

# Quality Indicator of Marriage Relationships among Muslim Couples 10 Years of Marriage in Malaysia

Nur Hasbuna Saleh<sup>1</sup>, Norhayati Mohd Noor<sup>2</sup>, Akbariah Mohd  
Mahdzir<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor, <sup>3</sup>University of  
Technology Malaysia, Jalan Sultan Yahya Petra 54100 Kuala Lumpur  
Email: norhayati@ukm.edu.my

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## Abstract

A quality ten-year marriage relationship is the dream of every married couple. Various factors that contribute to the quality of marital relationship between husband and wife. The purpose of this study is to explore the quality indicators of the relationship between Muslim couples at the beginning of marriage, namely marriage under 10 years. This study uses a qualitative approach that uses a case study design. The in-depth interview technique of 10 couples was selected based on purposive sampling of those who had been married under 10 years permanently. The results of data analysis are thematic using Nvivo 12 software. The results of the study found that there are six indicators that appear under the quality of marriage of Muslim couples at the beginning of marriage, namely the presence of children, career, finance, education, role and age of marriage. Discussions are also discussed in this article.

**Keywords:** Indicator, Marriage Quality, Couple Relationship, Early Marriage

## Introduction

A Muslim marriage is a social contract between two independent person who have attained puberty. The foundation of the family in Islam is blood ties or marital commitments. Islam builds the family on solid grounds that are capable of providing reasonable continuity, true security and mature intimacy (Jami'ah, 2011; Meraj 2018). The basis of building a marriage is to get the dignity and peace of life with the couple and feel comfortable with each other towards themselves (Nur Zahidah 2011). This institution is called the institution of the household and is the first stage of the formation of society through marriage subject to certain rules laid down in Islam. Therefore understanding marital relationship is also timely given the changes the institution of marriage has been witnessing over the last several decades (Neetu et al., 2017).

Gottman (2000) found many couples decide to end their marriages by separating or divorcing when the marriage built fails to be defended. Despite various efforts to maintain the harmony of marital relations, the collapse of the institution of marriage of Muslim couples in Malaysia is worrying. Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Malaysia (JKSM) released divorce statistics from 2010 to 2015 nationwide showed that divorce cases increased from year to year that is an increase of 7847 cases from 2010 to 2015. Based on these statistics, the shortcomings of the family institution among the Muslim community are seen to be getting worse. The statistics of cases such as divorce, domestic violence and others involving families are increasing (Zalikha & Zaleha, 2010)

Every married couple dreams of happiness in a marital relationship (Sperl, 2002). However, not all couples are able to maintain their marriage (Benokraitis, 2011). Marital quality refers to a global assessment of one's marriage and is also a concept related to well-being, satisfaction and overall good feelings in the context of the marital bond (Sharlin et al., 2000). A quality marriage can also directly help the formation of a happy family (Yusmini, 2003). Thus, quality in marriage is an area that is often studied by researchers in related fields. However, it is still a mysterious field and has to do with various internal and external factors (Norfaezah, 2016).

Laura (2013), young couples at the beginning of marriage will experience various changes especially in child management, work and household chores thus causing the quality of marriage to decline. In the first year of marriage husband and wife need to learn from each other to realize their role as a husband, wife or parent. This stage of the age of marriage is between one to ten years (Rachmawati & Mastuti, 2013). Raihanah (2001) the longer the duration of marriage the less conflict in the household. This view is also supported by Azhar Muhammad (2006) that the period of one to ten years of marriage is a period where many problems occur in marriage. Studies by past researchers report a variety of factors that influence the quality of marital relationships. This period of relationship is also seen to play an important role in creating trust in the relationship towards the couple. The marital duration factor was seen to be positively correlated with the formation or increase of trust in the relationship towards the couple. The longer the period of a person's marriage in getting to know the partner can increase or strengthen trust in his partner (Zuraini, 2015).

Thus, a quality marital relationship serves as a role model to children (Hakvoort et al., 2010), affect children's experiences in life (Schermerhorn et al., 2011) and affect children's relationships with others (Martinson, 2010; Steinberg, et al., 2006). Marital instability has a profound effect on children who are observers in the family. Negative effects are considered to be the adverse effects of an unsatisfactory marital relationship (Norfaezah, 2016). Therefore, this study focuses on the indicators of the quality of marital relationship between Muslim couples at the beginning of marriage, namely marriage under ten years. The quality of marriage is also one of the important aspects that play a role in the psychological and physical well-being of the couple and can maintain the relationship of the Muslim couple early in marriage. A healthy and quality marital relationship not only benefits the couple but also affects the behavior and development of the children (Lucas-Thompson & Clark-Stewart, 2007). Thirty years ago reserach by Howes and Markman (1989) in Child Developmen, study allowed the effects of the marriage on the child to be teased apart from the effects of the child on the marriage.

### **Research Objectives**

This study specifically intends to explore indicators pertaining to the quality of marital relations among Muslim couples in the early stages of their marriage. This study is also conducted to identify the backgrounds of research participants and to discover in more depth what are the indicators that form the basis for determining the quality of marriage.

1. Identify the backgrounds of Muslim married couples
2. Explore indicators of matrimonial quality of Muslim couples in the first 10 years of marriage

### **Methodology**

This qualitative approach study utilized case study structure in order to explore indicators in the relationship of Muslim couples in the early stages of marriage. In this study, research data was collected by means of face-to-face, in-depth interview method. These interviews were recorded using MP3, and were conducted over three or four sessions. The interview data was transcribed into verbatim text after each interview session to ascertain which questions had still not been answered by study participants, so that they could be addressed in subsequent interviews, and also to find out the saturation level of the data. In-depth interviews were performed according to protocols of semi-structured questions, that were prepared by researchers based on study of literature such as journals and book publications. Some sample interview questions are as follow:

1. Could you explain regarding your experiences as a wife/ husband?
2. Have your expectations with regards to your spouse been fulfilled after marriage?
3. How have you managed to maintain your marriage until this present time?

To ensure the validity of the interview question method, three experts in counseling, and qualitative studies, were selected for the purpose of vetting and approving them.

### **Research Participants**

Research participants in this study comprised 10 married Muslim couples. They were selected by means of purposive snowball sampling in adherence to established criteria, namely, participants have to be married for a duration of less than 10 years, be of Muslim faith, and are voluntary participants. This snowball method made it necessary for researchers to choose the initial research participants who fulfilled all conditions or criteria that had been determined by researchers so as to gather information that was concise. After the initial research participants had been studied, researchers then requested these initial participants to introduce other individuals who met the required criteria; this process was then repeated until the data had reach saturation level (Noraini, 2010; Pranee Liamputtong, 2014).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis process in this study was based on thematic analysis. To ensure validity and reliability of research data, the data that had been transcribed in verbatim was sent to the all subjects of the survey, checked by fellow researchers, and also examined by evaluation experts in qualitative studies, and also the specific field of this study. The development of themes and sub-themes were based on library reading and also by repeated close scrutiny of the transcriptions. Coding process was utilized by the researchers to represent research participant, research location, themes and also subthemes that were generated through this study. For instance, P1H denoted Research Participant 1 Husband, while P1W denoted

Research Participant 1 Wife. Researchers produced these by means of keywords that were yielded from data, and also from descriptive sentences of those specific keywords. Researchers also used NVivo 12 as the tool to manage the data that had been transcribed. To ensure that the resulting themes are accurate, researchers read them numerous times to assign the correct meaning in verbatim form. Researchers also did peer checking in instances where they were stumped or felt uncertain.

## Research Findings

### *Background of Research Participants*

Of the 10 Muslim couples, five couples had been married for less than five years, while the other five couples had been married for more than 10 years. It was also found that the participants were all aged between 20 and 35 years of age. Six of these couples did not have children, while the other four couples had children borne from their marriage. It was also found that five of these couples resided with parents, while the other five lived on their own. In the case of six couples, both husband and wife were working, while among the other four couples, only the husband was employed. A summary of these results is depicted in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1  
*Background of Research Participants*

Participants	Duration	Marriage	Status	Children	Place of Residence
PK1 Wife		27 Years			Hostel
PK1 Husband	6 Years	28 Years	Working	None	Parent Home
PK 2 Wife		26 Years			Rented House
PK 2 Husband	8 Years	28 Years	Working	2	
PK 3 Wife	1 Year	24 Years			Own House
PK 3 Husband	2 Months	24 Years	Working	1	
PK 4 Wife		23 Years	Not working		Parental House
	7 Years			2	
PK4 Husband		34 Years	Working		
PK 5 Wife	1 Year	26 Years	Working		Own House
PK5 Husband	2 Months	28 Years		None	
PK 6 Wife		31 Years	Not working		Parental Home
	4 Months			None	
PK 6 Husband		33 Years	Working		
PK 7 Wife		30 Years			Parental Home
	1 Year		Working	None	
PK7 Husband		30 Years			
PK 8 Wife		27 Years	Not working		Own House
	5 Years			None	
PK 8 Husband		28 Years	Working		
PK 9 Wife		20 Years			Parental Home
	9 Years		Working	None	
PK 9 Husband		22 Years			
PK 10 Wife		25 Years	Not working		Own House
	8 Years			3	
PK 10 Husband		27 Years	Working		

### *Quality Indicator of Married Couples during Early Marriage*

Research findings show that there exist six indicators for quality of married couples during the period of early marriage. These indicators are: (i) Presence of children (ii) Career (iii) Finance (iv) Education (v) Role acceptance in Marriage, and (vi) Age at Marriage.

#### *Presence of Children*

Data analysis shows the emergence of two quality subthemes for Presence of Children, namely life management and balancing of time. Research findings show that seven participants described the presence of children in terms of life management and three participants in terms of balancing of time. Meanwhile PK3I stated that the presence of children in married life had transformed the daily routine of the wife and husband. Research findings reveal that the wife was more inclined to prioritize the children before conducting any affairs or planning daily activities that involved the children. As for balancing of time, PK10I explained that the couple no longer spend time socializing with their friends, even on holidays. Most of the time is spent at home with the kids. Therefore, research findings illustrate that the presence of children preserves and enhances the quality of the matrimonial relationship whereby the couple is able to manage their life and balance their time efficiently.

“... but after having this kid, have to change a lot. We also have to be more mature, more rational when doing anything. It has become more cheerful with the presence of this kid, when going anywhere, we have to take the child along. Ok, like before there was no child, but now with the child, everything has changed, now after work, have to pick up the child, then have to wait for the husband to return, because only after he returns, can start doing anything”.

Indeep interview/P3W

“Sometimes on his off-days, my husband takes the kids to the mother’s house, or to the shops, yeah it’s like that. On working days, sometimes he comes back early, sometimes late. Only at nights, he can play with the kids, when he is off from work he can take them out, if only to the mother’s house just in front over there. Then I can complete my house work when the kids are not around. I wouldn’t say my husband hangs out a lot with his friends; when he is on leave, when he goes to the shop or anywhere, it is only for a short while. If he needs to go for a longer time, he takes the youngest child along with him, it’s like that.”

Indeep interview/P10W

#### **Career**

Data analysis depicts two quality subthemes under the category of career, namely physical preparedness and emotional preparedness. Findings show that six couples have elaborated on the aspect of career from the viewpoint of physical preparedness, and emotional preparedness. Research findings from PK7S highlight that physical preparedness is a critical factor in marital relationships, as husbands need to work far away from their spouses. Findings reveal that spouses are willing to accept the fact that they need to manage the household on their own for several days, or even weeks, when the husbands’ career requires them to work far from home. The acceptance of wives of the husbands’ career can greatly increase the quality of the marriage and ensure an enduring relationship. In terms of emotional preparedness, PK3I stated that she was ready and accepted the nature of the husband’s job even before the marriage. Findings show that wives attempt to think rationally when they return from work even though they are really tired. This is because they need to perform household chores such as cooking after they return from work. The quality of the

marital ties can be enhanced when wives are able to accept each other's careers and are able to control their emotions during marriage. Hence, it is vital to have physical and emotional preparedness towards the career in order to maintain and boost the quality of marital relationships.

"Mmm, I work in many places, but I mostly go to Sabah and Sarawak. My wife accepts me working over there. She takes care of all affairs herself, so she's considered OK. It's all right living far away from her as I have to work, right? So during holidays, I'll return to hometown to see her, but if I do not return for a long time because of work, she'll come to see me if I happen to be in KL".

Indeep interview/P7H

"It cannot be an excuse that I am too tired because of working ... can't be like that. We have to think rationally of how to take care of all things. Can't afford to get angry or anything like that. Ermm, before we got married, we were also coming back late after work, so after marriage, we cannot dispute about these matters as we already have realized about this prior to getting married. We already were prepared in terms of emotions".

Indeep Interview /P3W

### **Finance**

Research findings revealed that there were two subthemes that appeared in the financial aspect, namely financial management and financial influence. Research findings identified 13 participants making statements about financial management. Meanwhile, five participants, namely, spoke of financial influence in their relationship. Additionally, participants mentioned the same thing, which was the income obtained by the couple would be allocated according to priority, such as children's expenses, kitchen provisions, and payment for vehicle and house. Financial management is crucial every month to ensure there is adequate funds for expenses and avoid financial crisis for the couple in their marriage. As for financial influence, PK2I said that sufficient funds would make the wife happy. Findings indicate that wives attain better quality in relationships if they were provided enough money for monthly expenses. Thus, findings illustrate that financial indicators in terms of management and influence is capable of boosting the quality of relationship of the married couple in the early stages of marriage.

"It's during the payday, because when I get the salary, I will allocate for everything because if I don't do that, I fear that the money will be spent for other things, such as for the children, if it is used up, it's a problem as it is not easy to find money".

Indeep interview/P3W

"I can't say my partner is very romantic, but he makes me happy as he gives me enough money for expenses, so that gives me happiness".

Indeep interview /P3W

### **Education**

Research findings denote that two subthematic qualities surface in the realm of education, namely affordability and qualification. Findings noted that seven participants (spoke regarding affordability in daily living due to education. As for the subtheme of qualification, there were four study participants (PK1I, PK2I, PK2S and PK5S) who mentioned this. According to PK1I, PK7I and PK8I, they talked of the same matter, by saying that the strength of a

marriage depended on the education level of the couple, which subsequently decided the level of their income. Findings show that the comfort level of the couple in daily living depended on the capability of the individual self, and also as a couple. According to wife participant one, couples who were financially stable did not face problems when having many children. Hence, findings point out that income, which hinged on education level, was an important component to create strong bonds and improve quality of the marital relationship. Further wife participant one add that the occupation, which is determined by education, can influence the relationship between husband and wife. The wife, for example, would be willing to be away from the husband to further her studies. This is because the wife realizes that an attractive job would require a respectable level of education. As such, the couple explained that happiness and quality of the marriage is indeed influenced by financial capability, and also qualifications that enable lucrative careers.

“Earlier when I did not have an income and depended solely on my husband, I felt sorry for him as his income was not high, so couldn’t afford this, couldn’t afford that. There was no money to pay outstanding bills like ASB etc. Once we got incomes based on our education status, aah, then we could breathe easy, meaning when my husband ran short, I could give support as we got incomes based on our education”.

Indeep interview/ P1W

“Due our current situation, that was one of the reasons why I willed myself to be apart from my husband to study because I want to achieve the maximum level, when I will get the rewards that is really worth it, which is what I expect. God willing, after I graduate I will work here based on my new education and occupation. I feel our relationship has become stronger and this is a factor too of why marital relationship can work well based on the level of education. Now, I work according to my level of education, meaning there is a change in terms of finance, it’s smooth now”.

Indeep interview/P1W

### ***Role Acceptance in Marriage***

The results of the study show that A total of eight study participants have stated that when their partners are willing to accept roles and play a role in marriage, they feel happy. For the wife in this study acknowledged that a wife should be aware and need to do household chores after marriage whether the wife works or not. The experience of the wife not working, managing all household chores such as providing for the husband’s needs before and after going to work, cleaning the house, cooking and managing the children is common to them. Findings of the study also show that wives are aware and clear about their role after marriage. As for the subtheme of accepting change, a total of six study participants shared this matter and study participant 3 explained that after marriage, daily routines changed completely in terms of time, commitment and tasks. Findings show that wives are more likely to make changes after marriage because they have to manage the household before or after returning from work. This daily routine is very different from before marriage and after marriage in daily life. When a couple is able to realize the role clearly and accept the changes after marriage can help improve the quality of the couple’s relationship in marriage.

"I don't do a lot of household chores for my two children. All I manage to cook wear what all the reasons husband work a new night. I take care of the children's food and drink, manage the kitchen expenses like that, I manage a lot of the household because my husband is late for work".

Indeep interview/P1W

"It has changed 360 degrees in terms of time, tasks, commitment, everything has changed. Supposedly, the time before the wedding was sitting alone, sitting alone with the family, so near there, it must be strong. Before marriage, it was more about yourself, it was more independent to do what you want to do for yourself. It really takes time while wanting to become a habit like before before the wedding, tired of going back to work, take a shower, open the lid, and have food. Now that I'm married, I have to open the fridge to see what to cook, I have to see what I have to think about, what to cook. It's true that the thing is fully not the same as before, because it used to go back straight, now it has to go back to the kitchen, it has to sacrifice break time, what is all that?"

Indeep interview/P3W

### ***Age of Marriage***

The results of the study show that a sub-theme of quality under the age of marriage has emerged, namely maturity in terms of physical, emotional and social. The findings of the study showed that a total of eight study participants have stated that maturity in terms of physical, emotional and social is important to build the quality of marital relationships. According to the wife of Study Participant one stated the age of marriage in terms of physical maturity requires couples to look at various aspects before marriage. Findings show that couples at a young age need to be physically prepared before entering the realm of household such as ready to do household chores, willing to accept the presence of children, willing to share finances and willing to give commitment in marriage. As for emotional maturity, the wives of study two participants stated that the emotional maturity of couples who married at a young age is still not stable. Findings show that young couples are still not satisfied with living alone and when married will have problems with the presence of children if the couple is still not mature emotionally. Emotional maturity is important so that the young couple can maintain the relationship early in the marriage. As for social maturity, the wife of study participant two has confirmed that her experience as a young couple needs to mature socially before establishing a household. Findings of the study show couples easily listen to words from friends or family members when they do not have social maturity. Thus, overall, the age of marriage can maintain and improve the quality of relationships early in marriage when the couple has maturity physically, emotionally and socially.

So I think there are factors that we have to think about preparation with the responsibility of having another child at the same time financially, plus other commitments that affect the relationship.

Indeep interview/P1H

"Ermmm yes, because when we get married young, it's young blood because sometimes we have a little bit of it, so for a long time, a young marriage of hot blood must be emotional, so it's hard. Aaaa yes, because if you get married early, you can have children later, I want to enjoy it, it won't end, then if you have children, haa, so the emotional problems are not stable anymore, plus there are



more children, problems like many who get divorced after two years and three years of marriage like that haaa many are divorced ”

Indeep interview/P2W

"Sometimes this young couple doesn't know how to think anymore, in addition to listening to their friends and family members, it's hard to talk, it's okay, it's okay

Indeep interview/P2W

## **Discusson**

The quality of marital relationship The family is the basic institution in the formation and development of an individual. In the quality of marriage, the findings found that couples talk a lot about six indicators, namely presence of children, career, finance, education, role acceptance in marriage and age of marriage. According to Srisusanti and Zulkaida (2013) showed that couples feel that the presence of children can make the wife closer to her partner. Children are a factor that can affect the quality of a marriage. The quality of a marriage can be influenced by the presence of a child depending on the willingness of the couple in accepting the presence of a child. The findings of this study also show that couples' readiness for the presence of children, time balance and good life management can improve the quality of marital relationships.

According Maisarah (2005) stated that the marriage of young couples does not focus fully on the question of marriage because it is more concerned with career to strengthen the economy. However, the findings of this study show that early marriage couples in Malaysia are now physically and emotionally ready in terms of career can improve the quality of marital relationships. Thus, this study can provide an impression that the initial quality of married couples in Malaysia is not affected by career aspects. In addition, financial indicators have been identified as one of the indicators that can affect the dynamics and quality of marriage. In general, families with low financial status have less perfect housing, unsatisfactory nutritional and health care practices (Williams et al., 2006). Even so, this study shows that good financial management can improve the quality of marital relationships.

There are studies showing that education is a determinant to greater marital quality because education is associated with less depression, higher income and better communication skills (Amato, 2003). The study also found that education level and income had a positive relationship with marital quality. Brotherson and Duncan (2004); Luckey (2001) explain that level of education can predict marital quality or marital instability. For example, the results of their study show that more educated individuals are more likely to show marital quality. Educated couples act sensibly and rationally in dealing with family matters even in the face of conflict. Therefore, the findings of this study also show that the happiness and quality of the couple's marital relationship is influenced by the ability and eligibility to obtain employment based on education.

In this era of globalization, the high demands of life require more commitment and time at work than at home. This situation affects the traditional family system and changes the role of the system in the family. Mothers need to work to meet the demands of life and the economy of the country (Norhayati, 2012). In this regard, the unbalanced busyness of earning a living between career and household leaves an impact on neglect in fulfilling responsibilities to children. This situation causes parents to lack quality time with their

children. This is because mothers now mostly have to work to meet the increasing demands and needs of life (Adawiyah & Atikullah, 2010). Moreover, according to Xu and Lai (2004) found that women generally report lower marital quality than men. This is because the lack of involvement of the husband in household affairs causes the mother or wife to have to take on more roles in the family thus interfering with the quality of marriage (Nichols, 2010). Rizabuana Ismail (2008) found that there is a relationship between working wives and marital quality. For working wives, they generally experience little happiness in marriage and more conflict in marriage. This is due to the influence of the increasing demands of families and children. Even so, the findings of the study show that when couples are able to clearly realize the role and accept changes after marriage can help improve the quality of couples' relationships in marriage.

Islam considers marriage a very serious commitment; it has prescribed certain measures to make the marital bond as permanent as humanly possible. The parties must strive to meet the conditions of proper age, general capability, free consent, honorable intentions and judicious discretion (Meraj, 2018). The findings of this study indicate that married age can maintain and improve relationship quality early in marriage when couples have physical, emotional and social maturity. Couples who marry at a young age have lower marital quality and greater risk in divorce and separation. This situation is due to young people having immature emotions and psychology and not being ready for marriage. However, these findings are weak and limited to young people in their teens and early twenties (Glenn, 2010). A family that functions and provides a perfect parenting education can produce children who are balanced and prosperous from the physical, mental, social and emotional aspects. Instability in family functioning triggers a variety of problems that contribute to stress on marriage and in turn indirectly negatively impact children (Mazita, 2018).

The results of this study have highlighted another increase in knowledge in the field of marriage counseling in Malaysia. This study has elaborated in detail on the quality indicators of marital relations at the beginning of marriage. The findings of this study can fill the gaps of counseling research studies in the exploration of indicators of couple relationship quality and in turn help maintain relationship quality in early marriage. This research on marriage counseling needs to be continued in line with society's need to the importance of quality in maintaining a couple's relationship early in marriage.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the quality of couples' relationships in marriage became the main focus of the study. Several things that can explain the aspects of the couple's relationship in improving the quality of marriage have been discussed such as child attendance, career, finance, education, gender role and age of marriage. Themes and sub-themes that appear in the indicators of marital quality are important and must be present in a marriage, especially the beginning of the marriage to maintain the quality of the marital relationship. The various concepts and terminology used by researchers in the past have provided space for researchers to look at the quality of the relationship of Muslim couples early in marriage.

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