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The Determinants of Divorce in Malaysia: The Role of ED, Ethnicity, and Religion

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Abstract

The growing divorce rate is one of the main sociocultural problems in Malaysia today. The history of divorce in Malaysia is both fascinating and complex. It should be addressed individually for Malays, Chinese, and Indians as well as Muslims and non-Muslims since there have historically been significant and fundamental distinctions in rates of divorce between these communities. Apart from these demographic factors, physical factor such as a husband's erectile dysfunction is a common disorders that may make sexual activity challenging. It may result in a lack of intimacy in a marriage, impacting both partners' mental health, and perhaps marriage itself. The objective of this research is to investigate the impact of these both demographical and physical factors on marital dissolution. We applied the Probit and Logit binary models using a primary dataset of 164 divorced and non-divorced couples. Other relevant factors such as childlessness, debt, education, and income were also included. According to our findings, divorce is more frequent in Malay and Muslim communities and less frequent in chinses and non-Muslim couples. The findings also indicate that childlessness and income have no major influence on divorce. Having a debt burden, education level, and suffering from erectile dysfunction increase the probability of divorce.

Keywords: *Divorce in Malaysia, Ethnicity, Erectile Dysfunction, Religion*

1. Introduction

While much of the emerging nations have seen significant transformations in marital as well as fertility trends over the last three decades, most Muslim communities have

progressed to be marked by high, steady fertility and early, near widespread marriage—a reflection of the fortitude of Islamic family law and practices derived from it, even in the face of substantial social and financial change. Malaysia is one of the few obvious exceptions to this rule, and it is worth considering how Malays vary from numerous different Muslims and what may be learned from 3 decades of demographic transition in Malaysia. (Jones, 1981)

While Muslims in Malaysia had far increased divorce rates than non-Muslims 60 years ago and earlier, these differences have narrowed significantly in recent years, though divorce rates for Muslims (primarily Malays) in Peninsular Malaysia are more than twice as high as non-Muslims (Jones, 2021).

In Malaysia, there are two legal systems for marriage, divorce, and other associated issues. The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 (commonly known as the 'LRA') applies to non-Muslims across the nation and is implemented by civil law courts. Islamic Sharia or 'Syariah' law (as it is called in Malay) is implemented and executed by special courts for Muslims (legal smart, 2019). There is no nationwide Syariah law that covers Malaysia; instead, provincial or national territory law governs.

2. Trends of divorce in Malaysia

One of the greatest socio-cultural concerns in Malaysia today is the rising divorce rate (Abd Kadir, 2021). Repeated marital problems lead to couples opting for divorce as a final resort.

Among the Malay community, high divorce rates in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s are represented in significant levels of divorced women aged 45 and above in 1970, 1980, and 1991. Since then, the proportion of people who are presently divorced has decreased. Women in their 50s were the only category of Malay women whose divorce rate was above 5% in 1980 (Jones, 2021). Given the extremely high divorce rates prior to that period, the results imply a high percentage of re-marriage following divorce. The percentages of Chinese and Indians who are now divorced are much lower than the percentages of Malays of all ages. Other than the most recent decade (2000-2010), there are no continuous temporal trends in percentages presently divorced for

Chinese, with the exception of an increase in proportions presently separated for all age groups over 25(Jones, 2021). Indian women have greater proportions of divorced than Chinese women, and there is a notable rise in percentages of separated between 1990 and 2010 for all age categories over 25 (Jones, 2021).

The nation had a total of 50,882 divorce cases in 2018, which grew by 12% to 56,862 instances in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Divorce rates for Muslim and non-Muslim spouses from 1995 to 2010. According to the National Registration Department, the divorce rate among Muslims increased steadily between 1998 and 1998, as well as between 2008 and 2009. However, the divorce rate for non-Muslims fell sharply between 1998 and 1999, as well as between 2008 and 2009. Malaysia had a severe economic downturn between 1998 and 1999, and again between 2008 and 2009. As a result, the divorce rate for Muslim and non-Muslim married couples shows a contradictory trend, particularly during a recession. Literature evaluations also show that a recession has an impact on the stability of a marriage. However, the divorce rate among non-Muslims increased dramatically between 2009 and 2010 (Md Sam, 2014).

The number of Muslim weddings reported in 2020 was 145,202, a 1.8% reduction from the previous year's total of 147,847. (2019). CMR fell from 7.4 per thousand Muslim communities in 2019 to 7.3 in 2020. Similarly, non-Muslim weddings fell 29.4% from 55,814 in 2019 to 39,387 in 2018. (2020). As a result, the CMR fell from 4.4 (2019) to 3.1 (2020) per 1000 Non-Muslim communities (DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS MALAYSIA, 2021). The average age of the grooms stayed at 28.0 years old. Nevertheless, the median age of brides fell from 27.0 to 26.0 years. The median age of Muslim and non-Muslim grooms and brides remained constant.

Divorces declined 19.2 percent from 56,624 in 2019 to 45,754 in 2019. (2020). As a result, CDR fell from 1.7 (2019) to 1.4 (2020) per thousand population. The number of Muslim divorces registered in 2020 was 37,853, a 16.8 percent decline from 45,502 in 2009. (2019). CDR fell from 2.3 per thousand Muslim inhabitants in 2019 to 1.9 in 2020. Similarly, non-Muslim divorces fell by 29.0 percent, from 11,122 in 2019 to 7,901 in 2018. (2020). As a result, the CDR for Non-Muslims fell from 0.9 (2019) to 0.6 (2020) per 1,000 Non-Muslim people. (DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS

MALAYSIA, 2021). Males' and females' median ages at divorce stayed at 37.0 and 34.0 years, respectively. A similar tendency was seen among Muslim and non-Muslim divorced people.

3. Theoretical determinants of divorce

(Karney and Bradbury, 1995) assessed four theoretical approaches that have affected marital research: social exchange, behavioral, attachment, and crisis theories. These various methods represent diverse study traditions from many disciplines that have sought to examine the reasons for marriage breakup. Most research has been largely empirical in nature, seeking divorce predictors in the form of relationships or correlations between various qualities and marital breakup. Elements of the social exchange model are used in much research. According to (Levinger, 1965), variables influencing the probability of marital collapse may be characterized based on whether they impact the appeal of the partnership, whether they operate as obstacles to marital breakdown, or if they influence the choices to marriage. However, the portrayal of direct connections between predictors and divorce probability might be deceptive. For example, parental divorce may influence marriage outcomes through other factors such as internalization in interpersonal behaviors, although such mediating variables are seldom investigated in research studies. Most research, in general, has not sought to explain how any links between socio-demographic variables and marital stability function, or how marriages grow more or less stable.

The other three methods focus on the mechanisms that cause marriages to fail, such as marital interaction, features of each partner's dating life and household origin, or how spouses deal with stressful circumstances. (Karney and Bradbury, 1995) evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of each approach and find that no one framework meets all of the requirements of a marital development theory. While few studies have tried to incorporate all of these conceptual viewpoints, they do propose a more unified framework for future study. (Amato, 1996) shown in recent research that given sufficiently thorough longitudinal data on couples, it is feasible to analyze the routes via which socio-demographic determinants cause a marital breakup. This research, for

example, has demonstrated how the multigenerational transmission of dispute risk appears to work through enhanced interpersonal behavior behavioral issues among those whose parents divorced (such as loss of trust as well as inability to commit), which affect the restoration of satisfying relationships (Amato, 1996).

4. Factors affecting divorce:

According to Ghaniet al. (2017), national data indicate that from 2012 to 2015, over 32% of couples cited a lack of good communication as a primary factor for their divorce. This fundamentally emphasizes the need for communication between partners in order to survive a marriage (Abd Kadir, 2021). However, according to Mohd Zain et al. (2019), higher household debt often leads to stress and family breakups in the Malaysian population.

(Md Sam, 2014) found that age, age during the marriage, the number of marriages, and the presence of kids are the important variables associated with divorce. Furthermore, irreconcilable conflicts, reckless husbands, and interfering in-laws' relatives are the causes why couples divorce. As a result, when combined with financial
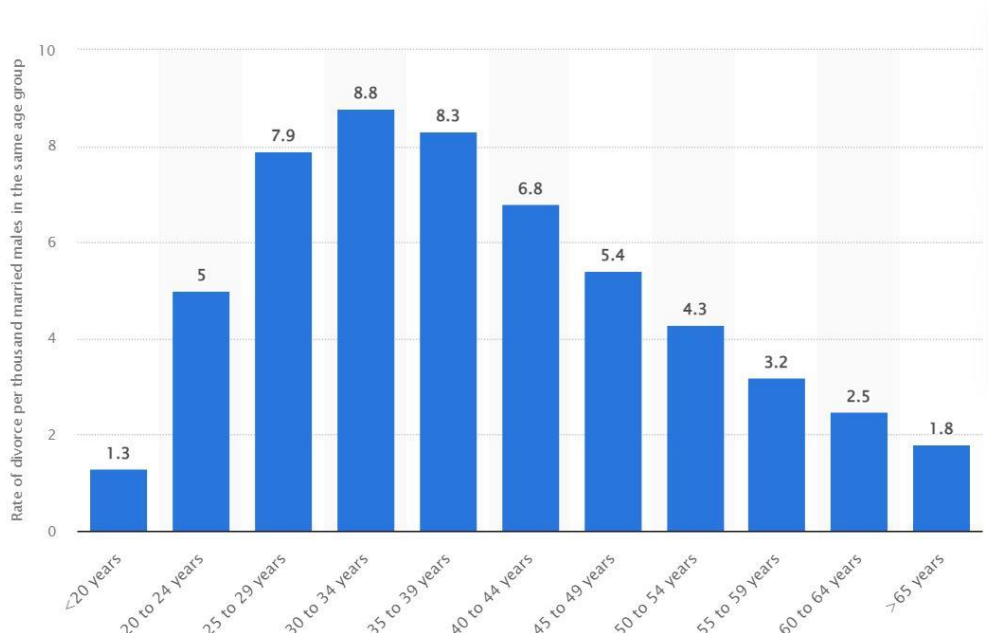

Figure 1. Divorce across different age groups in Malaysia. Source: Statista 2022

variables, the high prevalence of divorce may be ascribed to the social implications of a high family debt load. High debt levels often impair marital harmony and finally lead to divorce. Increased debt pushes individuals to prioritize money above moral integrity, which affects their choice of partner. Such relationships, however, do not endure long and are one of the key causes behind Malaysia's high divorce rate.

According to Statista (2022), in 2020, the divorce rate for men aged 30 to 34 is 8.8 divorces per thousand married men within this age range. As a result, married males in this age bracket saw the greatest rate of divorce. After 34 years, the divorce rate fell as people became older.

Many men find it hard to admit they have a problem, which is one of the hardest things they have to do. Men do not get help for ED because it has a bad reputation. Sexual health is an essential part of being

healthy all around. Often men with ED have poor self and feel alone because they are too embarrassed to talk to their doctor about this sensitive issue. Evidence has demonstrated that ED has a big negative effect on measures of quality of life and that treating ED successfully is linked to big improvements in overall and emotional health (Solomon, Man and Jackson, 2003).

Numerous recent studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between physical and sexual health. Epidemiological studies have shown a high association between sexual dysfunction and cardiovascular diseases, such as hypertension, cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity (Tan, Tong, and Ho, 2012).

The social stigma connected to ED and the fact that it is likely to become more common around the world makes it hard for people in charge of health care policy to come up with and implement ways to deal with ED. But one of the most important steps forward in the study of ED is that more and more people are becoming aware of how common it is in men with heart disease. A focus on this strong link between ED and heart disease would not only make it easier for men to admit they have ED, but it would also give health care systems a chance to deal with the rising number of men who have this distressing condition by assessing their cardiovascular risk.

Data from (Van Vo, Hoang and Thanh Nguyen, 2017) indicates that 66 percent of married men suffer from erectile dysfunction, thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that ED plays a role in the dissolution of a marriage.

5. Methodology

We used binary models to test our hypothesis. In this kind of model, the dependent variable can only have two potential values. Y might be a dummy variable expressing the likelihood of a scenario happening or a choice between two options. The goal is to find a link between team traits and the likelihood of divorce. y is a binary variable having a value between 0 and 1. Simply regressing y on x is inadequate because the observed conditional average model puts insufficient limitations on the model's residuals. Furthermore, in a basic linear regression, the value of y is not limited to zero. Rather, we use a specification to meet the basic requirements of binary regressors. Assume the following is the likelihood of seeing 1:

$$\Pr(y_i = 1 \,|\, x_i, \beta) \;=\; 1 - F(-x_i'\beta)\,,$$

The function F, which is a simple increasing continuous function that receives a true value and produces a number between 0 and 1, determines the kind of binary model that is used. Therefore:

$$\Pr(y_i = 0 \,|\, x_i, \beta) \;=\; F(-x_i'\beta)\,.$$

Given this specification, maximum likelihood techniques might be employed to discover the values of this model. The likelihood function is indicated by the notation shown below.

$$l(\beta) \;=\; \sum_{i=0}^{n} y_i \log(1 - F(-x_i'\beta)) + (1 - y_i)\log(F(-x_i'\beta))\,.$$

Because the first-order conditions for this probability are nonlinear, an iterative solution is necessary to provide parameter estimates. This standard presents two contradictory opinions that must be considered. Binary models are often used to

define latent variables. Assume there is a latent component y* that is linearly related to x.

$$y_i^* = x_i'\beta + u_i$$

y* decides whether the recorded response variable approaches a given value, where u represents random fluctuations:

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_i^* > 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } y_i^* \leq 0. \end{cases}$$

In this scenario, the threshold is set to zero; nevertheless, the threshold value is inconsequential if x includes a constant term. The marginal influence of a distinguishing x variable on a single conditional probability linked with the goal y is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\partial E(y_i | x_i, \beta)}{\partial x_{ij}} = f(-x_i'\beta)\beta_j.$$

Divorce = 1 if there is divorce.

Divorce = 0; if there is no divorce.

The data was gathered from surveys of 200 Malaysian couples. The total number of couples in the final sample is 164. As seen in table nn, out of 164 samples, we have 75 divorced couples and 89 not-divorced couples.

Table nn. Divorce counts in the sample

Dependent Variable Frequencies
Equation: UNTITLED

Dep. Value	Count	Percent	Count	cumulative Percent
Not Divorce=0	89	54.27	89	54.27
Divorce=1	75	45.73	164	100.00

Table 1. descriptions of the dependent and independent variables.

Variables	Definition	Calculation	Role in the model	Purpose
Divorce	Indicates whether the couples are divorced or not	Divorce = 1, for divorced couple Divorce = 0 for non-divorced couple	Target/Dependent variable	To check the occurrence of divorce considering the different factors.
Childlessness	Indicates if the couple suffers from childlessness	Childlessness = 1 for a couple with children Childlessness = 0, for Childless couple	Independent variable	To check if the childlessness has a relationship with the divorce.
Debt	Indicates the extent to which the couple has debt	The categorical/Likert scale ranges from 1=No debt to 5=severely in debt	Independent variable	To check if Debt has a relationship with the divorce.
Education	Indicates average education level for a couple	Categorical: 1= Primary, 2=secondary, 3=Tertiary	Independent variable	To check if Education has a relationship with divorce.
Ethnicity	Indicates 3 major ethnic groups in Malaysia	Categorical: 1= Chinese, 2=Indian, 3=Malay	Independent variable	To check if ethnicity has an impact on divorce.
Income	Income level of the couple	Categorical: 1= Poor, 2=Middle class, 3=Rich	Independent variable	To check if the income level has an influence on divorce.
ED	Measures the level of erectile dysfunction	**22-25**: No erectile dysfunction, **17-21**: Mild erectile dysfunction **12-16**: Mild to moderate erectile dysfunction **8-11**: Moderate erectile dysfunction **5-7**: Severe erectile dysfunction (scores were reversed following the literature)	Independent variable	To examine if erectile dysfunction has an influence on divorce.
Religion	Indicates the religious affiliations of the couples	Dummy variables: Religion=1; for Muslim couples, Religion = 0; for non-Muslim couples	Independent variable	To check if religion has an influence on divorce.

6. Results

The results of the binary probit model and binary logistic model are shown in Tables below, respectively. As previously indicated, we have added 7 independent variables in the equation. They are as follows: 1) childlessness, 2) Debt 3) Education, 4) ethnicity, 5) in-laws, 6) income, and, finally, 7) ED. The results indicate that the p-value for childlessness is greater than 5%. This suggests that childlessness has no major influence on divorce. The variable debt has a p-value of less than 5%. This suggests that the having debt burden has a major influence on divorce. Furthermore, the p-value for the education level is less than 5%. This shows that education level has influence has an effect on divorce. The p-value for the income variable is 0.75, which is larger than 5%. This suggests that income has little influence on divorce. This is perhaps some influences of income are captured by the debt; therefore, income is showing less influence on divorce. Moreover, the p-value for erectile dysfunction is less than 5%. This shows that erectile dysfunction causes divorce. Finally, the p-value for the variable in-laws is less than 5%. This indicates that divorce is more frequent in Muslim couples than in non-Muslim couples.

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Dependent Variable: DIVORCE
Method: ML - Binary Probit (Newton-Raphson / Marquardt steps)
Sample: 1 164
Included observations: 164
Convergence achieved after 9 iterations
Coefficient covariance computed using observed Hessian

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
CHILDLESSNESS	0.276872	0.412243	0.671622	0.5018
DEBT	0.627208	0.203678	3.079407	0.0021
ED	0.753561	0.161523	-4.665333	0.0000
EDUCATION	0.568425	0.285854	1.988519	0.0468
ETHNICITY	0.828039	0.328876	2.517781	0.0118
INCOME	0.082160	0.264705	0.310385	0.7563
RELIGION	2.068000	0.621057	3.329809	0.0009
C	4.388577	1.363292	3.219103	0.0013

McFadden R-squared	0.766403	Mean dependent var		0.457317
S.D. dependent var	0.499701	S.E. of regression		0.239473
Akaike info criterion	0.419690	Sum squared resid		8.946208
Schwarz criterion	0.570903	Log likelihood		-26.41461
Hannan-Quinn criter.	0.481077	Deviance		52.82921
Restr. deviance	226.1557	Restr. log likelihood		-113.0778
LR statistic	173.3265	Avg. log likelihood		-0.161065
Prob(LR statistic)	0.000000			

Obs with Dep=0	89	Total obs	164
Obs with Dep=1	75		

Dependent Variable: DIVORCE
Method: ML - Binary Logit (Newton-Raphson / Marquardt steps)
Sample: 1 164
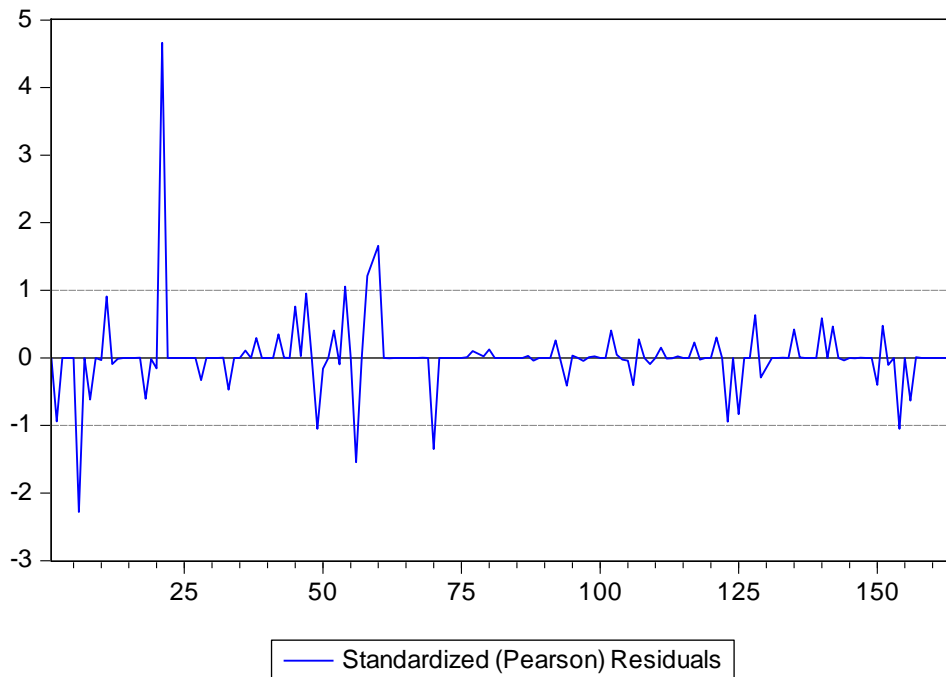Included observations: 164
Convergence achieved after 9 iterations
Coefficient covariance computed using observed Hessian

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
CHILDLESSNESS	0.412474	0.725796	0.568305	0.5698
DEBT	1.100190	0.362515	3.034878	0.0024
ED	-1.310600	0.296575	-4.419126	0.0000
EDUCATION	1.039793	0.533383	1.949432	0.0512
ETHNICITY	1.412099	0.578500	2.440968	0.0146
INCOME	0.182129	0.450244	0.404511	0.6858
RELIGION	3.683266	1.149784	3.203443	0.0014
C	7.434328	2.366971	3.140861	0.0017

McFadden R-squared	0.762713	Mean dependent var	0.457317
S.D. dependent var	0.499701	S.E. of regression	0.239490
Akaike info criterion	0.424780	Sum squared resid	8.947415
Schwarz criterion	0.575993	Log likelihood	-26.83196
Hannan-Quinn criter.	0.486167	Deviance	53.66392
Restr. deviance	226.1557	Restr. log likelihood	-113.0778
LR statistic	172.4918	Avg. log likelihood	-0.163610
Prob(LR statistic)	0.000000		

Obs with Dep=0	89	Total obs	164
Obs with Dep=1	75		

Standardized (Pearson) Residuals

7. Conclusion

Many marriages in Malaysia end in divorce in a sad and depressing way. When it does arise, it has much deeper effects on families with children in particular, with the potential to affect their mature perspectives on relationships, marriage, and civil partnerships. To repair partnerships before they become permanently broken, every effort should be made including awareness, proper debt management, as well as improving and supporting men's health.

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Appendix

Figure .A. 1: Pairplot for divorced and non-divorced couples