

**SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG SINGLE
EMERGING ADULTS: THE ROLES OF
DEMOGRAPHICS, SATISFACTION WITH
FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND SINGLEHOOD**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2024

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FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND SINGLEHOOD**

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Social Science**

March 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Intan Hashimah, for her unwavering support and guidance during my master's journey. Her expertise and patience have been priceless to me and have been critical to the accomplishment of this thesis. I am truly indebted to her for the countless hours of mentorship and assistance she has provided. I also want to acknowledge the indispensable contributions of my co-supervisor, Dr. Farhana, as well as all of the lecturers and colleagues from the School of Social Sciences. Their insightful comments and recommendations were helpful in shaping my research.

I am eternally grateful to my family for their unrelenting love and support throughout this journey. In particular, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to my father, who has continuously provided support, even during the moments when I contemplated giving up. It is through my parents' constant encouragement and motivation that I have been able to successfully complete this journey. Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Mr. Ng for his unending love and support, as he has always been there for me through the highs and lows.

Finally, I want to sincerely thank all of my friends who have shown continuous support during this entire endeavour. Without your kindness and love, this journey would not have been possible. I hope I made each and every one of you proud.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SWB	Subjective well-being
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**KESEJAHTERAAN SUBJEKTIF DALAM KALANGAN BUJANG
AWAL DEWASA: PERANAN DEMOGRAFI, KEPUASAN DENGAN
KELUARGA, RAKAN DAN STATUS BUJANG**

ABSTRAK

Walaupun banyak kajian telah dijalankan mengenai kesejahteraan subjektif (SWB), pengalaman dan kesejahteraan golongan dewasa muda yang bujang masih belum mendapat perhatian yang mencukupi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi jurang tersebut dengan meneliti faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kesejahteraan subjektif dalam kalangan populasi ini, terutamanya dalam konteks umur perkahwinan yang tertangguh di Malaysia. Sampel terdiri daripada 199 dewasa muda yang bujang yang telah dipilih menggunakan kaedah persampelan bola salji. Peserta menjawab survei dalam talian yang mengandungi ukuran-ukuran kepuasan terhadap keluarga, rakan-rakan, status bujang, dan kesejahteraan subjektif. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti golongan dewasa muda yang bujang melaporkan tahap kepuasan hidup yang tinggi, sementara tahap perasaan negatif dan positif adalah agak rendah. Terdapat perbezaan gender yang dapat dilihat, dengan peserta lelaki mencatatkan skor yang lebih tinggi sedikit daripada wanita dari segi perasaan positif. Walau bagaimanapun, status pekerjaan tidak memberikan kesan yang signifikan terhadap tiga komponen kesejahteraan subjektif. Selain itu, kajian ini juga mengenal pasti korelasi yang signifikan antara kepuasan terhadap kehidupan keluarga dengan semua komponen kesejahteraan subjektif, kecuali perasaan negatif. Begitu juga, kepuasan terhadap rakan-rakan juga menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan dengan semua komponen kesejahteraan subjektif. Turut diperhatikan bahawa kepuasan terhadap kebujangan telah didapati mempengaruhi hubungan antara kepuasan terhadap keluarga dan

kepuasan hidup. Dapatan ini mencabar stereotaip dan stigma yang wujud dengan menekankan kesejahteraan subjektif yang tinggi yang dialami oleh golongan dewasa muda yang bujang. Tambahan pula, hubungan positif antara kepuasan terhadap keluarga, rakan-rakan, dan kesejahteraan subjektif (kepuasan hidup dan perasaan positif) menunjukkan kepentingan hubungan sosial bagi kesejahteraan individu-individu ini. Peranan kepuasan terhadap kebujangan sebagai moderator juga menekankan kepentingan penerimaan diri dan keselesaan dalam menangani cabaran menjadi individu bujang. Sebagai kesimpulannya, kajian ini memberikan maklumat yang berharga mengenai kesejahteraan subjektif dalam kalangan dewasa muda yang bujang dan memberikan implikasi kepada pembuat dasar dan penyelidik yang ingin meningkatkan kesejahteraan populasi ini.

**SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG SINGLE EMERGING ADULTS:
THE ROLES OF DEMOGRAPHICS, SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY,
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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research on subjective well-being (SWB), the experience and well-being of single emerging adults have received limited attention. This study addresses this gap by investigating the factors contributing to SWB in this population, particularly in the context of a delayed age of marriage in Malaysia. A sample of 199 single emerging adults was recruited using a virtual snowball sampling technique. Participants completed an online survey comprising measures of satisfaction with family, friends, singlehood, and SWB. The findings revealed that the majority of single emerging adults reported high levels of life satisfaction, while reported relatively low levels of negative affect and positive affect. Gender differences was observed, with males scoring slightly higher than females in positive affect. However, employment status had no significant effect on the three components of SWB. Additionally, the study identified significant correlations between satisfaction with family life and all SWB components, except negative affect. Similarly, satisfaction with friends demonstrated significant associations with all SWB components. Notably, satisfaction with singlehood was found to moderate the relationship between satisfaction with family and life satisfaction. These findings challenge prevalent stereotypes and stigmas by highlighting the relatively high SWB experienced by single emerging adults. Furthermore, the positive relationship between satisfaction with family, friends, and SWB (life satisfaction and positive affect) highlights the significance of social connections for the well-being of these individuals. The moderating role of satisfaction

with singlehood emphasizes the significance of self-acceptance and contentment in navigating singlehood challenges. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the SWB of single emerging adults and offers implications for policymakers and researchers seeking to promote the well-being of this population.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Subjective well-being (SWB) has piqued the interest of behavioural scientists working in the field of positive psychology over the last decade (Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 1999; Helliwell et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It captivates how people evaluate their lives as a whole, which includes life satisfaction, the absence of negative affect, and an abundance of positive affect (Diener, 1984). Earlier studies made enormous strides in an attempt to understand elements that contribute to SWB, including health (Okun et al., 1984), job satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2010), educational attainment (Bücker et al., 2018), and personalities (Anglim et al., 2020). In the same vein, maintaining healthy relationship ties has been repeatedly proclaimed as one of the essential human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Particularly during emerging adulthood, being involved in a romantic relationship marks a significant developmental effort that is anticipated to enhance one's SWB (Dush & Amato, 2005; Furman & Collibee, 2014). Nonetheless, there are individuals who remain single.

Who are the single individuals? There are two aspects to scrutinize one's singlehood, namely, legal and social aspects. From a legal aspect, "single" merely describes individuals who are not committed in a legal marriage. Having a dual legal system in Malaysia, it divides legislation into civil law and Syariah (Islamic) law, in which the former is applicable to non-Muslims whereas the latter is applicable to Muslims. In regards to non-Muslims, they can only marry as early as they turn 18 as male and 16 as female, provided with parental or guardian consent. On the other hand, a Muslim girl who is under the age of 16 will be legally allowed to enter into a marriage

provided with consent from the syariah court, which is expected to administer each case respectively. Nonetheless, speaking of singlehood in a social aspect, “single” characterizes the status of those who are not committed in a thoughtful relationship at the present time (DePaulo & Morris, 2011). In the current study, both aspects were adopted to define single emerging adults.

Studies pointed out that on average, single emerging adults tend to experience greater loneliness and lower satisfaction with life than their partnered counterparts (Beckmeyer & Cromwell, 2019; Hudson et al., 2020), which may be owing to social support and companionship that one benefits from romantic partner (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015). On the contrary, being single does not necessarily jeopardize one’s SWB. In case that securing a romantic relationship is not made a primary purpose in life, feelings of failure are less likely to be invoked (Reynolds et al., 2007). To enumerate, remaining single at one’s own will has been found to be associated with a wide-range of positive outcomes across samples of single women, such as gaining autonomy (Meler, 2016), opportunity of self-improvement (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009), as well as achieving financial independence (Baumbusch, 2004). Down the line, single individuals can expect to be more satisfied with their lives and have a better physical and mental health with improved locus of internal control (Hostetler, 2009).

In light of these contradictory findings, it remains challenging to conclude whether the sole status of being single exerts a positive or negative influence on an individual’s SWB. Various factors such as personal values, societal norms, and individual circumstances adds an additional layer of complexity to this ongoing discourse, underscoring the need to unravel the true singlehood experiences among

this population. Besides, research into singles' SWB may be able to reinforce the idea that SWB is not solely determined by one's relationship status and challenge societal stereotypes surrounding singlehood. By dispelling myths and challenging preconceptions, it contributes to a more open-minded society that respects diverse life choices. Inopportunately, to date, information on single emerging adults' SWB remains scarce because most studies have either focused on other groups of population, such as single women (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2007); or have utilized a nationwide data set that comprised of several age groups (Helliwell et al., 2018; Jebb et al., 2020). At this instant, the specificity of emerging adults' singlehood experience remains vague and unanswered. It should also be noted that in today's society, many emerging adults remain single of their own will as being single at their age is considered normative (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Understanding the SWB of single emerging adults is therefore important, as it helps to promote social inclusivity by recognizing and validating diverse lifestyles.

Previous studies attempted to investigate the determinants of SWB in emerging adults, including important socio-demographic factors such as gender, with females reporting higher levels of SWB than males (Akba & Ümmet, 2017). Nonetheless, mixed results have been found, with some researchers claiming that males had higher SWB (Yurcu & Atay, 2015), while other studies found no gender difference (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018). In the long run, employment has been reported as a significant predictor of individuals' SWB, and that unemployment is a contributing factor to the high rate of singlehood in Greek communities (Apostolou et al., 2019). Given that emerging adults are prone to undergo employment insecurity (Russell et al., 2019), employment is a critical pivotal point in an individual's ability to search for a potential partner (Apostolou et al., 2019). These studies have primarily focused on emerging

adults in general, and the current study aimed to understand how gender and employment differences may play a role in SWB, particularly among single emerging adults.

Moving forward, many emerging adults have recognized the value of family life and friendship in the pursuit of a healthy level of SWB (Licy, 2015; Park et al., 2021). To enumerate, an intimate family relationship can offer support, companionship, and reassurance (Brannan et al., 2013; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Previous research has sought to understand how perceived family support differs between partnered and single emerging adults (Adamczyk, 2015). Nonetheless, little research has been conducted to narrow down the scope of study and to determine how satisfaction with one's family life would contribute to the SWB of single emerging adults. Meanwhile, research has discovered that single individuals can benefit from staying connected with others in order to combat loneliness (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2015). Taking these studies together, the current study sought to understand how satisfaction with family and friends would play a role in the SWB of single emerging adults, especially in the Malaysian context.

Despite staying single remains as a personal decision, a substantial body of literature emphasized the benefits of being committed in a romantic relationship, such as increased life quality, life satisfaction, and health in partnered individuals (Barr et al., 2013; Dush & Amato, 2005; Rosen et al., 2016). However, as Lehmann et al. (2015) pointed out, individuals in the same relationship status do not necessarily have comparable levels of SWB; rather, how satisfied an individual is with his or her relationship status is the one determining SWB at greater prominence. Hence, satisfaction with singlehood has been incorporated as a moderator in the current study

to fill a gap in the literature and provide a novel perspective on SWB among single emerging adults in Malaysia.

1.2 Problem Statement

The population of single emerging adults has grown incrementally over time. Significantly, they have been confronted with a series of challenges and special attention needs to be given to protecting their SWB.

1.2.1 Occurrence of Singlehood in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there has been a decline in the number of marriages from year 2018 to 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020c). As depicted in Table 1.1, the difference across two-year timeframe has been marked 1.2 percent of declination. In other words, there exists an increase in the time span of singlehood in Malaysia. Additionally, based on Figure 1.1, the median age of brides has increased from 26 years old (2018) to 27 years old (2019). Although the median age of grooms has remained constant, these statistics collectively indicate a noteworthy emerging trend: Malaysians are progressively gravitating towards a delayed age of marriage. This shift towards delayed marriage prompts an examination of the issues associated with singlehood in Malaysia.

Table 1.1

Number of Marriages in Malaysia Year 2018 and 2019

Year	Number of Marriages		
	Malaysia	Muslim	Non-Muslim
2018	206,352	150,098	56,254
2019	203,821	147,847	55,974

Figure 1.1

Median Age at Marriage by Sex in Year 2018 and 2019



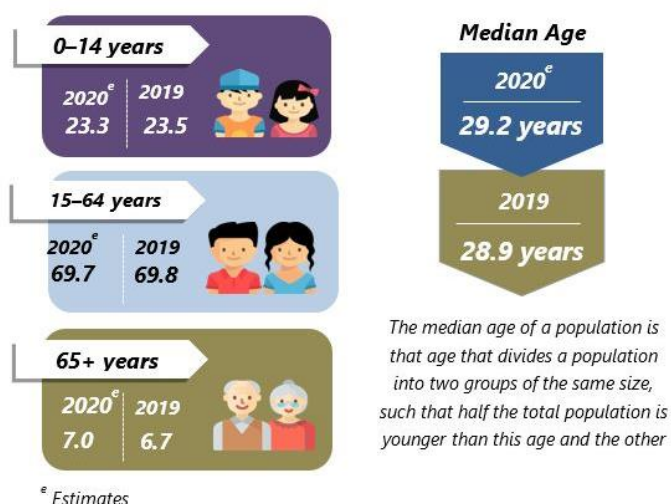
Furthermore, the overall population in Malaysia is categorized into three different groups, namely the young age (0 – 14 years), the working age (15 – 64 years), as well as the old age (65 years and above). As illustrated in Figure 1.2, from year 2019 to year 2020, there has been a shrinkage in the percentage of population within both young age and working age groups, while the old age group has faced an upsurge of 0.3 per cent. Concerning the shrinkage that occurs within the group of working age, it is caused by the reduction in the non-citizens population that is chiefly made up of foreign labors (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the government has not yet included the idea of “emerging adults” as a separate demographic group while conducting Census studies across the country. Instead, the term “young adults” has been employed to denote individuals aged between 15 and 30 years, constituting 9.1 million people or 27.8 per cent of the total population in the country (Awang, 2023). Although drawing definitive conclusions about the characteristics of Malaysian emerging adults based on the provided statistics present challenges, it is reasonable to

assert that this demographic comprises a quarter of the nationwide population, rendering them a significant asset to the country.

Figure 1.2

Percentage of Malaysia Population by Age Group and Median Age in Year 2019 and 2020



Additionally, it is worth noting that the age group with the greatest number of marriages falls within the 25 to 29 years range. The delayed age of marriage addressed in earlier paragraphs shows that while a substantial portion of emerging adults choose to enter into marriage, there is also a significant segment of this population who opt to remain single. The consequences of increased singlehood are wide-ranging and can significantly impact the country in the long run. For instance, there may be a reduction in the formation of households, a decrease in fertility rates, and a potential decline in overall population growth. As such, it is important to capture and understand the experiences of Malaysian emerging adults aged 18 to 29 years who remain single, as they represent a notable subgroup within the broader context of emerging adulthood in the country.

1.2.2 Social Stigma and Pressure

As reported by DePaulo and Morris (2006), single individuals are frequently described as childish, filled with uncertainties, selfish, miserable, lonely, and unattractive. Even worse, single and partnered individuals are viewed poles apart in the eyes of society. For instance, married individuals have been labelled as considerate, helpful, and benevolent (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; DePaulo & Morris, 2011). Significantly, the societal perception that emerging adults should actively engage in mating often leads to the disparagement of those who are single (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). Consequently, single individuals frequently grapple with feelings of exclusion or being left behind, particularly when peers progress through stages of establishing their own families and committed relationships (Barbeiri, 2016). This experience of singlehood is further underscored by research findings suggesting that single individuals perceive higher levels of discrimination compared to individuals who are homosexual, obese, or black (Morris, 2005). Moreover, the workplace dynamics contribute to the challenges faced by single individuals, as evidenced by preferential treatment that married counterparts often receive in terms of specific benefits (Farrell, 2018).

In Asian countries, marriage ritual epitomizes status and honor of the family, which is considered greater than the welfare of the married couples (Li et al., 2010; To, 2015). Besides, parent-arranged marriage still persists across various countries, notably in the Malay-Muslim societies of Southeast Asia (Jones & Yeung, 2014). In the same vein, marriage exemplifies one's accomplishments in social life and remaining single insinuates individuals having acute mental illness (To, 2015; Jones, 2010). In contrast to Western societies, singlehood and non-marriage have increasingly gained acceptance, which may aid in minimising the negative

consequences of staying single (Sassler & Lichter, 2020). As a consequence, in Asian society, being single could trigger a lot of immense emotional distress under a range of social stigma and discrimination.

In China, heightened concerns regarding low fertility rates, particularly in urban centres, have prompted the Chinese Government to direct attention towards the increasing prevalence of singlehood. These concerns, driven by anxieties about the long-term adequacy of social support systems, have given rise to public discussions surrounding initiatives perceived as discriminatory towards single individuals, such as the proposal to tax childless individuals to contribute to a “reproductive fund” and the implementation of preferential tax, education, and housing policies for couples with children (Zuo, 2018). Likewise, an illuminating perspective on the challenges faced by single females is revealed through in-depth interviews with three Malaysian, exposing the awareness among these females of their stigmatized status within Malaysian society (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). In their study, female single individuals within Malay society may be confronted with stigmatization, being labelled as ‘*andartu*’ or ‘*old virgin*’, leading to cynical remarks and suspicion of unlawful sexual activity merely due to the absence of a husband. This finding aligns with the assertion made by Himawan et al. (2018), that in societies where singlehood stigma prevails, individuals are confronted with significant tension as they navigate between individual choices and familial expectations.

Interestingly, as much as these single females recognized the importance of marriage (Azmawati et al., 2015), some of them interpreted singlehood as a choice of lifestyle. Consequently, it had never been a problem for these individuals to remain single in spite of their stigmatized status (Azmawati, 2011). Simply put, while societal views may cast individuals unfavourably due to their single status, a positive

interpretation of their own singlehood appears at a greater prominence in depicting their experiences in living as singles. In line with this, Heng et al.'s (2023) finding supports that Malaysian emerging adults with belief that romantic relationships are not the sole means of happiness, tend to view staying single positively. However, it is important to note that the aforementioned studies (Azmawati, 2011; Azmawati et al., 2015; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009) exclusively focused on a sample of Malaysian single females aged 24 and above, without confining their sample to a specific age group.

On the other hand, researchers provided evidence on the similar experience of singlehood among males. For example, single males are inclined to receive disrespectful treatment, in a way that they are just not as wise and sincere as their married counterparts (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Comparatively, they also reported experiences of being intimidated or harassed (Byrne & Carr, 2005). In the study of Tan et al. (2021), it was discovered that females scored higher on attitudes toward singlehood than their male counterparts. However, their study did not address the causes or effects of gender differences in this regard.

Intriguingly, societal stigma and discrimination could be shunned by single women who are financially independent, in turn, financial independence promotes their self-identity (Azmawati, 2011). Indeed, successful career represents a key component in helping single women to build their self-identity as decent individuals (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). Hence, it is not surprising that reports have demonstrated an increased rate of female labor force participation in Malaysia. As shown in Table 1.2, there has been an upsurge of female labor force participation rate (LFPR) within a one-year timeframe, rising from 55.3 percentage (Q2/2018) to 55.8 percentage (Q2/2019). In the same vein, having a positive attitude towards financial independence may motivate females to develop their career.

Table 1.2

Main Indicator of Labour Force by Sex in Second Quarter (Q2) 2018, First Quarter (Q1) 2019, & Second Quarter (Q2) 2019

Main Indicator	Q2/2018		Q1/2019		Q2/2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour Force ('000)	9333.0	5945.3	9469.5	6057.3	9492.5	6106.3
Employed ('000)	9035.6	5731.6	9149.6	5860.5	9175.5	5902.7
Labour Force Participation Rate	80.5	55.3	80.9	55.7	80.8	55.8

Nevertheless, looking into the latest report, there has been a shrinkage in LFPR across both sexes. Based on Table 1.3, the percentage of LFPR for females has dropped from 56.1 (Q4/2019) to 55.3 (Q4/2020). Likewise, males' LFPR has also decreased from 81.1 (Q4/2019) to 80.7 (Q4/2020). It is vital to remember that the year 2020 has been a difficult time for many people, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic together with lockdowns that thwarted economic activities (Surendran, 2021). As a result, a great deal of businesses had been shut down and many workers had been retrenched. Nevertheless, past findings have demonstrated the importance of securing a job as achieving financial independence is meaningful for single females (Apostolou et al., 2019; Azmawati, 2011).

However, females' LFPR across developed countries commonly surpass 60 per cent in general (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). Meanwhile, yielding a percentage of 55.3 in Malaysia, it denotes a room of improvement for the government to promote female participation in the labor force.

Table 1.3

Main Indicator of Labour Force by Sex in Fourth Quarter (Q4) 2019, Third Quarter (Q3) 2020, & Fourth Quarter (Q4) 2020

Main Indicator	Q4/2019		Q3/2020		Q4/2020	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour Force ('000)	9589.2	6177.5	9689.3	6151.3	9738.4	6183.9
Employed ('000)	9290.8	5963.7	9229.8	5865.8	9273.1	5888.6
Labour Force Participation Rate	81.1	56.1	80.5	55.3	80.7	55.3

All things considered, living in a society where marriage is culturally universal, it is foreseeable that single individuals will be confronted with a series of social stigma and pressure. For instance, females may be called '*old virgin*' as discussed in earlier paragraphs (Himawan et al., 2018). As stated by scholars, the challenges faced by single individuals extend beyond personal well-being, encompassing negative treatment and discrimination tied to their single status (Girme et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some individuals maintain positive views of singlehood and focus on building up their careers along the path of singlehood. Therefore, it is meaningful to understand if satisfaction with singlehood, gender, and employment status would be impactful on individuals' SWB, particularly among single emerging adults.

1.2.3 Scarcity of Information on Single Emerging Adult Population

Throughout recent decades, researchers strived to examine SWB in depth, which results in a proliferation of scientific literature (Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 1999; Helliwell et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Romantic relationship engagement, specifically during the period of emerging adulthood, had been revealed as a significant key factor that contributes to one's SWB (Dush & Amato, 2005; Furman

& Collibee, 2014). Although it has been considered a norm for emerging adults to initiate non-marital romantic relationships (Côté, 1997; Michael et al., 1995; Nelson & Barry, 2005), some of them choose to stay single (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Looking into the recent literature that discussed about SWB of partnered emerging adults (Demir et al., 2019; Love & Holder, 2016; Ratelle et al., 2013), they had not taken singlehood into account.

A considerable amount of studies demonstrated the downsides of staying single, one of the most prominent effects is deteriorating level of SWB (Helliwell et al., 2018; Jebb et al., 2020). Apart from being discriminated by the society (Azmawati, 2011; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009), single individuals are also susceptible to lower emotional well-being (Adamczyk, 2016). To enumerate, the longer a person has remained in single status, the greater level of romantic loneliness will be experienced (Adamczyk, 2016). On top of that, findings suggest that single individuals are vulnerable to depression compared to their married counterparts (Lamb et al., 2003; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977). Taken these findings together, single individuals are at greater risk of facing mental health issues in the long run. Notwithstanding the disadvantages of single status, information on how individuals could maintain their SWB at a healthy level appears to be essential.

Single individuals had been meticulously investigated in previous studies, such as across different age groups, such as young adults (Adamczyk, 2015), middle-age adults (Siregar, 2018), and elderly (Jingmark et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2010). Furthermore, single individuals of different populations, such as gay men (Hostetler, 2012), undergraduate students (Adamczyk, 2016), never married adults (Himawan et al., 2018; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009), as well as single mothers (Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2013), had also been studied by researchers. Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of

information on single emerging adults, a unique group that particularly consists of both university students and employees. While emerging adults' SWB can be boosted through initiating non-marital romantic relationship (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Shulman & Connolly, 2013), little is known about the SWB of those who remain single.

Within the Malaysian context, several researchers attempted to understand the experience of singlehood (Alwi & Lourdunathan, 2020; Azmawati, 2011; Azmawati et al., 2015; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2009). Nonetheless, their studies focused on delving into the experiences of single females. For instance, some of the single females will make their single status as something meaningful, such as living freely, happily, and independently (Alwi & Lourdunathan, 2020). However, it is also important to take into account that these studies utilized the method of in-depth interview in understanding the experiences of singlehood. With highly personalized responses and such limited number of participants that were involved in a study, it is unlikely that researchers are able to make inferences based on their findings. Additionally, to the best of my knowledge, no research has explicitly examined the experiences of singlehood in regards to their subjective well-being among Malaysian emerging adults.

Given these points, it is important that a new study is carried out utilizing a different method to provide a more thorough view of singlehood among the Malaysian emerging adults.

1.2.4 Gender and Employment Differences on SWB

As discussed in earlier paragraphs, both single males and females face a number of social stigmas. Despite these challenges, different perspectives regarding the role of gender in one's SWB have emerged. For example, empirical study indicates that a decline in SWB may be evident among single females, particularly those who

perceive difficulties in forming meaningful relationships (Reynolds et al., 2007). Moreover, research conducted among undergraduate populations in Istanbul suggests that females exhibit higher levels of SWB compared to males (Akbağ & Ümmet, 2017). Globally, data encompassing 156 countries suggests that employed females generally report greater life satisfaction than their male counterparts, facing heightened vulnerability to negative emotions (Tay et al., 2014). Males, on the other hand, tend to express higher levels of life satisfaction across various domains during emerging adulthood (Yaremtchuk, 2014). Contrary to these findings, a comprehensive meta-analysis spanning 44 years of well-being research across 106 nations shows that gender differences had no significant effect on individuals' life satisfaction at an aggregate level (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018). Likewise, similar conclusions have been drawn by Amati et al. (2018) in their examination of Italian individuals aged 18 to 64. In summary, the consensus regarding the impact of gender on SWB remains inconclusive, with some findings indicating significant differences while others suggest minimal effect. Nonetheless, these diverse findings underscore the complexity and uniqueness of each individual's experience in SWB.

As a result, future investigations could explore potential correlations between the observed differences in SWB and discriminatory practices evident in other domains that disproportionately impact specific demographic groups. Notably, scholars have highlighted the persistently negative portrayal of single females, whose femininity and desirability are often subjected to scrutiny solely on account of their unmarried status or its association (Pickens & Braun, 2018). This societal perception may contribute to disparities in SWB experienced by single females compared to their male counterparts. On top of that, explained by Batz-Barbarich et al. (2018), unequal access to resources such as education and employment among males and females may

induce a sense of incapability, particularly among females, leading to differences in SWB. Therefore, the consideration of intersectionality of gender with other social identities and structural factors could potentially provide deeper insights into the complex picture of individuals' SWB outcomes.

Following that, employment is a significant aspect of most people's lives and can have a significant impact on their well-being. Unemployment has potentially devastating consequences such as loss of income, civil reputation, and diminished self-esteem, along with difficulties accessing social connections (Hahn et al., 2015). Emerging adults, in particular, are vulnerable to employment insecurity (Russell et al., 2019). Apostolou and his colleagues (2019) discovered that being unemployed represents part of the reason underneath the high rate of singlehood in Greek communities. In other words, failure to obtain or secure a job would result in individuals being fired from the dating market for being unable to provide resources in a relationship (Apostolou et al., 2019; Buss, 2017). While romantic relationship engagement has been seen as a significant development effort during emerging adulthood (Dush & Amato, 2005), it is critical to determine whether successful or unsuccessful employment will have an impact on the SWB of single emerging adults.

To provide more comprehensive data, it would be worthwhile to investigate the role of gender and employment in the SWB of single emerging adults, particularly in the Malaysian context.

1.2.5 Potential Protective Effects of Family and Friends on SWB

Research has consistently shown that family and friends are important to singles' SWB. For instance, single individuals often maintain deeper bonds with family and friends compared to their married or previously married counterparts (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2015). In fact, in the absence of romantic partners, family and

friends serve as the primary source of mental and emotional support for these single individuals (Crocetti et al., 2012; Nanik et al., 2018). Moreover, the presence of highly supportive family members and friends is crucial for fostering self-validation among single individuals. For example, individuals are able to validate their singlehood as a satisfactory lifestyle through receiving reassurance and support from friends (Cockrum & White, 1985). Therefore, it is not unsurprising that single individuals prioritize their relationships with family as one of their top priorities, while ranking dating and romance as one of their lowest priorities (Park & MacDonald, 2023).

On the other hand, single individuals may encounter challenges in feeling supported by close others due to societal pressures exerted by family and friends. Research conducted by Girme and colleagues (2022) suggests that lower perceptions of social support are associated with increased experiences of negative treatment and discrimination among single individuals. This suggests that the perception of social support availability among singles may stem from direct experiences of discrimination from individuals whom they may turn to for support and comfort. For example, interactions with family members may involve both emotional support and pressure to enter into a romantic relationship. Notably, the issue of family pressure is particularly salient in Asian cultures, where singlehood conflicts with prevailing family and marriage ideals in highly interdependent contexts (Himawan et al., 2018). The pressure to marry, often exerted by family members, is prevalent in societies where singlehood stigma persists. Moreover, single individuals may experience social pressure from various sources, including parents, family, and friends, exacerbating their fear of remaining single (Sprecher & Felmlee, 2021).

Thus, the significance of family and friends to one's SWB in singlehood cannot be overstated. As emerging adults navigate the complexities towards adulthood,

maintaining positive relationships with family members and friends becomes paramount for their SWB. These relationships serve as crucial sources of support and validation for single individuals, shaping their perceptions of self-worth and satisfaction with their lifestyle choices. Moreover, family and friends play a pivotal role for single emerging adults who opt to remain unmarried, especially as their peers embark on relationships. Hence, it is meaningful to examine their satisfaction with family and friends, and its relation to their SWB in the experience of their singlehood.

1.3 Research Objectives

General: The current study aims to understand single emerging adults' experience of singlehood in the Malaysian context.

Specific:

1. To identify the levels of three components of SWB (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect) among single emerging adults.
2. To determine if there is any difference on the levels of three components of SWB across gender and employment status among single emerging adults.
 - 2.1 To determine if there is any difference on the levels of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect across male and female.
 - 2.2 To determine if there is any difference on the levels of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect across different employment status.
3. To determine if satisfaction with family and satisfaction with friends, correlate with the three components of SWB among single emerging adults.
 - 3.1 To determine if satisfaction with family correlates with life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, respectively.

- 3.2 To determine if satisfaction with friends correlates with life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, respectively.
- 4. To examine if satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationships between satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, and the three components of SWB among single emerging adults.
 - 4.1 To examine if satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationships between satisfaction with family to life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, respectively.
 - 4.2 To examine if satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationships between satisfaction with friends to life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, respectively.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1. What are the levels of three components of SWB (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect) among single emerging adults?
- 2. Is there any difference on the levels of three components of SWB across gender and employment status among single emerging adults?
- 3. Does satisfaction with family and satisfaction with friends, correlate with three components of SWB among single emerging adults?
- 4. Does satisfaction with singlehood moderate the relationships between satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, and the three components of SWB among single emerging adults?

1.5 Significance of the Study

As highlighted in the problem statement, there is a growing number of emerging adults who chose to remain single. Hence, more research is needed to gain a

better understanding of this population group. First, the current study may furnish a more thorough understanding of the occurrence of singlehood, particularly in a collectivist country where marriage is seen as both necessary and a sign of success in life. Rather than conforming to social norms, singlehood experience of these emerging adults can be revealed in a more nuanced light. The current study provides data by capturing the singlehood experience of Malaysian emerging adults.

As discussed in the problem statement, being single in Malaysia can be challenging due to numerous challenges such as social stigma and pressure, and is at a higher risk of mental health problems. Therefore, this study may provide useful information for policy and practise that will benefit single emerging adults. As singlehood becomes increasingly common in contemporary society, it is necessary for policymakers, tertiary education and practitioners to be equipped with a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the SWB of this population. The findings of this study can provide valuable information for policymakers to consider this unique group when formulating policy. In doing so, they can develop effective policies to improve the well-being of single emerging adults and develop innovative programmes to support them on their path to adulthood by promoting their financial literacy and financial independence. Furthermore, this study can help shape the development of programmes that promote SWB among single emerging adults, such as support groups and counselling services. With these effort, this study may help to address the social stigma faced by single emerging adults by emphasising the importance of understanding and supporting this population at multiaggregate levels, rather than stigmatizing or marginalizing them.

Furthermore, the problem statement emphasizes the scarcity of information on single emerging adults' SWB. This study fills an important gap in the literature by

focusing on the well-being of single emerging adults. It is important to note that the science of singlehood has not yet flourished in Malaysia, as little effort has been made to study the lives of single women alone. As a result, questions about the experiences of single emerging adults remain unanswered. While much research has been conducted on SWB among other age groups and relationship statuses, there is still much to learn about the unique experiences of single emerging adults in the Malaysian context.

Besides, gender and employment differences in relation to SWB have been highlighted in the problem statement. Future research can make use of the findings of this study to identify potential sources of inequality and discrimination, and thus potentially identify ways to improve single emerging adults' SWB through policies or interventions. This study also sheds light on how social and economic factors shape the experiences of this population. It can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving the SWB of single emerging adults, such as programs that provide employment training or support for females working in male-dominated fields. Ultimately, this study can help individuals to make informed decisions about their personal and professional lives, and it can contribute to a society that values the well-being of all its members, regardless of gender or employment status.

Last but not least, it has been highlighted in the problem statement that family and friends may serve as potential protective effect on SWB. This study benefits not only single emerging adults, but also their families and close friends. Through the findings, family members and friends are able to gain a better understanding of the factors that play a role in their loved one's well-being, allowing them to provide better support and be more attuned to the needs of their loved one. Furthermore, this study can help single emerging adults understand the importance of family and friends,

which can lead to better communication and, ultimately, a more open and supportive relationship that benefits both parties.

On the whole, SWB can have an impact on health, which is deemed crucial for every single citizen as well as society at large as denoted in earlier studies. Understanding the factors that contribute to SWB is essential for promoting psychological health and happiness, as well as preventing mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. In several ways, the current study is indispensable and critical. As a result, this study represents an effort to expand the literature on SWB and singlehood while also contributing to a better understanding of what factors that are strongly associated with SWB among Malaysian single emerging adults.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Below are the hypotheses for the current study which derived from past studies.

H_{2.1a}: There is a difference on the levels of life satisfaction across male and female single emerging adults.

H_{2.1b}: There is a difference on the levels of positive affect across male and female single emerging adults.

H_{2.1c}: There is a difference on the levels of negative affect across male and female single emerging adults.

H_{2.2a}: There is a difference on the levels of life satisfaction across different employment status of single emerging adults.

H_{2.2b}: There is a difference on the levels of positive affect across different employment status of single emerging adults.

H_{2.2c}: There is a difference on the levels of negative affect across different employment status of single emerging adults.

H_{3.1a}: Satisfaction with family correlates with life satisfaction among single emerging adults.

H_{3.1b}: Satisfaction with family correlates with positive affect among single emerging adults.

H_{3.1c}: Satisfaction with family correlates with negative affect among single emerging adults.

H_{3.2a}: Satisfaction with friends correlates with life satisfaction among single emerging adults.

H_{3.2b}: Satisfaction with friends correlates with positive affect among single emerging adults.

H_{3.2c}: Satisfaction with friends correlates with negative affect among single emerging adults

H_{4.1a}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with family and life satisfaction among single emerging adults.

H_{4.1b}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with family and positive affect among single emerging adults.

H_{4.1c}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with family and negative affect among single emerging adults.

H_{4.2a}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with friends and life satisfaction among single emerging adults.

H_{4.2b}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with friends and positive affect among single emerging adults.

H_{4.2c}: Satisfaction with singlehood moderates the relationship between satisfaction with friends and negative affect among single emerging adults.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The current study emphasized levels of SWB among single emerging adults. A virtual snowball sampling technique was employed to recruit individuals aged between 18 to 29 years as research participants. It should be noted that according to Arnett (2004), emerging adults refer to individuals with ages of 18 to 25 years. Nevertheless, the current study extended the age range of emerging adults for the purpose of including more potential participants and acknowledging that some individuals' emerging adulthoods are prolonged due to delayed milestones of adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004).

In light of socio-demographic factor, the current study concentrated on gender and employment status to better comprehend their levels of SWB. The recognition of Malaysia's multicultural setting underscores the importance of acknowledging the diverse socio-demographic factors that shape the views and perceptions of emerging adults beyond gender and employment status. In this context, factors such as religion, ethnicity, education, socio-economic status, and current family structure are integral components of individuals' identities and experiences within the country's diverse societal landscape. While these factors undoubtedly wield significant influence over singles' experiences and their well-being, the current study's focus primarily on gender and employment status aligns with its specific research objectives. Despite the nuanced interplay of various socio-demographic factors, narrowing the focus allows for a more targeted examination of the relationships between key variables within the defined scope. Thus, while the scope of current study may be limited, its findings remain valuable in contributing insights into the experiences of singlehood among emerging adults in Malaysia.