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## “I’m Not Married, Let’s Just All Look at Me”: Single Professional Malay Women’s Experience

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### Abstract

Clearly for most people and most cultures, marriage is a pre-ordained path, the preferred social status and the sanctioned way. In Malay culture, most people cannot accept the idea that a never married ‘normal’ woman could be happy and satisfied with her life. To be an *andartu* (*anak dara tua*) or *andalusia* (*anak dara lanjut usia*) is still marginally acceptable in Malay culture. This paper explores the voices of single Malay women in Malaysia with 'single' being defined as never married and focus on the professional working women. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, 20 interviews were conducted using semi structured in-depth interviews. This research examines perspectives of these women on being single and thus highlights some of the negative emotional consequences of being single. The analysis revealed that the emotional consequences include feelings of loneliness, feeling of incompleteness and inadequacy, regrets of missed opportunities and anger at perceived harassment. As the delayed marriage of women aged 30 years and over in Malaysia is a relatively recent phenomenon, the research outcomes will have important implications to the extant literature on professional Malay women who have not married by relating to Muslim women in general and Malaysia or South East Asia in particular.

**Keywords:** Singlehood, Psychology, Malay women, Marriage, Gender

### Introduction

As the delayed marriage of women aged 30 years and over in Malaysia is a relatively recent phenomenon, no studies have been conducted related to this issue. The phenomenon of *andartu* or *andalusia* or *lalo* in Sarawak local dialect – all meaning spinsterhood - is increasingly reported in contemporary Malaysian media, clearly illustrating the changing patterns of modern lifestyles and attitudes towards marriage. In Malaysia, marriage patterns have changed dramatically and an increasing number of people have remained unmarried. The mean age of a first marriage among Malaysian women increased from 22 years in 1970 to 25 years in 2000 (Tey, 2007). Singleness among