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## Love and Marital Satisfaction Among Malaysian Ethnic Chinese

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### Abstract

Love is a big and subjective topic in human life. It is an important element in a marital relationship. This study aims to investigate the relationship between love and marital satisfaction among ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. This study implements a survey study design using a questionnaire aimed at gathering personal background information and measuring marital love and satisfaction among the sample population. A total of 384 ethnic Chinese samples who were Malaysian citizens in the age group from 25 years to 44 years old and have been married for at least one year and above voluntarily participated in this study. Overall, the findings showed that love has a significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Love in this study which has been divided into three components namely, intimacy ( $r = 0.852^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ), passion ( $r = 0.835^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and commitment ( $r = 0.737^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) showed a very high significant relationship with marital satisfaction. These findings show the importance of love in helping to increase marital satisfaction among married couples. Among the implications of the study is to enrich the field of psychology that focuses on marriage and culture and counselling as well as sharing knowledge that can serve as a reference to the helping profession.

**Keywords:** Love, Intimacy, Passion, Commitment, Marital Satisfaction.

### Introduction

Marriage is a major factor in the development of human life. The intimacy of the husband and wife in a marriage is very important because the well-being of a matrimony is built based on strengthening the relationship between the husband and wife at the early stage of a love relationship (Willi, 1997; Wilfried, 2010). A harmonious relationship between husband and wife can increase marital satisfaction that act as a very inspiring social support for the individual.

Marital satisfaction is related to one's subjective well-being and means that those who have high marital satisfaction will show a higher level of subjective well-being. However, marital satisfaction has fluctuations that can be influenced by various factors (See & Ismail, 2018). Recently, various studies have been conducted to explore marital satisfaction in various backgrounds and cultural perspectives. Thus, this situation shows that the study of marriage and marital satisfaction is

necessary by looking at the well-being of marital relationships in local contexts (Razidah, 2010; Normahwati, 2012; Hidayati, 2013; Bahareh, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2018).

### Background of the Study

According to Bahareh Zare (2014), the feeling of love comes from a man and a woman who are attracted to one and another due to a mysterious power that originates from instinct, tradition and submission to their own choices. This process will grow and build a dynamic institution known as the "family". Love in terms of supportive perception will create positive interactions that can contribute to marital satisfaction and avoid various problems such as instability and disagreement especially in terms of a divorce.

The context of love is considered an important factor in achieving marital satisfaction in the process of the relationship between spouses (Sprecher & Hatfield, 2017). This situation can observe how couples or husbands and wives respond to the expectations and responsibilities set by the culture and social environment in marriage. In Western culture, marital satisfaction is closely related to the goal of self-satisfaction or ideal happiness between spouses (See & Ismail, 2018). Even in the ethnic Chinese tradition, Confucian cultural thinking still influences the ethics of ethnic Chinese marriage (Hong & Liu, 2013).

### Love

Love is a big and subjective topic in human life. This is an important element in a marital relationship. Understanding and appreciating the definition of love is very important in overcoming various problems of moral decay caused by misunderstandings of the concept of love. Robert Sternberg (1986, 1988) seeks to explain love in the context of two-person relationships through the concept of "Triangular theory of love". Figure 1 below summarises the "Triangular theory of love".

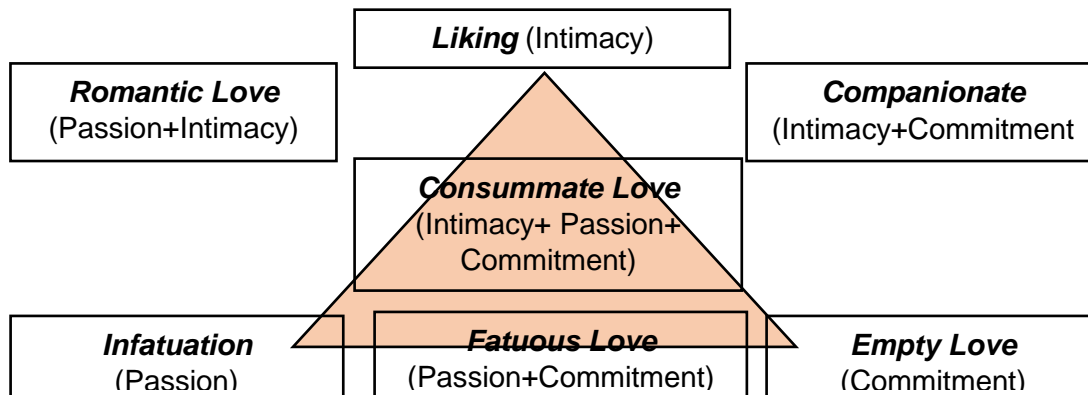


Figure 1. The Triangular Theory of Love

According to Robert Sternberg (1986), "Triangular love" contains three components: (1) intimacy, (2) passion and (3) commitment. Intimacy is an emotional element, in which there are warmth, trust and the desire to build relationships. It is characterised by the need for an individual to be close to someone, feeling happy to talk to him or her for a long time, longing when being away from each other for a long time, and the desire to hold hands or hug each other. Passion, on the other hand, is a motivational element based on sexual urges from within. For example, sincere love and the desire

to stay close together all the time. Most of the conditions in this component are indicated by sexual behaviour. In terms of cognitive elements, commitment is the decision to continuously and consistently live life together. For example, this commitment can be in the form of vow given by a husband to his wife (Sternberg & Weis, 2006).

He also stated that the three levels of love are often continuously going up and down. "Triangular love" can be used to describe all types of love (Wade & Chai, p247, 2015). The patterns of these three components can form various types of relationships such as nonlover, liking or friendship, infatuation, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love and consummate love (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 1998; 2009).

### **Love and Marital Satisfaction**

Love can increase marital satisfaction because it is an element that can improve the well-being and positive psychology of a person. Previous studies have shown that love is an attitude displayed from an individual's thoughts, feelings and responses towards a partner (Gana et al., 2013). Marital satisfaction can be enhanced through the presence of love by creating cooperation and understanding between two individuals. Love also serves as a source of support and encouragement of an individual towards his or her partner by influencing the quality of marriage (Duvall & Miller, 1985). Many factors determine the level of satisfaction and harmony in a marriage bond (Gill et al., 1999; Markman et al., 2010). One of them is the factor of love and it is an important dimension in a marriage (Hoesni et al., 2012).

According to Muchtar (2004) a significant relationship between love in the components of intimacy, passion and commitment to marital satisfaction, the components of intimacy and passion give a significant influence on marital satisfaction compared to commitment. Hally Weliangan (2016) suggests that the higher the quality of love, the higher the marital satisfaction. In fact, marital satisfaction is greatly influenced by the intimacy component. This component can contribute to marital satisfaction. The feelings of love that exist between couples can have a good effect in terms of the quality of relationships in marriage (Willi, 1997). This is because the presence of love in the relationship between the couple can reduce the probability of cheating and divorce. Thus, the style of romance plays a role in ensuring marital satisfaction (See & Ismail, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

Divorced family is a new type of family structure in the present era. The phenomenon of divorce is considered a common occurrence these days. This condition is also known as the collapse of the family structure and it is frequently studied in various fields such as law, sociology, psychology, family, anthropology and sociology (Azahari, 2007; Sahlan, 2012; Imron, 2016). When the love relationship between a couple does not exist, even though the husband and wife still keep the marriage intact, the family system has faced great challenges and burdens. Its effects can affect future generations by influencing their development in terms of physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Bert Hellinger, 2014; Ministry of Health, 2016). This condition occurs when family and parents become dysfunctional.

Divorce cases are on the rise. Statistics show that there is an increase in divorce registration every year and the number continue to increase by 33842 in 2014 and some of them only managed to keep their marriage for less than 5 years (Hameed, 2016). This situation happens since marriage is no

longer considered a permanent institution. Divorce has become a terminus in love ties besides legal and formal marital relationships and an end to living as couples or a way to solve problems in families (Sahlan, 2012; Imron, 2016). In addition, it is predicted that by 2020, a total of 15 couples will get divorced in every hour, making the rate of divorce in Malaysia at 360 couples per day. This trend is very worrying for Malaysians (See & Ismail, 2018).

Divorce cases involving Muslim couples in Selangor are the highest in the country (Kosmo, 2019). Based on the existing statistics, the number of divorce cases in each district in Selangor is increasing rapidly, although divorce case data from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) and the National Registration Department (JPN) by ethnicity is not open to the public, it can even suggest that the high occurrence of divorce cases phenomenon serves as an “alarm” to warn us about the impending state of marital breakdown. Many factors are leading to divorce. Although many studies have been done related to marital satisfaction, studies focusing on the relationship between love with marital satisfaction is still new in Malaysia. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the question of whether love has anything to do with marital satisfaction among ethnic Chinese in Selangor.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample and Procedure**

This study was conducted in the state of Selangor. The selection of the location was made based on the fact that it met all the demands, needs and requirements of the study. The selection of sample population in the study was based on 4 criteria, namely: (1) Malaysian citizens, (2) ethnic Chinese, (3) belong to an age group of between 25 to 44 years old, and (4) have been married for at least a year. Referring to the 1970-2010 report based on the mid-year population estimate in the Malaysian Population and Housing Census data, the data for the state and population strata by state stated that Selangor is the most heavily populated state in Malaysia. The state of Selangor is one of the states that has a high concentration of ethnic Chinese (Malaysian Chinese Demographics, 2015). This is in line with the sampling criteria that is to determine the relationship between love and marital satisfaction among ethnic Chinese in Selangor. Samples were selected by purposeful sampling method. The total sample of the study is based from the sample size determination table introduced by Kerjcie & Morgan (1970) where the calculation made for the sample is  $n = 384$  ( $N = 1,000,000$ ).

### **Measurement**

The Triangular Love Scale developed by Sternberg (1986) has been used as a measurement tool to test the feelings and experiences the samples have towards their spouses in a love relationship. The Malay version of the measurement tool has been translated from the Subjective Meanings of Marital Love (SMML) questionnaire (Hoesni et al., 2016). The Cronbach's Alpha value of this scale has been recorded at 0.98 and has 45 question items measuring 3 subscales namely Intimacy (15 items), Passion (15 items) and Commitment (15 items). The marital satisfaction using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) by Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grigsby (1986) originally had 3 items that were modified by Ismail (2005). This scale has a Cronbach's Alpha value of .93 and has 3 question items to measure marital satisfaction among the sample population.

Analytically, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods are used. According to Bowen (1978), the complete family information collection structure guided by the specific characteristics of the sample's background is very important. The demographic factors of the sample are explained with

descriptive statistics that include information such as gender, age, family hierarchy, level of education, occupation, parents' marital status, length of marriage and the number of children. Pearson correlation test is used to identify the relationship between love and marital satisfaction.

### **Findings of the Study**

Descriptive study data show the distribution of married samples by gender. The findings of the study show that the majority of 78.9 per cent (303) are women, and the number is higher than men which make up 21.1 per cent (81). Next, we examine the distribution of married samples by age. The findings show that the majority of 44.8 per cent (172) consists of those who are between 40 to 44 years old, while 32.6 per cent (125) are those between 35 to 39 years old, 13.3 per cent (51) are those between 30 to 34 years old, and the least of them, at 9.4 per cent (36) are those between 25 to 29 years old. Regarding the distribution of married samples according to family hierarchy, the findings show that the majority of them or 42.7 per cent (164) are neither the eldest nor the youngest, compared to the firstborns who made up 34.6 per cent (133), while 22.7 per cent (8) is the youngest. Concerning the distribution of married samples according to their level of education, the findings show that the majority of them or 54.2 per cent (208) bachelor's degrees, while 19.8 per cent (76) have diplomas, 9.4 per cent (36) have master's degrees, 8.1 per cent (31) possess SPM, 5.2 per cent (20) are STPM holders, 1.8 per cent (7) have SRP / PMR, 0.8 per cent (3) completed primary school and the same percentage that is 0.8 per cent (3) have PhD.

In terms of occupation, the findings show that the majority of the samples or 89.3 per cent (343) are working couples, while 10.7 per cent (41) of them are unemployed. Next, in regards to parents' marital status, the findings of the study showed that the highest majority or 65.1 per cent (250) of the samples have parents who are married and living together, while 24.0 per cent (92) have a deceased parent, 5.2 per cent (20) stated other reasons, 3.4 per cent (13) have parents who are married but living separately and finally, 2.3 per cent (9) have parents who are divorced.

Regarding the length of marriage, the findings show that the highest majority 31.0 per cent (119) of the samples have been married between 6 to 10 years, while 27.1 per cent (104) have been married between 11 to 15 years, 25.5 per cent (98) have been married between 1 to 5 years, 8.3 per cent (32) have been married between 21 to 25 years, and a small percentage of 8.1 per cent (31) have been married between 16 to 20 years.

Lastly, in terms of the number of children, the findings show that the majority of the sample, that is 57.3 per cent (220), comprised couples with 1 to 2 children, while 22.1 per cent (85) are couples with 3 to 4 children, 19.5 per cent (75) are couples without any children and the least, that is 1.0 per cent (4) are couples who have more than 5 children. The distribution of sample descriptive data sorted by gender, age, family hierarchy, level of education, occupation, parents' marital status, length of marriage and the number of children is explained in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Descriptive Findings for Samples' Demographic Traits**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	81	21.1
Female	303	78.9
<b>Age</b>		
25 – 29 years old	36	9.4
30 – 34 years old	51	13.3
35 – 39 years old	125	32.6
40 – 44 years old	172	44.8
<b>Family Hierarchy</b>		
Firstborns	133	34.6
In-between	164	42.7
Youngest	87	22.7
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Primary School	3	.8
SRP/PMR	7	1.8
SPM	31	8.1
STPM	20	5.2
Diploma	76	19.8
Bachelor's degree	208	54.2
Master's degree	36	9.4
PhD	3	.8
<b>Employment</b>		
Yes	343	89.3
No	41	10.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married and living together	250	65.1
Married but living separately	13	3.4
Divorced	9	2.3
One of the parents is deceased	92	24.0
Others	20	5.2
<b>Length of marriage</b>		
1 – 5 years	98	25.5
6 – 10 years	119	31.0
11 – 15 years	104	27.1
16 – 20 years	31	8.1
21 – 25 years	32	8.3
<b>Number of Children</b>		
0	75	19.5
1 – 2	220	57.3
3 – 4	85	22.1
5 and more	4	1.0

Table 2 below shows the significant relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction. The findings show that there is a relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction,  $r = .852$ ,  $p < .000$ , the level of relationship is very high. Due to the positive relationship, it can be interpreted that the closer the intimacy, the higher the marital satisfaction.

**Table 2. The Relationship Between Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction**

Component	Marital Satisfaction	
Intimacy	Pearson Correlation	.852**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384

Similarly, the findings of the study (Table 3) show that there is a significant relationship between passion and marital satisfaction,  $r = .835$ ,  $p < .000$ , the level of relationship is very high. Since the relationship is a positive one, it can be interpreted that the higher the passion, the higher the marital satisfaction.

**Table 3. The Relationship between Passion and Marital Satisfaction**

Component	Marital Satisfaction	
Passion	Pearson Correlation	.835**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384

The findings of the study as in Table 4 show that there is a significant relationship between commitment and marital satisfaction,  $r = .737$ ,  $p < .000$ , the level of relationship is very high. Since the relationship is a positive one, then it can be interpreted that the higher the commitment, the higher the marital satisfaction.

**Table 4. The Relationship Between Commitment and Marital Satisfaction**

Component	Marital Satisfaction	
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.737**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384



## Discussion

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between love and marital satisfaction among the ethnic Chinese in Selangor. The findings show that love has a significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Love in this study which has been divided into three components namely, intimacy ( $r = 0.852^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ), passion ( $r = 0.835^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and commitment ( $r = 0.737^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), showed a very high significant relationship with marital satisfaction. This study implements a survey study design using a questionnaire aimed at gathering personal background information and measuring samples' love and marital satisfaction.

A total of 384 ethnic Chinese samples who are Malaysian citizens, in the age group from 25 to 44 years old and have been married for at least one year voluntarily participated in this study. These findings show the importance of love in helping to increase marital satisfaction among married couples. The relationship between the three components in love is positive, so it can be interpreted that the higher the love, the higher the marital satisfaction. The findings of this study are parallel with the findings of studies conducted by Contreras and colleagues (1996); Muchtar (2004); Tang (2007); Syaidatun (2013); Carandang and Guda (2015); Hoesni, Kadir, Sulaiman and Hafidz (2016); Rohmah, Fitriana and Rahmatika (2017); Miri and Najafi (2017).

According to Dion and Dion (1996), the way individuals and groups view and conceptualise love and intimacy are different due to the influence of cultural differences. Based on observations, love is also influenced by cultural differences. Western society practices a culture of individualism and focuses on oneself. On the other hand, Malaysian society practices a culture of collectivism which is more concerned with family and togetherness (Razak, Hoesni, Zakaria, & Ismail, 2015). Thus, researchers focus on specific cultures to understand love and marital satisfaction. Thus, based on this fact, it can be seen that various factors may be influenced by the social and cultural background which in turn, play an important role in improving the quality of marriage as well as expanding the scope of relationship in the field of marital satisfaction (Bradbury et al, 2000; Zakaria, Jaafar, Shafuridin, & Hidayat, 2018; Hoesni & Zakaria. 2019; Cai & Zhang, 2020; Hoesni, Manap, & Zakaria, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are still few studies conducted on the relationship between love and marital satisfaction among married ethnic Chinese. The samples that have been tested in this study are composed of a group of ethnic Chinese who are happily married, instead of those who are divorced and separated. By using the latter set of samples, we can predict the relationship between love and marital satisfaction in another environment so that this study can contribute towards enhancement and perform a preventive role. Overall, the findings show that love is predictable and it is one of the important factors in achieving marital satisfaction. Studies on various ethnicities can be actively implemented and are still very much needed in the future. In summary, the findings of the study are appropriate to the local context.

## Implications of the Study

The findings of this study show that there is a relationship between love and marital satisfaction. Thus, this study enriches the field of psychology and serves as reference to the helping profession. In short, the component of love in this study has been found to be a basic reference in helping therapists and counsellors to address issues or to formulate interventions related to marital satisfaction. For example, the ability to develop therapeutically, especially to researchers and practitioners in the field of couple counselling and family therapy so that the source of "love" can be used in the therapeutic change process. Besides, this study shows that the study of love is still considered new in Malaysia.

This study is still lacking in the involvement of multi-ethnic samples in Malaysia. From this study, the researchers hope to share the knowledge and information as well as benefitting the multicultural and multiethnic society in this country.

In addition, the findings of the study should be seen as a great opportunity for spouses and loving couples to focus their attention so they can complement each other in understanding themselves and as partners in love relationships. This knowledge is very important for them and their partners in the form of enlightenment or awareness. For example, they can participate in various psychoeducational programs and guidance on how to share knowledge in the ability to express love and to improve the quality of relationships in daily life. This can help individuals to prepare themselves to enter and manage the realm of marriage and strive to harmonise family life by achieving marital satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

In general, studies related to marital and family well-being are often debated by various parties. Some of the husbands and wives usually have the motivation and try to maintain a happy and peaceful marriage so they can avoid divorce. Therefore, to help improve the quality of relationships and the well-being of married couples, love is an important thing in achieving marital satisfaction.

At a glance, the findings of this study prove that the components of intimacy, passion and commitment play an important role in determining marital satisfaction. The results of Pearson correlation analysis show that there is a very high correlation between love and marital satisfaction among ethnic Chinese and this finding describes the importance of love in helping to increase marital satisfaction among married couples.

To conclude, the findings of this study are significant and reveal the knowledge that may serve as a reference to the helping profession in this country. In terms of implications, this study can enrich the field of psychology that focuses on marriage, culture and counselling. Couples who are already married or about to do so also need to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge of romance, marriage and family so they have the ability and the wisdom to build a prosperous and happy family.

**APPENDIX**

**Demographics of Respondents (English Version)**

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Gender:

- a. Male
- b. Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years old

Your hierarchy in the family:

- a. The eldest
- b. The youngest
- c. In-between (please specify) number \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Education:

- a. Did not complete primary school
- b. Primary school
- c. SRP@PMR
- d. SPM
- e. STPM
- f. Diploma
- g. Bachelor's
- h. Master's
- i. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

**WORDS**

**OF**

(Career) Are you employed?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Parents' Marital Status:

- a. Married and living together
- b. Separated
- c. Divorced
- d. One of the parents has passed away
- e. Others (please specify)

Length of Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Total Number of Children (If any): \_\_\_\_\_

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