



Marital adjustment among postgraduate students at universities in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Postgraduate study has been considered as a main life event which can lead to marital discordance. Various adjustments have to be done by the students and their spouse. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate marital adjustment among married postgraduate students in two public universities in Malaysia. A random sample of 176 students from two public universities in Malaysia has been selected. The instrument employed is the adjusted Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment and a set of demographic variables. ANOVA 2x3x2 is used to investigate the means differences of marital adjustment according to gender, nationality, and university among the participants. Results indicated significant differences marital adjustment mean scores between gender, three nationalities, and two universities. Implications on family and college counseling are discussed. Finally, direction for future research on marital adjustments among postgraduate is suggested.

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Introduction

The growth in numbers of international postgraduate students enrolled in Malaysia universities has been marked, according to statistics available from the Ministry of Higher Education, the total numbers of international students in Malaysia in the years (2002) was 27,872. The numbers increased to 90,501 in the year (2008) Yusoff & Chelliah (2010). Those students are drawn from a wide range of countries throughout the world. To date, at these two public universities, students come from 40 countries especially, from the Middle East countries and Africa. Therefore, as a host country, Malaysia may need more information to help accommodate to the need of this growing number of population.

The pursuit of graduate studies can involve a substantial amount of personal effort, especially for married graduate students having to balance the demands of work, commitment, financial resources, and parenting, as well as a relationship with their spouse (Gerstein & Russell, 1990; Nedleman, 1991). Sanderson (2000) indicated that with these issues in mind, it is not surprising that the divorce rate among graduate students is relatively high. These results were in congruence with the findings of (Tian, 1996) who reported that the divorce rate is positively related to women's enrollment in higher education in the United States. In addition, there has been concern among educators regarding the causes of high dropout rates of doctoral students. Scheinkman (1988) believed that divorce is highly likely among graduate students. Also, he proposed a model of separation, which is believed to be "typical" among graduate students. This model shows the couple moving from an initial sense of adventure and cohesion to an increasingly unsatisfied life during graduate school, and often times to divorce, which coincides with graduation. According to Sokolski (1995), stressors such as finances, children, gender roles, housework, leisure, and communication are likely to contribute to low marital adjustment among married graduate couples. Gerstein and Russell (1991) indicated that graduate school has been regarded as a major life event which can result in marital problems. In other hand, Gilbert (1982) indicated that the

experience of graduate school can produce stress on the family. Financial adjustments, relocating to a new community, adjustment to changes in schedules, changes in social life, and lack of time spent with each other are a few of the stressors married graduate students face.

Numerous adjustments have to be made in the postgraduate students, especially for those who have to study abroad. Leaving their own countries and moving into another foreign country is undoubtedly requires adjustment. Since many clinical psychologists and researchers believe the relationship of spouses to be the most important relationship in the family; It is crucial to understand more on marital adjustment. Lovik (2004) indicated that the specialists must consider a wide range of issues affecting graduate students.

While personal characteristics, academic history, financial support, and area of study are important considerations, there is one influence that may have a significant relationship to success in graduate school: family. From this perspective, graduate education becomes a family task rather than an individual endeavor (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). The transition of students to graduate study entails a realignment of marital and family priorities of time, energy, commitment, and financial resources (Gold, 2006).

In spite of graduate study has been theorized to offer both potentially positive and negative impacts on the marital and family systems, a review of the empirically based research on this phenomenon is more pessimistic regarding the disruptive impact of graduate study on marital health and the reciprocal impact of marital dysfunction on graduate school continuation and success.

Although researchers like Nedleman (1991) have reported low level of marital adjustment among postgraduate student, solutions to this problem have only been suggested. Writers in the field have suggested many areas to target within the marital relationship of graduate students, such as finances, roles, and the collegiate environment. However, very few controlled studies were found to support these ideas and no conclusive evidences are provided. Therefore, more studies is needed to investigate

variables that are significantly related to marital adjustment among the post graduate students.

Gender, Nationality, University and Marital Adjustments

Gender is not only natural biological endowment of the different sex, but also accompanies with psychological and sociological differences. Females are more of social and emotional beings who take more initiative to fortify the marital relationships (Ebenuwa-Okoh., 2011, , Osborne, 1988,). In addition , women are seen as more responsive to intrafamilial issues and men, on the other hand, to extrafamilial issues (Block, 1973; Fisher et al., 1993, Isaac & Shah, 2004). Research on international students indicates that gender effect spouses in the expression of emotions, management of finance, communication flow and involvement in the place of work (environmental variables) which, in turn, affect their marital adjustment (Yusof & Cheliah, 2010).

Therefore we hypothesized that;

Hypothesis 1: Female marital adjustment means score is significantly higher than that of male among postgraduate students in Malaysia.

Moreover, many researchers identify cultural based on racial differences. The racial difference is basically referred to the countries of the origin. Although, researcher has long recognized the cultural differences between western and non western and the role of gender, the literature that focus on marital adjustments is still limited (De Leon, 1993). To date, none of the study found to investigate the cultural differences of three different cultures of African, Meddle East, and Asian on marital adjustments among postgraduate students.

Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the study is;

Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences of marital adjustment mean scores among postgraduate students in Malaysia based on nationalities.

The choices of universities, is another issues that postgraduate students need to consider especially when they are married. Studies on postgraduate students for different universities indicated that there are different entrance requirements, work loads and environmental supports (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2011). Therefore, these differences may have an impact on the students' marital adjustments.

The third hypothesis is;

Hypothesis 3: There is significant difference between the two university in the mean scores of marital adjustment among postgraduate students in Malaysia.

Method

Procedures

Names of all married graduate students were secured from the graduate school at the involved universities during second semester of 2010. The research instrument was administered personally on the subjects by the authors and two research assistants to facilitate the data collection.

Sample

The research design adopted in this study was the descriptive survey approach. A stratified sampling procedure was used to select sample from two public universities in Malaysia universities, and subjects. A total of 176 participants were drawn from all married students who were enrolled in postgraduate courses at these two universities in the second semester of 2010.

Additionally, all participants have been married at least minimum one year and were currently cohabitating with his or her spouse. The sample characteristics were closely aligned with

those of the university's married postgraduate student population, with the exception of gender. The sample was composed of 176 married individuals (58%) of the sample were male compared with (42%) of the sample were female.

They had been living together between (1-26) years with an average of 8 years. Almost half of the sample (42%) was 31-35 years.

The mean monthly income ranged from 1000 to 3000 RM. Number of years of married ranged from 1to 26, with 44% having been married between 6 and 10 years and 35% between 11 and 15 years.

Instrument

A questionnaire was prepared for the study and drawn from relevant sections of research literature, including demographic variables and the adjusted Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) Locke, & Wallace, (1959). Demographic covered the following: gender, age, nationality, sponsorship, university, and years of married.

The researcher computed reliability and validity of that MAT as below:

Firstly, recommendations from an advisory group were used to refine the questionnaire and modifications were made as a result of a small pilot study (n= 50). Then we distributed the scale on a sample included 50 participants and keep on all items related with total mark about "0.25" and above for content validity.

To check reliability of the scale we used chronbach's Alpha, the value of reliably test was "90" it is consider reliable value in educational researches (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The reliability of the instrument in this study is .872

Results

The collected data was analyzed with SPSS. The researcher computed the results which were collected .by using SPSS program version 19. A $2 \times 3 \times 2$ factorial ANOVA was used to study the effect of nationality, gender, and university on the marital Adjustment.

Marital adjustments between genders

The results of the F-tests shown in Table 1 indicates that there is significant different between gender on marital adjustments mean score $F(1, 164) = 10.680, p < 0.01$. Female mean scores (3.57) was significantly higher than the male mean scores (3.43).

Hence, the Hypothesis 1, Female marital adjustment means score is significantly higher than that of male among postgraduate students in Malaysia is retained in this study.

Marital adjustments between nationalities

Accordingly, result of F-tests as depicted in Table 1, indicates that there is significant different between gender on marital adjustments mean score $F(2, 164) = 3.724, p < 0.05$. Table 2 shows the post-hoc analysis. Tukey's test for multiple comparison between means indicated that the Meddle East Score ($M = 3.63$) was significantly higher than the African ($M = 3.46$) and Asian ($M = 3.48$) samples. African group did not differ significantly from South Asia Group.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences of marital adjustment mean scores among postgraduate students in Malaysia based on nationalities is retained.

Marital adjustments between universities

Finally, the results of the F-tests shown in Table 1 indicates that there is significant different between universities on marital adjustments mean score $F(1, 164) = 99.407, p < 0.01$. Univerity

Putra Malaysia scores (3.73) was significantly higher than the International Islamic University Malaysia scores (3.27).

Thus, Hypothesis 3: There is significant difference between the two universities in the mean scores of marital adjustment among postgraduate students in Malaysia is retained.

Discussion

The results obtained for hypotheses one indicated statistically significant values for male and females, the mean scores obtained revealed that females students at both universities have greater level of marital adjustment than males. Where males have encountered stress experiences more than females, the reason why male students perceive higher stress than female could be because, they are married and have dual responsibility to sort out. They need to cater for their own personal needs, the needs of their immediate family (wife and children), as well as, there are married female students too who have marital responsibilities in addition to academic demands, however, they are less disturbed about financial burden of their program and daily basic needs. Their husbands are there for them to shoulder both matrimonial and graduate school expenses. This result is not in consonant with the previous findings where males are found to be more confident with fewer difficulties than females in new culture; Misra et al. (2003) have reported that females' students have more depression and emotional, physiological, and behavioral reactions to stressors than males. Findings of Sumer et al. (2008) were found no relation between gender and international students' depression and anxiety levels. However, as discussed earlier, female as emotional and social being and into interfamilial relationship, hence value marital life. Therefore, most probably female try to accommodate family and score higher in marital adjustment, which is line with (Block, 1973; Fisher et al., 1993, Isaac & Shah, 2004).

The results related to the second hypothesis indicated statistically significant differences for nationality, years of marriage, and sponsorship. The mean scores obtained revealed that Middle East students have greater perception of marital adjustment than African and South Asia student, the reason why Middle East students score higher level of marital adjustment than others could be because, the middle east family tend to be more stability and adaptability. Furthermore, differences in approach the family policy in the Middle Eastern and other areas are affected by the different culture, ethnic, and religion. The clinical observations of Minuchin (1974), along with the general observations of Smadi (1996), Smadi and Alsmadi (1995), have indicated a strong relationship between the Middle East family system and social psychological problems. Consequently, classifying the Middle East family based on Minuchin's straight line, have put these families on the enmeshed side.

Other interesting finding was that concerning university. Statistically significant differences among the population of married postgraduate students were found for university in favor the individuals who studied at University Putra Malaysia (UPM) A possible explanation for higher mean scores on the marital adjustment at UPM is the environmental and the social support that they received. However, another reason is may be due that at International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) students are struggling to meet the higher demands of the graduate school.

Implications and Recommendations

The researchers strongly believe that the outcomes of the present study are very important for the following bodies: Center

for Postgraduate Studies; Students' Affairs Department; International Student Affairs Division, University Counseling Unit. The results of this review echo the themes expressed by Legako and Sorenson (2000) and Katz et al. (2000) regarding the impact of graduate study on marital dissatisfaction and of marital conflict on student retention. Moreover, these results imply that these couples may be underestimating the ongoing stress and future of their marital relationships (Legako & Sorenson, 2000).

Findings from this study are essential because they reflect the pictures of the hassles which students encounter on daily basis in this institution. Foreign students need to be thoroughly counseled and guided on the need to choose minimal number of course workloads.

If social support such recreation this is effectively done, the stress often associated with the heavy class workload will be reduced. Given the information gathered through this research, directions for preventive and remedial interventions can be devised to support graduate students in their marital relationships and their academic careers.

Graduate students can be made aware of existing campus resources and educated as to the impact of graduate study on marital satisfaction. College counselors need to be aware of the tendency of graduate couples to underestimate the level of marital dissatisfaction. The use of a standardized descriptive assessment may help couples identify areas of concern without diagnosis and can serve to legitimize the impact of graduate study on the marital relationship.

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Table 1: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Marital adjustment							
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
Corrected Model	8.726 ^a	11	.793	16.530	.000	.526	
Intercept	1138.769	1	1138.769	23730.839	.000	.993	
University	4.770	1	4.770	99.407	.000	.377	
Gender	.513	1	.513	10.680	.001	.061	
newnational	.357	2	.179	3.724	.026	.043	
University * Gender	.030	1	.030	.624	.431	.004	
University * newnational	.209	2	.105	2.183	.116	.026	
Gender * newnational	.200	2	.100	2.085	.128	.025	
University * Gender * newnational	.157	2	.078	1.633	.199	.020	
Error	7.870	164	.048				
Total	2199.133	176					
Corrected Total	16.596	175					

a. R Squared = .526 (Adjusted R Squared = .494)

Table 2: Multiple Comparisons

Marital adjustment						
Tukey HSD						
(I) newnational	(J) newnational	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Africa	Middle East	-.1639 [*]	.04010	.000	-.2588	-.0691
	South Asia	-.0114	.03968	.956	-.1052	.0824
Middle East	Africa	.1639 [*]	.04010	.000	.0691	.2588
	South Asia	.1525 [*]	.04256	.001	.0519	.2532
South Asia	Africa	.0114	.03968	.956	-.0824	.1052
	Middle East	-.1525 [*]	.04256	.001	-.2532	-.0519

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = .048.

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.