Exploring the Wellbeing Challenges of Educated Housewives: A Case Study in Malaysia

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Abstract
This study investigates the well-being challenges faced by educated housewives in Malaysia, a group that frequently combines highly educational attainment with full-time domestic responsibilities. Researchers use a qualitative case study approach to investigate the lived experiences of seven PhD qualified housewives under the age of 45 and having at least one child under the age of 12. In-depth interviews were used to gather information about the various challenges face by educated housewives in daily life. The study identified three main themes including physical, psychological and social. Exhaustion from managing household responsibilities, psychological struggles caused by feelings of underappreciation, isolation, stress from unmet personal aspirations and social constraints influenced by societal expectations. Notably, these difficulties were discovered to be temporary, primarily occurring during the coping and adapting phase of transitioning into the housewife role, especially when children are still in their early developmental stages. These findings highlight the complex and often invisible pressures experienced by highly educated housewives. The study has several implications, including increased societal awareness of the invisible labour and psychological cost borne by educated housewife, the development of community-based programs that promote intellectual engagement, social support and personal development for housewife. Finally, the study advances our understanding of how education, identity and domestic life interconnected, laying the groundwork for future research and interventions aimed at improving the well-being of highly educated housewife.
**Keywords:** Educated Housewife, Wellbeing Challenges, Case Study, Women Empowerment

Introduction
Over the last few decades, Malaysia has seen remarkable growth in women's educational attainment, with an increasing number of women pursuing and completing advanced degrees. This trend is consistent with global patterns of increased female participation in

higher education, contributing to enhanced opportunities for both personal and professional advancement (The World Bank, 2024). Notably, female enrollment has constantly surpassed that of males at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels over the last decade. In 2023, the gross enrolment rate for females in Malaysia was 99.5% at the primary level and 94.9% at the secondary level (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Furthermore, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, (2024) women enrolled in tertiary education at a rate of 50.7%, significantly higher than men at 33.8%.

In conjuction with female enrolment in higher education, Malaysian graduates labour force participation increase tremendously from 45.7% in 1982 to   56.2%, by 2023 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Figure 1 showed the labor force participation rate in Malaysia by gender. This figure indicates significant progress toward gender equality in the labor market. However, despite these gains, a persistent gender gap in labor force participation remains.
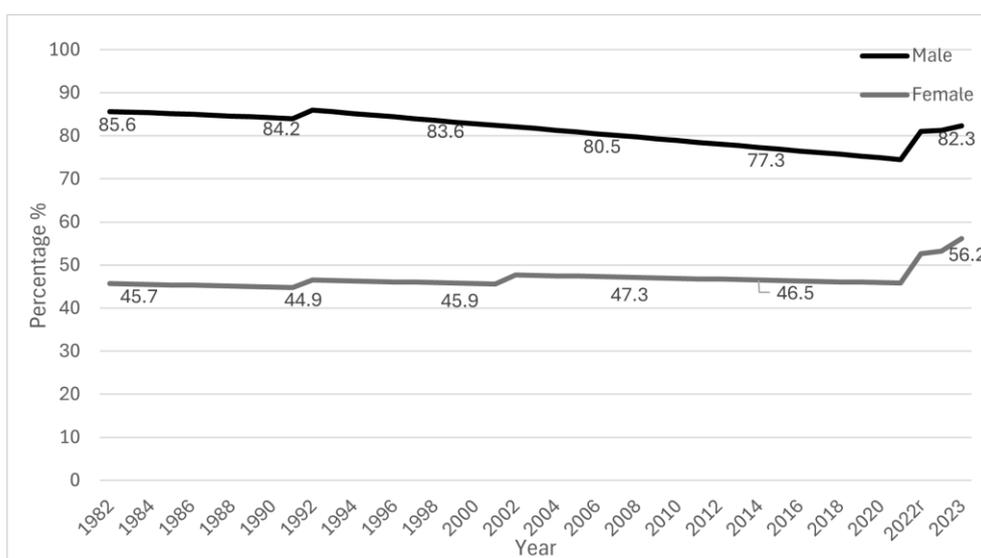
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024)
Figure 1: Gender Labor Force Participation Rate in Malaysia

Data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024) showed the 25-29 age group has the highest female participation rate (77.4%). In contrast to their male counterparts, female participation declines steadily with age, with a particularly drop observed in the age 30-40. Figure 2 indicate labor force participation rate in Malaysia by age and gender.
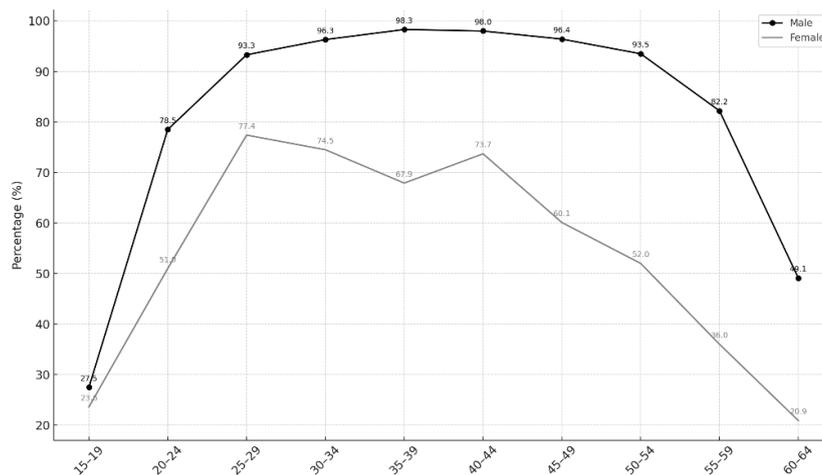
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024)
Figure 2: Age and Gender Labor Force Participation Rate in Malaysia

A notable trend is the withdrawal of highly educated women from the workforce after marriage, typically between the ages of late 20 until early 40, especially during the early years of childrearing (Mohsin & Syed, 2020; Sharifah Nabilah & Norma Mansor, 2022). 62.1% of women who are not in the labor force cite household chores and family responsibilities as their primary reason for not working (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This decision is frequently motivated by a desire to provide direct care, ensure their children's optimal development, and maintain religious, cultural, or personal values related to motherhood and family responsibilities (Ila Nursalida et al., 2024; Momani, 2025). As a result, many qualified women temporarily set aside professional goals in favor of full-time caregiving during this critical time.

This decision, while rooted in values of nurturing and caregiving, raises important questions regarding its implications for women's personal wellbeing. The wellbeing of women especially housewife not only affects her individual quality of life but also significantly influences various aspects of family life. Previous studies have primarily focused on comparing the lived experiences of housewives with those of working women (Edsel, 2014; Hamplová, 2019; Jindal, 2017; Mehfooz Ahmad & Aqeel Khan, 2018; Sato, 2022). However, such comparisons may overlook the unique challenges faced by housewives themselves. Therefore, studies on housewives should be conducted independently, without comparing them with working women, as each group encounters distinct and context-specific issues (Dillaway & Pare, 2008; Mehfooz Ahmad & Aqeel Khan, 2018; Sahin & Aytac, 2021). Limited attention has been given to the experiences of educated women who choose to become full-time housewife.

For highly educated housewives, the transition from professional careers to full-time domestic roles can lead to unique psychological and social challenges. These can include feelings of identity loss, intellectual stagnation, physical exhaustion, emotional stress, and social isolation (Ila Nursalida et al., 2021) especially in the early stages of motherhood, where caregiving demands are the highest peak (Hamplová, 2019). Although housework is often perceived as simple and trivial due to its familiarity and routine nature (Putri & Sudhana, 2013) in reality, the responsibilities of a housewife are highly complex and demanding (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). Despite this, the wellbeing of full-time homemakers remains an underexplored area in academic literature.

Therefore this study is crucial, as a psychologically well-adjusted housewife has the potential to positively contribute to her own happiness, marital stability, strong parent-child relationships, and the mental wellbeing of her children, especially during their adolescent developmental stages (Benson & McKay, 2019). This study aims to explore the wellbeing challenges faced by highly educated housewives in Malaysia, focusing specifically on the transitional period when they adjust to full-time caregiving roles. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this research sheds light on the lived experiences of these women and identifies the multidimensional impact of their role transition on physical, psychological and social wellbeing.

The findings of this study have significant implications for mental health professionals, family policy makers, and support organizations. By understanding the nuanced struggles of educated housewives, stakeholders can develop more targeted interventions and support systems that tailored to the needs of educated housewives, as well as contribute to a more inclusive understanding of women's wellbeing across various life stages. This research not only fills an important gap in gender and wellbeing studies but also contributes to a more inclusive and realistic understanding of women's life trajectories across diverse social contexts.

Literature Review
Housewife Wellbeing Challenges
Previous research on housewives' well-being (Lamb, 2011; Lilian Hughes, 2012; Posel & Bruce-Brand, 2020; Ünal, 2012) frequently refers to Betty Friedan's, (1963) foundational work, particularly her influential book The Feminine Mystique. In this influential work, Friedan discussed the dissatisfaction and unhappiness felt by women confined to domestic roles, inventing the term *"the problem that has no name."* The publication of this book sparked widespread debate and had a significant impact on the women's movement, resulting in increased female labor force participation and a notable decrease in the number of women choosing to be full-time housewives (Posel & Bruce-Brand, 2020).

Friedan, a radical feminist, argued that housewives lacked identity and self-determination, preventing them from finding happiness and psychological well-being. According to this perspective, highly educated women who chose homemaking as a full-time job were unlikely to find life satisfying due to the repetitive and undervalued nature of household tasks. Because homemaking does not generate direct financial income, Friedan saw it as a form of oppression and discrimination against women. This viewpoint is consistent with ideologies that devalue unpaid domestic labour as economically unproductive and thus socially insignificant (Choong, 2021).

As a result of these perceptions, many housewives experience a diminished sense of self-worth when compared to career women, who are often seen as performing more valuable and professional roles (Tomescu-Dubrow et al., 2019). However, from a sociological perspective, this notion can be challenged. Mikucka, (2011) suggests that increasing the number of highly educated housewives within society may serve as a form of social support. When educated housewives form a visible and engaged community, they can support one another, share knowledge, and create networks that reduce feelings of marginalization. This

peer interaction can help redefine the role of housewives as purposeful and socially meaningful, particularly when underpinned by educational and intellectual engagement.

Another sociological classic research conducted by Lopata, (1971) highlighted the challenges face by educated housewives. In the interviews with 571 housewives the study reported many of them felt isolated, powerless, fearful, and lacked personal identity. They also had narrow perspectives on their own roles and did not see housewifery as a legitimate or respectable career. This finding is supported by more recent research by Mehfooz Ahmad and Aqeel Khan, (2018) who found that housewives frequently struggle with poor mental health and low self-esteem, owing to limited social networks. Similarly, Posel and Bruce-Brand (2020) supported Lopata's (1971) previous conclusions by noting that housewives typically report lower levels of subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction than their working counterparts.

However, Hamplová (2019) and (Hori, 2017) emphasize that, in general, housewives report higher levels of happiness than working women, due to the satisfaction that comes from fulfilling their responsibilities to their families and children. This sense of accomplishment in promoting family well-being can improve their overall emotional state. Furthermore, Choudhary and Ahmad, (2017) argue that housewives' psychological well-being improves significantly when their spouses actively support them in managing household duties. Recognition and appreciation from the community can also help people feel better about themselves and their social standing. These findings imply that social support and perceived respect are critical to the psychological well-being of housewives, particularly in traditional and family-oriented societies.

Methodology
Research Design
This study employed a qualitative methodology using a case study research design to explore the wellbeing challenges experienced by highly educated women who choose to become housewives in Malaysia. Case study methodology allows for a comprehensive exploration of contemporary phenomenon within their real-life context, without requiring control over behavioral events in small sample size (Yin, 2018). Case study research is typically classified into two categories which are single case study and multiple case study designs. A single case study involves the in-depth examination of one individual, group, or situation whereas multiple case studies include the analysis of several cases for comparison and broader understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Yin (2018), a single case study is particularly well-suited when the case is unique, critical, complex, or extraordinary. The decision of highly educated women to deviate from conventional career paths and instead dedicate themselves to the role of housewife represents such a unique phenomenon, warranting in-depth investigation. Given that this study focuses specifically on PhD-holder housewives group which is both uncommon and under-researched, the single case study approach was deemed the most appropriate for capturing the depth and complexity of their lived experiences.

Unit of Analysis
In case study research, clearly identifying the unit of analysis is essential, as it defines the primary subject under investigation and anchors the study's focus on the central research

issue (Yin, 2018). It serves as a guide for data collection and analysis, ensuring that all information gathered directly contributes to answering the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this study, the unit of analysis is the individual PhD-holder housewife. Specifically, they are under the age of 45 and are full-time housewives with at least one child below 12 years old. This unit is deliberately chosen to align with the objective of the study, which is to explore the wellbeing challenges faced by highly educated women who have chosen to prioritize caregiving and household responsibilities over professional careers.

Procedure
To gather in-depth data of the highly educated housewives wellbeing challenges, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The in-depth interviews conducted between October 2022 and September 2023. To allow for consistency in the data and findings explored across participants, while also offering the flexibility to probe further into individual experiences, values, and perspectives, researchers follow the interview protocol as its primary research instrument (Yin, 2018). Table 1 outlines interview protocol used in this study, including both the main questions and follow-up prompts.

Table 1
Interview protocol

Section	General Question	Prompt
Background Information	Can you briefly tell me about your educational background?	What field is your PhD in? When did you complete it?
	What is your current family setup?	Number and age of children
	How long have you been a full-time housewife?	
Challenges	How has your daily physical routine changed since becoming a housewife?	Do you feel more physically tired or healthier?
		Have you experienced any physical strain or health issues related to housework or childcare?
	Can you describe any emotional challenges you've faced since becoming a housewife?	Feelings of frustration, isolation, sadness, or guilt
	Has your role as a housewife affected your mental focus or sense of self-worth?	How do you see yourself now compared to when you were studying or working?
	How has your social life changed since becoming a housewife?	Frequency of social interaction, feeling left out of professional circles, relationships with friends/family
		Do you feel understood or supported by your social circle in your current role?
Closing	Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience that you feel is important for understanding the challenges of women like you?	

Source: Field study, October 2022-September 2023

Sampling Procedure

Suhaida et al., (2017) previously highlighted the lack of statistical data in Malaysia concerning educated women who identify themselves as full-time housewives. Prior to that, the present study initiated a preliminary survey aimed to identify educated housewives. To recruit participants, the researchers used a random sampling method and distributed digital posters across social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Interested individuals accessed the survey by clicking on a link embedded in the poster. Data was collected using an online questionnaire hosted on Google Forms and available from September 28 to October 5, 2022. During this time, a total of 253 responses was recieved.

Among 253 respondents, they were screened based on predetermined inclusion criteria aligned with the study's objective. The inclusion criteria are PhD holders, age below 45, currently having kid at least below 12 and residing in Malaysia. The selection process is illustrated in Figure 3, depicts the participant selection flowchart.
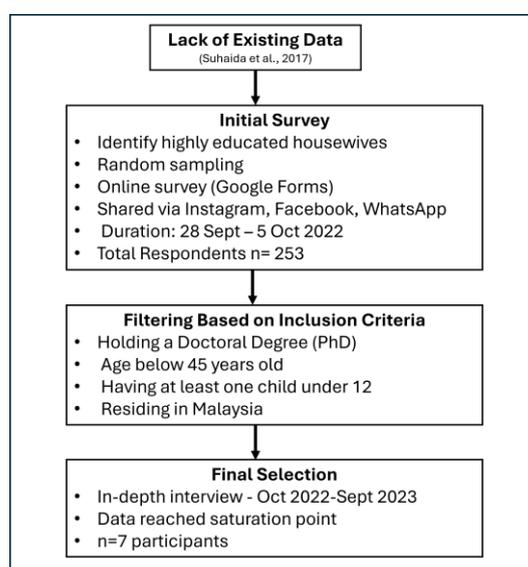
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Lack of Existing Data      │
│          (Suhaida et al., 2017)     │
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                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Initial Survey           │
│ • Identify highly educated housewives│
│ • Random sampling                   │
│ • Online survey (Google Forms)      │
│ • Shared via Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp│
│ • Duration: 28 Sept – 5 Oct 2022    │
│ • Total Respondents n= 253          │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Filtering Based on Inclusion Criteria│
│ • Holding a Doctoral Degree (PhD)   │
│ • Age below 45 years old            │
│ • Having at least one child under 12│
│ • Residing in Malaysia              │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Final Selection           │
│ • In-depth interview - Oct 2022-Sept 2023│
│ • Data reached saturation point     │
│ • n=7 participants                  │
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Figure 3: Participant Selection Flowchart

Participant

In accordance with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell, (2017) and Saunders et al., (2017) the determination of sample size in case study research is guided by the principle of data saturation. Saunders et al., (2017) refer data saturation to the point at which no new information or themes emerge from the data. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend a sample size of four to five cases for qualitative case studies, while Yin (2018) suggests a range of up to eight cases. In the present study, data saturation was achieved with seven participants. All selected participants met the inclusion criteria aligned with the objectives of the study, ensuring the relevance and richness of the data collected. Table 2 showed demographic background of participant in this study.

Table 2
Participant Demographic Background

Participant	Age	State	Area of study	Working experience	Housewife duration (y)	Number ( ) & children age (yo)
PT (1)	34	Selangor	Engineering	Research Assistant	4	(3) 9, 5, 1
PT (2)	34	Johor	Architecture	Research Assistant	3	(2) 6, 1
PT (3)	41	Selangor	Statistic	Lecturer	13	(4) 15, 12, 5, 3
PT (4)	35	Terengganu	Management	Lecturer	12	(2) 9, 11
PT (5)	36	Melaka	Management	Private Officer	9	(2) 6, 8
PT (6)	36	Johor	Sciences	Production Operator	10	(3) 2, 6, 9
PT (7)	43	Selangor	Sciences	Laboratory Officer	5	(3) 15, 9

Note : PT=participant, ( ) =indicate numbers (y)=years, (yo)=years old
Source: Field study, October 2022-September 2023

Data Analysis
The data analysis process functions as a critical stage for refining and interpreting the collected data with the aim to uncover the underlying meanings embedded within participants' narratives and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To manage and analyze the qualitative data effectively, the researchers employed Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), specifically NVivo. This tool facilitated the systematic organization, coding, and retrieval of large volumes of textual data. The analysis process was guided by the Interactive Model of Data Analysis developed by Miles & Huberman, (1994), which consists of three core components; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Figure 4 illustrates this model and outlines how each stage interconnects throughout the iterative process of qualitative data analysis.
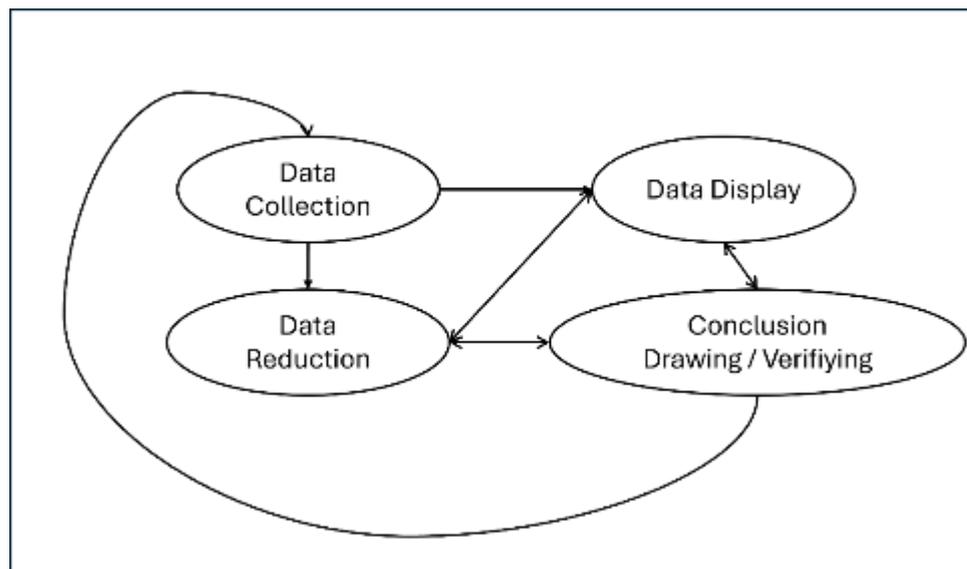
Source: Miles & Huberman, (1994)
Figure 4: Interactive Model of Data Analysis

These three activities are not linear but occur interactively and continuously throughout the research process. The use of interconnected arrows in the model reflects this dynamic, recursive nature of qualitative analysis. This iterative framework enables a deeper, more systematic understanding of complex qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The three core and interrelated activities are justified in Table 3.

Table 3
Data Analysis Process

Process	Description
1. Data Reduction	The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes or transcripts to highlight relevant information.
2. Data Display	The organized presentation of the reduced data using visual aids such as matrices, charts, diagrams, or thematic groupings to identify patterns.
3. Conclusion Drawing & Verification	The stage of interpreting the meaning of the data and verifying the validity of the conclusions through continuous checking, triangulation, and reflection.

Source : Miles & Huberman, (1994)

In addition to Miles and Huberman's (1994) model, this study also employed thematic analysis to systematically examine large volumes of qualitative data, identify recurring patterns, and develop meaningful themes (Jnanathapaswi, 2021; Saldaña, 2013). This approach allows researchers to generate deeper insights and uncover nuanced understandings of the case under investigation (Naeem et al., 2023). Themes were derived through a structured process involving coding, categorization, and synthesis. Initially, data were segmented into meaningful units and assigned codes. These codes were then grouped into subcategories, followed by broader categories, ultimately leading to the emergence of central themes. This inductive process enables the identification of key ideas that reflect the participants' shared experiences and core messages within the data (Miles et al., 2014). Figure 5 illustrates the process of thematic analysis as applied in this study.
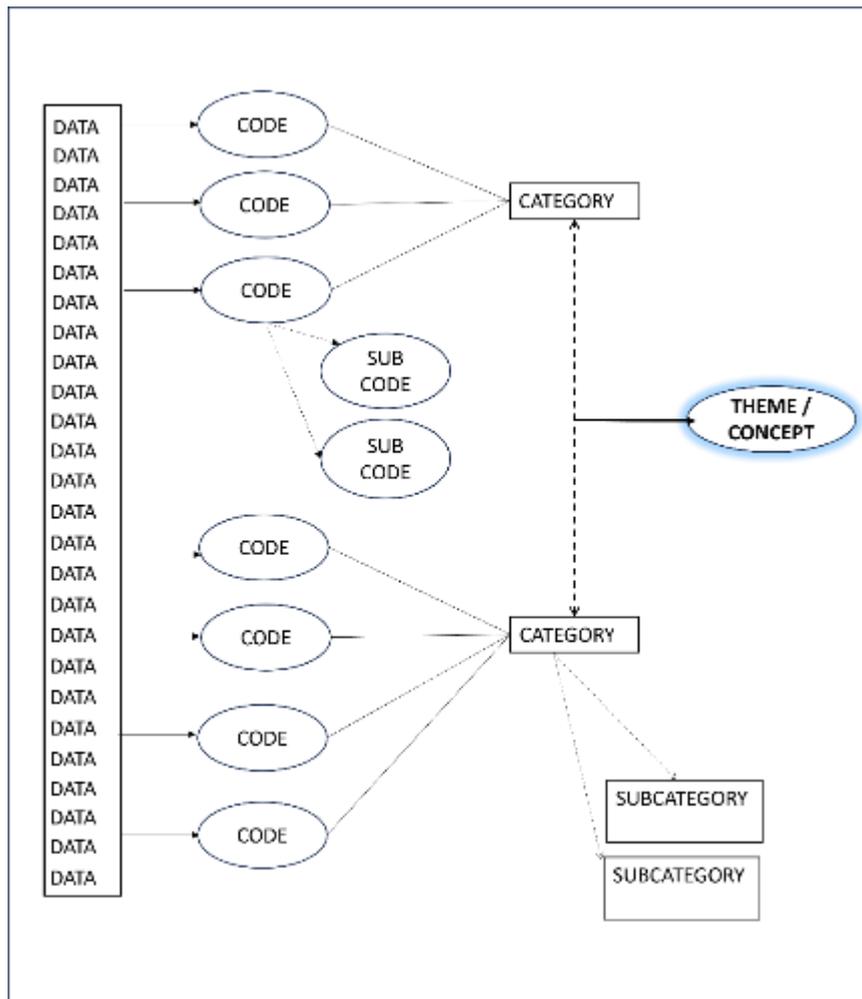
Source: Saldaña, (2013)

Figure 5: Thematic Analysis Process

Result

This study aims to explore the well-being challenges faced by educated housewives in Malaysia. Based on the developed codes and subcodes derived through thematic analysis, the well-being challenges are categorized into three main themes including physical, psychological and social. These multidimensional themes offer a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the complex challenges experienced by educated housewives in their daily lives. The structure of these well-being challenges is illustrated in Figure 6.
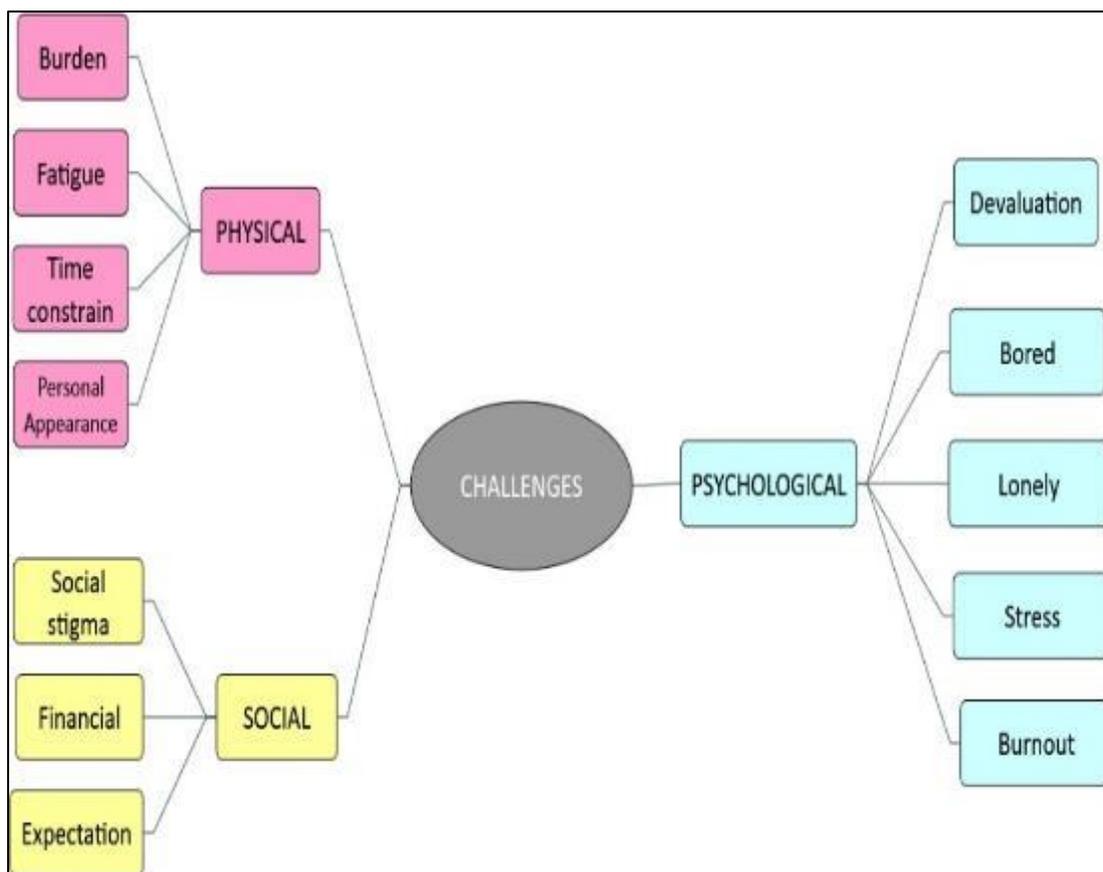
Source: Field study October 2022-September 2023
Figure 6: Wellbeing Challenges of Educated Housewives

Theme 1: Physical Challenges
The analysis of physical challenges identified four subthemes which include burden, fatigue, time constraints, and personal appearance. Table 4 presents a summary of these challenges together with narrative illustration quotations from the participants.

Table 4
Physical Challenges

Subtheme	Content analysis	Narrative Illustration
Burden	Participants expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by continuous housework and domestic tasks without breaks.	*"Actually, from morning until evening, there's always something that needs to be done"* (PT7)
Fatigue	Constant physical tiredness due to the repetitive and energy-draining nature of domestic duties and child care.	*"You've just finished tidying up the living room a bit, then you go to the kitchen, and the living room is already messy again. It's really tiring"* (PT6)
Time Constraint	The busy life of housewives leaves little free time during the day, especially when caring for young children. This constant workload limits their flexibility in managing time.	*"In the early days when I had only one child, the work wasn't too difficult. With two children, it was still manageable. But when the third child came along, that's when the exhaustion really set in"* (PT4)
Personal Appearance	Neglect of physical self-care, grooming, and health because personal needs are often deprioritized.	*"For months I've been wanting to go to the salon, to get a haircut... but I never got around to it. My husband said, 'Just go, it's okay, I can take care of the kids,' but I kept thinking… can I really?"*(PT2)

Source: Field study October 2022-September 2023

Theme 2: Psychological Challenges
The analysis of psychological challenges referring to the internal struggles that affect participants' mental and emotional state. Subthemes emerged including devaluation, bored, lonely, sad, stress and burnout. Table 5 presents a summary of these challenges together with narrative illustration quotations from the participants.

Table 5
Emotional Challenges

Subtheme	Content analysis	Narrative Illustration
Devaluation	A diminished sense of self-worth associated with disengagement from professional careers, often accompanied by feelings of uncertainty about their life direction	*"I feel kind of... worthless, like that. It's like I can't see where my direction is going"* (PT7)
Bored	The monotony of daily household routines often leads to feelings of boredom and lack of excitement	*"Nothing changes from Monday to Friday; it's the same routine every day"* (PT5)
Lonely	Felt isolated due to the lack of adult interaction or meaningful social engagement.	*"Because housewives don't have friends to talk to"* (PT6)
Sad	Feeling sad and emotionally low, especially during periods of exhaustion or disconnection	*"Sometimes I feel down"*(PT7)
Stress	Stress experienced is often multifaceted, arising from a combination of internal and external factors. It is triggered by intersecting challenges including role ambiguity, childcare demands, personal well-being, and school-related responsibilities.	*"talk about stress, right...I want to breastfeed him, but he can't, he doesn't want me to lie down, he only wants me to sit. If his older brother makes a little noise, he gets startled and cries."*(PT4)
Burnout	Occurs when educated housewives feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet the constant demands of their responsibilities.	*"Sometimes I feel burn out"* (PT2)

Source: Field study October 2022-September 2023

Theme 3: Social Challenges
Social aspects of wellbeing were shaped by external perceptions and structural limitations. The key subthemes included social stigma, financial dependency and expectation from others. Table 6 presents educated housewives social challenges analysis supported with narrative illustration quotations from the participants.

Table 6
Educated Housewives Social Challenges

Subtheme	Content analysis	Narrative Illustration
Social stigma	Educated housewives often experience negative societal perceptions that devalue their role as full-time mothers despite their academic qualifications.	*"You studied so much just to become a housewife?"* *"It's such a waste to have a PhD and not work"*
Financial	Choosing to stay at home limits personal income, leading to financial dependency and reduced spending freedom.	*"Now all the money comes from my husband... Oh, its really stressed because we used to have money to buy before"* (PT6) *"Honestly, the financial strain is really felt...it's like being urban poor, actually"* (PT1)
Expectation	There is pressure from family or society to conform to traditional gender roles or return to the workforce due to their education level.	*"My mother's expectation is that all her children must work. Even my mother-in-law keeps suggesting jobs here and there, telling me to go work because, to her, if you already have qualifications, you should use them to work. Why stay at home?"* (PT7)

Source: Field study October 2022-September 2023

Discussion & Implication of Study

The findings of this study showed that highly educated housewives face a diverse range of well-being challenges that are interconnected. These challenges are emerged into three themes mainly physical, psychological and social, reflecting the housewives' complex and overlapping roles. As mothers, wives, caregivers and household managers, they shoulder multiple responsibilities, each with its own set of demands and pressures. This reality highlights the cumulative burden they frequently face in managing household and family life. The multidimensional nature of these challenges aligns with the Qur'anic perspective on life's trials as described in Surah Al-Baqarah,

$$\text{وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَىْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِّ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ}$$

Meaning: "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient" (Al-Baqarah: 155)

This verse reflects the notion that humans are tested in a variety of ways, including physical (hunger), psychological (fear) and social (loss of wealth, lives and fruits), which correspond to the domains identified in this study. It provides a spiritual framework for dealing with adversity, highlighting the importance of patience (ṣabr) in overcoming life's challenges. From this perspective, the housewives' experiences are not only sociological and psychological, but also spiritual in nature, reinforcing their inner strength and resilience.

Generally without classifying their educational background, housewives do not have time for themselves (Ünal, 2012), whether to maintain their health or personal appearance (Damanik, 2014). Due to time constraints, housewives are more likely to suffer from metabolic syndrome

diseases such as obesity and being overweight, as a result of a sedentary lifestyle and work routine (Hamid Jan et al., 2013). In line with this, a report by Khazanah Research Institute, (2020) stated that housewives in Malaysia were reported to have higher blood pressure levels. This is possibly due to unhealthy lifestyles, unbalanced diets, and poor stress management (Sapora Sipon, 2020). Lack of time, motivation, support, and sports skills hinder housewives from participating in physical activities (Samir et al., 2011; Tan & Yim, 2010). Due to these factors, the physical well-being of housewives is compromised.

Psychologically, low physical wellbeing can trigger emotional and mental imbalance. Excessive and continuous household responsibilities leave housewives bound to the same routine every day (Kanwar, 2014). This repeated routine contributes to boredom and emotional fatigue (Ünal, 2012; Wulantami, 2018). Previous studies are consistent with the current study, which found that educated housewives experienced fatigue, boredom, social isolation, and a lack of physical activity as a result of repetitive routines and limited time. In addition educated housewives develop burnout symptoms as a result of extreme physical and emotional exhaustion, as well as a hectic schedule. Lebert-Charron et al., (2018) and Mousavi, (2020) reported housewives are among the groups most prone to experiencing burnout.

This study revealed that educated housewives experience loneliness. Although a study by Yesikar et al. (2014) reported that loneliness among housewives was associated with persistent headaches, the participants in this study did not mention experiencing such physical symptoms. Additionally, a life characterized by monotony, loneliness, fatigue, and lack of vitality (Putri & Sudhana, 2013; Yesikar et al., 2014) was linked to housewives appearing dull and withdrawn (Skoog, 2017). However, study conducted by Javed et al., (2016), found that educated housewives tend to be less emotionally affected and mentally more resilient. Similarly, Devi and Fourianalistyawati, (2018) highlighted that educated housewives exhibit higher self-esteem and better adaptability to domestic roles. Their capacity for critical thinking, organizational skills, and problem-solving appears to assist them in effectively regulating emotional and mental wellbeing (Sari et al., 2016; Siti Munirah, 2021). The ability to regulate emotions enables housewives to maintain life satisfaction even during distressing circumstances (Mittal, 2020). Participants' emotional wellbeing challenges were primarily experienced during the early childcare phase.

Participants in this study identified social wellbeing as their most significant challenge. From a social perspective, the well-being of educated housewives is frequently jeopardized by societal expectations that they enter the workforce after completing higher education. Similar to study conducted by Choong, (2021) housewives reported feeling undervalued because society frequently fails to recognize the legitimacy of their role, perceiving it as lacking material rewards or economic contribution (Junaidi, 2017). This social stigma not only diminishes their contributions at home, but it also reduces the perceived value of education to career advancement.

However from an Islamic perspective, the pursuit of knowledge is a *fardhu kifayah* (communal obligation) that extends beyond employment outcomes. Education is regarded as a means of personal empowerment and spiritual enrichment (Al-Attas, 2023). In this regard, educated housewives' intellectual abilities are an asset that contributes significantly to the development of the family unit (Wulantami, 2018). Additionally Sim, (2020) in a study on

Emirati women, emphasized that education serves not only as a pathway to professional success, but also as a critical factor in fostering personal growth and self-fulfillment. Even though participants reported financial difficulties, their educational attainment significantly contributes to improving financial literacy among housewives (Sahrawat, 2024).

This study sheds light on the multifaceted wellbeing challenges faced by highly educated Malaysian housewives, emphasizing the interplay of physical, psychological and social domain. The findings provide valuable insights that can be used to develop targeted support systems, such as peer support groups and wellbeing initiatives, with the goal of empowering housewives and improving their quality of life. Furthermore, this study advocates programs that promote physical and emotional well-being, encourage social interaction, and provide mental health support. However, as a qualitative study, findings in this study could not be generalized to a larger population. This study also focused solely on housewives who had already decided to stay at home, with no comparison to other groups of women. Further research is recommended.

Conclusion

In conclusion this study has explored the complex landscape of wellbeing challenges faced by educated housewives in Malaysia highlighting the frequently overlooked difficulties they face and their significant implications for overall wellbeing. The emerging themes of physical, psychological and social challenges are not only reveal the complexities of these issues, but also highlight the educated housewives strength and resilience in navigating their roles.

This research calls for greater societal appreciation of the housewife role and the development of inclusive wellbeing support systems. Programs that promote emotional resilience, physical activity, and social connectivity are crucial to improve the quality of life for this often-invisible group. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, stakeholders can better support the wellbeing of educated housewives, ensuring their contributions to society are both valued and sustained.

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