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Exploring Relationships Between Personality Traits and Marital Satisfaction among Urban Malays Using Malaysian Samples: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract
Personality is one of the most important psychological variables explored in understanding the underlying dynamics of marital relationships. Thus, this study aims to identify the relationships between personality and marital satisfaction using specific culture. This study is apart from a larger study that explored the relationships between psychological factors relating to marital satisfaction. This study was carried out adapting the explorative research design using survey and questionnaires. Cluster sampling from 10 areas within Lembah Klang were executed to gain respondents. A number of 578 married urban Malay individuals residing in Lembah Klang voluntarily participated in this study. Questionnaires consisted of questions relating to personal background, personality and marital satisfaction were distributed by trained enumerators and later collected for analysis. Results show that personality factor specifically *agreeableness* (β = 0.30*, k < 0.05)*, conscientiousness* (β = 0.16*, k < 0.05) *and neurotism* (β = -0.12*, k < 0.05) do influence marital satisfaction. This research implies that further in depth studies in the area of marital satisfaction are much needed to explore specifically on personality. A more detailed study focussing on the psychology of marital relationships, namely personality, would be an enormous contribution to the field of psychology specifically on marital relationships.
Keywords: Personality, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Relationships, Malays, Malaysia

Introduction
Marital satisfaction is one of the most important psychological indicators of well- being of an individual in a marital relationship. It is a general indicator of happiness of a married individual. Study of marital satisfaction has gained much attention from researchers since the early years of scientific research (Burchinal et al., 1957; Luckey, 1964; Rollins & Feldman, 1970) and is predicted to continue in future (Isik, & Kaya, 2022; Hatta et al., 2021; Hoesni et al., 2021). Marital satisfaction remains an important aspect in studying marriage and family due to the negative consequences when individual experience low marital satisfaction. Many studies have shown that low marital satisfaction is correlated with poor psychological, mental

and physical health. For instance, there are studies that investigated physical and mental health outcomes in enduring marriages (Wickrama et al., 2020), multimorbidity and subjective health in middle and later life married couples (Hee Kim & Joo 2021), depression (Du et al., 2021), low job satisfaction (Narimisaei & Fard, 2018) and ineefctive parenting (Yoo, 2020).

Personality is another crucial psychological variable which has been investigated together with marital satisfaction. Previous researchers have investigated marital satisfaction and personality and found specific personalities to correlate and have an effect on marital satisfaction (Abdi et al., 2020; Abe, & Oshio, 2018; Ariski & Nurhayati, 2021; Moblian et al., 2021; Salimi et al., 2022; Tavakol et al., 2017). Specifically, researchers found that specific personalities such as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness are correlated positively with marital satisfaction such as a high trait on openness in related to a more satisfied marriage.

In addition, studies have also suggested the importance of studying marital satisfaction and personalities in specific cultures. (Dobrowolska et al., 2020; Kazim, & Rafique, 2021; Tavakol et al., 2017). Studies indicated that there are cultural factors as well that contribute to marital satisfaction. They stressed the importance of researchers when investigating and including practitioners working with married individuals to be cautious of an individuals' culture. Their findings indicated that there are also differences and similarities of marital satisfaction predictors from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate relationships between personality traits and marital satisfaction in a specific culture, namely, urban Malays using Malaysian samples. This study is apart from a larger study that explores the psychological aspects and relationships to marital satisfaction among urban Malays in Malaysia.

Method
Research Design
This study adapted the exploratory research design using questionnaires.

Sampling and Procedures
A number of 578 respondents consisting of 256 males (44.3%) and 322 females (55.7%) residing in Lembah Klang voluntarily participated in this study. The inclusive criteria for this study involved Malay individuals who resided in Lembah Klang, married and living together. Conversely, exclusive criteria were those who were unable to read in Malay language, not residing in Lembah Klang and practicing commuter marriage. This study adapted the cluster sampling. Trained enumerators distributed questionnaires in 10 locations within Lembah Klang consisting of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Shah Alam, Petaling Jaya, Klang, Kajang, Subang Jaya, Selayang, Ampang and Sepang. Married individuals who fulfilled the sampling criteria for this study were given the questionnaires to complete. Completed questionnaires were then collected to be further analysed.

Questionnaires
Questionnaires in this study comprised of three main sections to gain responses in understanding personality and marital satisfaction. Namely, Section A: Personal Background information, Section B: Personality and Section C: Marital Satisfaction.

Section A: Personal Background Information

This section involved questions relating to personal background for the respondents. This included the age, sex, education level, income level and total years of marriage.

Section B: Personality

Personality in this study was measured using Big Five Personality Scale (Big5) developed by McCrae dan Costa (1987, 1997 & 1999). This instrument contained 44 positive and negative items which measured five main dimensions of personality as suggested by Goldberg (1993). John and Srivastava (1999) defined the main five personality to facets specifically: openness vs. closedness to experience, conscientiousness vs. lack of direction, extraversion vs. introversion, agreeableness vs. antagonism, neuroticism vs. emotional stability and. Responses for each item were 5-Likert scale from "1" as strongly disagree and "5" strongly agree. Personality scores were summed up according to the five dimensions primarily *Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.* The higher the scores indicate the proneness to specific personality measured.

Section C: ENRICH Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction in this study applied the ENRICH Marital Scale developed by Fowers and Olson (1993). This scale consisted of 10 items relating to marital relationships and five items related idealistic distortion to moderate the effects of idealistic distortion within marriage. All items were related to marital satisfaction such as habits and personality of spouse, ways of handling responsibilities in the family, communication, decision making and conflict resolution, finance, spending time together, intimacy and sexual expression, parenting, relationships with parents, in laws and friends and religious values and practices. The higher the scores indicates a higher marital satisfaction and the lower scores shows the lower marital satisfaction.

Analysis

Response from respondents were managed by coding and analyzed using the IBM SPSS version 28 software. Data were analysed using the descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, min and standard deviation to describe the data ibn this study. Conversely, inferential statistics such as the Pearson Correlation were carried pout to investigate the relationships between personality and marital satisfaction. In addition, regression were used to study the influence of personality on marital satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive Statistical Results

A number of 578 married Malay individuals residing within Klang Valley participated in this study. Respondents consisted of 322 females and (55.7%) and 256 males (44.3%). Respondents who participated in this study aged between 20 until 69 years old. Most respondents aged between 30 until 34 years old (30.28%) followed by respondents aged 25 until 29 years old (18.16%) and 35 until 39 years old (16.78%). Education level of respondents ranged from lower primary education until PhD. Most of respondents were Malaysian Certificate Exam (MCE/ SPM) holder (34.08%) and followed by Malaysian Higher Certificate Education (MHCE/ STPM) holder (32.01%) and bachelor's degree (23.53%) holder. Most respondents have a monthly income between RM4600 – RM 5000 (12.8%) followed by RM2600 – RM3000 (10.2%) and RM3600 – RM4000 (9.3%). Generally, almost half of

respondents in this study were married within 10 years and below (48.27%). Specifically, most of respondents were married for between four until six years (17.99%). This is then followed by respondents who were married between one until three years (16.09%) and seven until nine years of marriage (14.19%). Most respondents in this study also have at least two children (24.7%) followed by one children (21.6%) and three children (17.5%). A detailed descriptive results were summarized in Table ** .

Table 1: Descriptive results of respondents - personal background

Variables	n	%
Sex		
Male	256	44.3
Female	322	55.7
	578	100
Age		
20 – 24	21	3.63
25 – 29	105	18.16
30 – 34	175	30.28
35 – 39	97	16.78
40 – 44	69	11.94
45 – 49	34	5.88
50 – 54	43	7.44
55 – 59	35	4.33
60 – 64	5	0.87
65 – 69	4	0.69
	578	100
Education level		
Primary education	6	1.04
Lower Certificate Education (LCE/SRP/PMR)	16	2.77
Malaysian Certificate Examination (MCE/SPM)	197	34.08
Malaysian Higher Certificate Education (MHCE/ STPM) / Diploma	185	32.01
Bachelor's degree	136	23.53
Masters	32	5.54
PhD	6	1.04
	578	100
Personal Monthly Income (RM)		
100 - 500	1	0.2
600 - 1000	5	0.9
1100 - 1500	16	2.8
1500 - 2000	13	2.2
2100 - 2500	53	9.2
2600 - 3000	59	10.2
3100 - 3500	31	5.3
3600 - 4000	54	9.3
4100 - 4500	31	5.4
4600 - 5000	74	12.8
5100 - 5500	14	2.4
5600 - 6000	30	5.2
6000 - 6500	10	1.7

6600 - 7000	45	7.8
7100 - 7500	3	0.5
7600 - 8000	50	8.7
9000	2	0.4
10000	19	3.3
11100 - 11500	23	4
15500-20000	9	1.5
20100-25000	6	1
30000	1	0.2
Tiada	29	5
	578	100
Total years of marriage		
1 - 6 years	9	1.56
7 - 12 years	41	7.09
1- 3 years	93	16.09
4 - 6 years	104	17.99
7 - 9 years	82	14.19
10 - 12 years	46	7.96
13 – 15 years	41	7.09
16 - 18 years	38	6.57
19- 21 years	22	3.81
22 - 23 years	16	2.77
24 -26 years	19	3.29
27 - 29 years	20	3.46
30 - 32 years	20	3.46
33- 35 years	16	2.77
36 - 38 years	10	1.73
39 years	1	0.17
	578	100
Number of Children		
0	90	15.6
1	125	21.6
2	143	24.7
3	101	17.5
4	63	10.9
5	30	5.2
6	12	2.1
7	11	1.9
8	1	0.2
10	1	0.2
11	1	0.2
	578	100

Inferential Statistical Results

Pearson correlation analysis were carried out between subscales of Big 5 Personality in particular *openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness,* and *neuroticism*. Results showed that there was a positive and weak significant correlation between personality

specifically *openness* (r=0.16**, p<0.01), *extraversion* (r=0.12**, p<0.01) and marital satisfaction. In addition, there is a positive and moderate correlation between subscale of personality focussing on *agreeableness* (r=0.44**, k<0.01) and *conscientiousness* (=0.38**, k<0.01). Conversely, there is a negative and moderate significant relationship between *neuroticism* (r= -0.33**, k<0.01), and marital satisfaction.

Table 2: Correlation between Big 5 personality subscales with marital satisfaction

Variables	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Total scores of marital satisfaction	0.16**	0.38**	0.12**	0.44**	-0.33**

Note: N=578, p<0.01

Multiple linear regression was used to test if five personality factors significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Results show that personality dimensions specifically *agreeableness* (β = 0.30*, k < 0.05), *conscientiousness* (β = 0.16*, k < 0.05) and *neurotism* (β = -0.12*, k < 0.05) for Big Five Personality are factors that predict marital satisfaction. The three personality dimensions contribute 23% to the dependable variables. Extraversion and openness for Big Five Personality were included in the analysis, however the two factors were not found to predict marital satisfaction. Results for ANOVA regression model presents personality dimensions namely *agreeableness, conscientiousness* and *neurotism* are significant factors contributing to marital satisfaction (F = 57.21, k < 0.05).

Table 3: Big Five subscales for predicting factor contributing to marital satisfaction.

Variables	β	t	R²	p
Agreeableness	0.30	6.74	0.19	0.00
Consciousness	0.16	3.28	0.22	0.00
Neurotism	-0.12	-2.63	0.23	0.01
F (3, 577) = 57.21				

Note: N=578, p<0.01

Discussion
The importance of investigating personality traits in understanding the dynamics of marital satisfaction has gained attention by many marital relationship researchers. Thus, this study consistently discovered that personality traits do have significant relationships with marital satisfaction. Specifically, findings showed that specific personalities such as *openness, conscientiousness, extraversion,* and *agreeableness* do have positive relationships with marital satisfaction. The higher levels of *openness, conscientiousness, extraversion,* and *agreeableness* personalities individuals have, the more satisfied they are in their marriage. Conversely, there is a negative relationship *between neurotic* personality trait and *marital satisfaction.* The higher levels of neurotic personality trait predict less satisfied marriage. Further investigation showed that three personality traits such as *agreeableness, conscientiousness* and *neurotism* do contribute to marital satisfaction. Findings in this study supported by existing literature investigating personality and marital satisfaction (Abe, & Oshio, 2018; Ariski & Nurhayati, 2021; Tavakol, Nikbakht Nasrabadi, Behboodi Moghadam, Salehiniya, & Rezaei, 2017; O'Meara, & South, 2019; Sayehmiri et al., 2020).

Furthermore, results in this study suggests the importance to investigate traits of personalities and marital satisfaction in greater depths. Personality traits suggests that individuals do differ in ways of people think, feel, and behave in various situation including marital relationships (Goldberg, 1993). These are the core psychological elements encompassing individuals that influences how an individual would react to different situations in life including long term relationships such as marriage. This is crucial due to the fact marriage is a long-term relationship which involves many individuals around them including children, close family members, workplace and most importantly the married individual themselves. To illustrate, a prolonged unhappy marriage may result in marital distress that might contribute to future problems regarding to psychological health of an individual (Margelisch et al., 2017) and individuals close to them for example children (Lui et al., 2020). Not only that, by understanding personality traits, it can also be a predictor for issues related to marital satisfaction such as infidelity (Isma & Turnip, 2019). As a result, personality provides a scientific ground to find the most suitable intervention for married couples in achieving the optimum marital satisfaction. Hence, contributing to individuals' psychological well-being. For instance, a sufficient body of knowledge on personality and marital satisfaction would be a good referral for helping professions such as counsellors, social workers and marital therapists who are working with married couples to help clients achieve optimum level of psychological well – being. Moreover, adequate body of knowledge provides a good basis for module development and psychoeducation in helping couples who plan to marry and married couples in achieving a better marital satisfaction in future.

Future researchers may choose to investigate marital satisfaction applying various available types of marital satisfaction instruments when investigating personality types. One of the reasons is that each marital satisfaction instruments do provide researchers with a general or specific concept of areas relating to marital satisfaction. For instance, flourishing scale (Fowers, 2016) investigates flourishing relationships within which are vital in understanding marital satisfaction. On the other hand, findings suggests that researchers should also explore specific personality traits when exploring marital satisfaction. For instance, perfectionism (***) and narcissistic personality (****). In addition, emotional regulation should also be explored when studying marital satisfaction since findings suggest the neurotic personality trait has some contribution to marital satisfaction. How an individual manage their emotions can also be related to personality trait and how it affects marital satisfaction. Besides that, findings suggests culture is another aspect which are vital in exploring personality and marital satisfaction. Culture not only suggest a way of living but it also shape an individuals' thoughts, feelings and action. The norms, belief system and faith in certain cultures also help build values and the values may influence how an individual from certain cultures perceive marital satisfaction (Dion & Dion, 1996; Halford, 2018).

Conclusion

In summary, findings indicate the importance of exploring personality and marital satisfaction in greater depth. A more thorough investigation in future research is vital in expanding the psychological dynamics underlying marital satisfaction in relation to personality and other factors such as culture and also the application of measuring instruments for variables specifically marital satisfaction. An expansion of further study would not only enrich the knowledge within the field of psychology that focuses on marital satisfaction and personality, however, benefitting couples who intends to build a marriage, married couples and also helping professionals to empower married couples.

Acknowledgement

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