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## At Odds: Perceived Stigma of Single Professional Malay Women

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### Abstract

*Anak dara tua* (andartu) or *anak dara lanjut usia* (andalusia) are terms used in Malay culture to designate a woman's unmarried status which mean old virgin or old maiden. Our language further functions to enhance stigma in that population as they are being referred to as *tak laku* (not sellable) or *jual mahal* (playing hard). The majority of researchers have failed to consider the role culture and religion might play for single women in quality of life, social status and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 20 professional Malay Muslim women who have not married, this paper highlights some of the societal stigma, problems and pressures single Malay women experience when they are not married. This paper argued that the meanings of singlehood among women are personally constructed through one life's experiences that are situated within and reinforced by important social contexts, such as one's culture and religious faith.

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

### Introduction

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). The proportion of women who have not married among those aged 30-34 years increased from 6 percent in 1990 to 9.7 percent in 2000. Surprisingly, despite the relatively high degree of research in this area in the west, there remains a lack of research on issues faced by single professional Malay Muslim women who have not married.