

MARITAL HAPPINESS: AN INTRINSIC CASE STUDY OF MR. X

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Abstract

The objective of this investigation is to study marital happiness of visually disabled persons. To be specific, this study sought to: 1) Explore the dimensions of marital happiness of visually disabled persons; 2) Explore the sources of marital happiness of visually disabled persons; and 3) explore the strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness of visually disabled persons. As no investigation has been conducted regarding such matter, the intrinsic case study design has been utilized in this investigation. One respondent labeled as Mr. X has been recruited in this investigation. Data in this investigation has been collected using in-depth interview and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Four themes were constructed regarding the dimensions of marital happiness: 1) positive relationship, 2) positive emotions, 3) meaning, and 4) spirituality. For the sources of marital happiness, the study has discovered nine sources of marital happiness (i.e. responsibility, acceptance, self-efficacy, achievements, religion, sense of togetherness, access to transportation, financial stability, and characteristics of the spouse). Finally, three themes related to the strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness were also constructed (i.e. engaging in religious practices, practicing healthy communication, and dividing responsibilities).

Keywords: Marital happiness, intrinsic case study.

Introduction

Marriage is a legal contract that binds two adult partners, which the partner will initiate and participate in the sharing of economic resources as well as engage in sexual interactions [1]. Married couples will also have high chances of having children [2]. Aside from the simple definition of marriage, there are two distinct viewpoints of marriage which is the conjugal view and the revisionist view [3]. To simplify, the conjugal view refers to the traditional form of marriage which marriage is the unity between two adults of opposite sex. As for the revisionist view, it recognizes the right of marriage between same sex partners (e.g. lesbians and gays).

Several theories have dominated the field of positive psychology as well as the study of happiness [4-9]. However, the theories proposed by these renowned scholars do not cater specifically to persons with disabilities. In addition, the study of happiness among persons with disabilities is still an almost neglected field especially in Malaysia. For instance, the only research that has been conducted regarding happiness among the disabled in Malaysia is by Ferlis Bullare and Teoh Jia Long [10-12]. In terms of the focus of this investigation (i.e. marriage), it has been the attention of various researchers [13-18], yet again, limited investigations that focus attention on the disabled population especially among the visually disabled have been found. The investigations carried out in the past regarding marriage among the visually disabled mainly focused on employment [19, 20], psychological distress [21], self-concept, adjustment to blindness, and friendship [22], and mobility in regards to visual disability [23]. To make matters worse, most investigations regarding parents with disability have only focused on seeking problems in the families [24].

Based on the arguments presented, it is apparent that investigations regarding marital happiness among the visually disabled are still rudimentary and in desperate need to be added in as one of the branch of positive psychology. Hence, this study was conducted as a preliminary investigation on marital happiness of visually disabled persons. The objectives of the investigation are: 1) identify the dimensions of marital happiness of visually disabled persons, 2) identify the

sources of marital happiness of visually disabled persons, and 3) identify the strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness of visually disabled persons).

Methodology

The study has utilized the intrinsic case study [25]. Intrinsic case study is applied when the main concern is the case itself. The following is the statement by Stake [25] regarding the intrinsic case study design.

“We are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problems, but because we need to learn about that particular case.”

Due to the limited amount of studies regarding marital happiness among the visually disabled, the researcher believed that a single case is suitable to serve as a preliminary example. One respondent labeled as Mr. X has been recruited in this investigation. The researcher recruited the respondent through the process of snowball sampling, which the researcher approached the Society of the Blind Malaysia (SBM) to obtain their recommendation for the most suitable person to be included in this investigation. Mr. X is a person who acquired a visual disability due to high fever. According to Mr. X, he contracted high fever as a result of watching a solar eclipse while out on a fishing trip with his father when he was 15. He is from Sabah Malaysia and currently working as a massage practitioner. He is a totally blind person and married to his wife who is also blind. He is a Muslim with two children. His children do not have any disabilities.

Data were mainly gathered using in-depth interview which took roughly around 2 hours 7 minutes (i.e. 1 hour 17 minutes for the first interview, 25 minutes for the second, and 35 minutes for the third). The first and the third interview were conducted in a face-to-face manner and the second interview was conducted using telephone interview. All interviews were conducted in Malay language. Collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis [26] and the findings were validated through the process of investigator triangulation and member-checking.

Results

In this section, marital happiness of Mr. X will be presented and will be classified under three broad domains (i.e. dimensions of marital happiness, sources of marital happiness, and strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness).

1. Dimensions of marital happiness

Four themes related to dimensions of marital happiness of Mr. X have been constructed which are: 1) positive relationship, (2) positive emotions, (3) meaning, and 4) Spirituality. In this sense, dimensions of marital happiness refer to the overall concept of marital happiness which in the account of MR. X, categorized into four domains. Each domain will be discussed in this subsection. Note that the dimensions presented in this section will be closely tied to the sources of marital happiness which will be highlighted in the subsequent section.

1.1 Positive relationships

Positive relationship is a very straightforward dimension. The meaning of this dimension is as it is, having good connections with others. From the interviews conducted with Mr. X, he has good relationships with his family members. This theme is very prominent when Mr. X spoke of his interactions with his family members. He stated that he received good treatments from his in-laws, as well as his wife's sisters. In addition, he also stated that his family members visit them (Mr. X and his wife) from time to time, staying in their house for a few days. The following is the verbatim by Mr. X. This dimension is closely related to the theme acceptance which will be discussed in the next section.

“Ah ok. Penerimaannya memang ok. Layanan deorang memang bagus. Uh. Puas hati lah. Apa yang terima tu dia punya bapa lah’. Dia memang tiada mama, dia punya bapa

masih ada masa tulah. Bapanya memang cukup gembira lah kena hantar kahwin sama saya lah. Um kakak-kakaknya pun. Sekurang-kurangnya ada sudah yang menjaga sudah.”

“Ok. Semua ada datang ke rumah, kadang-kadang deorang sama-sama balik pergi rumah tidur sama situ, ada satu malam dua malam.”

1.2 Positive emotions

Positive emotions in this study reflects Mr. X's feelings of joy and pride/proud. Mr. X reported feeling of joy when family members do not ignore or sideline him and his wife even though they are visually disabled. He also stated that he felt joy when family members are willing to eat their cookings without complaining and do not feel grossed out towards them. The feeling of joy is also closely related to the theme acceptance which will be discussed in the next subsection of sources of marital happiness.

“Memang kita rasa tu cukup happy lah bah. Kita happy sebab keluarga kita menerima kita punya layanan kita, apa masakan kita pun deorang makan semua, deorang tidak pilih pilih apa saja kita masak deorang makan bah, jadi kita pun rasa happy, gembira, ertinya deorang tidak sisihkan kita dan tidak geli sama kita bah.”

Another positive emotion experienced by Mr. X is proud. The feeling of proud and taking pride is based on himself and his wife. He stated that he is proud of himself because he possess many skills (which will be highlighted in section 3.3) that enables him to contribute to his family despite his visual disability.

“Sebab kemahiran ni untuk membawa kita kepada bilang orang ni kemahiran yang boleh mendapatkan rezeki kita. Untuk kita keluarga, lepas kalau kita tiada kemahiran membuat perkara macam mana kita makan satu.”

“Memang kesan kita memang kita boleh macam kita rasa kita sangat, kita bangga diri sendirilah. Ah bangga terhadap diri sendiri sebab boleh semua. Kita tiada mengharap orang mengharap bantuan daripada orang. Kita boleh bantu diri kita sendiri. Walaupun kita tak nampak, tapi kita boleh lagi bantu diri sendiri, bantu keluarga kita sendiri. Ah itu yang kita boleh memegang di hati walaupun kita OKU penglihatan tapi kita boleh bilang apa ni, untuk memajukan diri kalau kita sendiri lah.”

Mr. X is also proud of his wife. In the interview, he said that he is really proud of his wife because although his wife is blind, she is able to fulfill her responsibilities to the family. The theme of responsibility will be highlighted in the subsequent section.

“Oh. Cerita dirinya. Isteri ok juga. Isteri ok tiada masalah juga. Dia tiada masalah dengan saya juga. Dia memang ok la dia anu la. Isteri pun, kepada anak-anak pun ok semua. Lepas tu isteri ni juga memang, dari dulu juga memang pandai jagalah. Memang banggalah dengan isteri. Walaupun tidak Nampak, tapi dia dapat jalankan tanggungjawab la.”

1.3 Meaning

Meaning refers to the feeling of serving something greater than the self as well as finding purpose in life. Having meaning in everything we do is important for our satisfaction and well-being. From the perspective of Mr. X, the meaning dimension emerged when he stated that skills are very important because by having the appropriate skills, he is able to ensure the survival of his family by providing basic needs. Without skills, he is unable to bring income to the family. Hence,

from the perspective of Mr. X, skills are required for the benefit of his family. Mr. X is also able to obtain meaning in his life by knowing that although he is blind, he is able to contribute to the family.

“Sebab kemahiran ni untuk membawa kita kepada bilang orang ni kemahiran yang boleh mendapatkan rezeki kita. Untuk kita keluarga, lepas kalau kita tiada kemahiran membuat perkara macam mana kita makan satu.”

“...walaupun kita tak nampak, tapi kita boleh lagi bantu diri sendiri, bantu keluarga kita sendiri.”

1.4 Spirituality

Spirituality and meaning has the same definition which is serving something greater than the self as well as finding meaning in life. However, the spirituality dimension is separated from the meaning dimension because society in Malaysia greatly emphasizes spiritual practices (i.e. close ties to religion) and it is very prominent in daily life in society. Hence, the spiritual dimension in this investigation deserves to stand by itself. The spirituality dimension was constructed based on Mr.X statement that when he holds true to his religion (i.e. Islam), he felt as if his heart is at peace. He also felt that by having strong faith in his religion, he felt like problems that arise are easily solved.

“...kalau agama ni makin kita punya setiap kita punya bilang orang agama ni, setiap bila orang pegang dengan agama ni, kita sentiasa macam hati kita rasa lapang saja. Kita bahagia sebab, macam selesai semua masalah kita tu. Apa pun masalah kita bilang orang kita sentiasa berada dengan Allah itu, memang macam masalah kita tu macam terlepas semua bah.”

2. Sources of marital happiness

In this section, sources of marital happiness of Mr. X will be presented. Based on the interviews with Mr. X, nine themes of marital happiness have been constructed which are: 1) responsibility, 2) acceptance, (3) self-efficacy, 4) achievements, 5) Religion, 6) access to transportation, 7) sense of togetherness, 8) financial stability, and 9) characteristics of the partner. The theme of responsibility was further divided into two categories or subthemes (i.e. responsibility in providing basic needs and responsibility in providing guidance). Two overarching themes also characterized the theme of acceptance (i.e. acceptance by family members and acceptance by society).

2.1 Responsibility

In this investigation, the theme of responsibility refers to the fulfillment of tasks or duties relevant to each spouse. To be specific, tasks or duties in the perspective of Mr. X are based on gender roles. Two sub-themes represented the theme of responsibility (i.e. responsibility in providing basic needs and responsibility in providing guidance). The foundations of the first sub-theme, responsibility in providing basic needs is the concept of “zahir” and “batin”, which mostly are embraced by the Muslims. The “zahir” represents basic needs such as foods, clothes, money, and alike which basically things that can be seen by the naked eye. In contrast, “batin” represents the inner self, needs that cannot be seen such as sexual needs and emotional needs. From the interviews with Mr. X, he stressed that the duties of a wife are to prepare meals as well as carrying out household chores such as washing clothes. As for the husband, Mr. X stated that his main responsibility is to be the bread-winner for the family, bringing income to the family to ensure the family’s survival. This reflects the “zahir” component. Another basic needs that is essential to be

fulfilled is sexual interactions (i.e. the “batin component”. Although the “batin component does not solely focuses on sex but also emotional needs (e.g. love, appraisal, secure, etc.), the only needs that emerged from the interviews with Mr. X was sexual needs. Mr. X stated that it is also the duty of the wife to attend to the sexual needs of the husband. In addition, Mr. X has also stated that it is the duty of both husband and wife to attend to the needs of their children (e.g. providing foods, clothes, education, and miscellaneous demands).

“...tanggungjawab kita punya isterilah. Makan minum kita, pakaian kita, semua, itu semua tanggungjawab isteri. Jadi kita laki-laki, tanggungjawabnya mencari apa tu rezeki apa untuk perbelanjaan anu lah. Untuk kita punya isterilah. Ah memang kebahagiaan lah. Memang kita laki-laki memang perlu layan isterilah. Itu yang paling membawa kebahagiaan. Layanan isteri kita kepada suami, daripada zahir pada makan kita punya anu la apa, batin lah (respondent laugh). Ah layanan kepada anak-anak tu apa ni, kita bilang layan anak-anak ni macam tu juga lah. Sentiasa kita layan deorang Sentiasa beri perhatian kepada anak-anak lah. Itu yang paling penting sama kitalah. Apa yang anak-anak perlukan, kita kena sentiasa layan deoranglah. Contohnya dari segi daripada makan minum, pelajarannya, daripada pakaiannya, apa yang keperluan dialah apa dia mau yang penting, yang ada kaitan dengan keperluan diri sendiri dia lah. Itu perlu untuk kebahagiaan anak-anak.”

Another category in the theme of responsibility is providing guidance. According to Mr. X, both him and his wife emphasized on providing guidance to their children especially in terms of interaction with peers and older persons. He stated that he and his wife always remind their children to be respectful to others. Furthermore, he and his wife also highlight the importance of providing guidance to their children regarding religion. Mr. X said that as parents, they should become a good example for their children when it comes to religion especially carrying out their responsibilities to God as Muslims especially completing the five time prayers per day. The following were articulated by Mr. X:

“Kita tekankan untuk berkomunikasi dengan anak-anak, sentiasa nasihat, sentiasa diberi peringatan lah. Terutama dari kita segi agama lah. Agama, segi itu lah yang kita kasi tekankanlah. Daripada segi daripada pergaulan dengan kawan-kawan, layanan kepada kawan semua, dan kita mau sifat hormat orang tua lah. Uh. Sebab kebahagiaan. Sebab kita sebagai ibu bapa dialah. Kita sebagai ibu bapa kita sentiasa kasi tunjuk yang baguslah (short pause) kepada anak-anak tu lah. Terutama contoh, dari kita buat amalan-amalan macam kalau orang Islam kan, Islam ni memang ada sembahyang lima waktu. Ertinya, lima waktu ni, dalam satu hari tu lima kali sembahyang lah. Jadi kita sebagai orang tua kita bagi contoh sama deorang sembahyang sebaik-baiknyalah. Jadi kita anak-anak pun kita pun kalau kita anak-anak kita kita sama-sama bawa dia apabila sampai waktu solat kalau boleh kalau dia masih di rumah kita bawa dia berjemaah bersama-sama. Itu membawa kebahagiaan kita dalam keluarga lah.”

2.2 Acceptance

The second source of marital happiness is acceptance. Acceptance in this investigation refers to non-discriminatory attitude from others towards the married visually disabled couple. This theme was divided into two sub-themes (i.e. acceptance from family members and acceptance from society).

The sub-theme acceptance from family members was constructed when Mr. X was telling stories about how he approached his wife’s family to propose the marriage. Mr. X stated that despite his visual disability, his wife’s family did not turn down his marriage proposal. Mr. X has also stated that during his marriage proposal, his wife’s father was so excited about it and he received good treatments from his wife’s family. Other than that, Mr. X said that he is happy that

family members (in-laws or own family) visit them from time to time. Mr. X argued that for some people, it is hard for them to visit their relatives but, in his case, he is very grateful that his family members took the initiative to visit them despite their visual disability as if they are not being sidelined. In addition, he also stated that he is happy that his families are willing to eat whatever they cook and are not grossed out by their cooking.

“Memang keluarga kita macam kita ni tidak nampak, deorang datang pergi tempat kita memang kita rasa memang kita gembira lah. Seolah-olah kita tidak disisihkan lah. Ah dia masih ingat kita walaupun sekurang-kurangnya deorang masih ingat pergi rumah kita lah. Memang gembiralah. Kita yang didatangi pergi rumah tu kan. Kadang-kadang, ada sesetengah orang, macam kita ini kadang-kadang walaupun kalau keluarga kadang-kadang deorang susah pergi rumah. Ah salah satu lagi deorang kita ni tidak nampak kadang-kadang deorang tidak makan masakan kita. Ah deorang peduli sama kita. Ah tapi saya punya daripada keluarga isteri dan keluarga saya sendiri Alhamdulillah la. Tiada yang pernah begitulah. Memang kita rasa tu cukup happy lah bah. Kita happy sebab keluarga kita menerima kita punya layanan kita, apa masakan kita pun deorang makan semua, deorang tidak pilih pilih apa saja kita masak deorang makan bah, jadi kita pun rasa happy, gembira, ertinya deorang tidak sisihkan kita dan tidak geli sama kita bah.”

The next category in the sub-theme of acceptance is acceptance from society. This sub-theme generally covers societal attitude towards persons with visual disabilities, or perhaps even persons with disabilities in general. In Mr. X's case, he stated that people around him often questioned his and his wife's abilities to take care of their own family. Regarding this matter, Mr. X elaborated that people often see persons with visual disabilities being guided by their family members when walking. Consequently, they viewed that persons with visual disabilities are not independent and they questioned Mr. X's and his Wife's ability to take care of their own family. Other than that, he also stated that people around him often questioned their abilities in performing child-rearing tasks such as feeding and bathing their children. Occasionally, when Mr. X and his wife are walking on their own, people around him will shout at them asking them to be careful of drains. Mr. X said that he felt pressured by such behaviors because he already knows the structure of the place they are navigating. Hence, this theme was developed, because if people surrounding persons with visual disabilities would understand how they manage their life and change their negative perceptions, it will make life less stressful for the visually disabled.

“Kalau yang orang-orang kampung ni kalau macam kita kahwin sama, sama-sama tak Nampak ni kadang-kadang deorang ni, macam hairan macam mana boleh hidup. Macam deorang Tanya, jadi macam mana lah kahwin ni dia bilang kalau mau, kalau tiada orang yang nampak. Kamu-kamu sendiri macam mana, boleh hidup ka? Boleh! (respondent stress the statement). Ya. Sebab kami sudah kena ajar berdikari di pusat, latihan semua. Ah jadi kami pandai sudah la. Biasa sudah. Ah. Sebab mungkin deorang hairan dia tengok kita kahwin sama-sama tidak nampak, habis tidak pernah berkahwin itu yang sama-sama tidak nampak bah. Ah jadi mungkin mereka hairan macam mana deorang kahwin sedangkan tidak nampak. Sedang pun macam mana boleh hidup? Deorang ni pun orang tua yang kasi makan kasi minum. Jadi mungkin maksudnya menyusahkanlah. Kalau yang satu jadi dua sedangkan tidak nampak itu keluarga. Kadang-kadang deorang hairan sama kita jalan, kita sikit-sikit berjalan dari rumah pun deorang teriak sudah jatuh-jatuh, ah itu kadang-kadang kita pun, itu tekanan sama kitalah. Kalau macam kita sikit-sikit berjalan dia tegur oi jatuh jaga-jaga parit ah itu kadang-kadang kita pun emosi kita pun tidak senang bah. Padahal sudah tahu. Kita dapat kesan mana itu parit itu anu. Macam mengganggu kita punya emosi itu bah tidak bagus.”

2.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the third theme in regards to the sources of marital happiness among visually disabled persons. Self-efficacy in this paper is defined as the feeling of competency in performing various tasks in relation to personal skills. Note that in the previous section, the paper has discussed about acceptance from society. Mr. X often receives questions in regards to their abilities in taking care of the family and child-rearing. This theme was constructed mainly based on Mr. X's responses to those questions. When questioned, Mr. X responded that they are able to live their life as a normal person and even take care of the family because they have been taught various skills to help them function independently (e.g. mobility, farming, and cooking).

“Ow masa saya di latihan tu, contoh macam dia kasi latihan untuk mula-mula, dia ajar kita cara berjalan, di Sandakan pusat tu. Di Sungai Manila Taman Cahaya. Ah dia ajar kita jalan, uh apa ni, berkebun, (researcher interrupts “ui ada juga berkebun”). Ada, tanam sayur-sayur begitu, uh menebas semua, termasuklah memasak-masak sendiri lah. Kena ajar semua.”

2.4 Achievements

Achievements will be the fourth source of marital happiness. Achievements is defined in this investigation as a sense of accomplishment. This theme might be related to self-efficacy as a person needs to feel that they are capable in order to know what they have achieved or vice versa. Mr. X reported sense of achievements because he believed that they have succeeded in raising their children without assistance from others, providing education to their children, as well as being able to treat their children just like non-disabled parents.

“Ah biasanya keluarga ni, mula-mula kalau kita tu, kalau kesan dia ni, dia paling deorang gembira ni kalau sudah anak kita membesar sudah. Ah. Deorang nampak kita membesar, kerana kita tiada siapa mau bantu kita selain suami isteri sendiri saja. Anak kita sampai boleh pergi belajar, sampailah kepada sekolah menengah. Ah. Di situ deorang betul-betul gembira dan cukup bangga sama kita walaupun kita tidak nampak tapi kita boleh buat anak kita macam orang yang nampak, yang normal. Itulah. Anak-anak kita ni boleh juga boleh belajar macam orang lain.”

As Mr. X and his wife are both blind, taking care of their children while they are still in their infancy stage is rather challenging. Mr. X stated in the interview that after they left their child on the floor, they have to really remember where they put the child and be extra careful when walking because they risk stepping on their infant. Mr. X also said that there are occasions when their child rolled on the bed and fell off. Due to significant hardship of taking care of infants as blind spouses, Mr. X felt a huge sense of accomplishment being able to raise their child.

“Ah yang masa anak masih kecil tu memang mencabarlah. Habis kita tidak Nampak, kadang-kadang takut terpijak. Ah deorang baring-baring di lantai. Kadang-kadang kita kasi simpan di katil kita lupa dia pergi golek-golek terjatuh, itu biasa tu. Habis kita tidak Nampak, macam mana. Dia diam lagi. Kena perlahan-lahan berjalan tu la raba-raba.”

2.5 Religion

Religion is an important source of happiness for Mr. X as it assisted in the development of meaning of life as well as resilience. In the accounts of Mr. X, he stated that by having faith in his religion, he feels that no matter what problems arise; he is able to overcome those problems with ease as if God is helping him. As mentioned earlier one of the responsibility of parents is to provide spiritual or religious guidance to children. Through the action of guidance, Mr. X stated that he is happy and proud of himself to succeed in guiding his family to stay close with God. Moreover, Mr.

X also believes that families who do not possess religious guidance will most likely be unhappy as everything that happens in this world is decided by God which include wealth, health, and happiness. The following was stated by Mr X:

“...setiap bila orang pegang dengan agama ni, kita sentiasa macam hati kita rasa lapang saja. Kita bahagia sebab, macam selesai semua masalah kita tu. Apa pun masalah kita bilang orang kita sentiasa berada dengan Allah itu, memang macam masalah kita tu macam terlepas semua bah. Yang saya pernah alami lah inilah. Sebab kalau kebahagiaan, isteri pun solat, anak-anak pun solat, kita rasa bahagia kita nampak anak-anak kita sentiasa tidak apa itu, tidak melepaskan apa yang ditentukan kepada kita oleh Allah S.A.W. Bah. Saya rasa kalau kita tiada agama, kebahagiaan ni memang, jarang orang bahagia kalau tiada didikan agama atau tiada agama ni. Sebab kita ni, kita kena dicipta oleh Allah, kita dilahirkan di dunia ni untuk menyembah Allah. Tapi kalau kita tidak sentiasa ingat Allah, kebahagiaan kita semua akan kurang. Sebab apapun diturunkan semua ini, semua oleh Tuhan. Jadi sama kita tidak pentingkan dalam hidup kita dalam keluarga kita, memang tidak akan bahagia orang bilang. Semua rezeki, rahmat semua diturunkan jadi kita minta perlindungan sama dia kita mohon doa sama dia.”

2.6 Access to transportation

Access to transportation refers to the availability of transportation whether personal or public and it could be obtained or utilized without difficulties. This theme was developed when Mr. X was talking about transportation. Before his children reached the legal driving age and obtained a driving license, the only way Mr. X and his spouse navigated from places to places was to call and wait for someone to drive them around. However, after his children have reached the legal driving age and are able to drive, the family does not need to wait for others to fetch them as personal transportation is now available. Although Mr X stated that access to transportation does not bring happiness, he stated that by having their own transportation, getting from places to places has gotten easier. In addition, he also stated that he enjoys riding in their own transport because there are no outsiders in the car. The fact that he stated enjoying having his personal transportation is sufficient proof that access to transportation is one of the sources of marital happiness for the visually disabled.

“Uh. Pengangkutan tiada jugalah. Tapi sekurang-kurangnya untuk memberikan kesenangan kepada kita sekeluarga. Ah senang lah apa urusan kita, lepas tu bilang orang apa-apa urusan kita senanglah. Tidak payah lagi panggil-panggil tidak payah lagi tunggu-tunggu lah. Ah kita rasa macam bahagia lah kita. Kita rasa ada kebahagiaan la. Kita sama-sama dengan keluarga kan, dengan anak-anak satu kereta, kebersamaan tu bah, kita rasa macam ada kegembiraan dalam satu kereta tu satu keluarga saja bah. Macam kita berasa happy kita sama anak-anak berjalan tu. Itu kesannya la tu lah.”

Another driving force for the construction of this particular theme is when Mr. X spoke of his troubles with public transportation. He stated that some drivers will drop him and his wife in a wrong location than their intended location. Being blind persons, it is hard for them to navigate back to their original destination as visual and spatial recognition of places are impossible. Relying on photographic memory is also impossible without vision. Other than that, Mr. X also stated that some drivers will drop them in unsafe locations such as having a drain right after they exit the ride. Mr. X reported he fell into a drain before in such situation.

“Ah cabarannya kalau pengangkutan awam ni cabaran dia, kadang-kadang kita punya pengangkutan awam ni kita kesannya kalau yang pirate la kan. Kadang-kadang kita

kasi turun, dia tidak kasi turun tempat yang kasi kita ma utu. Kadang-kadang jauh daripada anu. Ah. Kadang-kadang dia bilang terlupa. Kadang-kadang begitu tu. Terpaksa la. Kalau kau ingat anu, kau kena anu la tu. Pusing balik la. Kalau kau tidak tau. Terpaksa lagi ikut lagi balik Tuaran pusing lagi naik balik.”

“Um cabaran dia tu la. Kadang-kadang tempat dia tu kasi turun kita banyak yang lopak-lopak. Kadang-kadang ada air semua tu pun cabaran juga tu. Kalau bagus tempat tu kita tau rata saja. Kalau endak rata tiba-tiba kita melangkah masuk terus.”

2.7 Sense of togetherness

Sense of togetherness in this study refers to quality time spent together among family members. Mr. X stated that he is happy when the whole family sit down and eat together. Another situation that Mr. X reported of feeling happy is times when the whole family engage in group prayers which is known as “sembahyang berjemaah” or “solat berjemaah”. When the researcher asked why engagement in such activities (i.e. eating together and praying together) could bring happiness, Mr. X responded that by engaging in such activities, children spend less time with their friends which will most likely prevent them from getting involved in bad or unsavory activities. Also, he stated that by spending time together, children will realize that family is the most important thing in life.

“Jadi kita anak-anak pun kita sama-sama bawa dia apabila sampai waktu solat kalau boleh kalau dia masih di rumah kita bawa dia berjemaah bersama-sama. Itu membawa kebahagiaan kita dalam keluarga lah. Makan pun macam tu jugak. Kita makan sama-sama. Jangan asing-asing kalau anak di rumah. Sebab apa boleh bawa kebahagiaan begitu. Sebab kurang untuk deorang berkawan yang diluar bah. Kurang deorang pergi macam pergi jumpa kawan, ataupun selalu kadang-kadang anak-anak ni, dia banyak buat aktiviti di luar jadi bila kita sama-sama begitu, kita sentiasa layan begitu, kadang-kadang deorang di luar ini rasa macam di luar ni bukan perkara yang penting bah. Deorang jarang terjebak dengan bidang luar yang tidak bagus di luar bah. Jadi itu yang kita titik beratkan agama tu.”

2.8 Financial stability

The subsequent theme is financial stability. This study defined financial stability as having adequate or sufficient income in order to fulfill basic needs of the family which includes food, clothes, etc. Sufficient amount of funds are also needed to pay for installments. In the interview conducted, Mr. X stated that having a stable source of income is very important as without proper income, it is difficult to provide basic needs to his wife and children. He also stated that without a stable income, it would be close to impossible to send their children to school and pay for their car installments. MR. X also argued that sometimes, most conflicts or complications in marriage are caused by lack of financial power. The following were sample of verbatim by Mr X:

“Ah kita bilang bukan tidak penting dalam kebahagiaan tapi memang penting la duit ni masa kita hidup ni memang seharian kita ni pentinglah. Contohnya kan ok, sebab apa penting, kita apa perlu pun mesti guna duit. Jadi kalau tiada duit, anu anak-anak pun mau minta duit, isteri pun minta duit, macam mana kita mau bagi kalau tiada duit. Ha itu kadang-kadang yang membawa kebahagiaan juga. Sebab kalau kita tidak bekerja, macam mana kita menyara anak-anak kasi anak-anak belajar, bayar kereta itu ini, macam mana kau mau perlu itu ini lagi. Jadi kalau tiada duit macam mana kita boleh anu. Itu jadi kadang-kadang tiada kebahagiaan sudah. Kadang-kadang jadi pertengkaran. Memang susah sebab sekarang apa yang perlu semua duit bah. Tiada yang tidak perlu duit. Semua perlu duit. Jadi kita sebagai laki-laki sebagai ibu bapa ni

tanggungjawab kita la bah cari duit lah untuk perbelanjaan anak pergi sekolah, bayar kereta, semua itu perlu duit. Temberanglah kalau orang cakap duit ini tidak penting.”

Mr. X also argued strongly that money is important when he needed to ask for assistance. He stated that when their children are still at a very young age, they are required to request assistance from a friend to drive them to the hospital even during nighttime if their children are struck by a fever. He stated further that people will not go so far to provide assistance late at night if money is not available to pay that person.

“Ah kami pergi sendiri la tu hospital. Yang masa dulu kadang-kadang ada kawan telefon itu kereta kawan minta ambila minta hantar pergi klinik la. Walaupun malam la. Yang penting duitla. Itu yang paling penting. Susah kau minta tolong kalau tiada duit. Susah kau minta tolong.”

2.9 Characteristics of the spouse

Characteristics of the spouse will be the final theme in regards to sources of marital happiness of Mr. X. This particular theme was constructed when the researcher asked Mr. X to list down some characteristics of a good wife. He answered that, the only characteristic that he wants from a wife is a wife that possessed a strong faith in her religion and fulfills her responsibilities to God such as the five time prayers which for Islam, called “solehah.”

“Ah isteri yang anu ni kalau macam kita utamakan, kalau saya sendirilah isteri yang baik ciri-ciri isteri kita ni yang kita cari yang bilang orang yang soleh lah. Eh solehah.”

“...kita cari yang ada agama, memang sentiasa menunaikan tidak meninggalkan solat lima waktu, ah itu yang kita carilah kalau macam kita yang laki-laki ni itu yang kita carilah utama.”

3. Strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness

Three strategies to obtain or maintain marital happiness have been constructed based on the analysis conducted on the interviews with Mr. X. Findings in this particular section is very important as unlike the previous sections that tackled the “what” aspects of marital happiness, this tackled the “how” aspect of marital happiness. The three themes that have been constructed are: 1) engaging in religious practices, 2) practicing healthy communication, and 3) dividing responsibilities.

3.1 Engaging in religious practices

According to Mr. X, our common sense, or our real life experiences, conflicts and misunderstandings among married couples are not rare occurrences. This theme basically reflects the method applied by Mr. X when facing such situations. Mr. X articulated that women in general likes to nag about various things, or in other words women are more expressive. Such behavior will most likely lead to some strain in the relationship. As a solution, Mr. X stated that men should not pay too much attention when women begin to nag and it is better to perform ablution (i.e. a ceremonial act of washing parts of the body, usually by Muslims, before they go for their prayers). He stated further that by performing ablution, he is able to calm himself down.

“...Tidak lari lah. Kita suami isteri mesti ada perselisihan faham. Ah jadi kalau kita berselisihan faham ni, kadang-kadang kita ni, kalau kita sebagai laki-laki, isteri ni memang dia punya mulut kan, membebel. Ah jadi kalau boleh, isteri kita tu kita jangan layan. Bagus kalau kita pergi ambil wuduk kita pergi fbagus solat sunat ka apa ka supaya kita mengelakkan daripada itu. Itu memang dia punya mulut.”

“Ah ambil wuduk.... Dia menenangkan hati kita lah. Itu boleh menenangkan kita punya hati. Kita rasa lapang.”

3.2 Practicing healthy communication

Aside from applying religious practices, Mr. X also practice healthy communication. This is another method utilized by Mr. X when conflicts or misunderstandings occur between him and his wife. When arguments occur, Mr. X said that he will listen to what his wife have to say'. If Mr. X believe that he is on the right side, he will try to clarify things to his wife with the hope that she will understand. Furthermore, he also said that if it is clear that he is wrong, he will keep silent and admit his fault. This process can be perceived as the process of negotiation between spouses. Elaborating on the matter stated, Mr. X also argued that when couples argue, it is crucial for one partner (either the husband or the wife) to give in. He argued further that if both wanted to emphasize that they are right, the fight would not be over and potentially will bring more stress to the family. A suitable idiom for this situation is to not add oil to the fire. The following were articulated by Mr. X:

“Kita dengar apa masalah. Apa dia marah sama kita. Apa sebab dia. Kalau sebab dia tu betul, ah, jagnanlah kalau betul ko diam-diam lah. Ah jangan lagi jawab. Ah salah kita. Tapi kalau tidak betul kita kena jawab jugalah, kasi jelas sama dialah terang jelah.”

“Kadang-kadang kita ini suami isteri kalau ada pertengkaran, yang penting satu untuk mengalah la. Jangan kalau ada pertengkaran sikit pun jangan kata meninggi satu, satu lagi meninggi juga, jadi memang itu tidak membawa kebahagiaan lah. Membawa lagi kerosakkan lah. Jadi kita kalau ada suami-isteri ni, ada kesefahaman, jadi kita punya kebahagiaan akan kekallah. Bergaduh tu memang ada tapi mesti ada penyelesaian dia. Kita lumrah manusia, macam mana pun ada juga gaduh walaupun sikit-sikit mesti ada juga. Tapi yang penting antara salah satu jangan (short pause) jangan terus-terus melawannya kena ada diam satu, kalau yang bercakap tu, kena diam satu. Jadi itu bilang orang, tidak apa, tidak membesarkan itu permasalahan yang kecil tidak membesar bah.”

3.3 Dividing responsibilities

Note that in section 3.2, one of the sources of marital happiness is responsibility. Although division of tasks or duties in the perspective of Mr. X is based on gender roles (i.e. the wife should prepare meals, wash clothes, etc), Mr. X also emphasized the importance of giving his wife a helping hand. He stated that sometimes, he helps his wife to do the laundry when she cooks.

“Ah contoh, begitu lah macam dia pandai jaga anak itu, um semua dia layan kita lah. Kita semua pakaian jemur pakaian cuci pakaian semua tu. Ada juga lah masa-masa tu kita kena bantu jugalah. Sama juga lah, kalau macam saya isteri masak saya cuci kain. Berkerjasama lah.”

Discussion

The main objective of this investigation is to explore marital happiness of married visually disabled persons which are further divided into three additional objectives (i.e. to identify the dimensions of marital happiness, the sources of marital happiness, and the strategies of obtaining or maintaining marital happiness). In this section, discussion on the themes constructed regarding the dimensions and sources of marital happiness in this investigation will be presented.

Dimensions of marital happiness

Based on the in-depth interviews conducted with Mr. X, the researcher has constructed 4 themes that are related to the dimensions of marital happiness of visually disabled persons (i.e.

positive relationship, positive emotions, meaning, and spirituality. The dimensions of marital happiness will be discussed based on the PERMA model [9].

First and foremost, positive relationships reflect the situation of having good connections or interactions with others. In this case, marital happiness of Mr. X is characterized by having good relationships with his family members. In the PERMA model, most of the time, individuals reported feelings of joy when they are associating or interacting with others [9]. Most people might argue that positive emotions are innate and genuinely expressed by the self, not by others. For instance, people might say "I smile because I wanted to smile", "I laugh because I wanted to laugh". However, little that we know, we actually laugh at jokes and smile at cute behaviors displayed by children. These are some examples of how having good relationships with others is a very important domain of happiness. This situation clearly illustrates that we, as human beings are highly social creatures and we often seek positive interactions with others. Supporting the relevance of positive relationship, study has discovered that elders in Taiwan who received more emotional support as well as participated in more social events were associated with happiness [27]. Additionally, social relationships have been discovered to be a major cause of subjective well-being [28].

A positive emotion is another dimension of marital happiness of Mr. X. Through the analysis conducted on the interviews with Mr. X, the researcher has discovered that two positive emotions experienced by Mr. X are joy and proud. Mr. X stated that he felt joy when family members took the initiative to pay him and his wife a visit as if they are not being side-lined. Furthermore, he also felt joy when family members are willing to eat whatever they cook without feeling grossed out by their cooking. Another positive emotion is proud. Mr. X is proud of himself because he is able to contribute to the family. He is also proud of his wife because although she is blind, she is still able to carry out her responsibility towards the family. A positive emotion is the most basic component of happiness. Several well-known scholars in the field of positive psychology have acknowledged the importance of positive emotions toward happiness [4-9]. Broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions has argued that positive emotions could expend individuals thought processes, which will allow individuals to obtain more useful resources that they could apply in the future [5, 6]. Individuals are happy when they possess high positive affect, lower negative affect, and life satisfaction [4]. A positive emotion is also the first component of Seligman's authentic happiness theory and the PERMA model [8, 9]. Seligman [9] has argued that positive emotion is the easiest component to achieve as it emphasized on the hedonic doctrine which pleasure is the highest concern. Although pleasure (positive emotion) can be perceived as something temporary, it does serve as beneficial psychological resources for individuals to flourish as highlighted in the broaden-and-build theory [5, 6]. In addition, the benefit of positive emotion were also discovered, which is expressions of positive emotions among students were associated with self-reported personality traits of affiliation, competence, and low negative emotionality across adulthood [29]. This expressions of positive emotions also predicted good outcomes in marriage and personal well-being after 30 years [29].

The subsequent dimension of marital happiness of Mr. X is meaning. Having meaning in our life is very important. Meaning refers to serving something bigger than the self as well as finding purpose in life [8, 9]. In Mr. X's case, he obtains meaning by knowing he is able to contribute to his family despite his blindness. Indeed, Mr. X obtains meaning in his life by serving or contributing to his family.

The final dimension of marital happiness from the perspective of Mr. X is spirituality. By definition, spirituality refers to almost similar concept as meaning (i.e. serving something greater than the self and obtaining meaning in life). However, unlike the PERMA model which places spirituality under the meaning component [9], the researcher believes that spirituality should be a component that should stand by itself or in other words, independent. The reason is that as Malaysians, we possess strong spiritual beliefs. Studies have discovered that spirituality is an important component of happiness [11, 12, 30, 31]. However, the role of spirituality towards happiness should be interpreted carefully as the prevalence of this dimension might not be as prominent in other cultures [32].

Sources of Marital Happiness

There are nine sources of marital happiness for Mr. X. These nine sources are responsibility, acceptance, personal skills, self-efficacy, achievements, sense of togetherness, access to transportation, religion, financial stability, and characteristics of the spouse. Note that the order of each source does not reflect their level of importance. To be clearer, although the theme of responsibility was listed first, it does not carry the meaning that responsibility is the most important source of marital happiness for Mr. X.

The first source of marital happiness for Mr. X is responsibility. Responsibility in this investigation refers to equal division of tasks and duties relevant to gender roles and was divided into two sub-themes (i.e. responsibility in providing basic needs and responsibility in providing guidance). Moreover, tasks or duties relevant to each spouse as stated by Mr. X were based on gender roles. In an investigation, it was discovered that one of the impact of visual disabilities on marriage is it brings changes in the relationship dynamics [33]. Changes in relationship dynamics refers to adaptation needed to be implemented when a spouse acquired a visual disability and needed to quit usual tasks that the particular spouse used to perform and the other spouse will need to take over the tasks which might create some strain in the relationship [33]. For instance, Joseph needed to quit driving because he acquired a visual disability due to cataract. His wife, Annie would need to take over the driving task which includes driving her husband to work and sending their children to school. This situation creates additional workload for Annie and may result in stress. However, in this research, problems in the family is not the main focus but the sources of marital happiness. Hence, this paper argues that when responsibilities are divided clearly between spouses, conflicts or complications will be absent as spouses have already set clear boundaries of which duties need to be carried out.

Another source of marital happiness for Mr. X is acceptance which is divided into acceptance by family members and acceptance by society. Acceptance in this investigation refers to non-discriminatory attitudes from others in regards to Mr. X's and his wife's abilities to perform various parenting tasks and taking care of the whole family. Acceptance from family in this investigation carries the meaning that family members of the disabled spouses do not discriminate and ignore them due to their visual disability, taking the initiative to visit them, eating their cooking without feeling grossed out. As for the category of acceptance from society, it refers to the absence of discriminatory attitude from people surrounding the visually disabled spouses. In the interview, Mr. X reported that they are often questioned or challenged about their capabilities in taking care of their own family as well as executing parenting responsibilities. In an investigation, one of the influence of parenting experiences of blind mothers is external influence or societal influence [34]. In the investigation, blind mothers reported that most people discriminate them and blame them solely on their blindness. For example, people often associate their child's untidy appearance to their blindness or even when their child break things. In reality, breaking things and children being untidy will also occurs in families without disabled parents. Consequently, this paper proposed that by the absence of discrimination or stereotype, it could help visually disabled parents to feel less stressful and happier in their life.

The feeling of being competent or self-efficacy also plays an important role in marital happiness among married visually disabled persons. In this study, self-efficacy reflects respondent's feeling of confidence as he possesses many skills and being able to be independent. This theme was constructed mainly based on Mr. X's responses to questions from others regarding his' and his wife's capabilities both as a blind person and as parents. A few studies have discovered similar situation where self-efficacy contributes to the feeling of happiness [10-12]. Although the sample in these findings are different, the focus is the same (i.e. happiness) which proved that self-efficacy is a strong contributor to happiness. The researcher believes that when individuals possess high self-efficacy, they will be able to engage in a phenomena of self-motivation which encourage them to strive for better future.

Another source of marital happiness for Mr. X is achievements which refers to the sense of accomplishment. Respondent in this study reported a sense of achievement knowing he has succeeded in raising his children without help from others, provide education for their children. Similar finding has discovered that achievements is one of the significant source of happiness among persons with physical disabilities [11] (Ferlis (2014). This has proven that although types of disability might varies, they obtain happiness in almost similar ways. In the authentic happiness theory by Seligman [8], accomplishment is not included as one of the component of happiness or well-being. However, in his PERMA model [8], he added the accomplishment component as an independent contributor to happiness and well-being. As human beings, we need to have the sense of achieving something or being successful [9]. This researcher disagrees that achievement is placed as a component of well-being in the PERMA model [9]. He stated that a person often pursues success for its own sake, and there are no motives to that. However, the researcher believes that the pursuit of success is driven by motives (e.g. fame, wealth, satisfaction, etc.). Hence, achievement should be included in the meaning component of the PERMA model. This theme can be seen as closely related to self-efficacy. However, the researcher believes that self-efficacy is future oriented as individuals feel that they are able to contribute. In contrast, achievements are past oriented as individuals reflect on what have been achieved in the past.

The subsequent theme that contributes to marital happiness for Mr. X is religion. Respondent has stated that whenever he believes in God or stay true to his religion, he felt that his heart is at ease and as if all problems are solved without any hardship. In this sense, by having faith, it will assist individuals to be stronger, to have patience, and giving them a sense of meaning of life. This theme has also been confirmed as a significant contributor to happiness for the disabled [10-12]. In addition, to strengthen the argument, research has discovered that believing in God is one of the factors that lead to successful marital relationship [35].

The themes highlighted so far in this investigation mainly focuses on respondent's interaction with people. However, another source of marital happiness is access to transportation which reflects the infrastructure of a country. In the in-depth interview conducted, respondent stated that before his children are able to drive, the only way for him and his wife to navigate from places to places is by depending on others to drive them. After their children have reached the appropriate age to drive, he stated that going from places to places as well as taking care of matters that arise has gotten so much easier. Again, this theme collaborated well with findings from previous studies [10-12]. Although Mr. X stated that by having easier access to transportation does not bring much happiness, he stated that taking care of urgent and important matters have been easier. Additionally, Mr. X has also stated several challenges of public transportation (refer section 3.2.6 which the researcher come to believe that having better accessible transportation is important for Mr. X's happiness in marriage.

Marital happiness are also influenced by the sense of togetherness which refers to quality time spent together with family members. This paper does not deny that maybe this theme is more appropriate to be labeled as interaction. However, the interpretation by the researcher should not be discredited for such reason as stated in the book entitled *The Art of Case Study Research*, there are multiple realities to every phenomena [25]. The researcher constructed the theme togetherness because it reflects quality interaction in a family as a whole. While the researcher was unable to find any supporting studies for this theme, the researcher argued that having quality time with family members is imperative for marital happiness.

Last but not least, financial stability is also important for marital happiness. It is undeniable that money is needed for most things in the world. Most people might argue that money cannot bring happiness. However, it is hard to prove whether this statement is true or not as money is a main instrument in fulfilling our basic needs such as food, clothes, and accommodations. Furthermore, money is also required to fulfill our desires such as owning a high-ended smartphone, or a car which could make life easier for everyone. Consequently, this investigation has discovered that having adequate income to support the needs of family members is very important in order for a marriage to be happy or at least less stressful. Previous studies [10-12] did not present any

findings regarding financial stability as a contributor to happiness among the disabled. This might be due to the focus of their investigation which is happiness in general. Hence, when marriage is added into the context, financial stability does play a significant role.

The final contributor to marital happiness for Mr. X is characteristics of the spouse. Mr. X stated in the interview that the characteristics of a good wife are being “solehah”. The researcher would like to direct the reader’s attention to the research carried out by Wade [36] reviewed in Chapter 2. This researcher has discovered that one of the factors of successful intimate relationships among couples with intellectual disability is characteristics of the partner (e.g. funny, big nose, etc). Hence, this study argued that by having partner’s characteristics matching the criteria that have been set, it will not only lead to the success of intimate relationships but also leading to marital happiness.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher does accept that the generalizing power of this investigation is not strong as it focuses only on one case or one respondent only. However, this research does provide significant insights to marital happiness among the visually disabled that could be added into the branches of positive psychology. Moreover, judging this investigation based on its generalizing power is unfair as the main focus of case studies is not generalization but particularization [25]. Future research could increase the size of the respondent as it could provide more contextual richness to the themes constructed. Hence, future studies may apply the instrumental case study design shifting the interest of the investigation on the case to the issue. For the current investigation (i.e. the intrinsic case study), the focus is only the case. The sole interest is to understand the case. Hence, in order to provide more contextual and in-depth understanding on the issue (i.e. marital happiness), future studies could utilize several cases which is the instrumental case study.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, marital happiness of Mr. X are centralized on four dimensions (i.e. positive relationships, positive emotions, meaning, and spirituality). There are nine factors that lead to marital happiness which are responsibility, acceptance, self-efficacy, access to transportation, achievements, sense of togetherness, financial stability, religion, and characteristics of the partner. Three strategies have been utilized by Mr. X to obtain or maintain marital happiness which are performing religious practices, dividing responsibilities, and practicing healthy communication. When a marriage is a happy one, it will lead to better overall relationships between spouses and family members. Practical findings from this investigation is that the society should treat the disabled without any discrimination. The researcher believed that the disabled people has already gone through various challenges in their life and they do not need extra challenges by negative attitudes by the society. On a national level, policies should be developed which prioritized accessibility for the disabled persons in order to assist them in independent functioning.

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