

## **LOVE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG URBAN MALAYS: COMPARING THREE GROUPS LENGTH OF MARRIAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Love is an important psychological entity in relation to marital satisfaction. Therefore, this study aimed to compare how married couples from three groups' length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years) perceive love (intimacy, passion and commitment) and to compare marital satisfaction across three length of marriage. This study applied the survey research design using a combination of cluster and stratified sampling techniques. Questionnaires which were distributed consisted of questions related to personal background, marital background, love and marital satisfaction. Malay married individuals residing in Lembah Klang from eight different locations who volunteered to participate in this study were given questionnaires to complete. 310 participants (155 males and 155 females) completed the questionnaires which later were collected for data analysis. Results showed that there were significant differences on how three groups length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years above of marriage) perceive love (commitment and passion). However, there were no differences in marital satisfaction between the three groups length of marriage as suggested by previous research. Results indicated that love has an important psychological role at any stages of marriage. This research suggested that more research should explore the psychological aspects of love within marriage and its contribution to psychological wellbeing of married couples.*

**Keywords:** *love; marital satisfaction; marriage; length of marriage; Malay*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background Study**

Love is an important psychological entity in understanding the mind and behaviour of human beings (Harlow, 1959). This is especially true when studying the dynamics of long term relationship such as marriage. A number of research has indicated that love has some relationship with marital satisfaction (Bergner, 2000; Bonds-Raacke et al., 2001; Fehr, 2006, Gana et al., 2013; Grote & Friez, 1998; Ismail, 2004; Montgomery & Sorell, 1997; Muraru & Turliuc, 2013; Riehl-Emde & Ris-mawati Marasabessy, 2012; Sprecher & Hatfield, 2015; Thomas & Willi, 2003; Woodward, 2003; Willi, 1997).

Although love has been identified as an important psychological aspect to focus on when studying marriage, the development of studies

focusing on love and marriage is still slow. For example research by Baum (1971) examined on love, marriage and division of labour, Merves, Amidon and Bernt (1991) studied on the perception of love and marital satisfaction, Contreras and Hendrick (1996) has studied love and marital satisfaction among couples with different cultures, Merves-Okin, Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi (1999) focused on love and marital satisfaction among different faiths such as Muslims, Christians and Druze and Woodward (2003) studied love among long term relationships which focused on 'matured passionate love, Savulescu and Sandberg (2008) examined the biological aspects and love, Sprecher and Hatfield (2015) researched on the attitudes towards the importance of love in a marriage.

This slow development of studies on love focusing among married couples might be due to the late development in the study of love

within the field of psychology. According to Curtin (1973), love has not been discussed in 23 annual psychological review from years dating as early as 1940's until early 1960's. In addition, Elkins and Smith (1979) also discovered that there was no initiative to study love scientifically.

Only recently, more studies on love focusing among married couples has emerged for instance, Gana et al. (2013), Ginani et al. (2014) and Sprecher and Hatfield (2015). This might be due to the emergence of positive psychology which focuses on individual's strength and encourages positive functioning of an individual (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Positive psychology also recognizes the importance of love in understanding the complexity and dynamics of individuals (Compton, 2005; Hojjat & Cramer, 2013; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). As a result, more studies have focused on love, however, studies on love related to long term relationship such as marriage is still at its infancy. Thus, the study of love leaves many issues for debates.

To illustrate, studies on love overly focused more on singles and the early stage of a love relationship (Desai, McCormick and Gaeddert, 1990; Tennov, 1979; Hatfield, Brinton & Cornelius, 1989; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Yela, 1999) or specific kind of love such as passionate love (Hatfield, 1965; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a; Tennov, 1979). Besides that, many existing study of love in the field of psychology resulted from using specific respondents which comes from the west. This has also been the concern of love researchers such as Yela (1999) and Dion and Dion (2006). Although there are a growing number of research focusing on different cultures and comparing between cultures (Cho and Cross, 1995; Contreras & Hendrick, 1996; Dion & Dion, 1993; Gonzaga, Turner & Keltner, 2006; Shaver, Wu & Schwartz, 1992; Dion & Dion, 1993; 1996; Landis, 2000; Medorae, Larson, Hortacsu & Dave, 2002; Shaver, Wu & Schwartz, 1992; Stones & Philbrick, 1991; Yela, 1998), yet, there are still very much to explore and learn from love experienced by individuals from different cultures and long term relationships such as marriage. Hence, research focusing on love experienced in a specific context such as cultures and stages of life development, marriage,

should be encouraged. As a result, findings on love can further contribute to the field of psychology specifically on certain cultures such as Malay culture and stages of life such as within a marriage.

Although there are an increasing number of studies on love and also marriage (Bergner, 2000; Bonds-Raacke et al., 2001; Fehr, 2006, Gana et al., 2013; Grote & Friez, 1998; Ismail, 2004; Woodward, 2003), yet, not many studies have focused specifically on love and married couples. Many studies on marriage such as marital satisfaction focusses on other variables aspects such as sexual relationships among long term marriages (Hincliff, S. & Gott, 2004), gender, race and attachment (Kok-Mun Ng et al., 2013), marital confidence and time spent together (Johnson et al., 2013), communication, religiosity and spirituality (David & Stafford, 2013), personality (Rosowsky, 2012; Khalid Mahmood & Zara Najeeb, 2013), number of children and culture (Wendort et al., 2011), commitment (Givertz, Segrin, & Hanzal, 2009), gender from specific culture (Erci & Ergin, 2005), infidelity (Khalid & Zara, 2013). Therefore, the knowledge on understanding close relationships in long term relationships such as love and marital relationships are still scarce.

Due to the fact that the study of love within the field of psychology specifically during specific stages of life and culture are still at its infancy, this study seeks to answer questions related to the discussions earlier specifically: What is the relationship between personal background, relationship background, love and marital satisfaction among married Malays? What are the relationship between love components as suggested by Sternberg (1986) and marital satisfaction? Are there any differences on how Malay married individuals perceive love (intimacy, passion and commitment) and the length of marriage? Are there any differences on marital satisfaction in terms of from different groups' length of marriage?

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research were as follows: -

1. To describe the personal background, relationship background, love and marital satisfaction among married Malays.
2. To investigate the relationship between love and marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years above).
3. To identify the differences between love (*passion, intimacy and commitment*) and marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years above).
4. To identify the differences between marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years above).

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study adapted the survey research design using questionnaires as suggested by Langdrige and Hagger-Johnson (2013).

### Location and Sampling

This study was carried out in the highest density economic agglomerations involving a combination of areas from the continuation of urban area and independent towns. The location was defined by PEMANDU report National Key Economic Area (NKEA) consisting of 10 different locations. The areas consisted of areas governed by local authorities such as Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), Perbadanan Putrajaya, MB Shah Alam, (MBSA), MB Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), MP Klang (MPK), MP Kajang, MP Subang Jaya (MPSJ), MP Selayang, MP Ampang Jaya (MPAJ) and MD Sepang. Subjects were first chosen using cluster sampling and later purposive sampling techniques. Only married Malay individuals living together and willing to participate in this study were chosen using the sampling techniques.

### Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of four sections which were section A, B, C and D. The sections were described as follows.

*Section A: Participants background.* This section consisted of questions relating to participants' background. This included questions that access on gender, age, level of education and household income.

*Section B: Marital background.* This section consisted of questions relating to participant's marriage. Questions were aimed at gaining information on spouse's age, length years of marriage, and total number of children.

*Section C: Love.* This section consisted of questions relating to love specifically love components which were *intimacy, passion and commitment* as suggested by Sternberg (1986). According to Sternberg, questions on intimacy covers items relating to feeling of closeness, connectedness and bondedness (i.e. "I am able to count on \_\_\_ in times of need", "\_\_\_ is able to count on me in times of need" and "I feel close to \_\_\_\_\_"). Passion dimension consisted of items that accessed motivation that lead individuals to romance, physical attraction and sexual consummation (i.e. "Just seeing \_\_\_ excites me", "I find myself thinking about \_\_\_ frequently during the day" and "My relationship with \_\_\_ is very romantic"). Meanwhile, commitment directed statements which encapsulated items relating to two aspects of time, the short term which covers the decision to love the spouse and in the long term, the commitment to maintain the love for the spouse (i.e. "I have confidence in the stability of my relationship with \_\_\_", "I could not let anything get in the way of my commitment to \_\_\_" and "I expect my love for \_\_\_ to last for the rest of my life"). Each dimensions consisted of 15 questions which totaled 45 questions. Each response to each item in this scale applies the 7-Likert scale. The higher the scores for each dimension indicates the higher aspects of love for each components of love and the lower the scores shows the lower love aspects for each components of love.

*Section D: Marital satisfaction.* This section consisted questions regarding marital satisfac-

tion as suggested by Ferlis and Rosnah (2005). The original questions were adopted from the original *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale* developed by Schumm et al. (1986) which later adopted by Rumaya (1997). An additional item on love was included by Ferlis and Rosnah (2005). Each response to each item in this scale applied the 7-Likert scale. The higher the scores for each dimensions indicates the higher marital satisfaction and the lower the scores shows the lower marital satisfaction.

### Research Procedure

40 sets of questionnaires were distributed to eight different locations which were identified as described earlier in the sampling section. Enumerators were appointed to get participants from all eight locations. Only Malay and married participants who volunteered to participate in this study were given the questionnaires to be completed. A total of 310 participants (155 males and 155 females) completed and returned the questionnaires to be analyzed.

### Data Analysis

The data in this study was analysed by using the *IBM SPSS Statistics*. Descriptive statistics were used to describe participants' personal and marital background, love and marital satisfaction. Inferential statistics such as one-way ANOVA to describe the differences on perception of love and marital satisfaction between the three groups of length of marriage. Results were reported using two decimal points and 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

Results are presented according to the research objectives as mentioned earlier in this article. First, descriptive results are presented. Then, it is followed by inferential statistical analysis to answer test hypothesis relating to the research questions developed earlier.

### Background and Marital Background of Participants

Descriptive results for participants' background and marital background were presented in Table 1. A number of 310 (155 males, 155 females) married Malays volunteered to participate in this study. Participants aged from 21 years to 66 years old with the mean age of 38.92 years and standard deviation of 10.29 years. Participants' spouse mean age was 38.09 years and standard deviation of 9.74 years. Specifically, participants were divided into three groups which were the 0-5 years' length of marriage (104 participants), 6-18 length of marriage (105 participants) and 19 years above length of marriage (101 participants). Most of participants' level of education have a Master Degree (39.7%) and followed by Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) (28.7%). Participants' household income with a mean of RM 7,141.67 with standard deviation of RM 6,871.29. A number of 53.2% participants have one to three children and followed by 27.7% have four to seven children.

**Table 1.** Descriptive results of participant's personal and marital background

Variables	<i>n</i>	100%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender				
Male	155	50	-	-
Female	155	50	-	-
	310	100	-	-
Age	-	-	38.92 years	10.29 years
Spouse's age	-	-	38.09 years	9.74 years
Length of marriage				
0-5 years	104	33.5	-	-
6-18 years	105	33.9	-	-
19 years	101	32.6	-	-

	310	100	-	-
<b>Level of education</b>				
Primary school	8	2.6	-	-
SRP/PMR	8	2.6	-	-
SPM	89	28.7	-	-
STPM/Diploma	77	24.8	-	-
Master	123	39.7	-	-
PhD	5	1.6	-	-
	310	100		
<b>Household income</b>				
			RM 7,141.67	RM 6,871.29
<b>Total number of children:</b>				
0	51	16.5	-	-
1-3	165	53.2	-	-
4-6	86	27.7	-	-
7-9	8	2.6	-	-
	310	100	-	-

Note: n=number of respondents, m=mean, S.D. =standard deviation

**Inferential Statistical Analysis**

Pearson correlation analysis was applied to investigate the relationship between love and marital satisfaction. Results in Table 2 indicated that there were positive, moderate and

significant relationships between love and marital satisfaction. Specifically, from highest to lowest, intimacy (r = 0.78), passion (r = 0.65) and commitment (r = 0.64).

**Table 2.** Relationship between love and marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage of marriage using Pearson Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3
Intimacy	-		
Passion	.78**	-	.
Commitment	.83**	.70**	-
Marital Satisfaction	.78**	.65**	.64**

Mean score for love according to length of marriage were presented in Table 3. Mean score for intimacy, passion and commitment were highest for group 1-5 years of marriage (M=97.34, S.D.=8.41), (M=94.12, S.D.=9.99) and (M=97.88, S.D.=8.28). How-

ever, the lowest came from group 19 years and above of marriage (M=94.66, S.D.=11.42), (M=85.06, S.D.=18.58) and (M=93.73, S.D.=15.10).

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for Love among Three Groups Length of Marriage

Components of Love	Length of Marriage	N	M	S.D.
Intimacy	1-5	104	97.34	8.41
	6-18	105	95.61	11.43
	19>	101	94.66	11.42
	Total	310	95.88	10.53

Passion	1-5	104	94.12	9.99
	6-18	105	89.62	12.34
	19>	101	85.06	18.58
	Total	310	89.64	14.48
Commitment	1-5	104	97.88	8.28
	6-18	105	96.09	11.42
	19>	101	93.73	15.10
	Total	310	95.92	11.98

A one way between groups analysis of variance (One Way ANOVA) was conducted to explore the difference among three groups length of marriage on love, as measured by Triangular Love Scale (TLS). Subjects were divided into three groups according to their length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years). Results were presented in Table 4. There was a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$  level for the three age groups specif-

ically for *passion*  $F(2, 307)=10.64, p < .05$  and *commitment*  $F(2, 307)= 3.14, p < .05$ . However, there were no significant differences on how the three groups length of marriage view *intimacy*  $F(2, 307)= 1.71, p > .05$ .

**Table 4.** Differences of Love among Three Groups Length of Marriage Using One Way ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Intimacy	Between Groups	377.818	2	188.91	1.71	.182
	Within Groups	33898.766	307	110.42		
	Total	34276.584	309			
Passion	Between Groups	4202.234	2	2101.12	10.64	.000
	Within Groups	60601.021	307	197.40		
	Total	64803.255	309			
Commitment	Between Groups	887.516	2	443.76	3.14	.045
	Within Groups	43436.626	307	141.49		
	Total	44324.142	309			

Mean score for marital satisfaction from highest to lowest were as follows, 1-5 years of marriage ( $M=26.45, S.D.=2.29$ ), 6-18

years of marriage ( $M=26.16, S.D.=3.17$ ), and 19 years above ( $M=25.55, S.D.=3.33$ ) as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics for marital satisfaction among three groups length marriage

Dependent Variable	Length of marriage	N	M	SD
Marital satisfaction	1-5	104	26.45	2.29
	6-18	105	26.16	3.17
	19>	101	25.55	3.33
	Total	310	26.06	2.97

ANOVA was carried out to investigate participants' different views on marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage (1-5

years, 6-18 years and 19 years) as shown in Table 6. Overall, results showed that there were no significant differences on how partic-

ipants' from three groups length of marriage 1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years ( $F(2,$

$307) = 2.45, k > .05$ ) differ in their marital satisfaction.

**Table 6.** Differences of marital satisfaction among three groups length of marriage using One Way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	42.878	2	21.439	2.45	.088
Within Groups	2690.958	307	8.765		
Total	2733.835	309			

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Overall, findings indicated that psychological entity such as love plays an important role in achieving marital satisfaction. The more love that an individual perceive in a marriage, the more satisfied they are in marriage. Findings in this study are supported by previous study on how love is related to marital satisfaction (Baum, 1971; Bergner, 2000; Bonds-Raacke et al., 2001; Fehr, 2006, Gana et al., 2013; Grote & Friez, 1998; Ismail, 2004; Montgomery & Sorell, 1997; Muraru & Turliuc, 2013; Riehl-Emde & Rismawati Marasabessy, 2012; Sprecher & Hatfield, 2015; Thomas & Willi, 2003; Woodward, 2003; Willi, 1997).

To illustrate, findings showed that the most important to the least important components of love were identified as intimacy, passion and commitment. Intimacy in this study consisted of elements relating to having very close relationships such is found in a loving relationships; passion in this study consisting of aspects involving motivation which leads to romance, physical attraction and sexual consummation and finally, commitment which includes the needs to maintain the marital relationship as suggested by Sternberg (1986). For instance, intimacy involves being actively supportive of spouse's wellbeing, warm relationship, spouse and individuals is reliable when in need, sharing almost everything with spouse, giving and receiving emotional support, communicate well, valuing spouse, feeling close to spouse, being in a comfortable relationship, understanding each other, trusting each other and sharing very personal information about oneself with spouse. On the other hand, passion involves as follows, the feeling of excitement by just

seeing spouse, always thinking about spouse, being romantic, perceiving spouse as personally attractive, idealizing spouse, spouse as a source of happiness, sufficient to have spouse rather be with spouse than anybody else, feeling spouse as somebody important in life, liking physical contact with spouse, feeling magical with spouse, adoration and idealizing of spouse, having a passionate husband and wife relationship, always thinking of spouse including while watching or reading romantic books and always fantasizing spouse. Lastly, commitment in this study included elements such as caring the spouse, having the strong intention to maintain a stable relationship no matter what the obstacle and consequences, and also a sense of responsibility towards spouse.

Results from this study also found that specific component of love, namely intimacy, passion and commitment are all related to marital satisfaction. Findings in this study supports research carried out by Gana et al. (2103), Johnson and Anderson (2013) and Patrick, Sells, Giordano and Tollerud (2007). Compared to passion and commitment, intimacy indicates the most important component of love relating to marital satisfaction. Results from this study shows that the more individual perceive that intimacy characteristics exist in a marriage, the more satisfied they are in the marriage. As suggested by Sternberg (1986), intimacy includes "the feeling of closeness, connectedness and bondedness in loving relationships". A marriage with the existence of characteristics such as emotionally supporting each other, the existence of warmth, spouse being reliable, dependent on each other, sharing life and things in life, good communication, recognizing spouse,

feelings of being comfortable with spouse, feeling that spouse understands self, having faith in spouse and sharing very personal information are most likely to have a satisfied marriage,

Results found that there were significant differences how three groups length of marriage (1-5 years, 6-18 years and 19 years) perceive commitment and passion component of love. The more years that they are married the lesser they are in perceiving commitment and passion in their marriage. Findings indicate that this might be due of physiological aspects and also the lesser need to be in a committed marriage. However, intimacy remains the same throughout the three length of marriage and does not differ significantly across three length of marriage. This result again indicates the importance of intimacy in a marriage compared to passion and commitment component of love within a marriage.

In addition, there were significant relationships between all the love components and marital satisfaction. However, there were no differences in marital satisfaction between the three groups length of marriage as suggested by previous research. Results in this study suggested that love has an important psychological role at all stages of marriage, thus, challenging findings from previous research. This research suggested that more research should explore the aspects of love within marriage and its contribution to psychological well-being of married couples.

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