual fulfilment) and perceived disadvantages or regrets (e.g., viewed children as burden) on having children.

		Perceived Advantages/Rewards	
		Low	High
Perceived Disadvantages/Regret	Low	Indifference	Pro-Children/Rewards
	High	Anti-Children/Regrets	Ambivalence

Figure 1 Value-of-Children Typology by Neal et al. (1989) or Childbearing Rewards and Regrets Typology by Groat et al. (1997).

Childbearing and having children were a societal norm of marriage in the past generation. Children were seen as a foundation of individual immortality, a source of elderly parents' social support, a basis of family commitment, etc. (Fiskin & Sari, 2021; Groat et al., 1997). The research found a significant positive relationship between childbearing attitudes and marital attitudes (Fiskin & Sari, 2021; Kim & Ko, 2018). Childbearing and childrearing were expected to only occur within the marital union and begin quickly after entering marriage in non-Western countries due to the belief that having a strong family unit overrides the importance of personal happiness (Chang & Song, 2010; Cheng & Yang, 2021; Ghimire, 2017; Kim & Ko, 2018). However, along with the technological improvement, sex has been separated from marriage, the normative link between them has weakened and children and childbearing mean relatively little to parents and marriage nowadays. Khadivzadeh, Rahmanian and Esmaily (2018) found that despite participants holding positive or negative attitudes toward marriage, they still reported to have low desire toward childbearing.

### Family Functioning

Family functioning is the social as well as structural aspects of the comprehensive family environment (Lewandowski, Palermo, Stinson, Handley & Chambers, 2010). Family dynamics and connections were included, which was the degree of conflict and cohesion, flexibility, management, and communication calibre (Lewandowski et al., 2010). A healthy family functioning includes the characteristics of open communication, clearly defined roles, coherence, and competent affect regulation. Dai and Wang (2015) have introduced an innovative theory that was combined by the two main theory for family functioning which was result oriented and process oriented. A family function theory with two dimensions—a soft index and a rigid index. Affective reactions, commitment, behaviour control, values, and regulations are all included in the soft index. Role assignment, communication, and problem solving are all included in the rigid index. Research found that the family functioning is correlated positively with the attitudes towards two variables which are marriage and life satisfaction (Kim & Jung, 2015). Family dynamics and intimacy could predict conflict in marriage (Ghaem Magami, Abolghasemi & Niknam, 2017). However, Abbasi, Maleki, Sadeghi and Balakhani (2021) found that family functioning is negatively correlated with marital attitudes, but specifically in the veteran population. It also shows that a better family function will result a more unfavourable attitudes towards married along marriage for the individual that has parent occupation as a veteran as their parent. Nevertheless, limited sources reveal how original family functioning could affect the outcomes of marriage such as the attitude towards marriage and the satisfaction of marriage.

To frame these issues, this study adopted the Bem's (1981) gender schema theory and the Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory as the theoretical frameworks.

### **Bem's Gender Schema Theory**

The Bem's gender schema theory suggests that individuals will form their own attitudes and behaviour over time based on the schema-consistent information acquired through early life experiences and social environments such as the interactions with family, friends, and school (Bem, 1981). Individuals subsequently integrate and organise information into networks of mental associations that help them understand their surroundings and themselves and create schemas that represent knowledge about the external world and one's own identity. Individuals judge themselves based on how closely they correspond to the gender schema by evaluating their developed attitudes, preference, personal characteristics, and behaviours, to their gender role views within the gender schema (Bem, 1981).

The concept of gender schema suggests two processes that connect gender schema and attitude. First, after a child has decided whether they are a boy or a girl, they selectively pay attention to and recall information about their own sex (Canevello, 2020; Martin & Dinella, 2001; Zosuls, Lurye & Ruble, 2008). Second, the child will be driven to use this knowledge to make inferences and judgements about gender (Martin & Dinella, 2001; Zosuls et al., 2008) to avoid discrepancies between self-concept and attitude so that it is consistent with their schema to maintain their identities (Canevello, 2020; Martin & Dinella, 2001).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological systems theory explains individuals' development (e.g., attitudes,

perceptions, behaviors) within their relational systems and social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This theory posits that individual development is influenced by a complex interaction process involving multiple layers of surroundings (Alvi, Usman & Amjad, 2018). Generally, Bronfenbrenner (1992) indicated five layers of environment influences as follows:

- (1) Microsystem, that involves individuals' immediate environments they interact with, such as family, peers and school.
- (2) Mesosystem comprises the interaction or connections between microsystem, such as parents-children's peers relationship and parents-teachers relationship.
- (3) Exosystem composes the influence of individuals and content in the broader social systems that do not directly interact with the individuals, such as parents' workplaces.
- (4) Macrosystem, that includes broader cultural beliefs and societal contexts, such as laws and cultural norms.
- (5) Chronosystem, that comprises sociohistorical or time context, such as life transition.

This theory explained how individuals' attitudes may be formed. For instance, individuals' interaction with the immediate settings, such as family has direct effects on individuals' experiences, feelings and even attitudes through their observed or involved family functioning such as parent-child relationship, parental conflicts and parenting practices (Lazinski, 2016). While cultural norms and societal environment also play a significant role to shape individuals' attitudes (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

### **The Present Study**

Gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing, and family functioning were revealed to have a direct relationship with

attitudes toward marriage. However, existing literatures were holding inconsistent findings and limited studies were conducted to assess the relationship between these variables. In order to assure the relationship between these variables and predictive effect of gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing and family functioning on attitudes toward marriage, six hypotheses were proposed:

- (1) There is a significant relationship between gender role attitudes and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.
- (2) There is a significant relationship between attitudes toward childbearing and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.
- (3) There is a significant relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.

If the independent variables (i.e., gender role attitudes, childbearing attitudes or family functioning) are proven to be significantly correlated with dependent variable (i.e., attitudes toward marriage), the fourth to sixth hypothesis will be investigated to figure out whether they have predictive effect on the dependent variable.

- (4) Gender role attitudes significantly predict attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.
- (5) Attitudes toward childbearing significantly predict attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.
- (6) Family functioning significantly predict attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.

## Method

### Research Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted among Malaysian young adults. The data collection process was carried out from 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 to 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023 (12 days). The survey questionnaire was distributed to the participants online (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, *xiaohongshu*, Wechat, Microsoft Teams and email and physically (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar campus). 119 participants were recruited using purposive sampling and a final 100 responses were used. The study was reviewed and approved by the research ethical committee of UTAR (ref: U/SERC/02/2023). Participants were requested to agree to the informed consent as an acknowledgment that they were aware of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of personal information. The inclusion criteria of this study were Malaysian young adults who are aged between 18 to 25 years old, single (not married) and those who are childless. Conversely, the exclusion criteria consisted of individuals who are non-Malaysian, below 18 years old and above 25 years old, married, those who have one or more children and single mothers with childbearing experience.

### Participants

Among the 100 participants, there are 72 females (72%) and 28 males (28%) who are aged between 18 to 25 years old ( $M = 22.37$ ,  $SD = 1.152$ ). All respondents are Malaysians with the majority of them being Chinese (88.8%), followed by Indian (7%), Malay (4%) and other races such as Sino Kadazan (1%).

## **Instrument**

In the survey questionnaire, it consisted of three sections, which are informed consent, measurements of the four variables, and demographic information.

### ***Attitudes toward Marriage***

The General Attitudes towards Marriage Scale (GAMS) was developed by Park and Rosén (2013) aimed to measure individuals' attitudes toward marriage. It is a 7-point Likert scale consists of 10 items (0="strongly disagree" to 6="strongly agree"). Items 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10 are reverse coded. GAMS measures people's attitudes toward marriage by considering three factors, which are positive attitudes, negative attitudes and fears or doubts (affective component) toward marriage. Higher total scores indicate more positive attitudes toward marriage. The Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's Omega for GAMS in the present study are .806 and .775.

### ***Gender Role Attitudes***

The Gender Role Attitudes Scale (GRAS) was proposed by García-Cueto, Rodríguez-Díaz, Bringas-Molleda, López-Cepero, Paíno-Quesada and Rodríguez-Franco (2015) to measure individuals' attitudes toward gender role in three areas, which are family, social and employment context. It is a 5-point Likert scale with 20 items (1="totally disagree" to 5="totally agree"). It is a unidimensional scale that measures people's gender role attitudes in a bipolar structure – transcendent attitudes or sexist attitudes (stereotyped attitudes) in family, social and employment contexts. Items 1 to 6 are reverse coded. Higher mean scores indicated sexist attitudes, while lower scores indicated transcendent attitudes. The Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's Omega for GAMS in the present study are .848 and .857.

### ***Attitudes toward Childbearing***

The Attitudes to Fertility and Childbearing Scale (AFCS) was originally developed by Söderberg, Christensson, Lundgren and Hildingsson (2015) to assess women's attitudes toward fertility and childbearing. However, in this study, the AFCS was used to investigate childbearing attitudes in both males and females where male participants are required to answer the scale items based on their perception of women's childbearing role. It is a 5-point Likert scale (1= "totally disagree" and 5= "totally agree") with 21 items. It measures individuals' fertility and childbearing attitudes by focusing on three important components – importance for the future, hindrance at present and female identity. Items 8 to 16 are reversed coded. Higher total scores reflect higher levels of fertility and childbearing attitudes. In this study, AFCS showed a Cronbach's alpha of .906 and a McDonald's Omega of .887.

### ***Family Functioning***

The General Functioning Subscale taken from the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD-GF) was developed by Epstein et al. (1983) and aimed to measure general health level or pathology of family functioning. It is a 4-point Likert scale (1="strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree") with 12 items. The items of FAD-GF were categorized into positively worded items (items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 & 12) and negatively worded items (items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 & 11). Negatively worded items were reverse coded. Higher mean scores reflect higher levels of healthy family functioning. In the present study, FAD-GF showed a Cronbach's alpha of .873 and McDonald's Omega of .877.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was carried out by using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was



employed to examine the relationship between gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing, family functioning and attitudes toward marriage. Simple linear regression was conducted to find out the predictive effect between independent variable and dependent variable, if significant correlation was found.

**Results**

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was computed to examine the correlation between independent variables and the dependent variable. Once significant relationship was found between any independent variable with the dependent variable (i.e., attitudes toward marriage), simple linear regression analysis was

conducted to whether they have predictive effect on the dependent variable.

Based on Table 1, the relationship between gender role attitudes, attitudes toward childbearing, family functioning and attitudes toward marriage was investigated by using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. There is a significant moderate relationship between attitudes toward childbearing and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia ( $r=.585$ ,  $p<.001$ ), with high levels of attitudes toward childbearing correlated with high levels of attitudes toward marriage.

Since there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward childbearing and attitudes toward marriage among Malaysian young adults, a simple linear

*Table 1*

Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation between Attitudes toward Marriage, Attitudes toward Gender Role, Attitudes toward Childbearing and Family Functioning

Variable	<i>n</i>	Attitudes toward Gender Role	Attitudes toward Childbearing	Family Functioning	Attitudes toward Marriage
Gender Role Attitudes	100				
Attitudes toward Childbearing	100	.167			
Family Functioning	100	-.109	-.014		
Attitudes toward Marriage	100	-.041	.585**	.193	

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

*Table 2*

Simple Linear Regression between Attitudes toward Marriage, Attitudes toward Gender Role, Attitudes toward Childbearing and Family Functioning

Model		Regression (Coefficients)		<i>t</i>	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	16.234	2.547		6.373 <.001
	Attitudes toward Childbearing	.350	.049	.585	7.144 <.001

a. Dependent Variable: SUM\_GAMS

regression was conducted to examine the predictive effect between these two variables. Preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure all assumptions (i.e., normality, independence of errors, normality of residual, linearity and homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity) are met. The regression model is statistically significant,  $F(1,98) = 51.034$ ,  $p < .001$  with only 37.8% of variance. Table 2 shows that attitudes toward childbearing were a significant positive predictor of attitudes toward marriage,  $\beta = .585$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

### Gender Role Attitudes

The results showed that there is no significant relationship found between gender role attitudes and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia. There is an inconsistency in the results between this study with Kim and Ko (2018) which proved that the higher the gender role attitudes and the lower the expectations or attitudes towards marriage. The findings of Keldal and Atli (2018) on the other hand show that individual with higher female gender role attitudes has more positive attitudes towards gender role attitudes.

The differences in culture can be concluded as one of the main attributions towards the inconsistency in findings. The society in Korea has noticed the importance of gender issues and no longer suppressed their opinions about feminism and gender equality (Kang, 2022). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, gender role attitudes is not a popular topic to discuss and there is still a lack of awareness and attention for the topic regarding women's rights especially Muslim women in Malaysia (Shahrin, 2022). Therefore, we can conclude that Malaysians are unaware of the impact of gender role attitudes and deny that there is a huge detrimental factor contributing to their marriage.

### Attitudes toward Childbearing

The findings indicated that attitudes toward childbearing is not only significantly related to attitudes toward marriage, but it is also a predictor to attitudes toward marriage. This result is consistent with the findings of Fiskin and Sari (2021) and Kim and Ko (2018) who also found a significant positive correlation between attitudes toward childbearing and attitudes toward marriage. However, this result is inconsistent with the findings of Khadivzadeh et al. (2018) which showed no relationship between attitudes toward childbearing and attitudes toward marriage.

Possible contributors to this inconsistency are cultural and participants' age differences. Khadivzadeh et al. (2018) study was conducted in Iran, located at the west of Asia. However, most studies that found a significant relationship between these two variables were conducted in East and South Asia, specifically China, and Korea. The current study was conducted in Malaysia (Kim & Ko, 2018).

Besides, Khadivzadeh et al. (2018) had a greater study sample age range from 15 to 38 years old. The participants from age groups below 18 years old may contribute less mature opinion to the study's findings as marriage could be something that is quite far from their current life stage. While for participants above 25 years old that have exceeded the average age of getting married, may have already entered into marriage, and this may affect their attitudes toward childbearing and marriage as they're at a different life stage compared to those who have not married.

### Family Functioning

Our results showed no significant relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia. More specifically, the

positive association between family functioning and positive attitudes toward marriage was only trending towards significance. While our results did not replicate existing findings on family functioning and attitudes towards marriage in college students, the pattern of correlation is consistent with Kim and Jung (2015), who found a similar positive relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage. Further, our findings did not support the results of Abbasi & Hoseyni (2019), which found a negative relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage, such that higher family function led to more negative attitudes toward marriage.

The study by Abbasi and Hoseyni (2019) was conducted with a wider age range, a majority of whom were above 30 years old. Our study, similar to Kim & Jung (2015), was conducted with college students (< 30 years old). This variability in age range potentially explains the inconsistency in results. Based on these findings, we posit that family functioning may be more strongly correlated with attitudes toward marriage during the period of adolescence. During this period of development, adolescents' limited views towards marriage may stem from their individual experiences in their family, including family culture and parental relationships (Kim & Jung, 2015; Lee, 2008). As individuals grow older, they may experience a shift in the formation and maintenance of their attitudes toward marriage, such that family functioning may be differentially correlated with attitudes toward marriage.

Further, we reason that gender differences may account for our lack of significance in the association between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage. Coinciding with Kim & Jung (2019), our study sample consisted of more females relative to males. However, the proportion of females relative to males in our study was slightly greater

than in the former study. In Kim & Jung (2009), researchers found a significant effect of gender on attitudes toward marriage, where males had more positive values toward marriage compared to females. We suggest that the higher proportion of females in our study may potentially mask the correlation between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage. Taken together, these findings add novel information on the relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward marriage, including the role of age and gender in relation to family functioning and attitudes toward marriage.

### **Implications**

The findings of this research can be served as a source for developing and implementing program and social policies. By understanding the significant effects of childbearing attitudes on marital attitudes, respective parties can contribute efforts to plan a childbearing- and marriage-related awareness-raising campaign includes some contents of possible contributors and consequences of Malaysia's low marriage rate, young adults' current attitudes toward childbearing, and programs that are implemented by the government to motivate and help couples who plan to have more children. For example, couples with children that encounter financial problems may get financial help from government programs, working women less worry about their career path as the government has implemented labour laws that secure their work during pregnancy and some programs that planning to develop family-friendly work environment to ensure the life quality of couples with or planning to have children.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

There are a few limitations in this study as homosexual participants were not ruled out in the data collection procedure. Homosexual individuals may experience

different social environments due to their inability to give birth which will shape their attitudes differently. Thus, the finding of this study may not be able to fully generalize to both heterosexual and homosexual populations in Malaysia as data regarding the sexual orientation of participants was not collected in this study. Future researchers are recommended to emphasize more on this issue to enhance the generalizability of the research findings.

Furthermore, there is an uneven gender distribution in our study where majority of the participants are females. The responses of male participants may be underestimated due to the high gender imbalance in the study. The uneven gender distribution may also lead to gender bias result. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalized for the Malaysian male young adult population. It is recommended for future researchers to conduct this study on the male young adult population.

Other than that, the current research study is limited to the Chinese population as 88% of participants are Chinese. Hence, results are better generalized in this limit of Chinese. However, Malaysia has another two main ethnics with different culture and might influence the attitudes toward marriage, which may yield different results from this study. Therefore, it is recommended for future study to conduct further studies with equal amount in diversity in ethnics to improve the generalizability of research findings on Malaysia population.

### Conclusion

This study concluded that Malaysian young adults with high attitudes toward childbearing have a high and positive attitude toward marriage. Attitudes toward childbearing also predicted young adults' attitudes toward marriage. The findings of present study may be beneficial in providing insights to design interventions

and awareness programs that aims to increase positive attitudes towards marriage. This study revealed that gender role attitudes and family functioning have no significant relationship with attitudes toward marriage among young adults in Malaysia.

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