

AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF MARITAL HAPPINESS AMONG PERSONS WITH VISUAL DISABILITY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study explores marital happiness among Persons with Visual Disabilities (PwVD) in Malaysia. This research has utilized the instrumental case study design. Most investigations regarding marriage or parenting among PwVD have only focused on parenting experiences and adaptations. A total of 10 PwVD who are married were recruited using maximal purposeful sampling, which is supplemented by the snowballing strategy in this study. Qualitative content analysis has been applied as a method of data analysis. The researcher has also utilized member checking and investigator triangulation as validation strategies. Generally, three themes regarding the dimensions of marital happiness have been constructed—for example, positive emotion, positive relationship, and meaning. However, in this study, 11 themes were found in sources of marital happiness. All themes are positively discussed in this finding study.

Keywords: *Instrumental Case Study, Marital Happiness, Person with Visual Disability, Malaysia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Defining the concept of marriage is somewhat complicated as representations of marriage tend to vary amongst individuals. In general, *marriage* can be defined as a legal contract that binds two adult partners who initiate the sharing of economic resources and engage in sexual interactions [36]. A married couple or spouse will likely produce children [63]. There are also different viewpoints on marriage, among others, both the marital and the revisionist views [27]. The conjugal perspective lies in the traditional form of marriage, whereas the revisionist perspective stands in modern society where gay and lesbian couples are acknowledged. However, many cultures and religions in Malaysia strictly discredit the revisionist view of marriage. In this study, the researcher focuses on investigating marital happiness among PwVD. It is because the studies on marital happiness among PwVD remain scarce. It can be seen in previous studies where researchers only focused on studying PwVD employment, psychological distress, self-concept, adjustment to blindness and friendship, and mobility regarding visual disability [38] [40] [64] [70] [71]. However, studies of marriage or parenting among PwVD have mainly focused on parenting experiences and adaptations [11] [28] [50] [57]. Researchers argued that various studies regarding parents with a disability only focused on the families' negative aspects [35]. Therefore, previous studies do not concentrate on marital happiness among PwVD. In Malaysian society, a few studies are available on this issue—for example, the study of PwVD's happiness [19] [20], PwVD's psychological well-being [1] and the adolescents with visual disabilities' happiness [65]. However, investigations regarding marital happiness among PwVD remain limited. Consequently, this paper aims to explore the dimensions of marital happiness and sources of marital happiness among PwVD.

2. METHODOLOGY

a. Design

This study used an instrumental case study design by [60]. It enables the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of marital happiness among PwVD in Malaysia.

b. Participants

Participants were recruited using the purposeful maximal sampling technique by [12]. Alternatively, the maximum variation sampling is by [44], which focuses on gathering different cases in terms of their characteristics, and the snowballing technique supplements it. The reason for choosing this sampling strategy is to obtain and maximize the contextual richness of marital happiness from different cases. In line with the case selection criteria, [60] and [61] suggested maximizing what we can learn by choosing various topics. The characteristics of the participants involved in this study are:

- PwVD is married to a spouse without disability,
- PwVD is married to a spouse with a visual disability,
- PwVD is married to a spouse with other forms of disability, and
- PwVD is married to a spouse with multiple disabilities.

Hence, this study has recruited 10 cases of PwVD. There are four cases of PwVD married to a spouse without any disability and six PwVD married to a spouse with a disability. The two characteristics for sample inclusion are needed to identify the themes related to marital happiness. Firstly, PwVD must be married and stay married. Secondly, PwVD owns a Disabled Person Card issued by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia.

c. Procedures

An interview protocol has been developed to guide the data collection process in the initial stage. Potential respondents have been contacted in advance for their consent to participate in this study. Every respondent has been informed that the interview will be recorded and guaranteed confidentiality for their information—all the information only for academic purposes. Respondents were briefed and informed of the actual objective for the investigation of this study. By any means, respondents have a right to withdraw from this study if they feel uncomfortable. Even though this study is ongoing, they have the full right to do so. Besides that, respondents' signatures or fingerprints are asked for recorded interview sessions if they agree to participate in the study.

d. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interview sessions. Interview sessions were recorded using a digital audio recorder to assist in transcription. Follow up interviews were carried out using telephone or social applications such as WhatsApp due to geographical constraints [12] [21] [31]. Meanwhile, the interview sessions were conducted in English or Malay languages. It depends on the respondent's comfort. Generally, initial interviews were conducted with all PwVD within an hour to three hours. At the same time, follow-up interviews within 30 minutes to an hour. At the beginning of the discussions, respondents were asked to answer a standard question. For example: "*could you tell me something about yourself?*". It is to establish rapport and serve as a ground for further exploration in this study. However, the follow-up questions probed responses as the interview progressed.

e. Data Analysis

All the data in this study has been analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis forwarded by [53]. All data is transformed from audio recordings into raw data through transcription. After that, data

simplifies the raw data by paraphrasing and compiling down the paraphrased data to develop categories. In the first step of the analysis, recorded interview sessions were transcribed. Secondly, the researcher reorganized and changed the sentences from the transcription into formal sentences, eliminating repetition sentences and semi verbal articulations. The paraphrased data also served as indicators for constructing themes. Thirdly, the data were grouped into several categories based on marital happiness that provided clues to marital happiness. The naming for categories or themes that have been constructed can be obtained from the data, the researcher's personal experience or the literature reviewed by the researcher [62] [20] [44]. Note that smaller classifications were first built, and if one or more categories could be merged, classes will be grouped to form themes. Classifications were made based on repetitive readings of the interview transcripts to understand the data better, as stated by [60].

"...finding, for analysis, the right ambience, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking then understanding...."

f. Validity

This study has utilized the investigator triangulation approach and member checking as suggested by [60]. Investigator triangulation refers to showing our data to other investigators and confirming whether investigators' interpretations converged with the researcher's performances. As for member checking, the researcher has brought the findings or themes constructed back to the respective respondents to inquire about the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Here, the respondents themselves will acknowledge the accuracy of the arrangements and, if not, suggest relevant modifications. The researcher considered member checking as the highest priority in any qualitative research. The reason is that a qualitative researcher obtained data from the participants of the phenomena under investigation. Because the researcher is the tool for data collection, respondents' validation is crucial to ensure accurate representation of the instances conveyed by the participants. According to Maxwell, cited in [44], the most critical way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do. In addition, the prospective participants have on what is going on and is an important way of identifying researcher biases and misunderstandings of what the researcher observed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will elaborate on the findings of marital happiness among PwVD and relevant discussion. Specifically, the dimensions of marital happiness and sources of marital happiness among PwVD will be presented.

a. Dimensions of Marital Happiness

This study found three dimensions of marital happiness among PwVD in Malaysia. There are positive emotions, positive relationships and meaning.

- **Positive Emotions**

The first dimension of marital happiness derived from the 10 PwVD cases is a positive emotion. Positive emotions experienced by the PwVD in their marriage include joy, satisfaction, appreciation, pride, confidence, motivation, calmness, comfort, and gratefulness. The reasons that constitute these emotions are the spouse's characteristics, interactions with children, personal skills, interactions with family members, and accessibility. As shown in a verbatim of PwVD Case 1:

"... I appreciate such a wife like her. If I am outstation, she will call ask about me. Sometimes if I am stressed, she will message me to check on me. If I am down, she will always give me a word of encouragement..."

Indeed, positive emotion is the essential component of happiness, and well-known scholars in positive psychology have acknowledged its importance [13] [22] [23] [24] [25] [55] [56]. With her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, [22] and [23] has argued that positive emotions could expand individuals' thought processes, allowing them to obtain more valuable resources to be applied in the future. Positive emotion is also the first component of Seligman's authentic happiness theory and the PERMA model [55] [56]. [56] has argued that positive emotion is the most accessible component to achieve, emphasizing the hedonic doctrine. Although positive emotion can be perceived as something temporary, it serves as a beneficial psychological resource for individuals to flourish, as highlighted in the broaden-and-build theory [22] [23]. Researchers concur when they find out that expressions of positive emotions have contributed to good outcomes in marriage and personal well-being after 30 years together [29].

- **Positive Relationships**

The subsequent dimension of marital happiness for PwVD is a positive relationship. A positive relationship reflects having good connections or interactions with others. This theme was constructed based on the accounts of all persons involved in the cases who have experienced good interactions with their family members, including siblings, in-laws and their nuclear family, and the concept of peace. According to PwVD case 7, she stated that:

"... Family members should accept each other. We don't have to be oversensitive. Some families often fight because they take things too personally. The most important thing is to be good to one another."

The PERMA model [56] argued that people experience joy when interacting with others. Having a good relationship with people will lead to various mental and physical health ([14] [10] [52]). In addition, positive relationships are often defined by kindness, caring, and social interaction, contributing to various benefits of physical health [54] and better social interaction [49]. In fact, according to [2], good relationships could assist individuals in obtaining and maintaining happiness.

- **Meaning**

Meaning is the final dimension of marital happiness for PwVD. Meaning refers to serving someone more significant than oneself and obtaining the purpose of life either through volunteering or subscribing to any religious or spiritual principles. Based on the narratives of the 10 PwVD cases, they have obtained meaning by assisting the partner, staying true to the teachings of their religion, prioritizing the children's well-being, and sacrificing themselves for the well-being of the child. Indeed, having meaning in our lives is very important as it is a domain that shapes a person's morals, judgment and a principle regarded as authentic in their life [47]. Possessing meaning in life also leads to having a purpose or goal, which is a barrier to negative emotions [15]. To put it in a more straightforward sense, engaging in doing something for the benefit of others and staying faithful to the teachings and principles of the religion may define a person's overall identity. As evident in the verbatim of PwVD Case 7:

"My husband is blind and deaf. Whenever we go for dinner with friends, I must assist him. For instance, if his food or beverages arrived, I had to tell him. If someone is talking to him, I need to repeat what the person is saying because he might not hear the conversation."

b. Dimension of Sources of Marital Happiness

Eleven themes related to the sources of marital happiness have been discovered in this investigation, which are characteristics of the spouse, having children, financial stability, access to

transportation, responsibility, sexual interaction, achievement, self-efficacy, time together, support, and acceptance.

- **Characteristics of the Spouse**

One of the ingredients for happiness in a family is the characteristic of the spouse. This theme was constructed based on the good qualities of a partner described by all respondents in all cases. Previous researchers have discovered that one factor in successful intimate relationships among couples with an intellectual disability is a partner [69], such as funny, big nose, etc. Hence, this study argues that having some of the partner's excellent features will lead to intimate relationships and marital happiness. It is also supported by [8]. Their research discovered that introvert and extrovert women experienced longer satisfaction in marriage, which strengthens the argument that the characteristics of a partner could influence happiness in marriage. As evident in PwVD Case 9:

"... He is a very caring guy, la, I can say. He tries his best to make me feel very secure and care about me. I like to watch TV, to watch a movie. He wants to change the TV to a bigger size so that it is easier for me to see."

- **Having Children**

All cases involved in this investigation argue that having children is essential for a happy marriage. They explained that having children is crucial because children could serve as a source of motivation, relationship enforcer between couples, and contributors to positive emotions such as joy due to their cuteness. Based on the investigation by [45], happiness increases during the first child's birth. However, it decreases over time to the level of happiness before the birth of a child. The findings from this study suggest that marital happiness depletes as the number of children increases. Keep in mind many factors might influence such conditions, including financial burden and style of living. This issue could be somewhat subjective to every individual regarding how many children is enough. The most important thing is that having children leads to more happiness in marriage. It has been proven by [46]. They discovered that the number of children strongly predicts marital happiness more than wealth and education. According to PwVD Case 9, she argued that:

"... Sure, everybody who is married will be happier with children. It is a product of a marriage. Couples will get very lonely without any children. It will be quite empty."

- **Financial Stability**

The financial issue could be a huge culprit that leads to divorce [67]. Consequently, financial stability is the most essential in a marriage. All the PwVD cases argued that having sufficient and stable economic power is crucial in sustaining the family as money fulfils various family needs. It has been heavily discussed by [43] that income may be more critical for children's happiness than adults when it comes to family life. Children's upbringing requires enormous financial power to ensure proper development and integration into society. In addition, financial strength could safeguard life satisfaction from environmental challenges [33]. This is true as ecological challenges such as price increases of daily products could stress families without a good financial situation. Hence, stable financial power is crucial for the happiness of a family as it helps parents cope with economic changes that seem to be constantly happening. As stated by PwVD Case 1:

"... It is impossible to sustain the family without stable finances. You need money to pay for the mortgage, household expenses, children's education, house maintenance."

- **Access To Transportation**

The subsequent ingredient to marital happiness presented in this paragraph might be crucial to PwVD, such as access to transportation. The ability to drive is out of the picture for parents with visual disabilities. Although some of the PwVD cases who have participated in this investigation can go, they are still grateful that accessible transportation such as Grab services is available. They explained that such services had enabled them to be more independent. Worse comes to worst, in case of emergency, they can commute without depending on their spouses. This theme goes in line with the findings by [19] [20] and [65] in suggesting that accessibility plays a significant role in happiness among persons with disability. Hence, by having accessible transportation, PwVD could operate more independently, which will lead to better self-confidence. It also helps reduce the number of tasks that would need to be handled by sighted spouses, which is beneficial in reducing stress. The following is the verbatim of PwVD Case 5:

"... Transportation services such as grab help us a lot. In my mind, I am thrilled because I can go wherever I want to go. I don't have to depend on others to drive me. Grab has simplified how we travel. I don't even have to get out of my house to get a ride. If I need to send or fetch my children from school, I can do so."

- **Responsibility**

The following source of marital happiness is a responsibility that refers to the fulfilment of tasks by spouses. It is essential in a family because the completion of duties will lead to the proper functioning of the family. Some PwVD cases described responsibilities based on gender roles, and for others, it is more on the willingness to fill up the gap left by the partner. For example, if the wife is busy and cannot cook, the husband will take over the tasks instead. In an investigation conducted by [6], it was discovered that one of the impacts of visual disabilities on marriage is it brings changes in the relationship dynamics, which may result in additional stress for the other partner. Hence, this study argues that conflicts or complications will be absent when responsibilities are divided clearly between spouses or partners. They are willing to fill in the form for various reasons. As evident below:

"... Husbands should oversee the financial part of the family. He must be the breadwinner. He is a provider, he is a protector, and he should love the family. As for the wife, she should be the husband's helper. She helps to manage the family. She helps the husband in decision making."

- **Sexual Interaction**

Several investigations from the previous study have proven the positive impact of sex in marriage [16] [58]. It seems worthy to note that frequency is not the priority for sexual interaction, but the quality matters more [41]. It is undeniable that a marriage will be happier if sexual interactions occur. In this study, all PwVD cases have argued that sexual interaction serves as a tool for emotional bonding, improving the intimacy between partners. The absence of sexual interaction will also lead to feelings of suspicion amongst the partner as if one partner is engaging in acts of infidelity. PwVD case 5 articulated that:

"... There is a time when you have an intimate relationship so you can express your love to each other. It would improve the bond between the partners. If not, I can imagine la. If the wife or the husband doesn't, it could lead to some uh. (Short pause) and some suspicion. Maybe, they are cheating like that."

- ***Achievement***

Another source of marital happiness among PwVD is an achievement. All the PwVD cases reported a sense of accomplishment is when they have successfully contributed to the family despite their challenges as PwVD. Their success includes raising children, doing well academically, having good socializing skills, and alike. As PwVD case 5 stated:

"... I think I've raised them well. My children are doing well academically and socially. They don't bully; they don't create problems in their school. My son is an engineer, and one of my daughters is an accountant. I felt a sense of achievement in me."

But still, at a similar juncture, [20] has discovered that achievement is one of the significant sources of happiness among persons with physical disabilities. In the PERMA model [56], accomplishment is an independent contributor to happiness and well-being. However, the researcher intends not to place achievement as the core of happiness to pursue accomplishment and overcome many challenges. Perhaps, an individual would not be happy if the accomplishment is not related to their interests.

- ***Self-Efficacy***

Self-efficacy also contributes to marital happiness' source among married PwVD in Malaysia. Self-efficacy is reflected in respondents' beliefs in their ability to bond and regulate their children's emotional condition and better knowledge or skills in certain areas than other family members. Its domain is critical as it instils self-confidence, self-worth, and self-respect in PwVD. It leads to higher motivation. The feeling of self-efficacy is valuable in marriage because PwVD will feel that they are being appreciated by family members. As articulated by PwVD case 1:

"... I am more knowledgeable on matters regarding computers. If my children have trouble with their hardware or software, I will take care of it. I am also very playful. My children like to play with me. That is my strength. I am also able to soothe them if they are feeling down."

Several studies from previous have discovered a similar situation in which self-efficacy contributes to happiness [19] [20] [65]. In addition, the researcher [5] has proposed that self-efficacy is perceived based on performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback. PwVD cases recruited in this investigation had gained the feeling of self-efficacy. They received encouragement from others through verbal persuasion, who helped shape their self-esteem based on their capabilities.

- ***Time Together***

Spending time together with family is also crucial in pursuing marital happiness among PwVD in Malaysia. In modern society, the pursuit of material wealth is expected as the cost-of-living increases. However, spending quality time with family members could encourage emotional bonding and a break from daily stresses. In most PwVD cases in this study, spend quality time with family members on vacation and recreation. Spending time together can encourage the exchange of positive emotions between family members. The benefit of positive emotion has been highlighted under the dimensions of positive emotion. According to [3], marital quality is driven by men who pay attention to their partners' needs. This study argues that family members should pay attention to everyone's needs and do spending quality time together. As stated by PwVD case 1:

"Once in a while, we will go for a vacation—a break from a daily routine. We go to a nice resort. You know, a resort with a swimming pool. My

children love to swim. So, spend time with family members and improve our relationship."

- **Support**

Support or assistance is an integral element to facilitate proper functioning among PwVD. This investigation also found that support or assistance leads to happiness in marriage among PwVD in Malaysia. Due to the limited capabilities of PwVD, completing specific tasks such as driving the children to school could be challenging or impossible. Hence, parents with visual disabilities require assistance from family members to take their children to school. Other forms of assistance include taking care of young infants, devices, and others. It is also proven in the study of [20] and [65] that support is crucial for happiness among persons with disability. As stated by [50], parents felt they were side-lined in activities involving vision. Parents said they would seek assistance to describe their children's activities to combat their visual limitations. This demonstrates the importance of support for persons with disabilities. The following information is verbatim by PwVD case 4, in which she receives assistance from her father to drive her daughter to school and tuition:

"... assistance is critical. Like me, my dad is our main driver. He will be the one who drives my daughter to school and her tuition. It's essential. If I need to handle some official paperwork, or during emergencies, I need help from my family members."

- **Acceptance**

Acceptance is the final contributor to marital happiness among PwVD in Malaysia. This theme refers to the absence of prejudicial attitudes or behaviours directed towards persons with disability. A previous researcher has discovered that societal attitudes influence parenting experiences among mothers with visual disabilities [57]. The investigation highlighted those mothers with visual disabilities stated that most individuals stigmatize them solely on their visual disability. Hence, this study proposes that in the absence of prejudice. It could assist parents with visual disabilities to feel competent and happy in their lives. As evident in PwVD case 5:

"My in-laws let me do whatever I want. When I was just married, we moved to a new house. I got to explore the surroundings. My mother-in-law did not prohibit me at all. She will explain the surroundings to me and let me explore. She does not restrict me due to my visual limitation."

4. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research provides significant insights into marital happiness among PwVD in Malaysia. It could be added to the branches of positive psychology. Moreover, judging this investigation based on its generalizing power is unfair as [60] stated that the focus of case studies is not generalization but particularization. Other than that, this study has only focused on exploring the phenomena of marital happiness in Malaysia among PwVD. It cannot confirm any relational dynamics amongst the variables discovered in this investigation. Hence, developing an explicitly catered instrument for measuring marital happiness among PwVD is imperative to measure the phenomena objectively and accurately. Another limitation of this study is that it is highly dependent on the participants' perspectives. In other words, participants' honesty and willingness to disclose information significantly impact the investigation. It is challenging to overcome, as participants' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are uncontrollable by the researcher. The entire findings in this investigation may have been cut short if participants withheld information from the researcher.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, PwVD is capable of being happy. It has proven that challenges do not constantly surround persons with disabilities. It should be taken seriously so that persons with disabilities are not alienated from society and are treated like normal human beings. To clarify prejudice surroundings persons with disabilities, they are not unique and not exceptional. They are ordinary people who want to contribute to society as others without disabilities. Another unique perspective is that access to transportation among PwVD should be examined and paid attention to PwVD marital happiness. It signifies those policymakers should consider constructing an accessible environment for PwVD to function optimally, especially in developing countries. One unique contributor to this study is access to transportation. This study will enable visually disabled persons, families, and members of society to understand happiness in marriage among PwVD. This investigation also proved that persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities are the same. Persons with disabilities would like to be independent, contribute to society, and have the same desires as the non-disabled, thus eliminating stigma towards persons with disabilities.

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