

The Determining Factors for Muslim Household Deemed Ideal to be in Debt: Proposed Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

The dependency of Malaysia towards the debt industry has made the trend of growth of household debt according to the ratio of household debt to the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) in 2015 to have reached a level that is more than 89.1 percent compared to 86.8 percent in the previous year and further increased to 89.9 percent in 2016. Such an increase has placed Malaysia at the highest rank, as a country with the highest growth rate of household debt in Asia and the trend of the household debt growth has seen the high-income group becoming the largest contributor to the increased rate of household debt compared to the middle and low income counterparts. Other than that, Islam has established a guideline on debt-making, implying that the Malay ethnic (or Muslims in specific) should stay being moderate and should not face the issue of debt. However, cases on debt practice have shown some opposing findings. The question is what are the determining factors for a Muslim household that is deemed ideal to be in debt? How is the factor of Religious Adherence determining the high income Muslim household to start making debts? Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the relevant past literature and establish a conceptual framework that determines the ideal household to make debts by integrating the intrinsic determinants with the extrinsic determinants and further elaborates on the methodology that will be used in this work.

Keywords: Household, Debt, Religious Adherence, Muslim household, determining factor, Debtor

Introduction

Thus, payment through debts has become the main financing mode adopted by Malaysians for the purpose of fulfilling the basic needs in life (Abdul Basit, 2014: 2). This is also thought of as possible because debt repayment had started in the era of ignorance (*jahilliyah*) in the communities until the emergence of Islam to cater for the economic needs related to production and use (Abdul Halim, 1992: 256). Looking at the need to be in debt, in Islam, indebtedness is a state only allowed among the less fortunate ones. Nonetheless, due to the

more daunting and complex economic climate, other than the increasing needs and interests of the people, this has created a lot of consumer-individuals, with the fortunate, more able ones making debts as part of the needs (Mohd Kamal, Mohd Daud & Ahmad Nasir, 2011; Nik Mohd Zaim, Ishak & Munirah, 2012; Nur Aisyatul Radiah Alidaniah, Sanep, Mohd Ali & Mohammed Rizki, 2015). That said, Islam being *syumul* imposes that being in debt is neither forbidden nor encouraged and it has even outlined that the Malay race (or Muslims in specific) should be moderate debtors only and should not be subject to debt issues. However, cases about the practice of being indebted show quite different findings (Nur 'Adilah, Sanep & Tamat, 2015; Nur Aisyatul Radiah Alidaniah et al., 2015). The scenario that happens leads to the question of what are the determining factors for Muslim households deemed ideal or fit to be in debt? In short, this current work will pay attention to the relationship between the determining factors of ideally high-income Muslim households¹ being in the state of indebtedness in Selangor. Therefore, the objectives of this study are; 1) to identify the determining factor for Muslim households deemed ideal to be in debt and 2) to build a conceptual framework that determines the Muslim households deemed ideal² to be in debt. Based on the integration of past studies and literature review encompassing various aspects, this study assumes that the conceptual framework proposed is able to explain the different gap and the factor of consistency that determine Muslim households thought as ideal to make debts. Apart from that, this study will also develop the study hypotheses that will be tested empirically in the next studies, other than discussing the study methodology and the measurement of the construct instrument that is adopted in the study.

Literature Review

In this study, the construct will be divided into two constructs comprising of intrinsic and extrinsic determinants. Both these constructs will be introduced so that the study's conceptual framework will be able to be formed. Therefore, the elaboration on the intrinsic and extrinsic³ determinants can be discussed briefly.

Intrinsic Determinant (Motivation)

The influence of the intrinsic determinant factor characterising on religious values and the idiosyncracies of the consumers are still less explored as the commitment (adherence) to religion is regarded as a taboo subject and sensitive to be studied (Hirscham, 1983). However, this opinion is still relevant as researchers' reference (Khraim, 2010). In turn, Nazlida and Mizerski (2010) are of the opinion that the other understanding on consumers will be better through the testing of religious commitment as the factor of religious adherence is a stable construct and it is difficult to change in a certain period of time as compared to the testing of cultural factors. Based on this view, this study suggests that religious commitment or adherence is one of the variables in this study. Other than religious adherence as the

¹ High income in this study means the main source of income or side income for a couple in a household to obtain monthly salary, pension, bonus, home or building rent, dividend or shares, mortgage, government aid, child's incentive and so on more than RM 8,319 per month.

² The definition of Muslim's Ideal which is used in this research is the Muslim's debtor who is obey the debt rules as suggested in Islam.

³ In psychology field, the intrinsic and extrinsic determinants (motivation) can be broken down into two types which are physiological motivation and psychological motivation. The psychological motivation is associated with the internal and external factors respectively known as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ahmad Azrin, 2010). These two types of motivation based on internal and external domains will be employed in this study.

determining factor for Muslim households that are considered ideal to be in debt, there are two more dimensions that represent the intrinsic construct which are the moral of the debtor and the Consumption by priority. Each is dwelt upon as follows:

Religious Adherence

The importance of this construct has been stressed by a number of researchers including Shafiq (2009: 220) who state that the basic motivation in Islam lies in Faith.

The factor of religion is also important to every individual in daily life and automatically, the role demonstrates the degree of the strength of belief or moral that is translated into actions (Morphitou & Gibbs, 2008). For instance, in the context of indebtedness, Davies and Lea (1995) in their study state that students who are atheists or who are agnostics have the tendency to have debts compared to students who are Protestants. The finding of this study also shows that the non-Christian respondents have the highest tendency to be pro-debt. Conversely, the study done by Abdul Muhmin and Umar (2004) on Muslim respondents in Saudi Arabia shows a negative attitude towards credit and credit cards. The finding of this study is also supported by the UK Universities (2003) that Muslim Pakistanis are not likely to fall into debts. Thus, in evaluating the aspect of religious adherence towards indebted Muslim households, this study employs several indicators including Faith, Islam and Courtesy and all three indicators signify the personality of a true Muslim (Mohd Nasir, Siti Norlina & Siti Aisyah, 2013). Although a Muslim's level of faith is something difficult and impossible to measure, the measurement of the level of faith can be done by looking at the practice or actions done with regard to the Pillar of Faith in proxy (Rosmadi Fauzi et al., 2016). Thus, the hypothesis of the study is as follows:

P₁ When the level of the religious adherence of the household is high, the determinant of the state of indebtedness of the Muslim household is less positive.

The Moral of the Debtor

The word 'moral' originates from Arabic which is *khuluq*. *Khuluq* means manners, attitude, behaviour and habits, characteristics and customary actions. With regard to the term, moral is defined as the state of the soul⁴ that influences one to do something that does not require rational considerations before he or she is actually doing it (Nor 'Azzah, 2011; Fariza, Salasiah Hamjah, Mohd. Juraini, 2015: 15 - 23). The definition of moral, as interpreted has shown that moral stems from the heart⁵ and it is mirrored through one's display of behaviour and actions. In the context of debt, Islam has outlined a specific guideline in practices related to debt that centers on moral. The first issue that has been mentioned surrounds debtors with the moral of *mahmudah* or in other words, debtors who have high ability to repay the debts (Mohd Kamal, 2014: 74). This is because someone who wishes to make debt, would of course know his ability to pay off his debts which is already part of the debtor⁶ (Syahnaz, 2011: 14; Mohd Kamal, 2014: 74). The strong relationship between shari'a and moral and aqidah has created

⁴ The state of the soul implied covers two states namely something that happens naturally and formed through training and normality (Ibn Miskawayh, 1968:29; al - Ghazali, 1980).

⁵ The heart plays an important role in the action as it is in the heart that there is faith (Muhammad Syukri, 2003: 28).

⁶ Although Islam allows people who are really in need to have debts, it asserts that debtors should try to pay off the debts if he can afford to do so. If the debtor is not able to do that, the analogy is that he will be the same as someone who robs off other people and does not want to pay, but if one makes a debt and is really willing to pay it off, Allah SWT will help him pay it all off (Mohd Kamal, 2014: 75).

a relationship between humans and Allah SWT (*habluminallah*) and the relationship among humans (*habluminnanas*). Thus, moral plays an important role in the *muaamalat* of debt so that the human to human relationship stays on the right track. In conclusion, the element found in the construct of moral when determining the factor for an ideal Muslim household to be in debt is that he or she is very able to pay off the debts. Thus, our hypothesis is as suggested below:

P₂ When a household possesses high moral, the determinant for an ideal Muslim household to make debt is more positive.

Consumption by Priority

According to Ahmad Azrin (2010: 41), Consumption by priority means the priority of action done. He adds that although the use of individuals varies from one another according to circumstances and time, the purpose remains the same if the law, value or action are in their place and in order. In the debt practice, the concept of ideal consumption also has to be scrutinised. Therefore, this construct pays attention to two elements including the demand of *dhoruriyyat*. In the construct of Consumption by priority as the determinant for indebted household, Jasini (2014) also finds that one of the main factors that contribute to one's indebtedness is to pay off the use expenses. Ethical consumption can be determined through the use of financial resources that not only seek to carry out illegal activities but also find out about excessive use as such an action is regarded as *israf* (extravagant) and *tabzir* (Mat Hassan, 2003: 51 - 52).

Muslim with attributes of *mahmudah* as have been discussed earlier will decide on his or her goals and will be wise enough in selecting goods and services that are consistent and well-arranged according to priority, such as (*dhoruriyyat > tahsiniyat, tahsiniyat > haajiyaat, dhoruriyyat > haajiyat*) as excessive use in this world will only lead to carelessness (Basri, 2003: 95; Yusuf Qaradhawi, 2002: 25 – 27; Nur'Adilah et al., 2015). Therefore, in identifying the determining factor for ideally indebted Muslim households, this element has to be justified further. Through the discussion that has been made, an important element that has become the basis of the use dimension according to priority will be the demand of *dhoruriyyat*. Thus, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

P₃ When the level of consumption according to the priority of the household is high, the determinant for the ideal Muslims' household indebtedness is less positive.

Extrinsic Determinant (Motivation)

The characteristics of the extrinsic determinant are opposed to those of the Intrinsic Determinant. The former focuses on the determinants that lead to the desire to act, following factors that are external from the individual (Mohammad Shatar, 2005: 9).

Saving

The study carried out by Arifin, Wook Endut, Ismadi, Mohd Saladin and Nor Ghani (2002) reveals that the household saving is very much influenced by income. In addition, Azrina and Siti Fatimah (2010: 9) are of the opinion that the relationship between income and saving is inextricably linked with debt. For instance, when the level of income is low, there is a tendency for household saving to get affected. This indicates that the level of consumption

and low savings is likely to lead the household to the practice of debts. Individuals will continue using their expenses for basic necessities such as food expenses although their income is not sufficient for them to survive (Nur Shahirah, 2012: 11). The insufficiency of their existing income to cater for the usage can be overcome in two ways- using the current accumulated resources through the source of income obtained in the past using savings, or using current resources but delaying the payment to the future by making loans or borrowing (Livingstone & Lunt, 1992). The problem starts when the saving of the household is not able to cater for the excessive spending and this will trap the household into the state of debt. Livingstone and Lunt (1992) who adopt the regression analysis in their study have confirmed that the factor of income and saving is an important factor in predicting the total amount of debt for a household. The need for the household to save up or keep some money for the future has been mentioned in the decree of Allah SWT, meaning:

“(Joseph) said: “For seven years shall ye diligently sow as is your wont: and the harvests that ye reap, ye shall leave them in the ear,- except a little, of which ye shall eat.. Then will come after that (period) seven dreadful (years), which will devour what ye shall have laid by in advance for them,- (all) except a little which ye shall have (specially) guarded.” (al – Yusuf, 12: 47 - 48).

In the tafseer, Ibnu Katsir (2010) explains that this chapter in the Quran narrates that whatever the amount of the yield of crops for the good seven years, keep some so they will not rot and perish, except for some that you need to eat, and when eating, eat with manners, in moderation, not too much so that you will be able to make use of it for the next seven years of insufficiency and after the fertile season, what appears in your dream will be 7 female bulls eating 7 fat ones, indicating that the years of insufficiency will see you deplete all that you have gathered and kept in the fertile times, and in the dream you will be shown a dry wheat sacks. Looking at the construct of saving as the determining factor for Muslim households deemed ideal to be in debt, the element put forth is the saving made for future use. Thus, the hypothesis is established as follows:

P₄ When the level of saving of household is high, the determinant of ideal Muslim household in debt is more positive.

Characteristics of Products and Services in Banking or Financial Institutions

In general, Islam does not forbid the practice of being in debt if the debt made is to fulfill basic needs. However, Islam has outlined several compulsory guidelines so that the practice is at par with the demand of *syara'* and not in the way that is not blessed by Allah SWT like the *riba*-based debts. Ahmad Azrin (2010: 168 - 169) for example, has introduced characteristics of products and services as the construct in identifying the determinant for selecting Islamic banking institutions among Muslims in Terengganu. This construct is seen to be able to become the construct to the determinant of the Muslim household deemed ideal to be indebted. Normally, customers will look into the characteristics of the products and services offered by the banking institutions to get a good offer in the financial market by going to the banks selected. When customers are satisfied with the offer of the bank like competitive bank profit rate, easy payment facility, reasonable payment duration, low processing fees rate, customers will apply for funding from the bank. (IBFIM, 2011: 37).

Today, seeing that a lot of banking and financial institutions do offer debt financing service, an ideal Muslim must take into account and prioritise the issue of being Shari'a-compliant attached to the use of a product or service before making the decision to get the debt financing offered by a financial and banking institution. At least there are two elements that are able to become the determining factor for Muslim households deemed ideal to be in debt, which are; (1) interesting rate of profit (2) reasonable service charge, (3) assurance of confidentiality and (4) assurance of security. For the element of interesting profit rate, the advantage of the saving activities or investment or the use of services is allowed as long as it adheres to the framework of Shara' (Ahmad Azrin, 2010: 263). As Islam acknowledges the importance of the concept of profit in the economic activities, it is no wonder that a lot of works have shown the positive relationship between the element of profit and the bank selection (for instance Erol & El-Bdour, 1989; Erol et al., 1990; Omer, 1992; Sudin et al., 1994; Gerrard & Cunnigham, 1997; Metawa & Almosawi, 1998; Naser et al., 1999; Othman & Owen, 2002; Norafifah & Sudin, 2002; Abbas et al., 2003; and Mohd Amy et al., 2006). Other than that, a reasonable service charge is also examined based on the interview analysis of a group of experts (Ahmad Azrin, 2010: 263). Assurances of confidentiality and security deemed appropriate with the demands of Islam and the norms of humans who always yearn for self and material protection have a positive relationship with the bank selection in various observations (misalnya Erol & El - Bdour, 1989; Erol et al., 1990; Sudin et al., 1994; Gerrard & Cunnigham, 1997; Naser et al., 1999; Othman & Owen, 2002; dan Abbas et al., 2003). Thus, the next hypothesis is as follows:

P₅ When the characteristics of products and services of a bank are good, the determinants of indebtedness of ideal Muslim households are less positive.

Marketing and Advertising in Banking or Financial Institutions

According to Ahmad Azrin (2010: 267), the constructs of marketing and advertising are able to become one of the factors that determine customers who are getting the financing from the bank. This construct focuses on three elements, (1) advertisements highlighting good moral values, (2) interesting gift offers and (3) the promotional methods allowed in Islam. Based on the first element (highlighting moral values), Ahmad Azrin (2010: 267) finds that the products and services must be *Shari'a* compliant, the method of operation and transactions must adhere to the principles of Islam and the ethics and system of advertising either through the electronic and printed media must not be opposing to the values of Islam. Secondly, according to Nik Abdul Aziz and Mohd Fadli (2008: 72 - 74), the act of offering gifts by traders to consumers to stimulate their interests is permitted in Islam. Next, the promotional method allowed in Islam is actually not only a complement to the products and services offered in Islamic banking, but it also becomes a medium to give the right picture about Islam, including all physical and spiritual values contained in it. Thus, our hypothesis is as follows:

P₆ When the bank promotion and advertising are good, the determinant for an ideal household's indebtedness is more positive.

Methodology

This study adopts the questionnaire form method that will be distributed to 345 respondents comprising of high-income, indebted Muslim households in every district in Selangor. To cater for the characteristics and the difficulty in obtaining the sampling frame, the convenient

sampling method is selected. The sampling element is taken according to the researcher's convenience whereby anyone in the population identified, can become the sample without having to undergo any selection process randomly as long as they agree to become the respondents of the study. (Chua, 2014: 253). Thus, the generalization on the larger population has to be done carefully and in limitation. The size of the sample will follow the suggestion raised by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and the size proposed is the size deemed reasonable as asserted by Roscoe (1975). Selangor has been chosen as the sampling location as it is among the state with the highest residents receiving Acceptance Order and Punishment Order (AO&PO)⁷ (Malaysian Insolvency Department, 2015). Other than that, Selangor is also noted as the state with the highest percentage of residents after Sabah and Johor respectively with 12.0% and 11.5% (Malaysian Statistics Department, 2016). In this study, the construction of items of the questionnaire is based on questions tested by previous researchers like Safiek Mokhlis (2006), Rusnah and Abdul Mumin (2006), Wan Marhaini, Asmak, Nor Aini and Azizi (2008), Nurasyikin (2012), Ahmad Azrin (2010), Mohd Zailani (2009), Azrina Sobian and Siti Fatimah (2010), Mohd Azman (2014) and then they are modified to investigate the hypothesis proposed in this study. The questionnaire of the study comprises of three parts namely part A which contains general demographic questions, part B which is the questionnaire comprising of questions about debt payment practice and part C containing the construct that determines an ideal Muslim household to make debt. In section B and C, the questions included in the questionnaire make use of the main reference of previous researchers like Azrina and Siti Fatimah (2010) as well as Mohd Azman (2014) but it was re-edited so that the study objectives are met. Other than that, the construct measured will use the five-point Likert Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Next, the data will be analysed using a confirmation factor analysis using AMOS computer program and the multiple regression analysis through the SPSS software.

The Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on past studies and literature review, studies on the household debt factor have been established a great deal. Thus, this study looks into and suggests the determinants for Muslim households deemed ideal to have debts. The conceptual framework model proposed is as demonstrated in Diagram 1.

⁷ A debtor will receive Acceptance Order and Punishment Order (AO&PO) when the debtor is imposed with bankruptcy because of the failure to settle the indebted through bankruptcy Notice to the previous debtor (Malaysia Insolvencies Department, 2015).

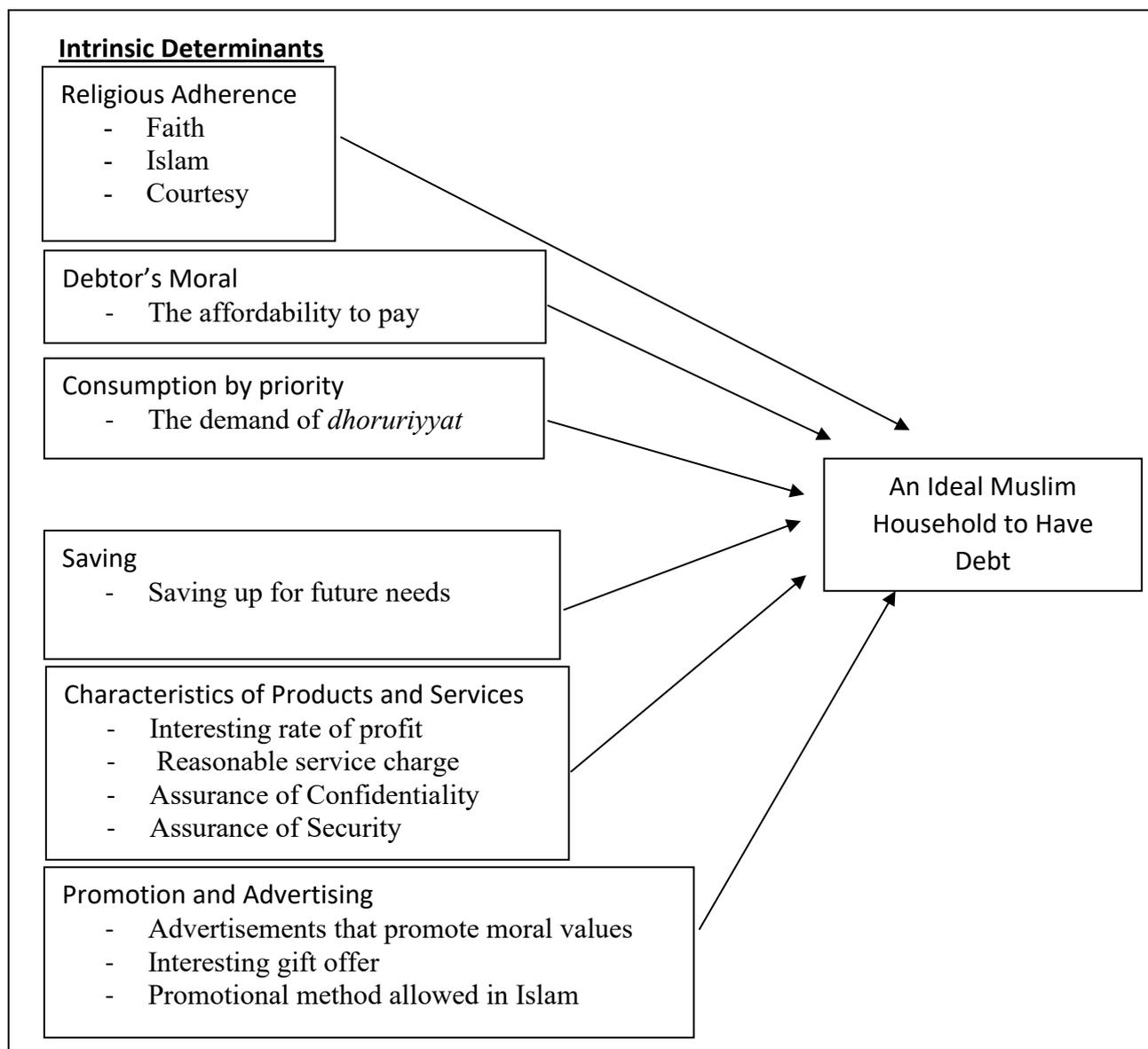


Diagram 1: The Proposed Conceptual Framework of Study

Conclusion

In sum, based on the factors that have been discussed, this study suggests factors like intrinsic factors (Religious Adherence, The Morality of Debtor and the Consumption by priority) and extrinsic factors (Funding, Characteristics of Products and Services, Promotion and Advertising) as determinants for the Muslim household's ideal debt practice. Thus, this study proposes a conceptual framework as can be seen in Diagram 1 to serve as guidance for this study to take it to the next level. The intrinsic determinant factor is important to be put forth as individuals are greatly influenced by religious commitment and this statement is confirmed by the previous literature review. Other than looking at the intrinsic determinant factors, the extrinsic determinant factors are also associated with characteristics of bank selection by the household in determining the household members who are in debt. These factors are important as the intrinsic determinants alone are not sufficient to explain about the issue of debt within households if the aspects of Muslims who are ideally in debt are to be delved into. This study also encompasses the policy of the bank as to evaluate the extent to which the

target respondents are able to understand and give response to the policies to enable them to make the decision in using debts as their mode of financing. Thus, this study also offers some empirical findings. This study can also be adopted as the point of reference (benchmark) for future studies on the group of low-income households and middle-income households. Additionally, this study does not only concentrate on the economic dimension, but it is also able to gather more micro data on household debt to suggest a more practical economic policy so that serious debt issues can be curbed.

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