

Bridging the Gap: Emotional and Practical Challenges in Commuter Marriages of Young Malaysian Couples

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Abstract

This study explores young Malaysian commuter couples' unique challenges, focusing on those married for less than five years. Commuter marriages, characterized by physical separation due to professional or personal commitments, present significant emotional, financial, and logistical challenges that differ from traditional cohabitating marriages. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, six participants engaged in commuter marriages were interviewed to understand their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The findings reveal that physical separation impacts the couples' emotional well-being, leading to feelings of loneliness, guilt, and dissatisfaction. Participants reported difficulties in fulfilling traditional marital roles, particularly during emotionally or physically challenging moments, such as illness or stress. Additionally, the study highlights the financial burden of maintaining dual residences and frequent travel, which strained the couples' resources and limited their ability to achieve long-term goals. Communication challenges, including inconsistent routines and the lack of physical intimacy, further compounded the emotional strain. Despite these obstacles, the study illustrates the resilience and adaptability of commuter couples. Participants employed various coping strategies to sustain their relationships, including leveraging digital communication tools and practicing financial prudence. However, they also acknowledged the limitations of such measures in replicating the emotional and physical closeness integral to marital satisfaction. This study contributes to understanding commuter marriages in a rapidly evolving societal context, offering insights for practitioners, policymakers, and employers to support these couples better. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of commuter marriages on relationship dynamics and the well-being of both partners.

Keywords: Commuter Couples, Emotional Challenges, Financial Burden, Coping Strategies, Relationship Dynamics

Introduction

One of the main characteristics of a traditional family is that the husband and wife live together and share their daily lives, fulfilling complementary roles. Living together and sharing life is an essential element that strengthens the marital bond between husband and wife. However, modern life changes have significantly altered the structure of marriage, such as the existence of commuter couples. Commuter couples are married couples who live separately, usually far apart, and only meet or spend time together periodically. Many factors influence married couples to be commuters, such as work demands, economics, continuing education, or seeking a balance between personal growth and marital responsibilities. While commuter marriage offers advantages regarding individual growth and financial stability, it also presents emotional and relationship challenges. Maintaining intimacy, managing domestic responsibilities, and meeting social expectations can be sources of stress for commuter couples. This study, therefore, seeks to understand the unique challenges and adaptations of Malaysian commuter couples who are newly married under five (5) years old. The perspective of these young couples, who have just embarked on their married life as commuters, promises to provide valuable insights into the challenges of married life outside the traditional structure, particularly in the Malaysian context. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the challenges commuter couples face, their strategies and the dynamics of their relationships. The findings are expected to significantly contribute to understanding how commuter marriages impact newlywed couples in a rapidly changing societal landscape.

Literature Review

Commuter Couples Profiles

Generally, couples who go through this commuter marriage have a dynamic lifestyle. Usually, these couples are professionals with dual careers, where both have jobs requiring high commitment and are in different locations. Commuter spouses also mostly have a higher education level and work in highly skilled jobs such as medicine, academia, or corporate, where moving is becoming a common practice to advance a career. In terms of age, this commuter couple is in their 30s to 40s. Married couples in their 30s to 40s usually go through a peak period regarding career development and family responsibilities. Typically, children are young, attend school, and need more attention. Such a situation makes family management more complex. The central place of residence usually depends on the place where the children are located. This primary residence becomes the center of family life for various social activities. Geographically, commuter couples are more common in urban areas, where job opportunities are better due to higher availability, diverse career options, and more significant financial incentives.

Factors For Commuter Marriages

The prevalence of commuter marriages is steadily increasing in today's society. There are no global statistics on commuter marriages. However, the commuter marriage trend can be seen in countries with strong economies and high job market demands, such as Europe, Canada, and Asia. Past studies have identified several factors contributing to this trend. One significant factor is the proliferation of dual-career couples. These couples, each with successful careers and stable incomes, play a crucial role in the family's financial stability. As a result, opting for a commuter marriage is often viewed as the most practical choice. The competitive job market makes it challenging for couples to switch jobs easily, further reinforcing the appeal

of this arrangement. Another driving force behind commuter marriages is the changing dynamics of modern relationships. Some married couples choose this arrangement because specialization and promotion opportunities are only available in specific locations. Moreover, traditional gender roles in marriages have evolved significantly. Stereotypical expectations no longer bind couples; instead, both men and women strive for success in their careers without the need for one to sacrifice. This shift in mindset underscores the importance of personal growth and individualism even after marriage. It is important to note that a commuter marriage is not a permanent arrangement for many couples. Instead, it is often a strategic decision influenced by better income opportunities in specific locations. This strategic approach to marriage decisions provides a unique insight into the changing dynamics of modern relationships.

Issues of Commuter Marriages

Despite their unique challenges, commuter marriages testify to married couples' resilience. These challenges, often less pronounced or absent in cohabitating relationships, are met with a determination to balance personal, professional, and family responsibilities.

A significant challenge is managing the emotional strain caused by being physically apart (Wu & Wang, 2022). The absence of a spouse in daily life can trigger feelings of loneliness and isolation for both partners. The lack of regular, face-to-face interaction that typically nurtures marital intimacy may erode closeness and emotional connection. Physical distance also makes it harder to provide emotional support during difficult times, increasing emotional vulnerability.

Advancements in communication technology offer benefits to commuter couples, with various methods like video calls, text messages, and emails available. However, digital communication can only partially replace in-person interaction (Glutzer & Federlein, 2007). Misunderstandings can arise quickly, and some methods, like texting, limit the ability to convey non-verbal cues such as tone of voice or facial expressions. Digital communication can also feel burdensome, requiring planned interactions instead of the spontaneous and natural exchanges typical in cohabitating relationships.

Time management is crucial for commuter couples. Coordinating work commitments, family responsibilities, and travel demands requires meticulous planning from both partners (Heilpern, 2016). Frequent commuting often leads to physical exhaustion, less time for rest or social activities, and a packed schedule, resulting in burnout and reduced quality of life (Glutzer & Federlein, 2007). Sudden changes in plans, such as emergencies or travel disruptions, add to the stress, making it difficult to maintain consistent routines. The constant need for flexibility and readiness for unexpected changes can cause frustration and mental fatigue.

Jealousy and trust issues are also common in commuter marriages. Physical absence may trigger insecurities, doubts about a partner's activities, or suspicions of infidelity. Poor communication routines can leave one partner feeling neglected, fostering mistrust. Maintaining trust requires good communication, mutual understanding, and a strong foundation of faith in each other, which can be challenging due to the distance (Heilpern, 2016).

Household and childcare responsibilities often become imbalanced in commuter marriages, as the partner remaining at home takes on the burden of managing the household and caring for children. This solo responsibility can lead to stress and feelings of dissatisfaction. Children may also experience emotional challenges due to the absence of one parent, who cannot consistently provide guidance and attention (Glotzer & Federlein, 2007).

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenology, as the research design. The phenomenological approach, which focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Moran, 2000), provides a thorough understanding. It involves in-depth interviews and an analysis that centers on participants' perceptions. Through this approach, the data is expected to delve deeply into how participants view and interpret their world (Giorgi, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). In commuter marriage research, the phenomenological approach empowers the researcher to actively explore the subjective experiences of participants living apart due to work commitments. Using semi-structured interview methods, the researcher can effectively capture commuter couples' emotions, challenges, and coping strategies. This approach is instrumental in uncovering the distinct dynamics and impacts of commuter marriage relationships, enhancing our understanding of the realities of these unique unions.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling ensures the researcher can select participants with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research questions. This method ensures the data is rich and informative, providing the depth and detail needed for comprehensive insights. For this study, the participant selection criteria were defined as follows: (1) couples who have been married for no more than two years, (2) engaged in a commuter marriage for at least three months, and (3) living apart at least three times a week.

Interview Questions

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The interview questions were prepared in advance prior to the actual interviews. Semi-structured interview questions allowed the researcher to ask questions relevant to the research objectives while allowing participants to share their experiences. The interview questions were divided into six (6) main sections, covering aspects such as (1) participant profile, (2) factors influencing the choice of commuter marriage, (3) challenges faced in commuter marriage, (4) positive aspects of commuter marriage, (5) the impact of commuter marriage on the couple, and (6) coping strategies for navigating commuter marriage. However, for this article, only three aspects were selected: (1) participant profile, (2) factors influencing the choice of commuter marriage, (3) challenges faced in commuter marriage, and (4) coping strategies for navigating commuter marriage.

Interview Procedure

The first step involved identifying married couples who met the predetermined criteria for the study. Once identified, the researcher contacted these individuals to obtain their consent to participate in the study. The researcher scheduled the interview date, time, and location

upon obtaining consent. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, following the agreed schedule and location. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The researcher guided the interviews using semi-structured questions prepared in advance. The key topics of focus included

- factors influencing the choice of commuter marriage,
- challenges in commuter marriage and
- coping strategies for managing the demands and needs of commuter marriage.

Data Recording and Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The researcher then transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. Thematic analysis was employed to identify the key themes presented by the participants. Thematic analysis was conducted in stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with familiarizing oneself with the data, requiring the researcher to read the data in detail and repeatedly. Next, a systematic and dedicated coding process covered all the data collected. The researchers identified categories and themes based on the initial coding process. Constructing categories and themes might occur multiple times until the researcher is satisfied with the developed categories and themes. These themes were ultimately reported narratively to strengthen the explanation of the constructed themes.

Findings

Participants Profile

A total of six (6) study participants were involved in this research. By gender, the number of male participants was 1, while six were female. Five (5) out of the six (6) participants were of Malay ethnicity, and one was of Indian ethnicity. The age range of the participants was between 25 and 32 years old. Only one participant had a child (1 child), while the other participants did not have children. Five out of the six participants had stable employment, while one participant was not working (a homemaker). All participants lived apart from their spouses, with five participants having partners residing in different states. One participant had a spouse living in the same state but in a different district, with a considerable distance between the two locations. These living arrangements are an important aspect of our research. Details can be referred to in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Participants' Profile

Participant	Age	Sex	Location	Occupation	No of children	Commuter marriage duration	Frequent meetings in a month/year
1	25	Male	Selangor (Wife in Johor).	Businessman	0	2 years	2 times a month
2	31	Female	Sabah (different district).	Doctor	0	2 years	2-3 times a month
3	27	Female	Johor (husband in Terengganu).	Government officer	0	10 months	2 times a month
4	31	Female	Kedah (husband in Sabah).	Housewife	1	7 months	2 times a month
5	26	Female	Melaka (husband in Selangor)	Private worker	0	3 months	2 times a month
6	28	Female	Kuala Lumpur (husband in Singapura)	Private worker	0	2 years	Few times in a year

Factors of Choosing Commuter Marriage

Five out of six study participants stated they chose commuter marriage for work-related reasons. For instance, Participant 2 mentioned that her husband's job in a uniformed service required frequent job relocations. Previously, her husband was posted to a distant location, but his latest assignment was even farther away.

"Yes, it is because of work. My husband works as a police officer and is now stationed in Ranau, Sabah. Before this, he was working in Kuala Lumpur. After getting the new posting, it is even farther in Ranau, Sabah." (Participant 2)

Participant 3 experienced a similar situation, as her husband had previously lost his job. Fortunately, her husband secured a new position, requiring him to relocate to Terengganu: *"Before that, my husband lost his job. Then, he got a better job in Terengganu. It is a better position than the previous one, but the location is far."*

Her job, however, was inflexible and could not accommodate a transfer. As a result, the couple decided to become a commuter couple, *"I work here (in Johor). Requesting a transfer was impossible, so my husband had to look for a new job. That is why we became a commuter couple, due to work needs."*

Participant 4's situation was unique because she initially had no issue following her husband to Labuan for his new job. However, she became pregnant when her husband received the job offer. Ultimately, she decided to stay at her parent's home until her child was older, as she felt childbirth would be easier with her family's support. This decision, while

practical, also meant a significant sacrifice on her part, *"I decided to stay at my parents' house until my child grew older. It is easier to give birth when close to family."*

Participant 6 also chose a commuter marriage due to her husband's job. Her husband's field of work had more opportunities in Selangor, while her field was still limited in his area. Consequently, they opted for a commuter arrangement:

"It is definitely because of work that we live apart. My husband's field is established in Bangi (Selangor). Hmm, I do not see opportunities in my field there yet. Maybe it is just not the right time. So, we decided to do long-distance for now." (Participant 6)

Conversely, Participant 1 and his spouse became commuters because his wife studied in Johor while he remained in Selangor to manage his business. "It has been two years because my wife is still studying in Johor."

Challenges of Commuter Marriage

Need to rely on oneself

The primary challenge faced by the study participants is the emotional burden of having to rely solely on themselves during tough times, such as falling ill. The absence of their spouse in such situations is a significant obstacle, forcing them to navigate these challenges alone. This not only affects their emotional and mental well-being but also underscores the unique struggle of each participant. Participant 3 vividly expressed this sentiment:

"If we talk about emotions, I think that would be, if not a big part, then the biggest part. Because once you're married, the attachment is different from before. We have someone we can depend on and share everything with, but that person is not physically there. So, the limitation is definitely on the emotional part." (Participant 3)

Participant 4 shared a similar experience, recalling moments during her pregnancy when complications required her to be hospitalized. She had to attend regular check-ups alone, and when admitted to the ward, her husband was unable to accompany her.

"During my pregnancy, I had some complications. Sometimes, I had to go to the hospital alone. I was admitted to the ward once, and it felt sad because people kept asking, 'Isn't your husband coming?' 'Isn't he here?' 'Why isn't your husband with you?' So, it made me feel sad. But, what could I do? It is because of work."

For Participant 4, facing challenges alone and dealing with people's questions about her husband's absence significantly affected her mental health.

"If possible, I do not want to be alone. So, most of the challenges are mental."

Participant 5 also agreed that falling ill is one of the most challenging situations for commuter couples. She had to find ways to recover independently, a stark contrast to her expectation that, after marriage, her spouse would be there to help care for her when she was unwell. The absence of her spouse during such moments was deeply upsetting, highlighting the gap between expectation and reality.

"The challenge is when you are unwell—it feels incredibly lonely. Like, when you have a fever or something, you have to go by yourself. Yes, it was like that before, but after marriage, you know, it's natural to expect someone to love and care for you. So... when you're sick, that's when it hits you the hardest because you're alone, with no one to take care of you."

Difficulty in managing emotions

Living in a commuter marriage necessitates a departure from the idealized expectations of married life. The distance and time constraints prevent commuter couples from experiencing married life in the same way as others. Many shared activities become unattainable, leading to heightened stress and dissatisfaction. As Participant 4 candidly expressed, the emotional toll is significant:

"The challenge is emotional, like figuring out how to manage it. I do everything on my own, and sometimes it gets stressful. If possible, I do not want to be alone. So, most of the challenges are mental. Even when I talk to my spouse, he can only listen. For me, if he does not experience it, he does not know. We have to stay positive, though sometimes it gets tough." (Participant 4)

This is particularly true for those in the early years of marriage. The initial phase, typically a time of joy and togetherness, is instead marked by prolonged separation. For instance, Participant 1 expressed feeling significant stress at the start of the marriage due to the inability to enjoy the early happiness of living together. This situation led to a significant emotional strain. *"Sometimes, when I think about it, I feel like giving up. However, reflecting on it, I have known her since school, and we have known each other for a long time. After getting married, we got to know each other deeper, including each other's feelings. Mentally, it was tough at first. For others, maybe the first year of marriage is wonderful... because they live together. In the first year, we were already living apart, which really took a toll on me mentally."*

The Emergence of Negative Emotions and Thoughts

The disruption of daily communication and interaction routines between partners is a common experience that can easily lead to the emergence of negative thoughts and emotions toward one another. For example, when a partner is slow to respond to phone calls or messages, the participant begins to think that something negative is happening, usually related to the partner having an affair. This can be seen from the confession of Participant 1. Participant 1's experience is familiar one:

"Sometimes, a feeling tells me things that are not true. What is she doing at times like this? Eh, why didn't she reply to my WhatsApp? Sometimes, she is sleeping, and I do not even know. However, we think of the worst things. You know? Where is he going? Why doesn't he answer the call? Why doesn't he reply to my WhatsApp? People say it is just the devil. It is an internal conflict. There are negative thoughts, like maybe she is cheating or something."

Participant 1 candidly acknowledges the internal conflict that arises from these unfounded thoughts: *"It's like an internal battle. My wife hasn't done anything wrong, but I'm the one harboring these negative thoughts."* Participant 1's tendency to investigate his wife's

whereabouts and potential interactions with other men further illustrates how unchecked negative thoughts can quickly escalate into conflict.

Participant 1's experience underscores the role of negative thoughts in relationship conflicts: *"Because of these negative thoughts, I often find myself asking her, 'Have you been out with someone?' I end up feeling blindly jealous for no reason, even though nothing is happening. These unfounded thoughts are the root cause of many of our conflicts."*

Participant 6's difficulty handling emotions is related to her experience of separation from her husband. The emotional bond felt after marriage differs from the bond experienced during the dating phase. Coping with the feeling of longing when apart from her husband becomes more complex and causes deep sadness. Participant 6 would cry every time she had to part from her husband.

"Okay, so for these three months, it is not challenging, but it is just that, you know, when we were dating, the longing felt different. Hmm. But when we get married, the longing feels different. Hmm. It is like feeling more sadness. When we were dating, it was okay to say goodbye; it was no big deal. But when we are married, it feels like this sadness. I have never felt this sad, but why am I feeling this way? Now I realize... because many of my friends are also in long-distance relationships. They said, 'It is okay; once you are married, you will know what it is like to be apart.' Hmm. I thought it wouldn't be sad, but sadness comes over you instantly. No matter where I send him, on public transport, I will cry." (Participant 6)

Inability to fully fulfill the responsibilities as husband and wife

The participants in the study were deeply affected by their feelings of disappointment and guilt. They felt they failed to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as husbands or wives perfectly due to their distance from their partners. This sense of disappointment and guilt was particularly acute when their partners were facing challenges or falling ill, as they felt unable to provide the support they wished they could.

"When he is sick, I feel useless at home. Hmm, it is like, when a man is sick, he needs more attention than a woman, right? So... it's like that. I keep thinking about when we can live together. When can we live together? It is like that. I would lie if I said I did not feel that way." (Participant 6)

The participants felt a deep sense of inadequacy in their ability to provide effective assistance. They believed that during their partners' difficult moments, they should be able to do more than just listen. This feeling of *inadequacy led to a sense of guilt, as they felt they had not been able to help as much as they wanted to.*

"When we are far apart, they face tough situations... If I were with her, I would try to help as much as possible, maybe by giving her a massage or making her a hot drink, right? When I am with them, I feel like I might be able to make them feel better. However, when we are apart, well... I hear her problems and complaining, but what can I do?" (Participant 1)

Deprived of Physical Closeness and Affection

The emotional impact of physical absence on intimacy was a significant finding in this study. The distance between the married couple and the infrequent meetings made the participants feel a lack of physical intimacy and affection. The daily pressures sometimes made the participants want to hug their partners or receive physical touch.

"But sometimes it is unstable, like when we are stressed at work, when we come home, we want to hug our husband and feel okay, but then it feels sad. There is no one at home. I live with a colleague from work." (Participant 2)

Unfortunately, such hopes do not always materialize. Although their partners can be a source of support and encouragement, there are times when the participants deeply desire this support to be complemented by touch and embrace. The absence of their partners during stressful moments makes these situations even more challenging to endure.

"I can express myself to my partner, but the feeling is not the same because, during those moments, we need some comfort in physical touch. When we're sad, we want to hug them and cry. Those kinds of things it was tough. Hmm, it was tough." (Participant 5)

A deep disappointment occurs when one misses their partner so much, but that longing cannot be expressed. This unexpressed longing adds to the participants' emotional burden, *"First of all, when I miss them, I cannot express it."* (Participant 5)

Struggle with Consistent Interaction

Not all couples in this study adhered to a consistent communication routine. Some, like Participant 6, preferred to seize the opportunity to connect when it arose rather than sticking to a specific time. Participant 6, for instance, enjoyed spending her evenings resting and retiring early.

Participant 6, for example, expressed her desire for nightly communication, acknowledging the challenges and her willingness to make it work.

"Okay, ideally, we should talk briefly at night, but we do not. Sometimes, we communicate during the day, but having a fixed time to call every night does not happen. I am the type who goes to sleep. I'm not going to tell you—I do not like looking at my phone."

Additionally, Participant 3 found it difficult to establish a suitable time for exclusive communication with her spouse because their daily schedules differed. Moreover, Participant 3's husband lived with his family, requiring her to be mindful of finding an appropriate time to communicate privately without interruptions.

"For example, sharing my feelings after work is different. Because when we are apart, I must consider his situation at home. He is not living alone. If he were living there by himself, maybe our timing would match. But he is with his grandmother and family, so his activities are different. Even though both of us finish work at the same time, communication is still challenging."

Difficulty Coordinating Visits

The next challenge is finding suitable times to take vacations and spend quality time together. Some participants, or their spouses, work as police officers or doctors, limiting their flexibility to take leave compared to others. Their vacation chances are sometimes affected by current circumstances or restricted to shorter periods. As a result, they often feel rushed when spending time together during these brief intervals.

"The overall experience is tough. Both of us are front liners, so getting leave is difficult. Sometimes it is just one or two days off. And when we meet, everything feels rushed to get done." (Participant 2) Despite these challenges, the participants show remarkable resilience in managing their time and relationships.

Although Participant 3 is not in the same profession as Participant 2, timing remains challenging. Even when vacation plans are made, unforeseen events can lead to cancellations. *"Then, whether it is a working day or not, we still need to check each other's availability. In terms of timing, sometimes something happens. You are eager to share, but you know he is unavailable."* The participants' determination to make their relationships work despite the challenges is evident in their efforts to coordinate their schedules.

Participant 5 faces even more significant challenges as her husband works abroad in Singapore. Planning to meet becomes more complex due to the distance and the involvement of different countries, each with its own set of travel restrictions and regulations. Despite deeply missing her husband, the difficulty in meeting often leaves her resigned to the circumstances, which is hard to endure.

"If it is after work or something, it feels different when you express feelings than when he is nearby. You have to consider his schedule at home when he is far away. Because he is not living alone, maybe our time would align if he lived alone there. However, his grandma and his family are at home. So his activities are different. Even though both of us finish work at the same time, the communication is challenging." The participants' adaptability in adjusting to their partners' different living situations is a testament to their resourcefulness.

Financial Burden

Commuter couples maintain two separate residences, which means they must bear the financial burden of supporting two households simultaneously. This situation significantly increases financial strain. For instance, a substantial amount of money is spent on frequent travel expenses, including fuel, airfare, train tickets, hotel stays, and other travel-related costs. This can lead to a significant portion of their income being dedicated to these expenses, leaving less for other necessities. These financial challenges can also impact the couple's emotional well-being, potentially leading to stress and strain on the relationship.

"Another issue when living apart is probably finances. Flights are costly, and sometimes the travel expenses are substantial. Then there are additional costs once you arrive there. That is the financial challenge. Now, with the house there, it feels like having two homes. Even traveling there requires fuel, which is costly these days." (Participant 2)

For Participant 4, although she saves by living with family, her husband's travel costs remain challenging due to the distance and high transportation costs. As a result, they must plan carefully regarding time and financial resources, as money needs to be allocated for emergencies and daily expenses. While they wish to meet their partners more frequently, Participant 6 admits they must also save money to plan for a better future, such as preparing to have children. Thus, they need to be prudent in spending and saving.

"We constantly remind each other to be frugal. Because now that we are living as a couple, that is crucial. Money can cause major arguments for many people. For me, money is essential in life. Even being single without money is stressful, let alone living as a couple. Moreover, what if we have kids someday? So, it is crucial to start saving now."

Discussion

This study reveals the multifaceted challenges of young Malaysian commuter couples, highlighting the emotional, logistical, and financial complexities of living apart. The findings underscore the significant impact of physical distance on marital satisfaction and emotional well-being, as well as the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by these couples in navigating their unique circumstances.

The human side of the study and the emotional challenges reported by the participants align with existing research on the strain caused by physical separation in commuter marriages (Wu & Wang, 2022). Participants expressed feelings of loneliness, disappointment, and guilt, exacerbated by their inability to fulfill traditional marital roles, particularly during critical moments such as illness or emotional distress. These findings resonate with Bernard and Bernard's (1981), assertion that emotional strain is a defining feature of commuter marriages, as physical separation limits opportunities for in-person emotional support. Moreover, the emergence of negative thoughts, including jealousy and suspicion, reflects the insecurities that can arise without regular interaction, corroborating Heilpern's (2016), findings on the importance of trust and communication in maintaining marital harmony.

The financial strain associated with maintaining dual households and frequent travel was a significant concern for participants. This aligns with Govaerts and Van den Broeck's (2018) findings on families' financial and logistical burdens with non-traditional living arrangements. Participants noted that these expenses affected their financial stability and significantly limited their ability to plan future goals, such as starting a family. The logistical challenges of scheduling meetings and vacations further compounded the strain, with participants expressing frustration over their inability to spend quality time together due to professional and financial constraints.

Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated remarkable adaptability, employing various coping strategies to sustain their relationships. For example, they relied heavily on digital communication tools to bridge the gap, though they acknowledged the limitations of such methods in replicating physical presence. These findings support Glotzer and Federlein's (2007), observation that technology, while beneficial, cannot entirely replace face-to-face interaction in fostering intimacy. Additionally, participants emphasized the

importance of financial prudence and emotional resilience, illustrating their proactive efforts to mitigate the effects of separation.

The insights gained from this study have significant implications for future research. They provide a rich ground for further exploration of the long-term effects of commuter marriages on marital satisfaction and family dynamics, particularly as these relationships evolve. This study paves the way for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by commuter couples and the strategies they employ to sustain their relationships.

Overall, this study highlights commuter couples' resilience and unwavering commitment in navigating the complexities of modern marital arrangements. While the challenges are significant, the adaptive strategies these couples employ underscore their dedication to sustaining their relationships despite the barriers posed by physical distance.

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