

# EVALUATING THE RISING TRENDS OF DIVORCES WITHIN MALAYSIAN COMMUNITY

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**Abstract.** The concerned research evaluates the increasing divorce trends among the Malaysian community and seeks to highlight the main reason behind it. In research background, earlier situations and comparative displays of societal values and factors behind divorce have been provided. It has shown the present situation in Malaysia behind continuous divorce cases. It has also shown specific details related to factors and reasons for rising divorce trends along with female and male discrimination in the society. A brief has been provided in the methodology section to understand the tools this research used to evaluate the divorce trends such as secondary research. Lastly, key research findings have described the relationship between lack of education and increased divorce rate, role of economic factors in influencing increased divorce rate and others for enhancing the main views.

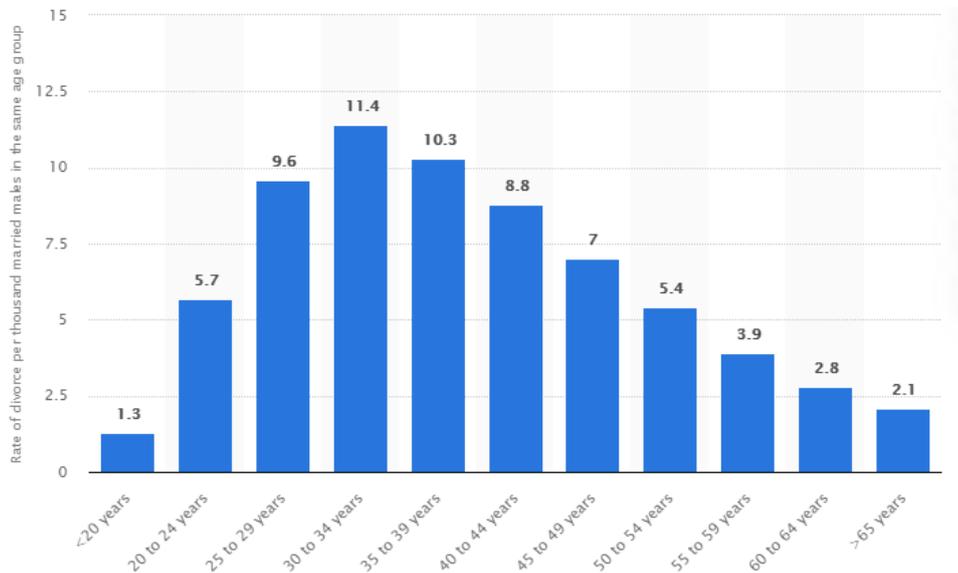
**Keywords:** *divorce, trends, discrimination, lack of education, economic factors*

## Introduction

Increasing divorce trends is one of the major socio-cultural challenges in Malaysia at present. Serial domestic conflicts cause spouses to choose divorce as the last solution. The country witnessed a total of 50,882 divorce cases in 2018 which further increased by 12% and recorded 56,862 cases in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). As opined by Hasbullah and Razak (2017), minimum age to get married is 16 and 18 for female and male Muslims in Malaysia however, 16 years and below is not a biologically appropriate age to start a family. Early marriage is commonly followed among Muslims across the world and in many cases the age protocol is not even considered. A case reported in Syariah, Malaysia, in 2012, where a 20-year-old male married a 12 years old female with legal consent from the court (Hasbullah and Razak, 2017). However, within less than a year the husband divorced the girl with a third “talaq”. This essentially depicts the religious and ethno-cultural practices as key reasons behind increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. Other than Muslim community, rising trends of divorce can be seen in Malaysian tribes and among the overall residents.

*Figure 1* showcases the age specific divorce rates in Malaysia where it can be seen that male between 30-34 years of age contribute 11.4% of the total divorce rate (Statista, 2019). However, the rate decreases proportionally with age increase. In addition, male up to the age group of 40 years generally tend to divorce their partner as compared to the male above 40 years. According to Samsudin et al. (2019), people belonging to the median age are more prone to involvement in extra marital affairs and crimes that eventually break husband-wife relationships. As per Malaysian government report almost 40% of divorce cases involving the median age group have stated extra marital affairs as the main reason for separation (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). In addition, people belonging to the age group of 32-40 years have been burdened with high financial debt out of which almost 52% are divorced in Malaysia (CEIC, 2020). This clearly explains the relationship between age and increased divorce

trends in Malaysia. In addition, financial vulnerability further influences people to aim for luxurious life and greed for wealth and choose a partner who can provide these.



**Figure 1.** Age specific divorce rate among males in Malaysia in 2019.  
Source: Statista (2019).

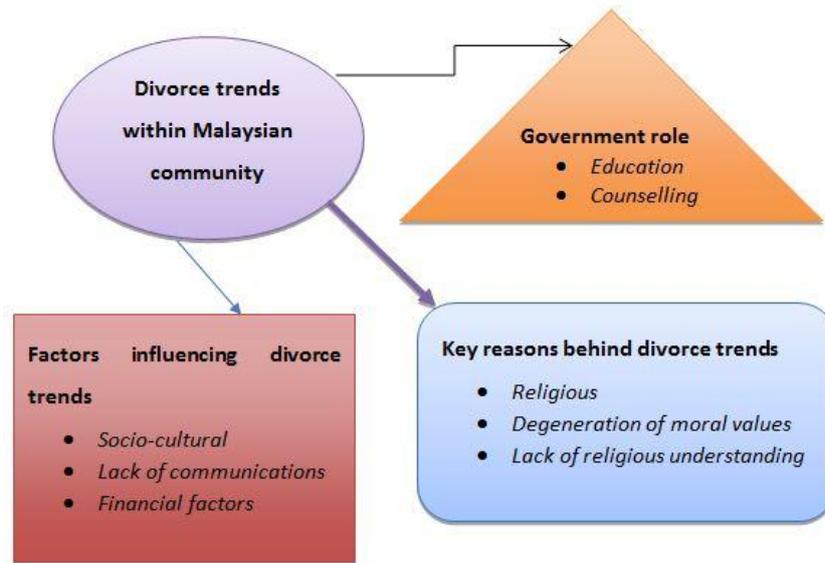
### ***Research focus and objective study***

Focus of the research is to evaluate the emerging trends of divorces within the Malaysian community. The objective of study are includes: (1) to evaluate the reasons behind rising trends of divorces in Malaysian community; (2) to analyse religious factors associated with rising divorce trends within Malaysian community; and (3) To discuss the role of Malaysian government in overcoming divorce matter.

### ***Literature review***

#### ***Conceptual framework***

A conceptual framework is a written or visual representation that is developed based on a literature review of existing studies and theories about the topic discuss. Strong conceptual frameworks capture something real that is easy to remember and apply.



*Figure 2. Conceptual framework.*

### ***Concept of divorce in Malaysian context***

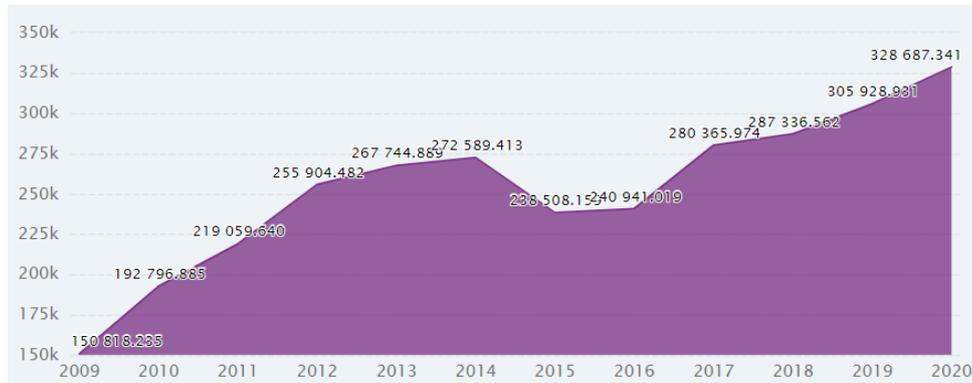
Divorce rate within Malaysian communities is increasing day by day as the country is unable to address this social issue in an appropriate manner. As opined by Sutrop (2020), the concept of divorce refers to the separation process between the partners. It is the process where the spouse returns to unmarried status and becomes free again to marry. Applying “mutual consent theory”, a spouse has the right to dissolve a marriage given any unpleasant circumstances (Naruse and Moss, 2021). Mutual consent between the couple allows a divorce to be in a peaceful and respectful manner. On the contrary, Franke and Elliott (2021) stated that, technically divorce is different to separation and is a decree of marriage dissolution. Relating it with the Malaysian context it is observed that the number of marriage dissolution has increased with time and several socio-economic factors are to be blamed for that.

### ***Factors influencing divorce trends in Malaysia***

Religious and socio-cultural practices are the pillars of stable marriage, and for Malaysia it is the religious factors that thrive within the society. The number of Muslim divorce cases has been increased by 13% in 2019 comparing to previous year and represents almost 80% of the total divorce cases (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). The massive gap between Muslim and non-Muslim community regarding divorce rate essentially hints the religious factors as one of the main reasons behind rising divorce trends in Malaysia. As opined by Ghani et al. (2017), national statistics reveals that almost 32% of couples have shown lack of effective communication as a main reason for their divorce from 2012-15. This essentially highlights the importance of communication between couples to sustain a marriage. According to Mohd Zain et al. (2019), an increased household debt often leads to consequences of stress and family breakups within the Malaysian community.

*Figure 3* depicts the ever increasing household debts in Malaysia till 2020. The household debts of the country have increased by 5.5% compared to previous year and currently stand at \$328.7 billion in 2020 (CEIC, 2020). Therefore, aligning it with the financial factors high rate of divorce can be attributed to the social consequences of

high household debt burden. High debt rates often disrupt the family peace and eventually cause divorce. Increased debt further influences people to choose money over moral integrity and that also influences people's choice of spouse. However, such relations do not last long and it is one of the major reasons behind the high rate of divorce in Malaysia



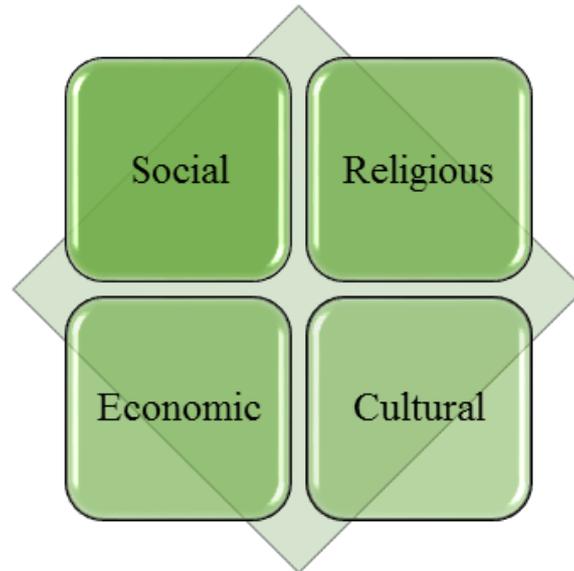
**Figure 3.** Household debts in Malaysia (until 2020).

Source: CEIC (2020).

### ***Reason behind rising divorce trends in Malaysia***

Over the years an increased divorce rate in Malaysian community has been seen and thorough research on the subject suggests social, economic and religious cultural factors to be key determinants of it. The Perlis community in Malaysia is often troubled with a high divorce rate, moreover, the concerned community had recorded the most number of divorce cases between 2006-2015 (Ghani et al., 2017). As opined by Cohen (2019), divorce involves the family institution that plays a key role in deciding the fate of a marriage. In Malaysia, the majority of the population appeared to be Muslim, the community often engaged in multiple marriages and thus the family of spouses appeared to be comfortable with the concept of multiple marriages. In contrast, as stated by Hartley et al. (2021), cultural aspect is more influencing in deciding the fate of a marriage than family, and for Muslim community family is nothing but a cultural reflection. Therefore, considering the societal norms and structure it is to be blamed for the high rate of divorce in Malaysia.

In addition, moral values, degeneration and social behaviors are key determinants of the success of marriage in Malaysia as well as in the entire world. As opined by Antonelli and De Bonis (2021), socio-economic variables such as individual financial status essentially determine the longevity of a relationship (*Figure 4*). Increasing household debts is touching the sky in Malaysia and the debt currently stands at almost \$200 per head which clearly is one of the main reasons behind rising divorce rate in the country (CEIC, 2020). Apart from that, lack of religious understanding, education and family inference are few societal factors responsible for emerging divorce cases in Malaysia.



**Figure 4.** Reason behind increased divorce rate in Malaysia.  
Source: Antonelli and De Bonis (2021).

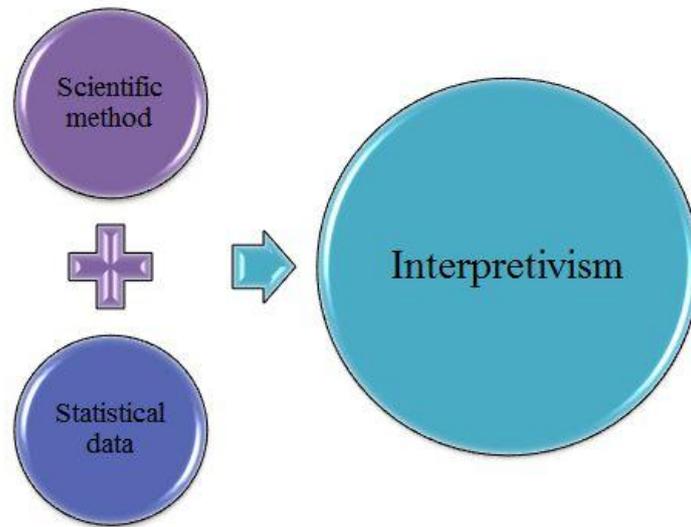
### ***Role of Malaysian government to overcome increased rate***

Education before marriage has been one of the major responses from the Malaysian government to reduce the divorce rate. As opined by Saporovskaia et al. (2021), lack of education forces females to marry at an early age and in most of the cases those marriages do not last longer because of improper decisions in early age. Considering this aspect Malaysian government has made 16 years the minimum age for females to get married and until 16 years' females are encouraged to pursue education (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). In addition, the government has made strict rules regarding divorce petitions where both parties need to agree about the separation process before submitting an appeal to court. Moreover, the government through "state religious affairs department" also counsels people to not take harsh decisions like divorce and rather overcome the matter with consultation (Ghani et al., 2017). However, situations such as consent separation are necessarily not prevented by the government and the complete authority belongs to the spouse in this regard.

## **Materials and Methods**

### ***Research philosophy***

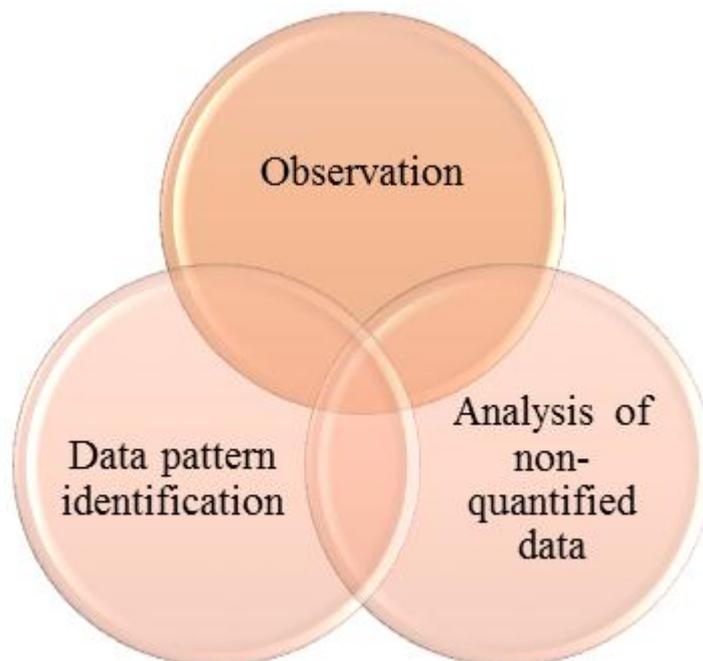
The concerned research considers an interpretivism philosophical approach to represent the social phenomena. As opined by Ryan (2018), interpretive research philosophy analyses the human action based on scientific method such as statistical data and validates with the current findings (Figure 5). Applying this philosophy, the concerned research identified social and economic factors as major reasons for increased divorce rate. One of the essential reasons behind choosing this research philosophy is its ability to provide in-depth understanding. Applying this aspect, the concerned journal discusses the religious and cultural factors responsible for the high divorce rate in Malaysia.



**Figure 5.** Research philosophy.  
Source: Ryan (2018).

### **Research design**

This research includes a descriptive research design to provide an accurate and systematic description of the research area. According to Bratianu et al. (2021), descriptive research design produces effective analysis of non-quantified data through observation (Figure 6). Implementing this aspect, concerned research observes past data regarding marriage and divorce rate in Malaysia to get a clear idea of current divorce trends. Moreover, this research design closely examines the data pattern to identify crucial factors that affect increased rate of divorce. Considering this aspect, current research has successfully represented cultural reluctance as one of the major reasons influencing the high rate of divorce within Malaysian community.



**Figure 6. Research design.**  
Source: Bratianu et al. (2021).

### **Research approach**

Inductive research approach has been integrated in this research to include and support the argument with a wide variety of sources. As opined by Remtulla et al. (2021), the inductive approach is capable of predicting the potential impact of phenomena through logical reasoning. Applying this research approach, the concerned study has identified the critical role that Malaysian government played and can play to reduce the divorce cases. One of the major reasons behind choosing this approach is its ability to conclude the study based on generalising the divorce related data. Considering this approach and based on the case findings this research identifies religion as the most effective reason behind rising divorce trends in Malaysia

### **Research strategy**

This research frames its data findings based on case study and therefore includes observation techniques to distinguish the necessary data from the overall dataset. In addition, case study allows further research exploration and this aspect has helped the concerned research to develop arguments based on increased divorce issues within Malaysian context.

### **Data collection**

This study considers a secondary data collection method to provide detailed analysis on the topic based on a wide variety of data sources. Secondary data sources are comparatively easy to access and it also provides a longitudinal analysis of the research phenomenon. Considering this aspect, the concerned study has accessed to Malaysian government websites, online scholarly journals and news articles to represent the divorce rate in Malaysian community. In addition, utilising the secondary sources has further guided this research to access past research data and connect it with the case studies and to conclude the research.

### **Data analysis**

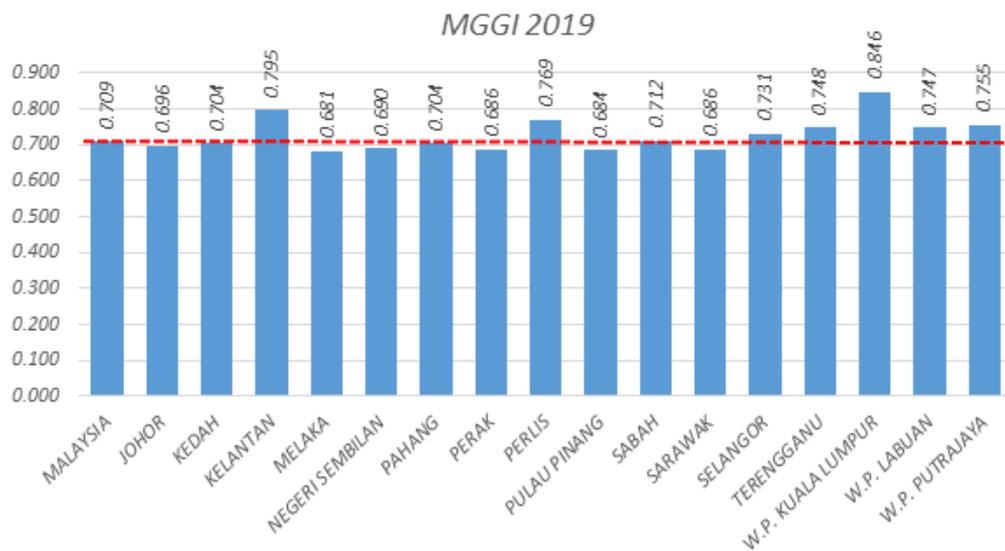
The concerned research considers qualitative data analysis techniques to consider the behavioral aspect in Malaysia and identify the education and cultural exposure as necessary factors influencing the rising divorce trend in the country (Kumratova et al., 2021). In addition, this data analysis method allows the research to explore behavioral patterns of different Malaysian communities and relate it with the divorce rate within the country.

### **Research limitations**

Lack of quantifiable data is one of the major limitations of this study as it prevents the research to integrate statistical analysis by not considering the survey and interview. In addition, this research limits itself within the Malaysian community and thus fails to compare divorce rate with global context.

## Results and Discussion

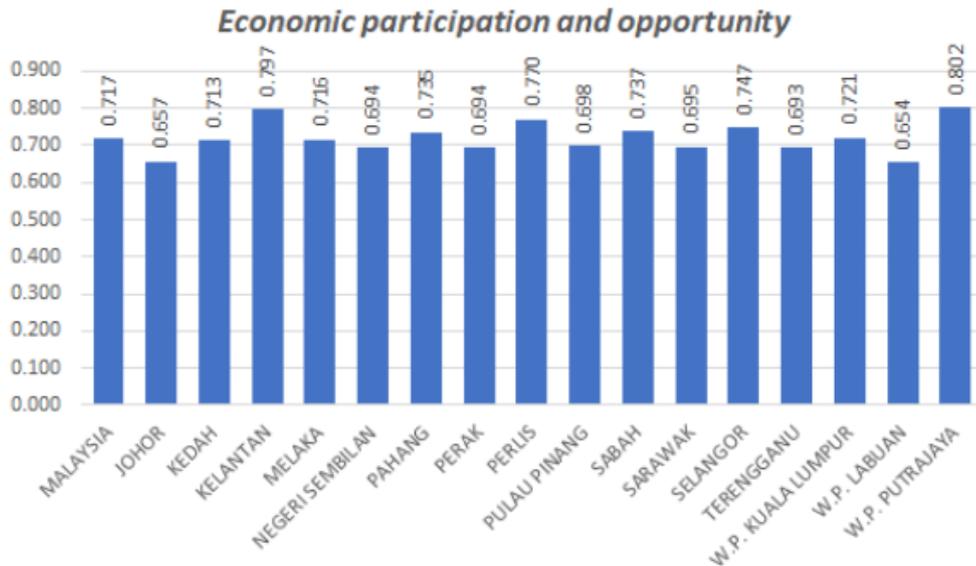
Based on the current divorce rate and the previous available information it appears that lack of equal financial opportunities and gender discrimination have been two major reasons behind increased divorce rate in Malaysia. *Figure 7* depicts gender gap status in Malaysia, where it can be seen that the Country has recorded a lower score in 2019 than of previous year. In 2018, the gender gap score was 0.711 whereas Malaysia recorded 0.709 currently which further depicts the misery of women in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Relating with the current context it appears that it is still the male gender that eventually decides the fate of a marriage and the existing gender gap is further influencing this area. Moreover, the country has yet to address the systemic gender discrimination which further extends the gender gap. Moreover, latest data in workplace gender discrimination also suggest that most of the Malaysian women are still skeptical about working in office.



**Figure 7.** Gender gap in Malaysia.

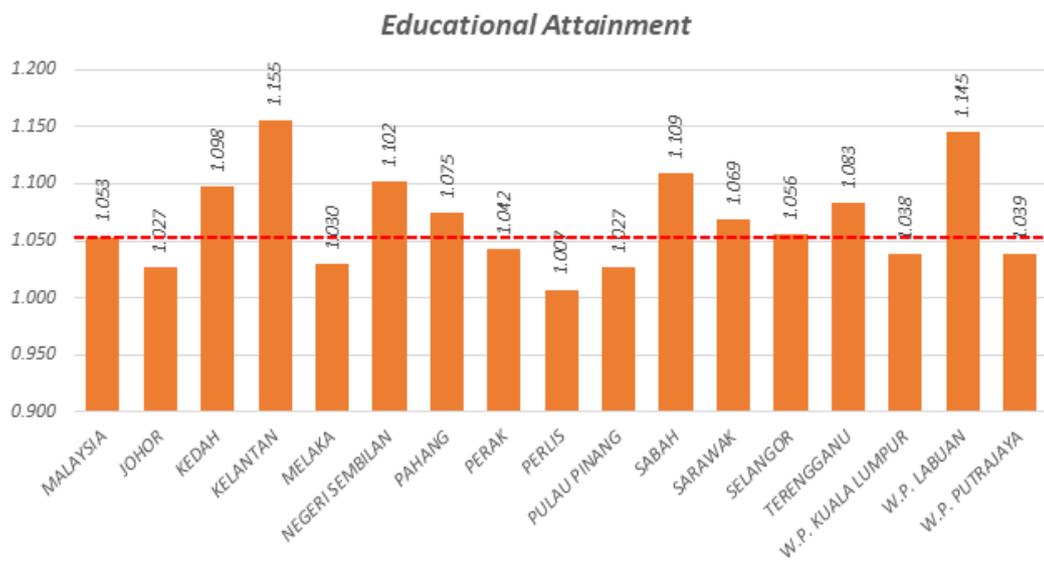
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021).

*Figure 8* essentially suggests the gender-based economic participation of Malaysian women and their current status. It is observed that the Malaysian women are yet to receive equal access regarding financial opportunities. The country is currently able to generate 0.717 points only in terms of providing equal access to the female in financial opportunities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). In addition, the Malaysian Government is also unable to ensure job placement for all eligible women within the country and this has significantly dropped their ranking in providing equal financial opportunities in the global index. It is further noticed that women in the country are unable to pursue their career aspirations due to lack of access to financial opportunities. Even at the workplace only a handful of females represent the hierarchy.



**Figure 8.** Gender-based economic participation in Malaysia.  
 Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021).

Figure 9 showcases that people in Malaysia do not get equal opportunity to access the basic education facilities. As per Malaysian government’s report gender based education access is still present in the current society. The country is only able to generate a 1.053 score in providing educational opportunities to the females (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). In addition, Malaysia also recorded a -0.5 point in 2019 as compared to the previous year in terms of equal opportunity to access to education (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Access to education has always been a challenge for the Malaysian females however, the lower ranking essentially suggests that basic issues related to survival are still present in Malaysian society.



**Figure 9.** Gender-based educational opportunity.  
 Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021).

**Relationship between lack of education and increased divorce rate**

Divorce among lower-middle income groups is comparatively more common than among upper income groups. As opined by Saporovskaia et al., (2021), poor financial status causes disruption in family happiness and is often the main reason behind a partner's separation. On the other hand, lack of education is a primary reason that restricts people from earning more. Countries such as Malaysia where divorce is mostly treated as a normal social phenomenon clearly suggest that the problem lies deeper than it is thought. According to an OECD survey, Malaysia ranks among the lowest in imparting competence in basic skills such as mathematics, science and reading in students (Woo, 2019). This essentially highlights the existing weakness related to basic academic skills in Malaysian education system. As opined by Kaiser and Menkhoff (2017), lack of education leads to low human values, unemployment and overall low quality of life which are essential for a human being to live. Relating it to the increased divorce rate it can be said that lack of academic exposure and absent moral value essentially led the country to witness several social crises and increased divorce rate is one of them.

In addition, the country has failed to provide equal access to education; especially females are main victim of this discrimination. Lack of equal opportunity to access any resources makes one community superior to another and Malaysia is certainly suffering for this (Woo, 2019). Unequal access to resources such as education created a gender division within the country and made it patriarchal in nature. It further created a male dominated society in Malaysia and eventually made males the decision maker in the society and take hasty decisions such as divorce. Moreover, lack of education leads humans to care less about moral values and often leads to the wrong direction in life. Increased divorce rate certainly reflects the poor societal values of Malaysian community.

### ***Role of economic factor in influencing increased divorce rate***

Malaysia remains one of the most open economies however; the current condition of households is vulnerable. Most of the households in the country remain under huge debts and are spending a low quality of life. According to Masyhuri et al. (2020), income level is directly related to family happiness and low income often causes conflict within the family. Therefore, it is evident that financial stability is one of the key determinants of personal happiness. Relating it with the Malaysian aspect it is observed that most of the households are unable to pay their debts which essentially disrupts their financial stability and often triggers family conflicts. This further leads to the breakup of a marriage, which highlights the role of economic factors in increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. As stated by Stasova and Vilka (2018), income inequality also restricts the access to financial opportunities which eventually hampers social harmony by creating poverty and poor health. Lack of financial equality impacts societal happiness and causes disruption in the life of Malaysian.

In addition, female representation in accessing the financial opportunity appears to be quite low in Malaysia which is also a key determinant of family happiness. As stated by Walczak and Pieńkowska-Kamieniecka (2018), lack of access to economic opportunity increases the greed among females and they prefer financial stability over societal values and bonding while choosing a partner. Malaysia ranks among the worst in providing financial opportunity to every community regardless of their gender and religion. In addition, the country is discriminatory in nature while promoting females at the workplace. Therefore, considering the unequal financial opportunity, females in

Malaysia choose economic status over love, emotion and values. Relationships without trust and value usually do not last long and the increased divorce rate in Malaysia is a reflection of that.

### ***Role of gender in increased divorce rate***

Gender discrimination is certainly one of the major societal concerns for Malaysia, the country ranks bottom in terms of ensuring gender equality. Starting from decision making in the family to workplace, females in Malaysia face gender based discrimination in accessing opportunities. As opined by Leopold (2018), females are mostly restricted in the household's activities and in most cases are not allowed to make decisions. Lack of decision making essentially allowed males to be an authority of the society which further pushed for forced marriage breakup in Malaysia. In addition, most of the societal and legal practices such as marriage norms and separation process are favorable to men that further enhance the mastery of male gender. Unequal responsibility towards marriage is one of the main reasons for the increased divorce rate in Malaysia. As per government survey it is noticed that almost 25% of divorce cases in 2018 had recorded forced divorce attempts by the male which significantly depicts the misuse of authority by men (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020).

In addition, the country has also witnessed domestic violence as one the main causes of divorce. Almost 28% cases recorded domestic violence by men as the main reason for divorce; this clearly highlights the gender role in influencing the divorce rate in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Moreover, rising gender discrimination creating a gender gap overall which prevents the women from making independent decisions regarding marriage, career and in overall life. Religious discrimination based on the gender can be termed as one of the most significant reasons behind increased divorce rate in Malaysia. For example, Islam allows highly discriminatory "triple talaq" to dissolve a marriage whereas women are not allowed the same. Therefore, this societal and religious discrimination emerged as major reason for high rate divorce in Malaysia.

### **Conclusion**

This study summarises the rising trends of divorces within Malaysian community. The two main factors contributing to the divorces are lack of equal financial opportunities and gender discrimination. Divorce has become a trend to the married couples who are in conflict or have problems in their marriage. They thought that divorce is the only way that could solve their problems and conflicts. Supposedly, divorce should be the last resort in the face of a domestic crisis. True, it is very difficult to realize the dream of family life in harmony and happiness without facing any problems but every couple must always be patient and mature in dealing with this great challenge which requires cooperation and tolerance from both parties. Family can not only be heaven but can also be the hell of the world. A happy family is everyone's dream which means a family full of love and affection. When family members love each other, then the household will be happy and harmonious.

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## Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest with any parties involved with this study.

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