

## A Qualitative Study: Exploring Marital Readiness among Generation Z

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### Abstract

Marital readiness among young adults is a significant factor in determining future success in developing partner relationships. Young people, commonly referred to as Generation Z, have different perspectives on life than earlier generations, particularly, marriage. The paradigm of Generation Z on *marital readiness* makes this research relevant to investigate. The study included ten people from Generation Z, five males and five women. In-depth interviews were performed to obtain their perspectives on *marital readiness*. Results from in-depth interviews suggested that Generation Z has a different age image for marriage compared to previous generations. This study found Generation Z believes in the necessity to make several important aspects of preparation before they are ready for marriage. These include age readiness, partner criteria, career readiness, psychological readiness, and knowledge readiness. Results also found that Generation Z values work and considers equal roles in marriage. In summary, findings suggested that Generation Z in this study were not ready to marry and needed to navigate through psychological issues before establishing the world of marriage.

**Keywords:** Marital Readiness, Psychological Readiness, Getting Married, Generation Z, Qualitative Study

### Introduction

Generation Z refers to individuals born between the year 1995 until 2010 (Jamiah et al., 2015). According to Csobanka (2016), Generation Z is heavily influenced by the media and celebrities. As a result of constant dependency on technology, Generation Z are also prone to experience sleep deprivation for fear of missing announcements on social media such as Facebook. Berhate and Dirani (2022) discussed that Generation Z will become the world's largest generation and influence various aspects of life, including the work environment, the use of retail, technology, politics, and culture. Generation Z were also found to have different work

preferences compared to previous generations. Specifically, Generation Z prefers to work in the industry that they are familiar with in their personal lives and desire various entrepreneurial opportunities with stable job security (Dangmei & Sing, 2006). Generation Z also values diversity, not only in terms of race and gender but also in terms of identity and orientation.

As Generation Z develops throughout the human lifespan, they also face important developmental tasks such as choosing a job and life partner (Hurlock, 1990). Generation Z is a generation that grew up in an era of increasingly connected and open digital technology. As such, they have broad access to social media and other digital platforms, thus, increasing the social comparison phenomenon. Generation Z's attachment to the digital world and social media increases the tendency to be influenced by information on social media and social change (Abdullah, 2018; Ali et al., 2022; Jamiah et al., 2021). Social change has changed many social and cultural views regarding marriage and family formation (Izzo, 2022; Kefalas et al., 2011).

In a study by Carroll et al (2009), in previous generations, marriage was seen as the ultimate transition to maturity. However, research suggests that the majority of Gen Z today no longer consider marriage and other important social events (for example, finishing school, becoming parents, etc.) as important criteria for adulthood (Nelson & Barry, 2005). This is surprising considering that perceived marital readiness, together with feelings and attitudes about marriage, was found to be a major variable in the decision to marry and an important predictor of later marital satisfaction (Keldal & Yildirim, 2022; Rahmah & Kurniati, 2021; Larson, 2007; Waller & McLanahan, 2005).

Recently, with the issue of many divorces, many Gen Z today are choosing cohabitation rather than marriage (Thornton, 2008). The study also found that family history, religious affiliation, values, educational projections, lifetime income and career aspirations influence marriage and living together. The individual's experience of the family as the first environment and provider of support can determine the extent to which the individuals make the decision to marry (Syamal & Taufik, 2019). perceptions related to marriage that are considered complicated and frightening by the younger generation (Permana & Medynna, 2021). Waters found that Generation Z is less likely to delay children and marry than previous generations. They are more likely to wait until they feel financially stable and have a steady job before starting a family. The average age for women to have children was 26 years, up from 21 years five decades ago, and for men to have children was 31 years, up from 27 years ago. The readiness stage of the spouse will be the main factor that will determine successful households in achieving the pure goal of marriage and the issue of willingness to settle down will be the initial basis for how future married couples will carry out their marriage (Nurainun & Yusuf, 2022).

### **Methodology**

The study applied the qualitative research using phenomenological approach in answering the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach is used to explore and understand the experience of individuals in the area that researchers focused on, specifically, marital readiness.

This research was conducted at one of the public universities in Malaysia. Research informants were selected based on purposive sampling technique. Specifically, research informants were selected based on certain criteria according to the research objectives. The

informants in this study were ten students who were in Generation Z category. The criteria for the informants in this study included

- a. The informant is a student.
- b. Informants were Generation Z born between 1997-2012 years.
- c. The informant is single and has no experience in marriage.

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. According to Sugiyono (Fuad & Nugroho, 2014), purposive sampling, namely informants determined by researchers, who were believed to have the information needed in the specific research. In this study, the data analysis technique used is an interactive data analysis technique. Huberman and Miles (1994) stated that there were three main things in interactive analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. Data analysis also used focus group discussion (FGD).

### **Findings**

The research informants were aged between 20-25 years which consisted of five males and five females. All informants were students from a public university in Malaysia. Informants consisted of three undergraduate students, five master's degree students, and two PhD students. All informants were single and had an attitude that was not against marriage. This study focused on the informant's description of their readiness to marry. The focus of research is on marriage readiness and the informant's views on marriage. Overall, it was found that all informants reported that they were not ready to get married but made plans to marry in future by preparing. In sum, findings found five major aspects of marriage readiness. The five aspects are as follows

#### *Age Readiness*

Regarding the informant, it was found that there was a difference in the ideal age for marriage between male informants and female informants. Overall, the male informants agreed that the ideal age for marriage was 28 years old. Meanwhile, all female informants reported the ideal age for marriage was 27 years old. During the interview, the informants' age was between 20 and 25 years old. All informants reported that they were not ready to get married.

#### *Mate Selection Criteria*

Informants in this study stated the importance of partner criteria before stating readiness for marriage. Couples who meet the criteria become reinforcements in declaring whether they were ready to start a marriage. The informant also reported that it was important to know each other before deciding to get into marriage. Other important aspects identified reported by informants before determining a partner for marriage are getting to know each other about the vision and mission, personality, and ways of communicating.

In the criteria for selecting a partner, female informants agreed that the most important aspect in choosing a husband is having a mature person, while male informants prioritized physical and attraction aspects such as beauty. Furthermore, the male and female informants agreed to choose a partner who communicated well, was mature, and was compassionate. The difference is that the male informant states the importance of looking for criteria for an educated wife. In contrast, the female informant states the importance of the male character who wants to work hard to become a husband.

### *Career Readiness*

A career is found to be an important criterion for all informants. Informants in the study, both men and women, has future career plans. And they reported that they would work before getting married. For the female informants, they choose to pursue their career after marriage and reported that career should not interfere with their intended future marriage. Moreover, the male informants agreed and were comfortable for their future spouse is to work and will continue to support spouse to work after marriage. All informants also stated that they will not compare their future spouse career. Because they think marriage is about cooperation and equal responsibilities. Thus, there is no obligation that the husband must be higher than the wife in a career or vice versa.

### *Psychological Readiness*

The informant stated the importance of mental and psychological criteria before deciding to marry. Currently, the informants reported that mentally they are not prepared to marry. The informants stated that mental health plays an important role in becoming a partner or becoming a parent in the future. The informant views marriage and life after marriage as sacred, so a strong mentality is needed to deal with problems in future marriage.

Psychologically, the informant views "must be enough for oneself" before being ready to marry. All informants agreed that they wanted to enjoy their youth before getting married. They want to seek knowledge as much as possible and gain experience until they are ready to get married later.

### *Knowledge Readiness*

Informants who were students also view that knowledge as one of important aspects of expressing marriage readiness. Knowledge about marriage, partner's responsibilities, parental responsibilities, and parenting knowledge are important before marriage.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Findings indicated that the informants who belonged to Generation Z had their views on readiness for marriage. In general, the informants who belonged to Generation Z stated that they were not ready to marry. This is because informants who have not reached the ideal perceptual age for marriage are 27 or 28 years. Yanti et al (2022) stated that Generation Z are those born between 1995 and 2010. Gen Z is a national asset that needs attention, especially regarding their growth and development. Gen Z wants to start family life before the age of 33 and aspires to have a good job first to raise a family in the future (Puiu, 2017). Generation Z delays marriage compared to previous generations, who tend to marry at an earlier age (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). The informants in this study were still students and did not have permanent jobs. Therefore, it can be concluded that the delay in readiness for marriage is also influenced by career plans by Gen Z. Gen Z currently indicates that work is an important aspect for current Gen Z before determining the marriage factor of work (Shmuel et al., 2023). The findings also found that psychological readiness is an important aspect in determining marriage readiness in Gen Z. The readiness in question can be related to self-fulfillment, and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is assumed as part of the personal factors in the willingness to marry. Psychological well-being becomes a strength within the individual because it combines positive affective states and functions optimally in individual and social life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Young individuals show that marriage is not always a sign of maturity

but must be preceded by the ability to make free decisions and a strong personality before achieving marital satisfaction and prosperity (Lo-oh, 2023). The maturity criteria that characterize Gen Z today are characterized by developmental identity, mental health, autonomy, self-responsibility, and other internal qualities as their maturity criteria (Arnett, 2000; Nelson, 2003; Cheah & Nelson, 2004). The mark of maturity for young adults seems to reflect individualistic values because it emphasizes the personal aspect. However, it also reflects the maturity of individuals and relationships that are important for the provision of marriage and family life (Badger et al., 2006).

In conclusion, Generation Z does not reject marriage, but they state that they are not ready to get married at this time. Generation Z believes in the necessity to prepare several important aspects before being at the stage of mature marriage readiness. These aspects include age readiness, partner criteria, career readiness, psychological readiness, and knowledge readiness. These aspects are important in the findings of the study for Generation Z since marriage is perceived as a sacred phase of life and an equal relationship, shared responsibility and as a form of finding the suitable life partner in fulfilling shared life goals and happiness.

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