

**MATE SELECTION CRITERIA TOWARDS MARITAL SATISFACTION
AMONG IRANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**

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MATE SELECTION CRITERIA TOWARDS MARITAL SATISFACTION
AMONG IRANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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To my beloved parents and my dear siblings

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to develop a model of mate selection criteria towards marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia. It identifies mate selection criteria for achieving marital satisfaction, gender moderation effect in the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction and explores the importance of values and roles criteria of mate selection towards marital satisfaction. In addition, a hierarchical guideline for mate selection criteria is developed to achieve marital satisfaction. Using exploratory mixed-method approach, this research was conducted in preliminary study and main study. For the preliminary study, 18 semi-structured interviews were carried out and analysed using directed content analysis. For the main study, through stratified random sampling, 250 married Iranian postgraduate students were selected from five universities in Malaysia and asked to complete a researcher developed questionnaire. Findings from Partial Least Squares (PLS) confirmed that mate selection consisted of values criteria and roles criteria. According to the findings, marital satisfaction could be predicted through both values and roles criteria by approximately 65%. Values and roles significantly predicted marital satisfaction variance by $\beta=0.52$, $t=12.09$, $p< 0.001$ and by $\beta=0.38$, $t=8.95$, $p< 0.001$, respectively. Moreover, it was found that the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction was not moderated by gender (values criteria: $\beta_{\text{male}}=0.48$, $\beta_{\text{female}}=0.53$, $t=0.499$, $p> 0.05$; roles criteria: $\beta_{\text{male}}=0.402$, $\beta_{\text{female}}=0.408$, $t=0.073$, $p> 0.05$). Accordingly, marital satisfaction was largely influenced by both values criteria (0.38) and roles criteria (0.36) and not any third variable. Finally, using Rasch measurement model, the mate selection criteria guideline was developed hierarchically in three priority levels: basic, moderate, and high. The basic priority level of the guideline included the following values: beauty, economic, commitment and responsibility, education, and life style and leisure time. The moderate priority level included sexual desire and love expression, religious, social, and health value. The high priority level included parental role, household role, spouse's family value, spousal role, independence value, employment role, and security value. Hierarchically, the mate selection criteria guideline showed that values criteria were placed more in the basic and moderate priority level, while roles criteria were placed in high priority level. The valid mate selection criteria guideline developed in this study is designed to help students who are going to get married and counselling centres. The results help counsellors raise awareness of couples who are considering each other for marriage. In addition, this research can contribute to the reduction of the rate of divorce that may occur due to the lack of certain and clear criteria for mate selection.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk membangun satu model kriteria pemilihan pasangan bagi mencapai kepuasan perkahwinan dikalangan pelajar pasca siswazah Iran di Malaysia. Ia mengenal pasti kriteria pemilihan pasangan bagi mencapai kepuasan perkahwinan, kesan pengantara jantina yang mempengaruhi kepuasan perkahwinan serta meneroka kepentingan nilai kriteria dan peranan kriteria pemilihan pasangan terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan. Di samping itu, garis panduan bagi kriteria pemilihan pasangan dibangun untuk membantu pelajar mencapai kepuasan perkahwinan. Kaedah penerokaan *mixed-method* digunakan melalui dua langkah iaitu kajian awal dan kajian utama. Bagi kajian awal, temu bual separa berstruktur dijalankan ke atas 18 responden dan menggunakan analisis kandungan terarah. Kajian utama melalui persampelan rawak berstrata. Seramai 250 orang pelajar pasca siswazah Iran yang berkahwin dipilih daripada lima universiti di Malaysia dan diminta mengisi soal selidik. Hasil dapatan daripada *Partial Least Squares* (PLS) dengan menggunakan perisian *Smart PLS* mengesahkan pemilihan pasangan terdiri daripada kedua-dua kriteria. Dapatan kajian mendapati kepuasan perkahwinan dapat diramalkan melalui kedua-dua nilai dan peranan kriteria sebanyak 65 peratus. Nilai dan peranan ketara menyumbang kepada varians kepada kepuasan perkahwinan $\beta = 0.52$, $t = 12.09$, $p < 0.001$ dan $\beta = 0.38$, $t = 8.95$, $p < 0.001$ masing-masing. Selain itu, didapati bahawa pengaruh kriteria pemilihan pasangan terhadap pkepuasan perkahwinan tidak diperantarakan oleh jantina (kriteria nilai $\beta_{\text{male}} = 0.48$, $\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.53$, $t = 0.499$, $p > 0.05$ dan peranan Kriteria $\beta_{\text{male}} = 0.402$, $\beta_{\text{female}} = 0.408$, $t = 0.073$, $p > 0.05$). Merujuk hasil dapatan, kepuasan perkahwinan lebih besar dipengaruhi oleh kedua-dua kriteria nilai (0.38) dan peranan (0.36) dan bukan pemboleh ubah ketiga. Akhirnya, model pengukuran Rasch digunakan sebagai garis panduan kriteria pemilihan pasangan dibangun secara hierarki dalam tiga peringkat utama: asas, sederhana dan tinggi. Tahap keutamaan asas garis panduan itu termasuk nilai keindahan, ekonomi, komitmen dan tanggungjawab, pendidikan, dan gaya hidup serta masa lapang. Tahap keutamaan sederhana termasuk keinginan seks dan ungkapan kasih sayang, agama, sosial, dan nilai kesihatan. Tahap keutamaan yang tinggi termasuk peranan ibubapa, peranan isi rumah, nilai keluarga pasangan, peranan isteri, nilai kebebasan, peranan pekerjaan, dan nilai keselamatan. Secara hierarki, garis panduan kriteria pemilihan pasangan menunjukkan kriteria nilai diletakkan lebih pada tahap keutamaan asas, manakala kriteria peranan diletakkan lebih pada tahap keutamaan yang tinggi. Garis panduan kriteria pemilihan pasangan yang dibangun dalam kajian ini membantu pelajar yang akan berkahwin dan pusat kaunseling. Dapatan kajian dapat membantu kaunselor meningkatkan kesedaran pasangan yang berencana untuk berkahwin. Tambahan pula, kajian ini dapat member sumbangan kepada pengurangan kadar perceraian yang akan berlaku disebabkan oleh kekurangan kriteria tertentu dan Kriteria yang jelas dalam pemilihan pasangan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AVE</i>	-	Average Variance Extracted
<i>CA</i>	-	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>CR</i>	-	Composite Reliability
<i>EMS</i>	-	Enrich Marital Satisfaction
<i>LV</i>	-	Latent Variable
<i>MGA</i>	-	Multi Group Analysis
<i>MS</i>	-	Marital Satisfaction
<i>MSC</i>	-	Mate Selection Criteria
<i>PLS</i>	-	Partial Least Square
<i>SE</i>	-	Social Exchange Theory
<i>SEM</i>	-	Structural Equation Modeling
<i>SVR</i>	-	Stimulus-Value-Role
<i>UKM</i>	-	Universiti Kerabasa Malaysia
<i>UM</i>	-	Universiti Malay
<i>UPM</i>	-	Universiti Putra Malaysia
<i>USM</i>	-	Universiti Sains Malasis
<i>UTM</i>	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
f^2	-	Effect Size
β	-	Path Coefficient
R^2	-	Coefficient of Determination

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Introduction

Relationships among the members of a society contribute to the experience of a happy and joyful life. Relationship is the foundation of human identity and is the primary basis of connection among individuals. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the reasons for making relationship are physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization needs.

One of the significant relationships that individuals build in their lives is marital relationship. According to Hashmi *et al.* (2007), marriage is a commitment with responsibility and love for happiness, peace, and development of strong family relationships. Alfred Adler viewed marriage from general system theory perspective and considered marriage as a system in which both partners provide input. Experiencing better relationship or motivation conflict are the output of this system (Carlson *et al.*, 2002). Thus, prior to marriage, it is essential to know well each other and to choose a mate freely without pressure from other people (Celik *et al.*, 2012).

Mate selection is the process and criteria by which one selects her/his potential mate (Mughni, 2013). People need to determine their purpose in marriage and determine whether their criteria are certain and realistic. Individuals that have agreement with each other on the selected criteria have a higher chance of experiencing satisfaction in their marital life (Celik *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, satisfaction with marriage depends on this selection. In other words, marital

satisfaction is achieved when the mate selection criteria are based on awareness and attention.

Marital satisfaction starts at the beginning of the marriage process such as when the criteria are chosen and the decision is made to establish the relationship legally. Huston *et al.* (2001) showed spouses with high level of marital satisfaction are not likely to divorce. Although divorce has always been a concern, it has become more widespread in the last 50 years. This is seen in many developed countries, where marriage has become increasingly unstable over the last few decades (Fan and Lui, 2004). Most of these high-divorce countries are Western countries with a long history of cultural and family change. In view of that, it is not surprising that the divorce rate in Iran shows unprecedented trend. The official statistics of Iran's divorce rate shows almost 40% increase in 2013 compared to divorce rate in 2012 (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013).

The increasing trend in the divorce rate has been accompanied by an increase in fundamental changes of gender-role attitudes among modern individuals (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013). Modern people are more accepting and approving of non-traditional gender-role attitudes (Gubernskaya, 2010; Cunningham, 2008). It is clear that peoples' attitudes change in different ways over time. Female breadwinner and male homemaker were important mechanisms driving these changes in attitudes. As a result, these changes in attitude accompany high divorce rates and changes in gender-role attitudes influence mate selection criteria among modern individuals.

In addition, graduate study involves a substantial amount of personal effort, especially for married graduate students (Al Horany and Hassan, 2011; Shollenberger, 2001). In fact, graduate study has been considered as a main life event that leads to marital discord with high divorce rates (Hoffer *et al.*, 2001; Shollenberger, 2001). Therefore, special attention should be given to graduate students.

Since partner selection has great importance as an early foundation in establishing family, it is of great importance to take into consideration the influence of certain mate selection criteria on marital life. Accordingly, this research tended to identify certain criteria of mate selection towards marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students. This will enhance students' awareness about effective criteria for selection of their partners, which can lead them to experience a satisfying marriage.

1. 2 Background of the Study

Studies indicated that mate selection is the most important decision individuals make in their lifetime (Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Neustadter, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Hashmi *et al.*, 2007; Buss *et al.*, 2001; Regan *et al.*, 2000; Murray, 1999). One of the major tasks of young people especially when they are in a university and often at the age of marriage is to find a state of identity (Maliki, 2009). They need to develop intimacy with others at this stage and to accept the intimacy needs of another person. Only in cases where one becomes intimate with another person will he/she be capable of understanding and having confidence in oneself. During an intimate relationship, individuals' identity may be fulfilled through living validation of the individual with whom one has intimacy (Maliki, 2009). However, when a relationship develops they may find that those qualities are not what they desire. This realization may end the relationship or shape an ill relationship. Ill relationships lead to incongruences, conflicts inside families, and inability to solve family issues, many psychological abnormalities, and mental health problems.

Considering mate selection with uncertain criteria has some negative effects such as violence and divorce (Schwartz and Scott, 2012). A common negative experience of dating and having intimate relationships is violence. Studies indicated that the rate of nonsexual violence ranged between 9 percent and 65 percent depending on whether threats and verbal or emotional aggression are included in definition (Witmer, 2006). Most recent studies supported that violence and abuse occur most often in families with the absence of satisfaction.

According to Larson (1992), great expectations that individuals place on marriage lead many people to struggle hard to find the right mate. However, the initiation of internet dating has caused an increase in the number of potential mates as well as lent confusion to the process of mate selection. Failure to choose a proper mate from available options may result in their generation not surviving.

Making a right choice when it comes to selecting a mate has always been a source of stress, no matter how old people are, what gender they are, and what race and culture they come from. The criteria that individuals desire in a long term mate has been examined in different studies (Boxer *et al.*, 2013; Blankinship, 2008; Okami and Shackelford, 2001; Gangestad and Simpson, 2000; Regan *et al.*, 2000; Buss, 1998; Buss *et al.*, 1990; Buss and Barnes, 1986). These studies showed the importance that individuals place on characteristics in a mate. They also routinely showed that men and women have different preferences in terms of mate selection criteria. For example, according to the findings, across several decades and different cultures, men value physical attractiveness more than women in a long-term marital life, while women place greater value on long term financial prospects (Buss, 1989).

According to previously conducted studies, most preferred criteria in partner selection among students were physical attractiveness (Suhaimi *et al.*, 2012; Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Shackelford *et al.*, 2005; Regan *et al.*, 2000; Buss *et al.*, 1990; Buss and Barnes, 1986), health (Alavi *et al.*, 2014; Shipman, 2010; Shackelford *et al.*, 2005; Todosijević *et al.*, 2003; Regan *et al.*, 2000; Buss *et al.*, 1990; Buss and Barnes, 1986), educational qualification (Schwarz and Hassebrauck, 2012; Vaillant and Wolff, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Shackelford *et al.*, 2005; Buunk *et al.*, 2002; Buss *et al.*, 2001), religion (Alavi *et al.*, 2014; Suhaimi *et al.*, 2012; Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Regan *et al.*, 2000; Buss, 1989), and the profession and financial status (Alavi *et al.*, 2014; Schwarz and Hassebrauck, 2012; Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Maliki, 2009; Shackelford *et al.*, 2005; Buss *et al.*, 2001; Buss, 1989).

Individuals need to carefully determine their specific criteria before they enter marital life. Suitable partner selection leads to happiness and satisfaction with marriage (Celik *et al.*, 2012). Unfortunately, marital decline perspective indicates

that, currently, individuals turn away from getting married since it has become increasingly difficult to stay in a happy and stable marital life (Amato *et al.*, 2003).

Marital instability caused a dramatic increase in the divorce rate during the 1970s, with a maximum rate around 1980 followed by a slight decline (Amato *et al.*, 2003). In view of that, in a comparative context, during the first decade of the 21st century, Iran was categorized among high-divorce countries. By 1997, the rate of divorce slowly changed from 78 per 1,000 marriages to more than 82 per 1,000. Then, by 2001, this rate dramatically increased to 94 per 1,000. Then, in 2011, this rate surged to 153 divorces per 1,000 marriages. This high rate demonstrates an increase of almost 44% over the rate in 2006 (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013).

In addition, family life in Iran has seen significant changes during the last two decades (Dhillon and Yousef, 2009). Fertility is falling and the number of unmarried women and men has increased rapidly from age 29. It rose from 8 percent to over 25 percent for women and from less than 20 percent to almost 40 percent for men between 1985 to 2004 (Dhillon and Yousef, 2009). Delayed marriage may reflect inflexibility in the marriage stemming from increased costs of marriage such as buying car and house.

The marital decline perspective in Iran indicates that, currently, high number of married individuals are not satisfied with their marital life, and single individuals turn away from marriage (Amato *et al.*, 2003). In general, the increasing number of children that are born outside of marriage, increasing popularity of non-marital cohabitation, delayed marriage, increasing rate of divorce and the decreasing rate of remarriage indicate that marriage cannot be considered as a permanent part of adult life as it was during past decades (Gubernskaya, 2010; Thornton *et al.*, 2008; Kalmijn, 2007; Amato *et al.*, 2003). Marital decline perspective is supported by the low level of marital satisfaction among modern individuals. Parker (2009) indicated that marital satisfaction has become a significant subject that has been broadly studied over the past 20 years in terms of its relationship with divorce. Rogers and Amato (2000) found that recent marriages show less interaction, more marital conflict, and lower marital quality and satisfaction.

The marital decline perspective has been associated with fundamental changes in recent decades to gender relations and marriage (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013; Chang *et al.*, 2011; Erchull *et al.*, 2010; Cunningham, 2008). Today, men and women have less traditional gender-role attitudes. The increasing convergence of the economic lives of women and men has caused evident changes in gender relations. Currently, women, like men, demonstrate commitment to employment over the life course and make important contributions to the family's economic resources. The conventional division of labor considers most household tasks and child care to be the responsibility of wives while a large portion of paid work is the responsibility of husbands (Erchull *et al.*, 2010). Current increase in married women's education level and income has raised the status of women and it has given greater decision-making power to wives (Gubernskaya, 2010; Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; Amato *et al.*, 2003). In other words, women are more educated and employed compared to the old days and they have less traditional attitude toward family and children (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013; Gubernskaya, 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that better educated and employed people will hold less traditional attitudes toward marriage and children.

Accordingly, today's fundamental changes in gender-role attitudes lead to changes in mate selection criteria preferences. On the other hand, gender-role attitude change raises the roles and expectations of a mate. In this regard, marital choice theory focuses on three categories of mate selection criteria including stimulus (S), value (V), and role (R), but little research has identified roles and expectations as criteria in mate selection. Uncertainty of roles criteria in marriage reduces clarity and misunderstanding in the trajectory of partner relationships. According to Waller and McLanahan (2005), unclear roles in partner selection lead to unclear aspirations of the partners' relationships. Therefore, there is a need to consider changes in gender-role attitudes and identify mate selection criteria among modern individuals in today's society.

In addition, changes in gender-role attitudes have precipitated changes in mate selection criteria. In this line, changes in mate selection criteria lead to changes in role of criteria that influence marital satisfaction. This is strongly supported by the

influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction that has been given little empirical attention by previous studies. Although transformation of gender-role attitudes from traditional (differences) to egalitarian (similarity) caused gender gap to narrow over the lifetime of the marriage (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013; Erchull *et al.*, 2010; Cunningham, 2008) it is not clear whether gender moderates the influence of mate selection criteria on marital life.

Generally, indicators of marital decline perspective in Iran such as low level of marital satisfaction, rising age of marriage, growing rate of divorce, fundamental changes in gender-roles attitudes (from traditional to egalitarian form), and missing the identification of influence of mate selection criteria on marital life, formed the background for this study.

1. 3 Statement of the Problem

A fundamental change of gender-role attitudes among individuals has been the transformation from traditional to egalitarian form (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013; Gubernskaya, 2010). Changes in gender-role attitudes lead to changes in preferences of mate selection criteria and raise roles and expectations for marital life among modern individuals. Role criteria in mate selection as a crucial element in marital choice theory has received less attention in the previously-conducted studies. Therefore, in this regard, there is a need for consideration of changes in gender-role attitudes in mate selection criteria and to identify mate selection criteria among modern individuals.

On the other hand, changes in mate selection criteria lead to changes in role of criteria in marital satisfaction and support the close relationship between mate selection criteria and marital satisfaction. This relationship has received less attention in previously-conducted studies. Therefore, there is a need for identification of the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction among individuals.

Due to many problems in context of Iranian marital relationships, more marital studies on Iranian sample seem to be necessary. Therefore, this study focused on mate selection criteria among Iranian postgraduate students in order to identify the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction.

1. 4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are as follow:

- 1.4.1 To develop a model of mate selection criteria to predict marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- 1.4.2 To identify the effect of gender moderation in the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- 1.4.3 To identify the importance of mate selection criteria in terms of values and roles criteria towards marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- 1.4.4 To develop a hierarchical guideline of mate selection criteria for achieving marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students.

1. 5 Research Questions

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1.5.1 What model can be developed to predict marital satisfaction based on mate selection criteria among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia?
- 1.5.2 How does gender moderate the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia?

- 1.5.3 What is the importance of mate selection criteria in terms of values and roles criteria towards marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia?
- 1.5.4 What hierarchical guideline of mate selection criteria can be developed to achieve marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students?

1. 6 Hypotheses

The proposed hypotheses related to research question 1 and 2 are as follow:

- H1a: Marital satisfaction can be significantly predicted based on mate selection values criteria among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- H1b: Marital satisfaction can be significantly predicted based on mate selection roles criteria among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- H2a: Gender moderates the influence of mate selection values criteria on marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.
- H2b: Gender moderates the influence of mate selection roles criteria on marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia.

1. 7 Significance of the Study

Adjusting to another person who belongs to a different culture and comes from a family with a different cultural and social background is difficult. Moreover, life cycle changes make the situation more complicated. In addition, individuals may bring factors from their familiar environment to marital life that may affect their relationship. Therefore, close attention should be paid to mate selection criteria before marriage. In this regard, this study focused on mate selection criteria towards marital satisfaction. The significance of this study is discussed in the following three subsections of practical, academic and theoretical significance.

1. 7. 1 Practical Significance

In this study, identification of mate selection criteria towards marital satisfaction produces new findings for individuals who are going to get married, counselors, especially premarital counselors, mental health professionals and educators that work with students. The results of this study are informatively valuable for students or other individuals who are planning to marry as well as those who plan to select their mate to gain insight about their marriage criteria and prepare to accept the new conditions based on research and norms. Both males and females focus on potential and useful criteria for marital life while considering each other's criteria to shape a satisfied family in future. Moreover, they can gain better understanding of thought and feeling about each other from early in the marriage.

Counseling centers can facilitate premarital counseling more effectively according to valid criteria of mate selection by using the result of this study. According to the premarital counseling policy, counselors should raise awareness between two people who are considering each other for marriage. This is helpful because these two people are directly involved in their relationship and are going to live with the consequences of this choice. They can make the best decision concerning the appropriateness of their relationship. Counselors can help to foster closer relationships. This can be carried out through group counseling and individual counseling.

Literature showed that positive and small criteria or behaviors have the potential to make a big difference in long-term success of marriage. Additionally, awareness is vital if some criteria are recognized as a wake-up call (Gottman *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, if counselors, educators, and couples become more aware of factors that make marriage successful, people will have a chance to choose certain mate criteria and enhance their marital satisfaction, leading to a reduction in the divorce rate (Nimtz, 2011). The results of this study are helpful to decrease the rate of future divorces that may occur due to uncertain and unclear criteria of mate selection.

1. 7. 2 Academic Significance

The significance of this study in an academic setting is to provide additional literature on this research area to the body of knowledge and present “values criteria” and “roles criteria” in mate selection. In addition, this study provides the mate selection criteria that contribute to marital satisfaction in different priority levels to the body of knowledge.

Moreover, the significance of this study in an academic setting is to provide theoretical framework that supports the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction. It supports the substantial influence of mate selection values and roles criteria towards marital satisfaction. The provided theoretical framework can be a starting point for studies in the context of mate selection criteria and marital satisfaction.

1. 8 Scope of the Study

In order to identify the students’ mate selection criteria, this study is focused on postgraduate students (Master and PhD) in five public universities in Malaysia namely; Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in academic year 2012-2013. Postgraduate students were ideal for the purpose of this study because they are at an age when mate selection is most relevant (Boberg, 2007). As well, postgraduate study has been considered as a main life event which can lead to marital discordance (Al Horany and Hassan, 2011).

In addition, this study is focused on Iranian population because indicators of marital decline perspective in Iran such as delayed marriage (Azadarmaki and Bahar, 2006) and growing rate of divorce (Aghajanian and Thompson, 2013) support low level of marital satisfaction in Iranian setting.

This study focused on students who were married for at least three years. According to Aghajanian and Thompson (2013), National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran reported that about 51% of divorces in Iran happen among couples who were married less than 5 years, and according to Welle (2013), most divorces occur in the first three years of marital life. Therefore, the divorce rate is significantly high among couples with less than three years marriage that were not taken into consideration in this study.

This study was conducted using mixed method. First, preliminary study using structured interview was applied followed by the distribution of questionnaires as part of the main study. The collected data were analyzed by PLS and Rasch measurement.

1. 9 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study considers related theories to provide a conceptual structure based on scholars to show how satisfied marital life is formed. Three theories are integrated in this study including Marital Choice Theory (Stimulus-Value-Role), Social Exchange (SE) Theory, and Gottman Marital Satisfaction Theory. The outline of these theories closely related to the research topic is presented below briefly. More details about the theories are given in Chapter two.

As the theory of Marital Choice focuses on three categories of mate selection criteria including stimulus (S), value (V), and role (R), it can give structure to perceive more clearly the topic of the study. SVR theory refers to mate selection among couples, which holds that in a relatively free choice situation most couples pass through three stages before deciding to marry. Based on this theory, the initial stage of relationship is stimulus (S) in which attraction occurs primarily. A man and woman, for example, may be attracted by each other's charm such as voice or look. In the value stage (V), an individual evaluates the other person in terms of compatible values such as attitudes toward education, religion, or other criteria. They make comparison between their values to know whether they are well matched

enough to keep their relationship going. In the role stage (R), individuals share their needs or expectations. Partners need to be similar in roles or compliant about role differences.

Since marital choice theory focuses on three stages in mate selection, it can be used as a basic approach and conceptual structure to perceive the issue of this study. In fact, it is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that this study plans to study and what is going on with these three stages of SVR.

The criteria of mate selection influence couples' marital relationship. Gottman Marital Satisfaction theory is used to support the influence of mate selection criteria on marital life. Gottman's theory considers marital satisfaction by focusing on spouse behavioral, cognitive, affective, and physiological experiences and the way that spouses perceive and define what has happened in their relationships. These experiences can influence marital satisfaction and are perceived as certain criteria for mate selection.

Gottman theory was used to achieve the research objective that is the prediction of marital satisfaction through mate selection criteria. This study considered factors of marital satisfaction first, and then considers them as a certain criteria for potential mate selection. Applying factors of marital satisfaction as criteria in mate selection could help to predict satisfaction in future marital life. Capability of predicting marital satisfaction helps to be able to maintain functional marriages. In cases where individuals are capable of predicting marital satisfaction, they are able to achieve high level of marital satisfaction (Sanders, 2010).

Social exchange theory focuses on relationship interactions between partners (male and female) based on positive outcome or maximum rewards of their personal relationships. An interaction that elicits approval (reward) from another person is more likely to be repeated than an interaction that elicits disapproval (punishment). If the reward for an interaction exceeds the punishment, then the interaction is likely to occur or continue. These interactions can be behavior, action, feeling, and as well as criteria for marital life. According to social exchange theory, in this study,

interactions are assumed as criteria in mate selection. Spouses value (reward/approve) different criteria in a mate for marital life as they look for different resources in their offspring (Buunk et al., 2002). If spouses approve the criteria, they will repeat in marital life over time leading to marital satisfaction.

According to literature, the differences of mate selection criteria in terms of gender became similar over time. Literature is supported that in spite of spouse's demands for mate selection criteria, the nature of their criteria has transformed from traditional (different criteria) to egalitarian (similar criteria). In fact, gender gap has narrowed over time. Egalitarian gender-role attitude in mate selection and contribution of gender equality towards marital satisfaction support that gender does not play an important role in mate selection criteria and marital satisfaction but the influence of gender on the relationship of mate selection and marital satisfaction is not clear. Accordingly, it is assumed that gender moderates the influence of mate selection criteria on marital satisfaction.

Generally, these three theories were grouped together and shaped the interrelated variables of this study. In order to identify the relationship between variables and connectors within study and to show how they are related to the research topic, the conceptual framework of the study was developed.

1. 10 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The purpose of conceptual framework is to clarify variables and propose relationships among the variables in a study. Figure 1.1 shows the conceptual framework of this study. Variables of mate selection criteria are obtained from Marital Choice Theory. These variables are stimulus, value, and role. Marital satisfaction is obtained from Gottman Marital Satisfaction Theory and gender refers to couples (male and female) obtained from Social Exchange Theory.

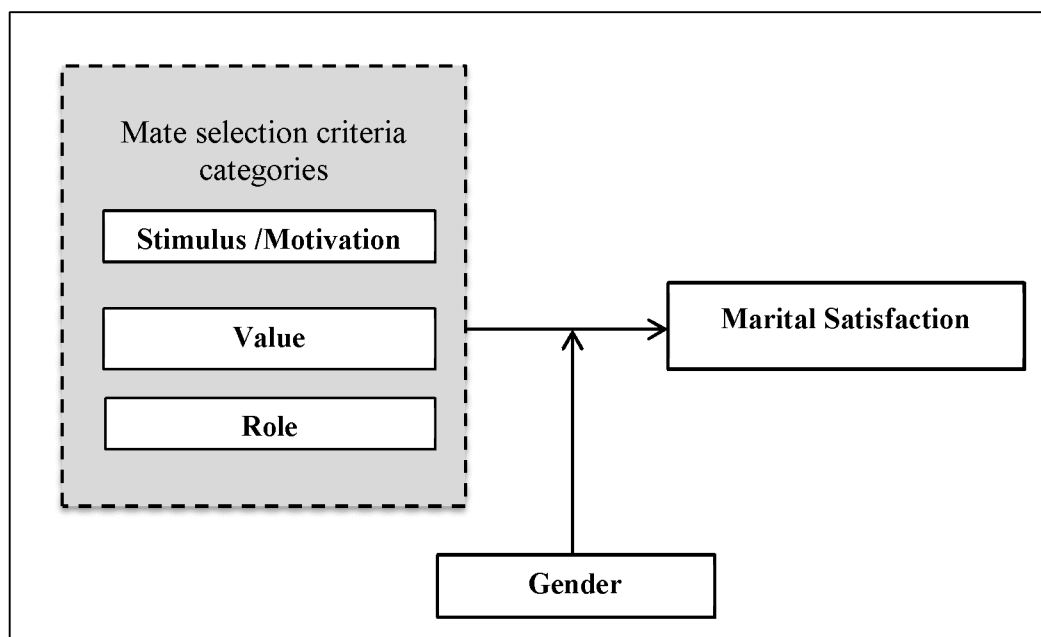


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the study

As discussed earlier, mate selection criteria influence marital satisfaction. Thus, mate selection criteria are considered as independent variables and marital satisfaction as dependent variable. In view of SE theory, spouses exchange their similar criteria of mate selection. Since egalitarian gender-role attitude is highly preferred in marital life, gender is considered as a moderator in the relationship between mate selection criteria and marital satisfaction.

For the purpose of this study, the factors or criteria based on marital choice theory (SVR) are explored from the participants through qualitative and quantitative method. As the stimulus stage is based on both sensate and non-sensate and does not necessitate any kind of meaningful interaction, it is not explored from participants. The stimulus stage includes initial movements which are due to primarily non-interactive cues and not dependent on inter-personal interaction. Although this stage is of crucial importance in the open field relationship, if the other person fails to provide sufficient reinforcement of one's value system at this stage, further contact is not sought. Therefore, the criteria related to the value stage and role stage obtained from the participants and the conceptual framework was extended as follow.

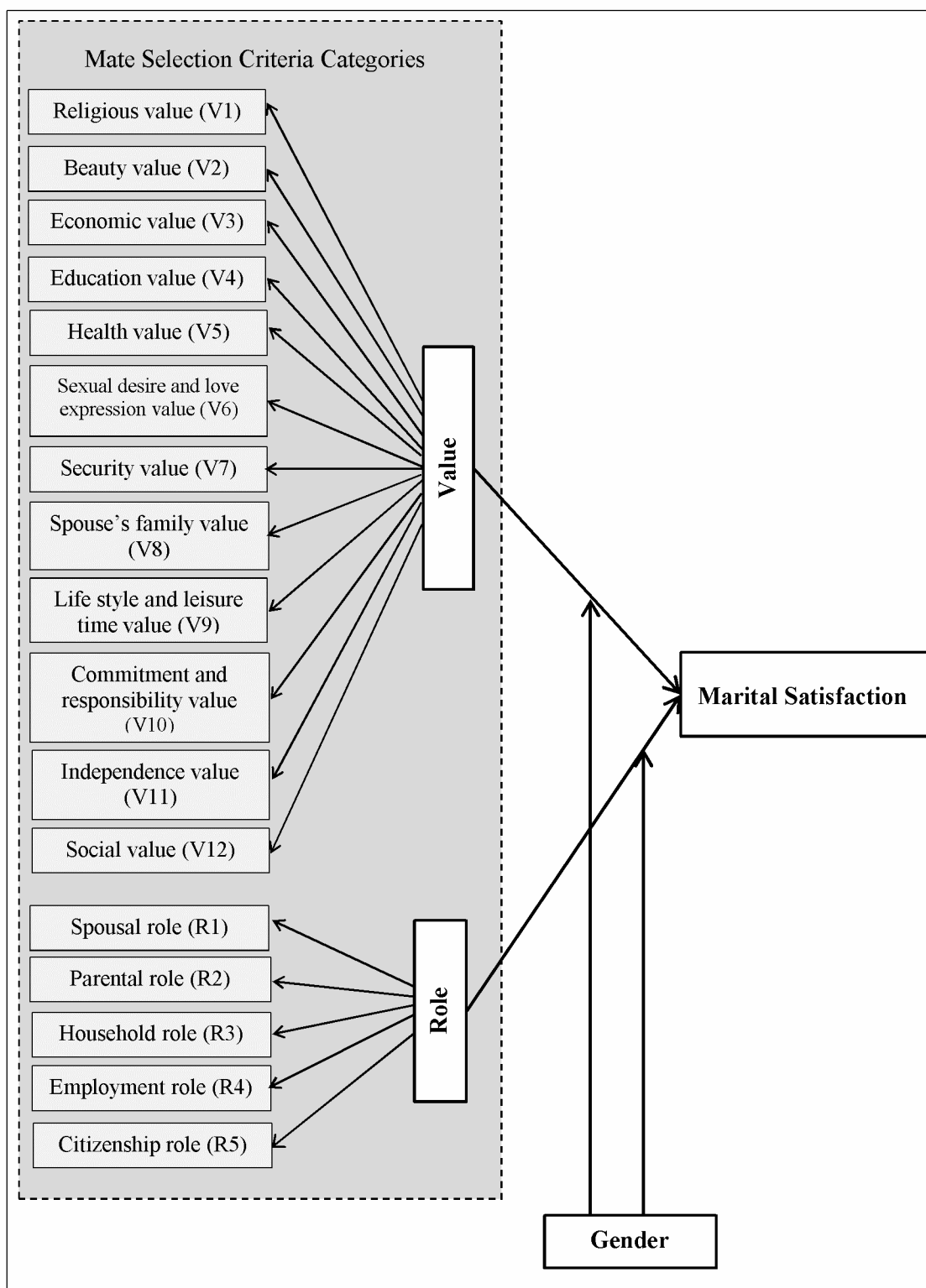


Figure 1.2 Extended conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1.2 shows the extended conceptual framework with the factors in value stage and role stage, which were explored from the participants. The value stage involves values compatibility. The obtained criteria in value stage are Religious, Beauty, Economic, Education, Health, Love and sexual expression,

Safety, Spouse's family, Life style and leisure time, Commitment and responsibility, Independence, and Social. The role stage involves roles criteria. The obtained criteria in the role stage include the role of Spouse, Parent, Household, Employment, and Citizen.

1. 11 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Terms used in this study need to be explained in terms of conceptual and operational definitions. These terms are mate selection criteria, marital satisfaction, and Iranian postgraduate students.

1. 11. 1 Conceptual Definitions

Conceptual definitions refer to the elements of the research process, which tells exactly what the specific concept as a measurable occurrence means.

1.11.1.1 Mate Selection Criteria: refers to considered criteria of opposite sex to mate with. Mate criteria influence who is chosen and who is excluded from mating, thus influencing the direction of sexual selection (Chang *et al.*, 2011). These criteria are significant in fulfilling the physical and mental needs of both mates. Satisfying criteria provide appropriate genes that have the quality to survive and contribute to reproduction.

1.11.1.2 Marital satisfaction: refers to a special case of relationship satisfaction, that requires couple's approval of different aspects of their marital relations (Madanian, 2013). From Kaplan and Maddux (2002) perspective marital satisfaction is the experience of couple in marriage and it should be evaluated only by each partner.

1.11.1.3 Iranian Postgraduate Students: refers to students from Iran who study and learn for academic or professional certificates, or other qualifications, which a bachelor degree is generally required. This is normally considered as a part of higher education (Zeeshan *et al.*, 2013).

1. 11. 2 Operational Definitions

It is important to gain a contextual understanding of operational definitions of the terms that form the foundation of the research. Consequently, this section provides the definitions of the widely used concepts in this study.

1.11.2.1 Mate Selection Criteria: in this study refers to the factors or items obtained from the participants through mixed method (qualitative and quantitative method) according to Marital Choice Theory in the three categories of Stimulus, Value, and Role.

Stimulus: this category refers to external characteristics that do not necessitate any kind of meaning interaction. In this stage, an individual may be attracted to another based on his/her perception of the other's physical or reputational attributes and his/her perception of his own qualities that might be attractive to the other person.

Value: this category refers to the attitudes and beliefs about values such as education, religion etc. The partners compare their attitudes towards education or religion through verbal interaction. They should find similar or accepted value orientations in important areas of life. The values criteria which are obtained from the participants were:

Religious value: refers to religious attitudes, activities and behaviors of mate

Beauty value: refers to external characteristics or physical attractiveness and appearance of mate

Economic value: refers to occupation and financial resources or status of mate

Education value: refers to education, knowledge, and intelligence of mate

Health value: refers to physical and mental health of mate

Sexual desire and love expression value: refer to love transfer, sense of passion, and sexual issues of mate

Security value: refers to mate's desire for providing safe and calm environment and having control over important resources

Spouse's family value: refers to cultural and social integrity of the mate's family

Life style and leisure time value: refer to agreement with mate about time together, entertainment, and relationship with others

Commitment and responsibility value: refers to mate's loyalty, sharing, and trust

Independence value: refers to self-direction with consultation of mate

Social value: refers to mate's social demands in terms of social situation and social contacts

Role: this category refers to desired role between partners in marital life such as spousal role. In this stage, partners become more cognizant of what they desire in a future spouse and they compare these expectations with their partner expectations.

They also become aware of the impact that their behavior has on the partner and whether he/she considers these behaviors to be appropriate. The roles criteria obtained from the participants in this study were:

Spousal role: refers to mutual roles of mates as husband and wife in terms of paying attention to each other needs and, respect each other

Parental role: refers to roles of mates as father and mother for child's education, duties and needs

Household role: refers to routine tasks at home, which require sharing, cooperation, and equal handling by mates

Employment role: refers to roles of mates regarding their work outside home in order to balance between work and marital life

Citizenship role: refers to mate's position in society and obeying social law and rules and respect privacy of others in a society

1.11.2.2 Marital satisfaction: in this study refers to the factors or items which were obtained from the participants through quantitative method by using an Enrich Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale. EMS scale provides a single item of 10 dimensions of marital satisfaction inventory, including:

Personality: perception of a mate towards her or his partner regarding the behavioral issues and the satisfaction level felt on those issues

Communication: attitudes and feelings of an individual towards communication in her or his partner relationship

Conflict resolution: perception of the mate towards the resolution and existence of conflicts in the relationship

Financial concerns: concerns and attitudes regarding the way economic issues are managed in the relationship

Leisure activities: preferences of mates for spending free time with her/his partner

Sexual relationship: feelings of mates concerning affection and the sexual relationship

Children and parenting: feelings and attitudes of mates concerning having and raising children

Family and friends: attitudes of mates concerning relationships with friends, relatives, and in laws

Equalitarian roles: attitudes and feelings of mates in relation to different marital and family roles

Religious orientation: religious practice and beliefs of mates within a marital relationship

1.11.2.3 Iranian postgraduate students: in this study this term includes the Iranian students who registered in Master or PhD level in five public universities in Malaysia (UM, UKM, UPM, UTM and USM) for the purpose of tertiary education in academic years 2012-2013.

1. 12 Limitation of the Study

There were some limitations in the present study. First, the constructed items were extracted from a purposive sample of Iranian students who were chosen from five public universities in Malaysia. It is not clear whether the participants fully

reflect all mate selection criteria of Iranian postgraduate students. Therefore, the study should have involved more participants to fully extract criteria of mate selection among Iranian students.

Second, due to the limitation of time, this study was conducted among Iranian students only. Therefore, the findings of study could not be generalized to other international students. Thus, more studies should be conducted with more time to carry out the research among other international students.

1. 13 Summary

This chapter presented a brief explanation of the study. The objectives of this research were to develop a model of mate selection criteria towards marital satisfaction among Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysia, to identify the role of gender in the model as a moderator, to identify the importance of mate selection criteria (values and roles) towards marital satisfaction, and finally to develop a guideline of mate selection criteria for achieving marital satisfaction. The sample was selected from Iranian postgraduate students in Malaysian universities. The significance of this research is for individuals who are at the age of marriage; marriage counselors, educators, and counselors, counseling centers as well as for the body of knowledge. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study also were discussed. The discussion came to the conclusion that a combination of Marital Choice Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Gottman Marital Satisfaction Theory will support this study. The chapter concluded with a discussion of conceptual and operational definitions and limitations of the study.

Generally, in Iranian culture, less traditional roles and egalitarian gender-role attitudes for husband and wife in marital life benefit both men and women and result in mutual relationship and finally marital satisfaction is the output. In fact, equal relationship and egalitarian values and roles between spouse's means that spouses are more likely in Iranian marital life to experience marital satisfaction and develop intimacy and commitment.

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