

NON-MARRIAGE IN KUCHING: A STUDY OF NEVER-MARRIED WOMEN AND MEN

There was a time when spinsters and bachelors were seen as anomalous. Family members, friends and matchmakers were always on hand to introduce a partner for those who are eligible for marriage. Times and society have changed. Being single is no longer seen as an aberration of society. Images of incomplete old maids and old bachelors are fading away, and are being replaced by the image of a vibrant career woman and man who are living life to the fullest. Lately, there has been a tremendous increase in the percentage of never-married women and men. For example, never-married Chinese women in Kuala Lumpur number was reported to be 4.5 percent in 1970, but the number increased to 10 percent in 2000. The statistics for Philippines show an increase from 5.6 to 6.2 percent, while for Thailand there is a dramatic increase from 3.0 to 8.0 percent. The most cited factors to explain this trend are higher education and, with it, employment and independence, as well as difficulties in finding a partner. Kuching, and Sarawak in general, is also in the midst of rapid social and cultural transformations. According to the 2000 census in Sarawak, 6.24 percent of women aged 35 and above have never married, while the percentage for never-married men is 5.89 percent. It is therefore important to study non-marriage in Sarawak. The object of study in this research is the never-married women and men in Kuching. Factors such as education, employment, living arrangements and other perceptions and values in life are evaluated to get a better understanding of the lives of never-married persons.

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