

Factors Influencing Commitment: The Bisexual Husband's Perspective in Malaysian Marital Relationships

*Faktor Mempengaruhi Komitmen: Perspektif Suami Biseksual
dalam Hubungan Perkahwinan di Malaysia*

MOHD RAFIZEY DALIN, NUR HAFIZAH YUSOFF
& AZLINA ABDULLAH

ABSTRACT

Commitment is crucial in a marriage to ensure that the relationship can endure and thrive. This includes mixed-orientation marriages where one partner is a bisexual male, and the other is a heterosexual spouse. In a conservative country like Malaysia, socio-cultural and religious influences undoubtedly exert significant pressure and affect the ability and commitment of bisexual husbands to remain in their marriages, often necessitating the concealment of their sexual identity from their partners. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the commitment levels of bisexual husbands to their marital relationships. Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 bisexual husbands who are currently married. The findings revealed that love for their wives, caring for their children, hope for change, internal religious motivation, upholding family honor, and avoiding social stigma are key elements contributing to maintaining commitment in their marriages. The insights gained from this study are expected to guide the development of interventions, support programs, and more effective counseling, as well as the formulation of more inclusive and supportive policies for this group within the context of marriage. Additionally, this study aims to raise societal awareness about the challenges faced by bisexual males in maintaining their marriages, thereby helping to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Keywords: commitment; bisexual married men; marital relationship; heterosexual marriage; Malaysia

ABSTRAK

Komitmen adalah penting dalam sesebuah perkahwinan untuk memastikan hubungan tersebut dapat bertahan dan berkembang dengan baik. Ini termasuklah hubungan perkahwinan mixed-orientation yang mana salah satu pasangan adalah lelaki biseksual dan pasangannya wanita heteroseksual. Dalam konteks negara konservatif seperti Malaysia, pengaruh sosiobudaya dan agama sudah tentu memberikan tekanan yang besar serta mempengaruhi kemampuan dan komitmen lelaki biseksual yang sudah berkahwin untuk terus kekal dalam perkahwinan walaupun terpaksa menyembunyikan identiti seksual daripada pasangan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap komitmen suami biseksual terhadap hubungan perkahwinan mereka. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kajian kualitatif, temu bual mendalam telah diadakan bersama dengan 15 orang suami biseksual yang berkahwin dengan pasangan wanita heteroseksual. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa perasaan cinta terhadap isteri, perasaan sayang kepada anak-anak, mengharapkan perubahan/kembali normal, motivasi dalaman agama, menjaga maruah keluarga, dan mengelakkan stigma sosial mempengaruhi motivasi lelaki biseksual untuk terus kekal dalam perkahwinan mereka. Cerapan yang diperoleh dari kajian ini diharapkan dapat membimbing pembangunan intervensi, program sokongan, kaunseling yang lebih efektif serta merangka dasar-dasar yang lebih inklusif dan menyokong golongan ini dalam konteks perkahwinan. Selain itu, dengan adanya kajian ini dapat meningkatkan kesedaran masyarakat tentang cabaran yang dihadapi oleh lelaki biseksual dalam mengekalkan perkahwinan mereka, seterusnya membantu mengurangkan stigma dan diskriminasi.

Kata kunci: komitmen; suami biseksual; hubungan perkahwinan; perkahwinan heteroseksual; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Commitment is a foundational element that shapes the core of marital relationships, influencing their stability, resilience, and overall success (Stanley et al. 2019; Schoebi et al. 2012). In marriage, commitment is a core element that includes emotional, psychological, and behavioural aspects (Amato & DeBoer 2001). Traditional marriages entail a commitment to preserve the partnership despite challenges, creating loyalty, trust, and mutual support between partners. It typically appears as shared duties, transparent communication, and a readiness to address obstacles together (Schoebi et al. 2012).

Exploring commitment factors within marital relationships is a complex and nuanced endeavour, particularly when considering the unique context of mixed-orientation marriage. A mixed-orientation marriage involves partners with differing sexual orientations. A mixed-orientation marriage typically involves one partner being bisexual, gay, or lesbian while the other is straight (Hanis Nabihah et al. 2018). Mixed-orientation marriages, where one spouse identifies as non-heterosexual, present a complex dynamic that can significantly impact the notion of commitment within the relationship. Nasrudin et al. (2014) found that marriages between gay men and women tend to be not lasting when the only purpose of the marriage is to prove to family and society that their sexual desires are similar to those of heterosexual men.

Challenges in these relationships may arise from cultural stigma, potential misconceptions about sexual orientation, and the necessity for detailed communication regarding desires and boundaries. In the culturally rich landscape of Malaysia, where societal norms and expectations play a significant role in shaping relationships, understanding commitment becomes paramount. This importance is magnified when delving into the specific experiences of bisexual husbands. A delicate interplay of tradition, exploring commitment factors specific to bisexual husbands allows for a nuanced understanding of how cultural nuances impact the formation and sustenance of marital bonds in this demographic.

Bisexuality, often subject to stigmatization, can pose unique challenges within a Malaysian cultural framework. Unravelling commitment factors within this context becomes a crucial step toward dismantling stigmas and fostering supportive environments for bisexual individuals in marital relationships (Kays et al. 2013; Hopwood et al. 2019). Bisexual husbands in Malaysia also may grapple with societal expectations that often adhere to heteronormative standards. Understanding commitment factors specific to this group sheds light on how individuals navigate the complexities of their dual sexual identity within the societal expectations of traditional marriage.

Researching commitment factors specific to bisexual husbands contributes to the broader movement for inclusivity and diversity in relationship studies. It fosters a more comprehensive understanding of marital commitment beyond conventional norms, promoting a richer and more representative discourse. The insights gained from this exploration inform the development of inclusive support systems within interpersonal relationships and broader societal structures. It facilitates the creation of environments that acknowledge and validate the diverse experiences of bisexual husbands in Malaysia.

DEFINITION OF BISEXUALITY

Bisexuality is considered the most contentious and least comprehended sexual orientation. Bisexuality is a sexual orientation when an individual is sexually and romantically attracted to both males and females. Bisexuality can be viewed as a significant inclination towards engaging in sexual activities in a non-traditional manner, often referred to as 'AC-DC' or 'Switch-hitter', indicating an individual who can switch between two directions (Anang et al. 2007). Bisexuality typically exhibits fewer symptoms compared to heterosexuality and homosexuality. These two sexes can coexist in an individual who is in a heterosexual relationship while also engaging in a same-sex relationship (homosexual or lesbian) (Suhaya et. al. 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, commitment refers to a pledge or agreement to do something in the future (Merriam-Webster 2022 in Azima et al. 2023). Commitment to enduring marital partnerships in bisexual-heterosexual marriages is a multidimensional phenomenon driven by numerous circumstances. Studies indicate that the state's public approval of same-sex partnerships, financial advantages, and commitment to a shared future might have beneficial health outcomes (Carr & Springer 2010). Bisexual men encounter significant issues in sustaining their marriages, especially in mixed-orientation marriages, which can result in anxiety and despair bisexual men (Hopwood et al. 2019). The legal and societal complexities of mixed-orientation marriages, together with the absence of legal recourse for heterosexual women, added complications to the commitment in these relationships.

Religion and commitment influence marital satisfaction, emphasizing the need to comprehend how religious beliefs shape relationship commitment (Zaheri et al. 2016). Furthermore, the obstacles encountered by bisexual husbands in Malaysia in sustaining their marriages highlight the necessity for government agencies to develop tactics to assist married bisexual men in overcoming their unique challenges, promoting more satisfying marital relationships (Mohd Rafizy et al. 2023).

The rationales for maintaining a relationship are comparable to those observed in other couples, including the presence of a strong friendship, feelings of love, emotional connection, and commitment (Brownfain 1985; Matteson 1985; Buxton 2001; Edser & Shea 2002). Several studies have contrasted the experiences of married gay guys to those of married bisexual males (Buxton 2000, 2004; Edser & Shea 2002). Research indicates that bisexual males with heterosexual female partners often have more fulfilling sexual relationships (Buxton, 2000). Bisexual spouses cited love for their wives as the main reason for remaining in the relationship, whereas gay husbands identified support from friends as the most beneficial factor.

In Malaysia, societal norms and laws lead to mixed-orientation marriages being hidden as traditional heterosexual unions, showing the complex relationship between societal norms, rules, and personal experiences in such marriages (Mohd Rafizy et al. 2023). Bisexual males encounter significant obstacles in sustaining their marriages, especially within mixed-orientation marriages, which can result in anxiety and depression among gay and bisexual men (Hopwood et al. 2019).

Research has highlighted the importance of marriage as a symbol of commitment compared to non-marital cohabitation, underscoring the impact of legal and societal acknowledgement of relationships on commitment (Haas & Whitton 2015). The link between satisfaction and

commitment varies among married couples, showing the intricate connection between satisfaction and commitment in marriages (Givertz et al. 2009).

Based on the literature review above, various elements such as societal attitudes, legal restraints, religious beliefs, and individual experiences influence the commitment to long-lasting bisexual-heterosexual marriages. Comprehending these intricacies is essential for creating ways to bolster and improve the satisfaction of marriage partnerships in various settings.

METHOD

The objective of the study was to investigate the factors influencing commitment among bisexual married men in marital relationships. This study employed a qualitative methodology to acquire data and information from married bisexual men. Given the focus of this study on bisexual perspectives and experiences, a qualitative method was considered the most feasible option. One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to investigate complex phenomena by considering the perspectives of individuals within their social contexts, resulting in a comprehensive and detailed outcome (Merriam 2002). This method allows researchers to have flexibility when interviewing the informants.

A comprehensive interview was carried out with 15 self-identified bisexual husbands who are legally married to their wives (shown in Table 1). However, in this context, they are still not disclosing their bisexuality to their wives and plan to stay married for as long as feasible. The participants were chosen through a snowball sampling technique. When individuals with the desired characteristics are scarce, researchers employ the approach described by Abedsaiedi (2015). The process of sampling continues until saturation is achieved.

After receiving indications of interest from potential participants, an informed consent form and a questionnaire are emailed to them to request their participation in the study. The survey instrument was developed to gather essential demographic information, such as age and duration of the relationship, which is commonly documented in scholarly publications. Following acquiring the duly completed questionnaire and signing an informed consent letter, participants were contacted through email to arrange the initial interview. The study's findings were examined utilizing a thematic approach, in which the author organized the outcomes of the interview sessions according to predetermined themes. Each topic was explicitly crafted to tackle the research concerns directly. The data were presented descriptively and narratively.

Protecting people participating in this research was vital (Glesne 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of the writing report, the name of informants involved as participants in this study is not disclosed (Siti Hajar et al. 2021). The institutional standards encompass broad ethical issues, including providing an informed consent document to participants, which elucidates the objectives and particulars of the study as well as any potential risks and benefits associated with their involvement. Unforeseen occurrences might give rise to particularly challenging ethical dilemmas, necessitating a constant awareness of the impact of one's actions, behaviour, and judgments on the other people involved in this study. The issue of the secrecy of information and the protection of the informant's identity is similarly safeguarded and treated as a subject of confidentiality.

TABLE 1. Demographics of the study informants

Informant	Age (Year)	Marriage (Year)	Number of Children
1	35	7	3
2	32	6	2
3	29	5	2
4	29	6	1
5	30	6	3
6	33	8	3
7	34	7	3
8	31	5	2
9	32	5	2
10	32	6	2
11	32	5	2
12	28	6	1
13	30	5	1
14	31	5	2
15	32	6	1

RESULTS

Based on in-depth interviews with married bisexual male participants in this study, six main themes emerged: love for their wives, caring for their children, hope for change, internal religious motivation, upholding family honour, and avoiding social stigma.

LOVE THEIR WIVES

The most common factor cited by bisexual husbands in this study is loving their wives. This theme is similar to the survey by Buxton (2000, 2004), where bisexual spouses stated that their most significant motivation for remaining in the relationship was their love for their wives. Daly (2003) noted that love is the basis of family relationships, yet family theorists hesitate to use love. The freedom that bisexual individuals feel in choosing intimate partners based on emotional connection rather than gender is a significant internal factor (Dyar et al. 2017).

Love can create a strong sense of commitment in relationships, even when individuals experience attraction to people of the same gender. This is particularly true when they are already in a loving relationship before getting married marriage. The shared history evokes a feeling of lasting connection and reliability. Consider how the thought of divorce by Informant 1 and 3 could potentially disrupt the narrative of their shared life, bringing about a sense of uncertainty and upheaval. The unwillingness to consider separation is often driven by a desire for stability and the comfort derived from a familiar history.

“You know, I love her so much. From the beginning when I knew her in high school, until now, the feeling of love for her has never changed even a little. I enjoy spending time together, sharing experience and being my biggest support system. She is everything to me. I am happy and want to live forever with her”. (Informant 1)

“There is no reason for me to leave her. We have been together for about eleven years, and my feelings of love and affection for my wife are still the same. Even I’m bisexual, my love towards her never gone. Alhamdulillah’s, after all, so far, my married life still fine” (Informant 3)

Feeling loved and loving one's partner contributes significantly to overall life satisfaction (Londero-Santos et al. 2021). Participants who entered into marriage without a pre-existing romantic relationship with their wives, such as Informants 2 and 6, admitted that their feelings of love only developed after they tied the knot. They noticed that their feelings of love grew due to their wives' attitudes and personalities, which compelled them to stay committed to their marriages. The informants emphasized the importance of their wives' attitudes towards love, communication styles, emotional regulation, respect, and trust in maintaining their feelings of love.

"it's true when people say love after marriage is more beautiful. I admit that it was awkward at first after marriage because we didn't know each other very well before. But after while we became close and felt love for my wife. She cares a lot about me, be a good listener and always cooks my favourite dishes. After a long time, my love to her increased" (Informant 2)

"To be honest, I did not expect my relationship with my wife to be close after we got married. Yes, we didn't even know each other before, but I am grateful because I was matched with a woman who has the characteristics of a good wife. Good at cooking, taking care of children and most importantly caring. That's why I love and want to stay with her" (Informant 6)

Informant 2 and Informant 6's experiences demonstrate how positive attitudes, effective communication, emotional regulation, respect, trust, personality traits, positive interactions, shared values, and adaptability are crucial in fostering love within a marriage.

CARING FOR THEIR CHILDREN

The findings also showed that children motivated all the participants to stay committed to marriage. Most participants talked about the responsibility of being a parent, especially a father, who often comes with a solid commitment to providing a stable and nurturing environment for their children. Goldberg et al. (2012) conducted a study that emphasized the problems of balancing parenthood with managing a bisexual identity and how these men worked to establish a supportive and nurturing environment for their children despite these difficulties. Based on the interview, Informant 5 and Informant 8 said:

"I feel responsible for the children, especially since they are all so young. Whatever happens, I want them with me. I don't want them to grow up without a father, even though I am no longer alive. As long as they are alive, I am committed to taking care of them and ensuring their proper growth" (Informant 5)

"As parents, we come together to tackle the challenges that come our way, strengthening our bond and sense of unity. Our dedication to our children serves as a guiding principle that impacts our decisions, communication, and the overall strength of our marital relationship. The goal is to establish an environment where our children feel loved, welcomed, and nurtured, regardless of any complications in our connection" (Informant 8)

Informants 7 and 9 mentioned wanting to provide their children with parents' presence and support, believing it's in the children's best interest. According to Tornello and Patterson (2018), when one parent misses a child's upbringing, the child is likely to feel abandoned by the absent parent, and their introspection will be affected. The children will have difficulty with social adjustment, friendship, explicit behaviour problems such as misconduct and youth crime, mental health problems and wellness problems.

"The presence of both parents is essential for children's growth. As a child who has been without his father since the age of ten, I acknowledge that I have lost my life's passion. It's painful to watch your friends having dads at that time, and the issue of fathers was quite delicate at the time. So, when I become a parent, I don't want my children to feel the same way I had before; instead, I want to look after them till everything is successful afterwards". (Informant 7)

"I worry about their emotional wellbeing." I know that a divorce or separation could have a mental effect on the children.. I think as a parent, I feel responsible for them and want to prioritize my children's need and happiness over their own desires". (Informant 9)

Bisexual husbands as fathers' dedication to their marriages while raising children is based on parental responsibility, providing stability, emotional bonds with children, positive role modelling, a long-term family perspective, a sense of legacy, family unity, and the sacrifices and efforts put into parenting. These variables together create a solid motive to remain dedicated to the marriage for the benefit of the children.

STILL HOPING TO CHANGE

The belief that marriage can help them eliminate homosexuality also influenced all participant's desires to stay married. Individuals may feel substantial pressure to adhere to heterosexual standards due to societal and cultural conventions. Bisexuality may face stigma or discrimination in certain cultures or societies. Individuals may feel compelled to adhere to these rules and evade societal scrutiny.

According to the interview, one of the elements that encouraged their marriage was the desire to become a heterosexual man. Moreover, even after several years of marriage, their desire to change persists despite hurdles, particularly in attractiveness to another man. Informant 4 said during the interview:

"I choose to marry because I have intention to change to normal guys. Early after marriage, I could hold back and control myself. But I could only hold it for eight months, then I looked for a partner outside. I've tried many different ways before this, but still can't forgot that thing (sex with men)" (Informant 4)

The assertion that "marriage cannot change a person's sexual orientation" was refuted by the majority of the participants in this study. According to the interviews, all the participants acknowledge being bisexual and are more interested in women than men. In addition, their attraction to males was solely sexual. Furthermore, their attraction to males changed gradually throughout their marriage. However, they claimed that changing was not as easy as expected, but they continued to attempt despite several obstacles. For example, Informant 7 said:

"As I said before, one of the reasons I want get married is because I want to change and become a normal guy, but guess what, I have already tried my best, but you know, it's not easy to change as hoped before I got married" (Informant 7)

Beliefs can affect the willingness to remain married, causing individuals to face emotional and relational difficulties related to authenticity, self-acceptance, and cultural expectations.

INTERNAL RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION

In a diverse nation like Malaysia, where religion plays a significant role, the husband's religious beliefs and practice can affect how he deals with his sexual orientation inside their marriage. The overlap between bisexual and religious or spiritual identities, together with the varying attitudes towards bisexuality across different sexual orientations and gender groups, can influence the dedication and encounters of a bisexual husband in his marriage.

Within the interview, the majority of the Muslim participants cited that they feel a deep religious obligation to honour and maintain marital vows to fulfil their faith's teaching. Islam places a strong emphasis on the sanctity of marriage as a sacred contract. Informant 10 mentioned the sense of duty and obligation. His belief can foster a sense of duty and obligation towards their

spouse and family. They feel morally bound to fulfil these responsibilities, even if they are grappling with their sexual orientation. He said:

“For me, God has entrusted me to carry out my responsibilities as a husband, so, when I get married, of course, I expect rewards and pleasure from God”.

Some of the participants, like Informant 8, believes in redemption. He believes in the possibility of redemption and atonement for perceived sins or transgressions. The decision to stay in marriage is a way to seek forgiveness and spiritual forgiveness even though sometimes they are still into men-sex-men activity. He mentioned that:

“God made human nature live in pairs. It is complementary to life from a physical and spiritual point of view. I believe, in Islam marriage is something sacred. The purpose of marriage is to maintain dignity and ensure the relationship is maintained” (Informant 8)

Informant 1 further responded that he regards marriage as a lifelong commitment that is bought to endure forever. The significance of carrying out his rights and obligations as a husband and parent in their marriage is mentioned below:

“I always remind myself that I want to get married so that it last forever. For me, marriage is a lifelong commitment. We marry someone and we hope our relationship lasts forever” (Informant 1)

Overall, the participants feel a robust religious duty to uphold and respect marital vows due to the Islamic belief that marriage is a holy agreement. Their dedication is consistent with the overarching Islamic principles of family, morality, loyalty, and the significance of carrying out religious obligations within the institution of marriage. The participants probably view their dedication to marriage as a fundamental aspect of their faith and a way to adhere to Islamic ideals.

UPHOLD FAMILY HONOUR

Most informants cited that family honour also influenced them to stay committed to marriage. Malaysian society has strong Eastern values, particularly in specific cultural contexts where family reputation, social standing, and collective identity are highly valued (New Straits Times 2023). This concept is often prevalent in collectivist cultures, where individual actions are closely tied to the reputation and status of the family as a whole.

Since there are arranged marriages by their family, which is Informant 6, the decision to end a marriage might be viewed as a failure of the family's judgement and matchmaking process. He said he felt compelled to stay in the marriage to uphold the family's choice. Staying in the marriage is a way to avoid open conflict and protect the appearance of a harmonious family. He mentioned:

“My wife is the daughter of my father's close friend. I need to stay because want to take care of the relationship between both parties. I don't want if I leave my wife, my father's relationship with his friends will be strained. So, because I respect my father, I have to take care of our relationship as well”.

In contrast to informant 2, keeping family honour is motivated by the family's standing and clout in the community. According to informant 2, he wanted to preserve his family's honour since his father, a respected village called an 'imam', had a lot of sway with the community. He continued

by saying that he feels compelled and decides to avoid bringing perceived shame or dishonour to the family, especially his father.

"As the child of a well-known family, I do not want to do anything that will harm their reputation." Furthermore, the father's image, the village priest, must be such that people expect his children to conduct themselves appropriately and in the manner of their father".

Ultimately, the choice to remain in an arranged marriage, even in the face of difficulties, may be driven by a commitment to family honour, cultural norms, loyalty to family authorities, conflict avoidance, cultural taboos, sacrificial values, and preserving a positive family reputation. Together, these elements add to the intricacy of decision-making in the context of arranged marriages.

AVOIDING SOCIAL STIGMA

Society frequently stigmatizes bisexuality, which can profoundly affect the lives of bisexual individuals, including their relationships and mental well-being. Studies indicate that bisexual individuals experience more stigma than their lesbian and homosexual counterparts (Balsam & Mohr 2007). This stigma can impact their choices regarding revealing their sexual orientation, as well as their internalized stigma and emotional responses to being part of the sexual minority community (Herek et al. 2009).

In Malaysia, societal norms and expectations around marriage and family life can create pressure to conform to traditional standards. Individuals, including bisexual married men, fear being stigmatized or judged if they deviate from these expectations. Staying in a committed marriage may be seen as a way to maintain stability and social acceptance. This phenomenon is often driven by the fear of perceived discrimination and the desire to sustain heterosexual privilege (Matsick & Rubin 2018).

"I'm paralyzed by the worry of how my wife, family, and even friends will react if they find out I am bisexual. The threat of prejudice is extremely real, and that fear has a direct impact on how open I can be about my identity."

"Bisexuality is widely misunderstood. The worry stems not just from discrimination, but also from dealing with misinformation. I'm worried that others may make assumptions or hold misconceptions about what it means to be a married bisexual man."

Another concern is the social humiliation of leaving or divorcing their spouse. Divorce is generally condemned in society, not just from a religious standpoint but also from a cultural perspective (Kadir 2021). Divorce has been perceived negatively throughout history for a variety of artistic and familial reasons, frequently as a broken promise, a betrayal of one's commitment, irresponsible, or a breach of religious beliefs and community standards. During the interview, Informant 4 mentioned that:

"I'm worried about what people say later if I left or divorce my wife, especially the people closest to me. If there is a reasonable reason, maybe people can understand, but if it's like suddenly, people around you will surely blame the man as well" (Informant 4)

Informant 4's reference to the social embarrassment linked to divorce mirrors these broader societal beliefs. Fear of being perceived as irresponsible, a promise-breaker, or failing in commitments can powerfully drive individuals to overcome issues in a marriage rather than risk the social repercussions of divorce.

DISCUSSION

This study examines the factors influencing the commitment of bisexual husbands to remain in their marriages. These decisions are predominantly driven by internal motivations originating from within the individual rather than external factors related to the context in which they find themselves. Previous research has found that most bisexual-heterosexual couples cite internal motivations, such as solid friendships, love, emotional connections, and a commitment to their spouse and family, as reasons for staying in their marriages, regardless of their initial motivations for entering the mixed-orientation marriage (Brownfain 1985; Matteson 1985; Buxton 2001; Edser & Shea 2002).

The prevalence of love being mentioned by most participants is not unexpected. Previous research on bisexual-heterosexual couples, such as the study by Edser & Shea (2002), found that bisexual men were motivated to remain in their marriages due to their respect and love for their wives as friends. Over time, they developed a more profound love for their wives and desired to spend their lives together while being mindful of their promises and commitments. In the present study, the vast majority of bisexual husbands expressed how their initial attraction and reasons for staying in the marriage revolved around love and emotional connection. A strong emotional bond and genuine love for their wives can be powerful motivators to navigate and sustain the marriage.

In addition to receiving rewards, many participants identified various barriers that contributed to preserving their marriages. The most frequently mentioned barrier, as reported by most participants, is the decision to remain in the marriage for the well-being of their children. This choice is primarily motivated by the strong emotional bond that children form with their parents, particularly in the case of marriages involving individuals who identify as bisexual. Furthermore, children tend to flourish in stable and consistent environments, and remaining in a marriage can offer stability and routine that positively impacts their emotional and psychological growth. (Buxton 2001).

The study revealed that bisexual husbands frequently cited religious motivations. This finding indicates that despite their bisexuality, these individuals prioritize their spiritual obligations to maintain their relationships with their wives. Additionally, the study demonstrated that these husbands are genuinely aware of the expectations placed upon them as spouses and fathers, and they willingly accept the corresponding responsibilities. Similar to heterosexual individuals, bisexual husbands exhibit a wide range of perspectives and approaches to their roles within a marriage as parents. The qualities associated with being a good husband and father, such as effective communication, emotional support, shared responsibilities, and cultivating a loving and nurturing environment for their spouse and children, are not contingent upon sexual orientation. Instead, their upbringing, values, beliefs, and level of relationship effort all impact them.

The present study acknowledges the existence of retention factors that differ from previous research and can be attributed to the prevailing conservative cultural and religious norms in Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country. These norms may contribute to the limited acceptance of bisexuality, potentially resulting in societal pressures to conform to heterosexual marriage. Within the context of this study, it is observed that bisexual husbands express a desire to remain in their respective marriages as a means to conceal their homosexual inclinations, which persist in extramarital encounters. These individuals, who primarily seek sexual fulfilment without establishing genuine emotional connections with their same-sex partners, maintain the belief that their homosexual tendencies can be eradicated through marriage.

In Western scholarly literature, "outside support" is commonly used to denote the encouragement provided by friends, family members, counsellors, or therapists to mixed-orientation couples. It has been observed that online support groups play a crucial role in assisting such couples, as they offer a platform for seeking guidance, support, encouragement, and a sense of community from individuals and couples facing similar circumstances. However, within the scope of this study, it is emphasized that bisexual husbands are expected to remain in their marriages to uphold the family's integrity and avoid societal stigmatization, which often portrays them as unreliable individuals or husbands who abandon their wives and children without apparent justification.

In comparison, a smaller proportion of husbands identifying as bisexual than their spouses reported encountering challenges that complicated their marital relationships. Their inclination towards engaging in homosexual activities was indicative of underlying emotions and internal conflicts they experienced as they grappled with the tension between these desires and their commitment to maintaining enduring marriages. However, the availability of support networks and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those identifying as bisexual, in Malaysia is limited due to cultural and legal constraints. Consequently, bisexual husbands may encounter difficulties in accessing the necessary expertise to navigate and resolve their internal struggles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the decision of a bisexual husband to stay committed to a marriage is primarily influenced by a complex interplay of personal values, emotional bonds, cultural factors and familial expectations. Despite experiencing ongoing attraction towards men, individuals are often inclined to remain committed to their marital relationship. Nevertheless, the endeavour of upholding one's sexual identity remains arduous, necessitating an ongoing effort, even if individuals are compelled to conceal their authentic orientation. Despite facing significant challenges, the positive influences that enhance the chances of a lasting marriage for bisexual husbands are particularly effective in helping them maintain a stable and fulfilling relationship, achieve mutual understanding and acceptance with their spouse, and balance their sexual identity with their marital life.

It is desirable for governmental bodies responsible for supporting families, such as the Department of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, to develop initiatives that assist individuals in non-heterosexual partnerships in Malaysia to navigate their unique challenges. By doing so, these agencies can improve marital relationships by fostering understanding and ensuring the longevity and contentment of such unions. Furthermore, society needs to cultivate a more inclusive and accepting environment that acknowledges and respects diverse sexual orientations.

This study examines the experiences of bisexual males who are married to heterosexual women, representing a recent contribution to the existing body of research in this area. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within these marriages, it is recommended that future studies include the perspectives of both spouses. It is imperative for future researchers, particularly in the field of social science, to further investigate these matters, as it can enhance understanding, contribute to existing knowledge, and inform strategies for addressing similar occurrences in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for the financial support provided through the TAP-K019019 grant. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the participants who contributed to this study.

REFERENCES

- Anang Harris Himawan. 2007. *Bukan Salah Tuhan*. Indonesia: Tiga Serangkai.
- Amato, P. R., & DeBoer, D. D. 2001. The transmission of marital instability across generations: Relationship skills or commitment to marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(4): 1038-1051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01038.x>
- Brownfain, J. J. 1985. A study of the married bisexual male: Paradox and resolution. *Journal of Homosexuality* 11(1-2): 173-188. https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v11n01_13
- Buxton, A. P. (2000). Writing our own script: How bisexual men and their heterosexual wives maintain their marriages after disclosure. *Journal of Bisexuality* 1(2-3): 155-189. https://doi.org/10.1300/j159v01n02_06
- Carr, D. and Springer, K. W. 2010. Advances in families and health research in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(3): 743-761. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00728.x>
- Dyar, C., Feinstein, B. A., & Schick, V. 2017. Minority stress, sexual identity uncertainty, and partner gender decision making among non-monosexual individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 4(1): 87-104. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000213>
- Edser, S. J., & Shea, J. D. 2002. An exploratory investigation of bisexual men in monogamous, heterosexual marriages. *Journal of Bisexuality* 2(4): 5-43. https://doi.org/10.1300/j159v02n04_02
- Givertz, M., Segrin, C., & Hanzal, A. 2009. The association between satisfaction and commitment differs across marital couple types. *Communication Research* 36(4): 561-584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650209333035>
- Haas, S. M., & Whitton, S. W. 2015. The significance of living together and importance of marriage in same-sex couples. *Journal of Homosexuality* 62(9): 1241-1263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1037137>
- Hanis, N. B. H.-D., Rohani, A. R., Fieza, F. B. F., Mohd, F. B. Y., & Annalisa, Y. 2018. Mixed-orientation marriages: An analysis on heterosexual wife legal redress in Malaysia. *International Journal of Asian Social Science, Asian Economic and Social Society* 8(5), 241-255.
- Hopwood, M., Cama, E., Wit, J. D., & Treloar, C. 2019. Stigma, anxiety, and depression among gay and bisexual men in mixed-orientation marriages. *Qualitative Health Research* 30(4): 622-633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732319862536>
- Kays, J. L., Yarhouse, M. A., & Ripley, J. S. 2013. Relationship factors and quality among mixed-orientation couples. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 40(6): 512-528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623x.2013.788107>
- Londero-Santos, A., Natividade, J. C., & Féres-Carneiro, T. 2021. Do romantic relationships promote happiness? relationships' characteristics as predictors of subjective well-being. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships* 15(1): 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.4195>

- Matsick, J. L. and Rubin, J. D. 2018. Bisexual prejudice among lesbian and gay people: Examining the roles of gender and perceived sexual orientation. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 5(2): 143-155. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000283>
- Merriam-Webster. 2022. Definition of commitment. In Azima, A. M., Zaimah, R., & Suhana, S. 2023. Faktor yang Mempengaruhi komitmen Pekebun Kecil kelapa Sawit ke arah memperoleh Persijilan MSPO. *Akademika* 93(3): 139-156.
- Mohd Rafizey, D., Nur Hafizah, Y., & Azlina, A. 2023. Factors influencing bisexual men to marry heterosexual women: A case study of Malaysia. *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 13(3): 112-121. <https://doi.org/10.55493/5007.v13i3.4745>
- Nasrudin, S., Mohd Radzi, T. A. H., Ezarina, Z., & Salina, N. 2014. Pengaruh homofobia dalaman terhadap perkahwinan lelaki gay. *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia* 28(2):18-38.
- Ross, H. L. 1971. Modes of adjustment of married homosexuals. *Social Problems* 18(3): 385-393.
- Schoebi, D., Karney, B., & Bradbury, T. 2012. Stability and change in the first 10 years of marriage: Does commitment confer benefits beyond the effects of satisfaction? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102(4): 729-742. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026290>
- Siti Hajar, J., Nasrudin, S., & Salleh, A. 2021. Pengetahuan Kaunselor dalam memahami klien gay dan lesbian. *Akademika* 91(1): 3-15.
- Stanley, S., Rhoades, G., & Whitton, S. 2010. Commitment: functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 2(4): 243-257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00060.x>
- Suhaya, D., Salasiah H. H., Ahmad, I. M., Anis Nor Amelia, N. A. & Izzah Nur Aida, Z. R. 2017. Identifikasi identiti biseksual dan hubungannya dengan aspek sokongan sosial dan Kesihatan mental dalam kalangan individu biseksual di Melaka. *A-Hikmah* 9(2): 113-130.
- Tornello, S. L., & Patterson, C. J. 2018. *Gay and bisexual fatherhood*. The Wiley Handbook of Group Processes in Children and Adolescents, 2, 1-16.
- Zaheri, F., Dolatian, M., Shariati, M., Simbar, M., Ebadi, A., & Azghadi, S. B. H. 2016. Effective factors in marital satisfaction in perspective of Iranian women and men: A systematic review. *Electronic Physician* 8(12): 3369-3377. <https://doi.org/10.19082/3369>

Mohd Rafizey Dalin
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
43600 Bangi, Selangor
Email: mohdrafizeydalin1992@gmail.com

Nur Hafizah Yusoff (Corresponding author)
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
43600 Bangi Selangor
Email: nur_hafizah@ukm.edu.my

Azlina Abdullah
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
43600 Bangi Selangor
Email: azlina_ab@ukm.edu.my