

Marital Status as the Mediator Role towards Work Engagement on Life Satisfaction Among Working Women in Sabah, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Work engagement is a good practice in work organizations and very important in this world today. In addition, work engagement has been implemented in many studies for two decades. Women populations are higher than men and they are highly needed to get involved in labor force to improve the stability of economy. However, in Malaysia, DOSM (Department of Statistics, Malaysia) produced statistics on where women that involved in labor force still lower than men. In addition, very few studies focused on work engagement among working-class women towards their life satisfaction in Sabah, Malaysia. **Objective:** This research aims to test marital status as the mediator role towards relationship between work engagement and life satisfaction among working-class women in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. **Methodology:** A total of 348 working women in public sectors in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia participated in the study by using snowball sampling method. An online questionnaire and physical questionnaires distributed to the respondents at government sectors. **Result:** Working-class women's marital status fully mediates the relationship between work engagement and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), which is one of dimensions in life satisfaction. Further research is needed to investigate specific marital status that has higher level of mediator role towards the relationship between work engagement and life satisfaction among working-class women in Sabah, Malaysia.

Keywords: Marital status, life satisfaction, working women, work engagement, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Women with different marital status influenced their well-being (Hsu & Barrett, 2020), income (Marziah et al., 2018), life satisfaction (Marziah et al., 2018; Marziah, Ijon, See, & Wan Shaharuddin, 2017), priorities and commitments (Kuppusamy, Angusamy, R.N, & Said, 2023) that they have in their lives. On the top of that, extra priorities, and extra commitments

occurred, when women participated in labour force which help them to earn monthly salaries to support their own needs (Peng, Li, & Lian, 2022). In Malaysia, percentages of women participated in labour force on the year 2023 is 55.8% which considered as low compared to men, on where percentages of men participated in labour force is 81.9% (DOSM, 2023). To be specific, only 40.7% are among women who work in professional and technical sectors and 59.3% are men. In addition, very little women holding decision maker roles such as holding ministerial position which only 17.9 % and 82.1 % are men. According to Salleh and Mansor (2022), majority women decided to exit from labour force when they reached 35 years old and above (especially married women). Women in marriage have different roles which a role as a mother and a wife; have dual responsibilities (Marziah et al., 2018; Salleh & Mansor, 2022). Due to this, women in marriage desired to leave workforce and very least likely to re-join in workforce (Salleh & Mansor, 2022).

Work engagement promotes better well-being among employers and employees in workplace (Khairi, Nor, Johar, & Maskun, 2023; Panatik, Azhar, Ahmad Ungku, & Ashari, 2016). According to Mazzetti et al. (2021), employees have good work engagement when employees have similarities between them such as similar level of education backgrounds. In addition, Panatik et al. (2016), stated that work engagement is a very important component that help to improve workers' level of performance, productivity, motivation and other cognitive aspects that can help to ensure work operations run smoothly in their workplaces. When workers' have good work engagement, they should be rewarded with tangible rewards such as increment of salary, awards, and job promotion to a higher level (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). In work engagement, there are three dimensions that cover a worker's engagement to one's workplace which are Vigor (VI), Dedication (DE) and Absorption (AB) (Panatik et al., 2016; Peláez-Fernández, Mérida-López, Rey, & Extremera, 2022). According to Kuok and Taormina (2017), VI shown where employees have high and positive attitude and energies to perform their job scopes at workplace, DE shown where employees have high level of inspiration towards their work, and AB shown where employees have full concentration performing their jobs scopes at workplaces. Work engagement role is very crucial to help employees to stay motivated and inspired to perform well towards their jobs (Kahn, 1990).

In this study, the main objective is to investigate the role of marital status as a mediator between the relationship between dimensions in work engagement and dimensions in life satisfaction. Again, there are three dimensions in work engagement which are Vigor (VI), Dedication (DE) and Absorption (AB) (Kahn, 1990), and two dimensions in life satisfaction which are Cognitive Life Satisfaction and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Working Women and Work Engagement in Malaysia

A research by Harun, Mahmood, and Md. Som (2022) has tested work engagement to examine employees' role stressors in Malaysian government public hospitals. The participants

are among medical doctors and specialists where 72.3% are among female respondents and 27.7% are among male respondents. Based on findings, work engagement has a significant relationship with work-life conflict. In addition, work engagement mediates the relationship between one of the role stressors which is the RA (Role Ambiguity) – lack of clarity towards TI (Turnover Intention). Harun et al. (2022) also stated that work engagement mediates on where helps to reduce or delay the intention for respondents to job resignation due to the high level of role stressors. Findings also stated that work engagement negatively associated with TI (Turnover Intention), which tells us that work engagement is a positive attribute that has no connection with TI (Turnover Intention); which is a negative attribute. Harun et al. (2022) encouraged for the higher authorities to which are the hospital directors to identify and cope with turnover issues among medical doctors that are on the rise and the policymakers to find ways and provide supports to the medical doctors that experienced high level of stress.

A qualitative study by Rusdi, Razak, and Embong (2023) towards twelve university academic staffs selected from public and private universities in Malaysia. Among twelve university academic staffs, nine of them are females and three of them are males. Based on the findings, university academic staffs stated they experienced burnouts due to expectations from academic institutions and workplace environment where work colleagues are all very competitive. According to Rusdi et al. (2023), it is not limited to the only expectations from academic institutions, but also referring to the personality traits of the academic staffs themselves, such as being perfectionists and having set of standards; which leads to extreme burnout. This is similar to the findings by Khamisa, Peltzer, Ilic, and Oldenburg (2017), where the result stated that respondents in the study (85% are female nurses involved in the study) have experienced burnout due to personal stress and workplace environment. In addition, Khamisa et al. (2017) also stated that personal stress has better predictor towards burnout compared to work stress. Personal stresses are related to the individuals' marital issues, health issues and financial issues. In Rusdi et al. (2023)'s study, however, stated academic staffs that possessed resilience able to cope with workloads and sustain their passion towards their careers, which will alleviate their level of burnout. Past studies by Kuok and Taormina (2017) and Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, and Bakker (2002) stated that work engagement associated with burnout. When a worker has low level of work engagement, it led to burnout. Kuok and Taormina (2017) also stated that burnout and work engagement can occur together at once.

Working Women and Life Satisfaction in Malaysia

A quantitative study done by Marziah, Ijon, Wan Shaharuddin, and See (2017) towards job satisfaction for workers; in which has roles in influencing the change in life satisfaction of a working individual. Marziah, Ijon, Wan Shaharuddin, et al. (2017) justified the importance of involvement of other predictors that influence life satisfaction, with supported from previous and newer studies in relation with three main predictors which are social supports, which connected with health (Isacco, Garfield, & Rogers, 2010), family attachment (Kasprzak, 2010) and job satisfaction (Marziah, Ijon, Wan Shaharuddin, et al., 2017) towards life satisfaction among career women; specifically in Malaysia. From the study, Marziah, Ijon, Wan Shaharuddin, et al. (2017) reported that there was very significant relationship between the association of job satisfaction, family attachment and social supports that received by middle-

aged career women on towards their life satisfaction outcome, which are similar to the findings by Ahmad (1996), where there is a relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Veenhoven (2012) stated that happiness is also known as life satisfaction or subjective well-being. A study in Malaysia by Mohd Hashim and Mohd Zaharim (2020) investigated happiness in Malaysia among Malaysian adolescents. This study has found that Malaysian adolescents with mean age 15.97, with total 1766 samples collected in 20 secondary schools in peninsular Malaysia, where high level of happiness correlates with high level of household income and their father's high level of income. This finding has consistently proved a study by Diener (2006) where, higher level of income contributes to high level of happiness. Another finding by Mohd Hashim and Mohd Zaharim (2020) that support Degges-White and Kepic (2020)'s study on where, good family and friends support contribute to the high level of happiness.

Zhao, Osman, Omar, and Yaakup (2023)'s quantitative study has used life satisfaction towards Chinese international students in Malaysia in relation with their SNSs [Social Networking Sites] usage (usage engagement and acculturation usage), and used host cultural identity and ethnic cultural identity, as mediating effect. There are research hypotheses in Zhao et al. (2023)'s study which are SNSs usage engagement is positively associated with life satisfaction, SNSs acculturation usage is positively associated with life satisfaction, host cultural identity is positively associated with life satisfaction and ethnic cultural identity is positively associated with life satisfaction. In Zhao et al. (2023)'s study, host cultural identity referred to Malaysian cultural identity while ethnic cultural identity referred to Chinese cultural identity. Number of female respondents that participated in the study is 165 and male respondents are 102. 67% are not married, 27% are married and 5.2% are widowed. Based on findings, it is found that SNSs usage engagement and two cultural identities both have positive relationship towards life satisfaction. From here we know that cultures influence individuals' level of life satisfaction.

Marital Status's Role towards Work Engagement

Çemberci, Civelek, Ertemel, and Cömert (2022)'s study focused towards the role of marital status that influenced individuals' level of work engagement in the workplace, particularly during post-Covid pandemic period. In addition, the study itself also stated that the number of children in the households also influence the level of work engagement as what to the later studies by Fukuzaki, Iwata, Ooba, Takeda, and Inoue (2021) and Smith and Dumas (2007). Back to the findings found by Çemberci et al. (2022), married individuals have higher level of work engagement (specifically focused on dimension of absorption), especially married, working individuals that are middle-aged due to their longer number of work experiences in the workplace. Work engagement are becoming more popular in the studies ever since the post-pandemic era occur.

Marital Status as a Mediator Role

Jang, Schuler, Evans-Polce, and Patrick (2018)'s quantitative study emphasized the role of marital status as mediator variable in relation with young adult substance use (independent variable) and their subsequent substance use disorder (dependent variable). As marital status as the mediator variable of this study, marital status are categorized into two categories which

are “married” and “never married”, where “married” coded as 1 and “never married” coded as 0. In Jang et al. (2018)’s study, the respondents are among young adults with maximum age of 30. For married category, the study required the respondents to state married or not. For unmarried category, the researchers stated for never married category, it consists of single, divorce, separated and engaged. Jang et al. (2018) stated that, based on past study by Power, Rodgers B Fau - Hope, and Hope (1999), substance users contributed to lower rates of marriage. Jang et al. (2018) emphasized on their study where, marriage influenced individuals to change their values and beliefs. Based on their findings, marital status partially mediated the relationship between young adults (specifically young adults that age between 19 and 20) and their subsequent substance use disorder. To be specific, particular marital status that never married.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Based on the objectives and literature reviews, conceptual framework has been developed:

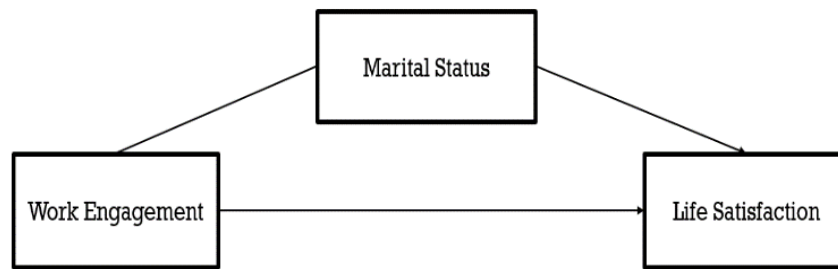


Fig 1: Based on Marziah, Ijon, See, et al. (2017) and Kuok and Taormina (2017)’s studies

This conceptual framework are based on Hierarchy Needs Theory that is introduced by Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943). Below is the model:

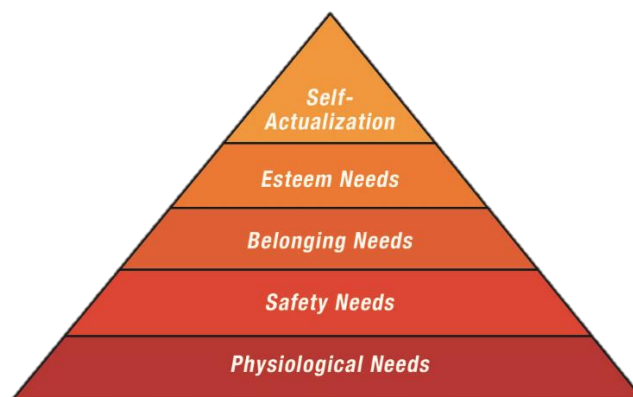


Fig 1: Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Based on Figure 2, there are five levels in the Hierarchy of Needs theory. Most focused levels for this study in Hierarchy of Needs theory are safety needs, belonging needs and esteem needs.

According to Maslow (1943), safety needs occurred when individuals desired to achieve stability that are tangible such as income stability, career stability, long-term assets (houses, businesses and lands) and short-term assets (investments, vehicles and etc.). Working women focused on income and career stability, so that can cope with their living expenses in their daily lives such as paying house and car loans, insurances, personal maintenances and so much more. From this, having income and career stability leads to good level of life satisfaction (Kuppusamy et al., 2023; Marziah et al., 2018). For belonging needs, Maslow (1943) stated this level where individuals desire for emotional connection which can solidify with romantic relationships, platonic relationships and even family relationships. From this, individuals seek marriage as a way to tighten the bond (emotional connection extended to bigger families) which this can view as a part of culture and religious beliefs in some countries (Coontz, 2004; Vaughn & Heaton, 1997; Wadsworth, 2016). However, marriage can also be viewed as a safety need and a quick way to reduce financial burden, especially for individuals that come from poor families. This is where the issue of child marriage is very concerning (Kohno, Dahlui, Nik Farid, Safii, & Nakayama, 2020; Pourtaheri, Sany, Aghaee, Ahangari, & Peyman, 2023). Married, working women are viewed as multitaskers and being married viewed as receiving supports from their spouses, primarily financial supports (Kuppusamy et al., 2023). For esteem needs, Maslow (1943) stated that individuals seek recognition that boost their confidence. This is where the role of work engagement step in, and this is very crucial to women who have jobs/careers. Women up until today still viewed as vulnerable individuals and, working women struggling to achieve life satisfaction due to inequality in workplace (Joshi & Jovanović, 2020; Kok, 2018; Peace & Egharevba, 2018). When women highly engaged in their work as what findings by Panatik et al. (2016), this exists when women feel highly appreciated by their superiors, when their superiors express emotional supports and giving rewards, where this contribute to positive life satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, researcher used snowball sampling method to collect data from respondents. Respondents in this study are female government servants which consist of 348 samples. Data collected based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Researcher used online questionnaire and physical questionnaires and distributed to the respondents. All respondents are voluntarily participated in the study after researcher received approval letters from government sector representatives. Female government servants are from Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah (Sabah State Education Department), Jabatan Meteorologi Negeri Sabah (Sabah State Meteorological Department), and Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara Negeri Sabah (Sabah State Registration Department). Data Analysis statistical technique that are used are mediation analysis by using Hayes Process Macro (Model 4). Researcher used SPSS (IBM version 28) to analyse the data.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographics

Descriptive statistics implemented to summarize female government servants' socio-demographics (marital status, age range, religiosity and ethnicities). In terms of marital status from Table 1, 68.7% are married, 23.6% are single, 3.2% are widowed and 4.6% are divorced. In addition, only 34.77 % among female government servants have work experiences in private sectors. Moreover, majority female government servants that participated in this study are Muslim with Bajau ethnicities which holds 16.9%. In terms of age range and the number of children that are under their in their households are age between 34 and 41 years old that have 1 or 2 children under their care which holds 34% (holds the highest percentage). Below are the tables from 1 until 4 shown:

Table 1: Female Government Servants' Marital Status

		No. of respondents	Percentage
MARITAL STATUS	MARRIED	239	68.7%
	SINGLE	82	23.6%
	WIDOWED	11	3.2%
	DIVORCED	16	4.6%

Table 2: Female Government Servants' Work Experience in Private Sector

		HAVE YOU EVER WORKED IN PRIVATE SECTOR?	
		YES	NO
MARITAL STATUS	MARRIED	85	154
	SINGLE	29	53
	WIDOWED	2	9
	DIVORCED	5	11

Table 3: Female Government Servants' Ethnicity in Relation With Religion

		RELIGION									
		ISLAM		CHRISTIAN		BUDDHIST		HINDU		OTHERS	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
ETHNICITY	KADAZAN-DUSUN	58	16.7%	44	12.6%	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	BAJAU	59	16.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

	MURUT	2	0.6%	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	OTHERS	100	28.7%	16	4.6%	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	MALAY	33	9.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	CHINESE	14	4.0%	6	1.7%	5	1.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	INDIAN	0	0.0%	2	0.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Table 4: Female Government Servants in Relation With Age and No. Of Children

		NO. OF CHILDREN							
		NONE		1 - 2 CHILDREN		3 - 4 CHILDREN		MORE THAN 4 CHILDREN	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
AGE	18 - 25 YEARS OLD	1	0.3%	5	1.4%	1	0.3%	1	0.3%
	26 - 33 YEARS OLD	18	5.2%	18	5.2%	17	4.9%	8	2.3%
	34 - 41 YEARS OLD	28	8.0%	34	9.8%	33	9.5%	12	3.4%
	42 - 49 YEARS OLD	27	7.8%	32	9.2%	25	7.2%	14	4.0%
	50 YEARS OLD AND ABOVE	23	6.6%	22	6.3%	19	5.5%	10	2.9%

Marital Status as Mediator Variable

Table 5: Mediation Analysis

EFFECT	B	SE(B)	β	t	p
VI -> MS	0.0660	0.0609	0.0581	1.0832	0.2795
MS -> PNS	0.0211	0.0360	0.0315	0.5850	0.5589
(total) VI -> PNS	0.0049	0.0408	0.0065	0.1202	0.9044
(direct) VI -> PNS	0.0035	0.0409	0.0046	0.9316	0.0859
				LLCI	ULCI
(indirect) VI -> MS -> PNS	0.0014	0.0360	0.0018	-0.0047	0.0088

VI = Vigor, MS = Marital Status, PNS = PANAS

Note: (p < 0.05)

Based on Table 5, marital status partially mediated the relationship between VI and PNS. VI, which is an abbreviation of Vigor, is one of the dimensions in work engagement. PNS, which is an abbreviation of PANAS (Positive And Negative Affect Schedule), on the other hand, is one of the dimensions in life satisfaction. The value of LLCI, - 0.0047 and ULCI, 0.0088 satisfied the condition of $p < 0.05$, and did not satisfy the condition of total affect of VI towards PNS, and the condition of direct effect of VI towards PNS, on which both $p > 0.05$, where the p-value for total affect VI to PNS is 0.9044, and p-value for direct affect VI to PNS is 0.0859. However, when look at the value of B of the indirect effect, it is equivalent to 0.0014 for the indirect effect of MS in association with VI and PNS, which was 0.0014, and the total affect is 0.0049 (the value of B), for VI towards PNS and direct affect is 0.0035 (the value of B), for VI towards PNS. From this, the indirect effect of marital status towards relationship between Vigor (VI) and PNS (PANAS) occurred.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Based on the results shown, regarding to the partial mediation effect of marital status on towards the relationship between Vigor (VI) – one of dimensions in work engagement and PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) – one of dimensions in life satisfaction, this shows that marital status has played very crucial role that influenced their level of energies (Vigor) towards their life satisfaction. In PANAS, majority of female government servants are feeling alert (which can potentially lead to burnout) as what stated by Rusdi et al. (2023) towards their job scopes at their workplaces. In this matter, since majority of female government servants are married, they are considered as very capable to do multitasking responsibilities and holding multiple roles such as being a mother, a wife, and a full-time worker as what stated by Salleh and Mansor (2022) and Marziah et al. (2018) in their findings. However, in addition to negative emotions, majority female government servants are not sure whether they are feeling upset, feeling ashamed and feeling afraid when they are performing their tasks and responsibilities at the workplace since majority female government servants that are involved in the study are married women, which was contradict to the findings by Marziah, Ijon, See, et al. (2017) and Marziah et al. (2018). This is due to because female government servants especially those who are married, exhibit complex emotions that was hard to express exactly on how they are feelings towards their job and responsibilities at the workplaces. Female government servants have obligations to not just support their households but also wants to lessen their spouse's burden to cope with commitment at households, which to them, it's a good thing to do. Higher authorities that hold decision-maker roles should play roles in providing mental health supports to the female government servants.

In terms of theoretical concept which based on Hierarchy of Needs theory, female government servants in this study achieved their safety needs since working in government sectors provides income and career stability in the long run. In terms of belonging needs, on the other hand, female government servants' marital status somewhat did not influence their level of life satisfaction (good or bad) entirely, in other words, neutral. This is most possibly married female government servants that practices Islam, view marriage is a good act of practice to avoid sinful activities that are prohibited in Islam, where falls in safety need and

belonging need (Kamarudin, Yen, & See, 2020; Vaughn & Heaton, 1997). From this, marriage is viewed as duty or obligation in Islam and quite complex whether this can view as positive or negative life satisfaction.

ETHICAL STATEMENTS

Through ERAS 2.0 (Educational Research Application System 2.0), the researcher applied for an official letter of approval (for research purposes) from the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The researcher had to submit a number of documents, including proof of their status as a student at the university, a verification letter from their academic supervisor stating that their research proposal was approved, a questionnaire, and their research proposal. It takes five working days to receive the permission. The researcher obtained formal letter authorization to send questionnaires to female employees of the government. By signing consent forms that the researcher provides, directors and officer-in-charges of other government departments are also contacted by researchers.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENTS

Elpidia Juli is the primary researcher and first author of writing the paper (including conducting data collection and data analysis), together co-researchers, Md Sayed Uddin and Trixie Marjorie Tangit, which assist with supervision.

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DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There is no conflict of interest while conducting in this research.

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