

Missing the marital transition: Implications for counselling single Malay women

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Clearly for most people and most cultures, marriage is a pre-ordained path, the preferred social status and the sanctioned way. As in many countries in Asia, families in Malaysia are experiencing substantial change as new patterns of marriage emerge. Recent qualitative studies of singles have provided some evidence that mature single women are beginning to report more advantages to single status in terms of personal autonomy and growth than might have been true in the past (Anderson et al., 1994; Marks, 1996). There are several popular assumptions that may held by counsellors as well as general public: that everyone wants to be married, that men are afraid of commitment and women are desperate for marriage and that divorced individuals are bitter and unhappy (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Lasoff & Maurer, 1996). Despite these assumptions, there appears to be numerous implications for mental health counsellors when working with single women as literatures suggest that single professional women are a unique group of people as they have different personal and interpersonal needs in developmental and social aspects (Gordon, 2003; Lewis, 1997). This paper explores the voices of 'single' Malay women in Malaysia with 'single' being defined as 'never married' and my research focus is on the professional working women. Negative consequences of this 'problematic' status in Malay's culture are examined, and counselling implications are provided.

Keywords: Singlehood, Malay, Muslim women, Marriage and Gender, Counselling

Paper presented at PERKAMA International 19th National Counselling Convention, June 9-11th, 2013. Akademi Kenegaraan, Kuala Lumpur.