



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, CONFLICT  
WITH MOTHER-IN-LAW, DYADIC COPING, MARITAL SATISFACTION,  
AND MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MALAYSIAN CHINESE DUAL-  
EARNER COUPLES***

**LEONG MEI SAN**

**FEM 2021 15**



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COUPLES**

**By**

**LEONG MEI SAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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Philosophy**

**March 2021**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, CONFLICT WITH MOTHER-IN-LAW, DYADIC COPING, MARITAL SATISFACTION, AND MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MALAYSIAN CHINESE DUAL-EARNER COUPLES**

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**March 2021**

**Chair : Rumaya binti Juhari, PhD**  
**Faculty : Human Ecology**

Managing both work and family simultaneously is a tough responsibility. However, many past studies that investigated such issue were conducted in Western countries. The objective of this thesis is to examine how marital satisfaction is experienced by both spouses should they face work-family conflict and conflict with mother-in-law, while considering other personal factors of gender role attitudes and dyadic coping. The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage, Social Role Theory, and Role Conflict Theory were used to guide the present study in explaining the relationships between gender role attitudes, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction and marital stability among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples. Work-family conflict in this study is bidirectional which includes work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). The second objective of this thesis is on the spillover and crossover effects of work-family conflict and dyadic coping on the family outcome of marital satisfaction. Concerning how dual-earner couples cope with the stressors faced (work-family conflict and conflict with mother-in-law), the third objective focuses on the mediating role of dyadic coping towards the relationship between the stressors and marital satisfaction.

An exploratory research design was used to investigate this issue by collecting dyadic data from 134 Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples (268 individuals) aged between 27 to 61 years old. The participants completed the survey, which was a combination of instruments measuring the latent variables of gender role attitude, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, marital stability, and a brief demographic data.

The research hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling. The results showed that the husband's and wife's WIF ( $r_s = -0.244, p = .002$  [husband];  $r_s = -0.158, p = .034$  [wife]), FIW ( $r_s = -0.200, p = .010$  [husband];  $r_s = -0.224, p = .005$  [wife]) and dyadic coping ( $r_s = 0.512, p = .000$  [husband];  $r_s = 0.596, p = .000$  [wife]) were significantly correlated to marital satisfaction. Conversely, gender role attitudes and conflict with mother-in-law were not significantly correlated to marital satisfaction. The overall model of gender role attitudes, WIF, and dyadic coping explained 35.8% variance of marital satisfaction. The second overall model of gender role attitudes, FIW, and dyadic coping explained 35.3% variance of marital satisfaction. The third model of gender role attitudes, conflict with mother-in-law, and dyadic coping explained 35.4% variance of marital satisfaction. No significant gender differences were found in all variables. The spillover effects of WIF, FIW, and dyadic coping were also significant for husbands' WIF ( $\beta = -0.286, p = .000$ ), FIW ( $\beta = -0.249, p = .005$ ), dyadic coping ( $\beta = 0.456, p = .000$ ), wives' FIW ( $\beta = -0.248, p = .003$ ), and dyadic coping ( $\beta = 0.581, p = .000$ ) to their own marital satisfaction. Only one crossover effect of husbands' WIF conflict ( $\beta = -0.180, p = .019$ ) was significant. The actor effect of dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between husband's WIF and marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.106, p = .022$ ), husband's and wife's FIW and marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.152, p = .008$  [husband];  $\beta = -0.113, p = .015$  [wife]), husband's conflict with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.146, p = .007$ ).

This study contributes to the understanding of the spillover and crossover effects of work-family conflict and dyadic coping to marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples. Furthermore, the role of dyadic coping and how it mediates the relationship between stressors and marital satisfaction are highlighted. The theories are supported, and better coping skills significantly lead to a higher level of marital satisfaction among the participants. Thus, psychoeducational programs may need to consider educating couples on how to cope with life stressors in order to enhance marital satisfaction. This may be the first study done among Malaysian Chinese that collected dyadic data. The findings of this study allow comparison between spouses and it signifies cross-cultural comparisons on how work-family conflict is experienced in different cultures for future studies.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERKAITAN DI ANTARA KONFLIK KERJA-KELUARGA, KONFLIK IBU  
MERTUA, DAYA TINDAK PASANGAN, KEPUASAN PERKAHWINAN, DAN  
KESTABILAN PERKAHWINAN DALAM KALANGAN PASANGAN DWI  
PENDAPATAN CINA MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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**Pengerusi : Rumaya binti Juhari, PhD**  
**Fakulti : Ekologi Manusia**

Mengurus kerja dan keluarga pada masa yang sama merupakan satu tanggungjawab yang sukar dilaksanakan. Namun begitu, kebanyakan kajian berkaitan isu ini telah dijalankan di negara barat. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyelidik kepuasan perkahwinan bagi pasangan yang berkemungkinan menghadapi konflik kerja-keluarga dan konflik ibu-mertua di samping mengambil kira faktor-faktor individu seperti peranan gender dan daya tindak. Model “Kerentanan-Adaptasi-Tekanan bagi Perkahwinan”, “Teori Peranan Sosial”, dan “Teori Konflik Peranan” digunakan sebagai asas kajian untuk menjelaskan hubungan antara sikap peranan jantina, konflik kerja-keluarga, konflik ibu-mertua, daya tindak pasangan, serta kepuasan dan kestabilan perkahwinan dalam kalangan pasangan dwi pendapatan berbangsa Cina di Malaysia. Konflik kerja-keluarga adalah satu situasi yang bersifat dua hala, iaitu konflik kerja yang mempengaruhi keluarga (WIF) dan keluarga yang mempengaruhi kerja (FIW). Tesis ini juga meneliti kesan limpahan dan rentasan konflik kerja-keluarga dan daya tindak pasangan terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan. Melihat kepada cara bagaimana pasangan berdwi-pendapatan mengatasi tekanan konflik kerja-keluarga dan konflik ibu-mertua, tesis ini juga mengkaji peranan mediasi daya tindak pasangan terhadap hubungan antara tekanan dan kepuasan perkahwinan.

Reka bentuk penyelidikan penerokaan telah digunakan dalam kajian ini dengan pengumpulan dan analisis data pasangan yang melibatkan 134 pasangan (268 individu) Cina Malaysia dwi-pendapatan yang berusia antara 27 hingga 61 tahun. Para responden melengkapkan soal selidik yang merangkumi pengukuran sekala sikap peranan jantina, konflik kerja-keluarga, konflik ibu

mertua, daya tindak pasangan, kepuasan perkahwinan, kestabilan perkahwinan, serta ringkasan data demografi.

Hipotesis kajian ini telah diuji dengan *Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling*. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa konflik WIF ( $r_s = -0.244$ ,  $p = .002$  [suami];  $r_s = -0.158$ ,  $p = .034$  [isteri]), FIW ( $r_s = -0.200$ ,  $p = .010$  [suami];  $r_s = -0.224$ ,  $p = .005$  [isteri]), serta daya tindak pasangan ( $r_s = 0.512$ ,  $p = .000$  [suami];  $r_s = 0.596$ ,  $p = .000$  [isteri]) mempunyai korelasi signifikan dengan kepuasan perkahwinan untuk suami dan isteri. Sebaliknya, sikap peranan jantina dan konflik ibu-mertua tidak menunjukkan korelasi signifikan dengan kepuasan perkahwinan. Model keseluruhan sikap peranan jantina, WIF, dan daya tindak pasangan menjelaskan 35.8% kepuasan perkahwinan responden. Model keseluruhan kedua yang merangkumi sikap peranan jantina, FIW, dan daya tindak pasangan menjelaskan 35.3% kepuasan perkahwinan responden. Manakala, model keseluruhan ketiga yang merangkumi sikap peranan jantina, konflik ibu-mertua, dan daya tindak pasangan menjelaskan 35.4% kepuasan perkahwinan responden. Tiada perbezaan signifikan antara suami and isteri dalam semua sekala yang dikaji. Kesan limpahan WIF, FIW, dan daya tindak pasangan adalah signifikan untuk WIF suami ( $\beta = -0.286$ ,  $p = .000$ ), FIW suami ( $\beta = -0.249$ ,  $p = .005$ ), daya tindak pasangan suami ( $\beta = 0.456$ ,  $p = .000$ ), FIW isteri ( $\beta = -0.248$ ,  $p = .003$ ), dan daya tindak pasangan isteri ( $\beta = 0.581$ ,  $p = .000$ ) terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan sendiri. Manakala, terdapat hanya satu kesan rentasan konflik WIF suami signifikan ( $\beta = -0.180$ ,  $p = .019$ ) terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan isteri. Kesan limpahan untuk peranan mediasi daya tindak pasangan adalah signifikan untuk hubungan antara WIF suami dengan kepuasan perkahwinan suami ( $\beta = -0.106$ ,  $p = .022$ ), FIW suami dan isteri dengan kepuasan perkahwinan suami dan isteri ( $\beta = -0.152$ ,  $p = .008$  [suami];  $\beta = -0.113$ ,  $p = .015$  [isteri]), dan konflik ibu-mertua suami dengan kepuasan perkahwinan suami ( $\beta = -0.146$ ,  $p = .007$ ). Tiada kesan rentasan peranan mediasi daya tindak pasangan dikesan.

Kajian ini menyumbang kepada kefahaman tentang kesan limpahan dan rentasan konflik kerja-keluarga terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan dalam kalangan pasangan Cina berdwi-pendapatan di Malaysia. Selain itu, peranan daya tindak pasangan dan bagaimana ia bertindak sebagai perantara (mediasi) dalam hubungan tekanan dengan kepuasan perkahwinan juga dikemukakan. Hasil kajian ini menyokong teori-teori sedia ada bahawa kemahiran daya tindak pasangan yang cemerlang boleh membawa kepada kepuasan perkahwinan yang lebih signifikan dalam kalangan responden. Oleh itu, program pendidikan perlu mendidik pasangan berdwi-pendapatan tentang cara-cara menangani tekanan hidup untuk meningkatkan kepuasan perkahwinan mereka. Kajian ini merupakan antara kajian terawal yang mengumpul data dalam kalangan pasangan berdwi-pendapatan Cina di Malaysia. Hasil kajian ini boleh diperkembangkan dengan menumpukan kepada perbandingan antara pasangan serta antara budaya dalam aspek menangani konflik kerja-keluarga.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WIF	Work-to-family conflict/work interfering with family
FIW	Family-to-work conflict/family interfering with family
VSA	Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage
QMI	Quality of Marriage Index
PARQ	Parent Adult Relationship Questionnaire
APIM	Actor-partner Interdependence Modelling
APIMeM	Actor-partner Interdependence Mediation Model
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
UK	United Kingdom
EU	European Union
n	Sample size
L	Value achieved from the power value table for specific $\alpha$ , k, and power
f <sup>2</sup>	Effect size for ordinary least squares regression
k	The number of predictors in the regression model
$\alpha$	Alpha
$\beta$	Path Coefficient
CB-SEM	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling
VB-SEM	Variance-based Structural Equation Modelling
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
LISREL	Linear Structural Relations
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
PLS	Partial Least Squares
ADANCO	Advanced Analysis of Composites
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
HTMT	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations

pc	Composite Reliability
MS	Marital Satisfaction
MSS	Marital Stability
DC	Dyadic Coping
WFC	Work-to-family Conflict
FWC	Family-to-work Conflict
CM	Conflict with mother-in-law
R <sup>2</sup>	Coefficients of Determination
Q <sup>2</sup>	Predictive Relevance
q <sup>2</sup>	Effects Size Of Predictive Relevance
VIF	Variance Inflated Factor
t	Path Coefficient
SE	Standard Error
D	Omission Distance
SSE	Sum of Squares of Prediction Errors
SSO	Sum of Squares of Observations
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
N	Number
SD	Standard Deviation
M	Mean
MIL	Mother-in-law
LLCI	Lower Level Confidence Interval
ULCI	Upper Level Confidence Interval

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Work-family conflict is a bidirectional construct which includes work-to-family conflict/work interfering with family (WIF) and family-to-work conflict/family interfering with work (FIW). This thesis focuses on the effects of work and family conflict interfering with each other on the family outcome of marital satisfaction. Traditionally, marital satisfaction was examined and understood mainly by having only one of the partners answering the surveys (Jackson et al., 2014; Leach & Butterworth, 2012). This limitation is addressed in this study using dyadic data collected from Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples.

This chapter outlines the research background, identifies the research questions and research objectives, discusses the significance and implications of the thesis, and concludes with a brief description on the purpose of the remaining chapters.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Marriage is a personal choice in today's society (Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Li & Fung, 2011) and it is considered as an important component contributing to happiness and life satisfaction (Diener & Chan, 2011; Oshio et al., 2013). However, when couples get married, they also signed up for many other responsibilities inadvertently. This is especially true among the collectivist culture, such as Malaysian Chinese (Hofstede, 2001; Ng et al., 2009). Malaysian Chinese are affected by collectivism, Confucianism, and contemporary values (Edwards & Roces, 2000; Ng et al., 2009; Rahman et al., 2020). Collectivist culture expects married women to fulfil the social expectations of being filial to their parents-in-law and taking care of the family (Wu et al., 2010). Conflict with in-laws was stated as one of the main reasons behind Malaysians' divorce (National Population and Family Development Board, 2016).

Relating this to the global trend of increased women participation in the labour force, the number of dual-earner families are expected to increase in Malaysia (Amstad et al., 2011; Aryee et al., 2005; Zaimah et al., 2013). In recent years, work-family conflict has received remarkable attention from researchers. This is because more and more couples are expected to experience both work and family roles at the same time. It is intriguing to find out if juggling between these two roles will have an impact on marital satisfaction as a family-related outcome.

Early years socialization of gender role was deemed to affect how we cope when met with work-family conflict (Ahmad, 1995). Gender role is defined as the characteristics that each sex are expected to have in order to prepare them for the tasks that they typically carried out and it differentiates men and women into specific social roles (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2012). Typically, women are expected to play the housewife role while men are into the breadwinner role (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2012). This combination of findings provided supportive evidence on the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage (VSA; Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The VSA integrates the advantages of the Social Exchange Theory, Behavioural Theory, Attachment Theory, and Crisis Theory and addresses the weaknesses of each theory in understanding marital quality and marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Furthermore, it is one of the most widely used models to explain marital satisfaction in research (Bradbury, 1995). This justifies its usage to guide the current research.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage was designed as a simple but reasonably comprehensive model which aims to organise marital research by including more constructs into the different components of the model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). It posits that individual's stable personality and early life experiences (the enduring vulnerabilities component) and stressful events in life, which includes developmental transitions in life and the environmental conditions couples are exposed to, can affect the marital quality and marital stability. This process is mediated by the coping abilities on how couples react and adapt to the stressful events in life (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Depending on their resources, lesser enduring vulnerabilities and stressful events in life, and better coping abilities, couples will have better marital quality and more stable marriages (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

When investigating work-family conflict, work-related outcomes were frequently studied in the field of work and organisational psychology (Amstad et al., 2011). However, according to the role conflict model proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell, (1985), the family domain is equally important when understanding work-family conflict. Furthermore, previous meta-analyses mainly focused on the relationship between work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, and job, family, or life satisfaction (Ford et al., 2007; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). The important family-related outcome, i.e. marital satisfaction, is often missing in past research while marital distress is found to be negatively correlated to both physical and mental health (Sandberg et al., 2012). In addition, past research has propounded on the need to investigate the similarities and differences of work-family conflict between the Western and Eastern cultures to examine the Asian work-family conflict (Hassan et al., 2010). Therefore, this research aims to study how work-family conflict is related to the family-related outcome, namely marital satisfaction.

The involvement of women in the labour force continues to rise which creates issues such as changes in gender roles, marital conflict, partnership, and family financial decisions (Olah & Gahler, 2014; Zaimah et al., 2013). It was proposed that one of the reasons contributing to family instability following increased female employment is that the roles of women and men in marriage have not changed in a symmetrical way (Olah & Gahler, 2014). On top of that, it was mentioned that work role has to be understood within a larger societal context as it is interrelated with other life roles (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). Work role cannot be fully understood as a standalone construct but with gender roles, cultural background, contextual perceptions, and values (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). These lend support to research on dual-career families among Malaysians as part of the effort to understand the issues raised and how the participation of women in the labour force has impacted family life, particularly marital satisfaction.

When faced with stressors from both work and family domains, both spouses cope with the situation either similarly or differently since dyadic coping is a dynamic process (Bodenmann, 2005, 2008a). For example, when women face the stress of working outside of the home and having limited time to complete the household labour, their spouses might struggle with unexpected higher home demands at the same time. Participation of females in the labour force has been on consistent rise, subsequently causing an increase of dual-earner families (Zaimah et al., 2013). It was reported that the female labour force participation rate had risen from 55.3 percent in the second quarter of 2018 to 55.8 percent in the second quarter of 2019 (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2019). With more females joining the workforce, it is fair to speculate that the emerging trend of increasing dual-earner families is likely to continue.

According to Bodenmann, (2005), dyadic coping plays an important role among dual-earner couples to cope with dyadic stress when faced with demands from multiple stressors. Dyadic coping refers to couples who work together in attempting to deal with dyadic stress within a shared social context (i.e., their marriages) while considering each other's satisfaction (Bodenmann, 2005). It also enhances an individual's well-being when their spouse utilises dyadic coping. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how dyadic coping mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction when couples are facing the stress of work-family conflict. Furthermore, gender role attitudes and coping strategies are among the factors affecting marital quality (Nurhayati et al., 2019).

Interdependence is present in a relationship when one person's behaviour, thought, or emotion affects the behaviour, thought, or emotion of a partner (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Marriage is a dynamic process and it involves both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Each person's experience is unique, but at the same time dependent on the interaction with the other person, thus affecting one's subjective experience (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Interdependence within interpersonal relationship

may lead to nonindependence of observation. This means that the observations of two individuals are correlated where the knowledge from one's score provides information about the other person's score. An example of nonindependence of observation is the marital satisfaction scores of husbands and wives as they tend to be positively correlated (Cook & Kenny, 2005). As dyadic coping is a dyadic process where couples' coping have an effect on their partners (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005), such process may be considered as a nonindependence of observation. However, the notion of nonindependence of observation is problematic as it may lead to bias in significance testing (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny, 1995; Kenny et al., 2006). Therefore, this study aims to examine the nonindependence of observation by collecting dyadic data from both husband and wife. The actor-partner interdependence model is the de facto method for analysing dyadic data (Wickham & Knee, 2012) because the association between a predictor and outcome variable for both members of a dyad is analysed simultaneously and decomposed into two distinct parts. Both actor effect (the effect of a person's predictor variable on their own outcome variable) and partner effect (the effect of a person's predictor variable on the partner's outcome variable) are estimated in the same model (Kenny et al., 2006).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problems**

### **1.2.1 Literature Gap**

Many past studies agreed that the majority of the work-family conflict and marital satisfaction studies have been carried out in the context of western countries (Aziz, 2011; Hassan et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2009, 2013). Yet, the prevalence of marital dissatisfaction among a study sample was reported at 37.3% in a study involving married Malaysians (Ahmad Faizal et al., 2017). Furthermore, the studies investigating work-family conflict in the Malaysian setting mentioned above did not examine the impact of work-family conflict on marital satisfaction. The crux of the matter is the limited number of studies that had looked into marital satisfaction in Malaysia (Abidin et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009) and the data were collected from only either one of the spouse (Abidin et al., 2018; Angusamy et al., 2017; Drahman & Mohd Yusof, 2018; Mustafa et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2013). The lack of studies in this area and the methodological weaknesses thus limit the understanding of both work-family conflict and marital satisfaction. This signifies the importance of research in this field of study in order to add on and expand the knowledge on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, Malaysian Chinese have the highest prevalence in experiencing work-family conflict as compared to Indians and Malays. This is because they are working in formal sectors (i.e., professional, technical, clerical, and sales workers) and are more likely to spend less time with their families (Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011). This study aims to investigate how work-family conflict is experienced among Malaysian Chinese and the impact of work-family conflict on the level of marital satisfaction.



In an earlier study investigating work-family conflict among married working female researchers, only 28% of the respondents reported experiencing high work-family conflict and 40% reported a moderate level of work-family conflict (Ahmad, 1995). Similarly, administrative employees in a semi-government company also reported low level of work-family conflict and job stress (Jamadin et al., 2015). Several other studies have found high level of work-family conflict among professional doctors, academicians, and school teachers (Abdul Razak et al., 2011; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2012; Panatik et al., 2011). Thus far, these studies involved participants from different ethnicity where the Malays were the main respondents of the surveys and the participants were mainly government or semi-government employees. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the level of work-family conflict experienced among different working-class of Malaysian Chinese. This is an effort to address the inconsistencies found on the level of work-family conflict reported in past research.

Although researchers have drawn on the importance of gender roles as an underlying rationale to understand work-family interface in non-Western context, the majority of the studies only theorised the cultural influence without including a cultural dimension in their design (Aycan, 2008). For instance, individuals were categorised based on couple types and ethnicity when measuring marital satisfaction in Malaysia (Mustafa et al., 2013; Noor, 1999). This neglects the cultural differences across different ethnicity. Ng et al. (2009) suggested that Malaysian Chinese still hold a traditional Confucian culture by large and Malaysians in general are still inclined towards traditional gender role attitudes (Hassan et al., 2010). However, Malaysian Chinese are often not treated as the main subject in the literature where they are often included as part of the comparison group of another dominant ethnicity (Aziz, 2011; Noor, 1999).

Dyadic coping plays an important role in mediating and predicting relationship and marital satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2015; Razak et al., 2015). It was suggested for the role of dyadic coping in marriage to be investigated cross-culturally (Razak et al., 2015). In this regard, Hilpert et al. (2016) conducted a cross-nation study across 35 countries and reported significant cultural differences in dyadic coping. However, most of the research concerning the positive impact dyadic coping on relationship satisfaction was conducted in the Western cultures (Falconier et al., 2015; Fallahchai et al., 2019). Culture plays an important role in marriage (Schoebi et al., 2010) and how individuals communicate their stress to elicit support from their partners when coping with stress differs across countries (Xu & Hiew, 2016). Therefore, this study investigates how gender roles, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, and dyadic coping contribute to marital satisfaction and marital stability among Malaysian Chinese as the targeted sample.

Another limitation in past cross-cultural or cross-countries work-family studies is that cultural differences are often assumed as a national difference without considering the cultural differences across different ethnic groups. This is problematic in countries with multiracial and multi-ethnic groups like Malaysia. When studies such as Oshio et al. (2013) compared marital satisfaction across countries, only single ethnic dominant countries were included like China, Japan, and Korea. Such practice of equating cultures with countries might be inappropriate when the country comprises of multi-ethnic groups (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 2005). In addition, when one ethnic group makes up a significant percentage of the total population, it might affect the results of the research findings. Furthermore, the prevalence of work-family conflict is highest among Malaysian Chinese, followed by Malaysian Indians and Malaysian Malays. Malaysian Chinese are 3.1 times more likely to experience work-family conflict than Malaysian Malays (Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011). Therefore, this study focuses on how marital satisfaction is influenced by the work-family conflict experience among Malaysian Chinese.

### **1.2.2 Theoretical Gap**

It is widely acknowledged that the majority of studies in both work-family conflict and marital satisfaction have been conducted in Western societies (Hassan et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2014). Therefore, this study aims to address the gap of how work-family conflict is experienced in the Eastern culture so that Asian work-family conflict scales can be developed in the future and to contribute to the understanding of whether the work-family conflict model is applicable and can be generalised to an Eastern culture (Hassan et al., 2010). In order for an Asian work-family conflict scale to be developed, more research is needed to explore the similarities and differences of work-family conflict in the Eastern cultures (Hassan et al., 2010; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2012).

An additional gap that this study is trying to address is the lack of studies that look on both directions of the work-family conflict interface (Amstad & Semmer, 2011; Hassan et al., 2010). Several studies have investigated both directions of work-family conflict (e.g., Abdul Razak et al., 2011; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2012; Panatik et al., 2011) but the spillover and crossover effects were not discussed because only one spouse answered their surveys. Therefore, this study aims to measure both directions of work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) through dyadic data in order to investigate how work-family conflict contributes to marital satisfaction. Furthermore, results concerning gender differences in spillover effect were highly debated (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). Therefore, utilising dyadic data in this study will allow for the comparison of gender differences in spillover effect.

### 1.2.3 Methodological Gap

Thus far, no conclusions can be drawn on the direction of crossover effect due to limited scientific evidence in this effect, where some studies tested only one direction of crossover while other studies only involved one of the spouses (Abdul Razak et al., 2011; Amstad & Semmer, 2011; Hassan et al., 2010; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2012; Panatik et al., 2011). Therefore, by utilising the methodological advantage of dyadic data, two directions of crossover effects can be tested thus contributing to the knowledge in crossover effect of work-family conflict.

Past studies investigating work-family conflict among Malaysians only collected data from one of the spouses (Abdul Razak et al., 2011; Ahmad, 1995; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2012; Panatik et al., 2011) and dyadic data was suggested to examine how each partner's reported work-family conflict interacts in shaping marital satisfaction (Minnotte et al., 2015). Similarly, marital satisfaction among Malaysians was mainly investigated and understood through one spouse's perspective (Abidin et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2010; Mustafa et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009, 2013). Collecting dyadic data was suggested in order to understand marital satisfaction from a more holistic point of view by obtaining both spouses' perceptions of their marriage (Durtschi et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2014; Leach & Butterworth, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to utilise dyadic data in attempting to investigate marital satisfaction as an interpersonal experience.

In addition, the interdependence within interpersonal relationship can be measured using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). APIM was designed to measure the actor and partner effects with appropriate statistical allowances in dealing with the nonindependence of the data (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Hong & Kim, 2019; Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). The model is useful to investigate dyadic relationship (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010), determining actor and partner effects (Hong & Kim, 2019), and serves as the most promising model in analysing dyadic data (Kenny & Cook, 1999). These evidences suggest that APIM is a suitable strategy to analyse the dyadic data collected from this study. Thus far, no published research is known to the researcher that examines the bidirectionality of work-family conflict (work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict) and its relationship on marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples. In addition, no published studies have looked on the actor and partner effect of dyadic coping on marital satisfaction as well as the mediating effect of dyadic coping between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples. The special focus on this minority population (Malaysian Chinese) has not been researched before after extensive search and literature review conducted by the researcher. This study serves as a novel contribution by examining the relationships between gender role attitudes, work-family conflict, dyadic coping, and marital satisfaction.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In general, the central research question in this thesis is: "how is the work-family conflict experience related to marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples?" Specifically, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage (VSA; Bradbury & Karney, 1995) explain the relationships between gender role attitudes, work-family conflict (both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work), conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, and marital stability among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples?
2. Does work-family conflict (spillover and crossover effects of both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work) correlate differently with marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples?
3. Does dyadic coping mediate the relationship between work-family conflict (both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work) and marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1.a. To examine the relationships between the social demographic characteristics (gender, age, household income, educational level, number of children, marriage duration, stay-in domestic helper, co-residence with parents-in-law, number of hours worked per week, and occupation) and marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples.

1.b. To examine the relationships between gender role attitudes, work-family conflict (both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work), conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital stability, and marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual earner-couples.

2. To examine the spillover and crossover effect of work-family conflict (both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work) and dyadic coping on Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples' marital satisfaction.

3. To examine the mediating role of dyadic coping on the relationship between work-family conflict (both directions of work interfering with family and family interfering with work), conflict with mother-in-law, and marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual earner-couples.

## 1.5 Research Hypotheses

HA1: Husband reports a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction than wife.

HA2: Younger participants have a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction as compared to older respondents.

HA3: Participant with higher level of household income experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA4: Participant with higher level of education experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA5: Participant with fewer number of children experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA6: Participant with shorter marital duration experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA7: Participant working fewer hours per week experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA8: Participant who does not co-reside with parents-in-law experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA9: Participant who has a stay-in domestic helper experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

HA10: Participant of the non-executive level experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction as compared to participant working at the executive and managerial level.

HA11: Participant with traditional gender role attitude experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction as compared to participant with egalitarian gender role attitude.

HA11a: Participant with consistent gender role attitudes (traditional-traditional and egalitarian-egalitarian) experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction as compared to participant with inconsistent gender role attitude (traditional-egalitarian).

HA11b: Participant with inconsistent gender role attitudes of husband<sub>egalitarian</sub> - wife<sub>traditional</sub> experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction as compared to participant with inconsistent in gender role attitudes of husband<sub>traditional</sub> - wife<sub>egalitarian</sub>.

HA12: Participant with lower level of work interfering with family conflict (work-to-family conflict) experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>A13</sub>: Participant with lower level of family interfering with work conflict (family-to-work conflict) experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>A14</sub>: Participant with lower level of conflict with mother-in-law experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>A15</sub>: Participant with higher level of marital stability experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>A16</sub>: Participant with higher level of dyadic coping experiences significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>A17</sub>: There is a significant dyadic effect of work-family conflict on marital satisfaction among couples.

Work interfering with family conflict (work-to-family conflict):

Actor effect – spillover effect:

H<sub>A17a</sub>: Husband/wife with low level of work-to-family conflict experiences high level of own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect

H<sub>A17b</sub>: Husband/wife with low level of work-to-family conflict experiences high level of partner's marital satisfaction.

Family interfering work conflict (family-to-work conflict):

Actor effect – spillover effect:

H<sub>A17c</sub>: Husband/wife with low level of family-to-work conflict experiences high level of own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect:

H<sub>A17d</sub>: Husband/wife with low level of family-to-work conflict experiences high level of partner's marital satisfaction.

Actor effect – spillover effect:

H<sub>A17e</sub>: Husband/wife with high level of dyadic coping experiences high level of own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect:

H<sub>A17f</sub>: Husband/wife with high level of dyadic coping experiences high level of partner's marital satisfaction.

HA18: Dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between work interfering with family conflict (work-to-family conflict) and marital satisfaction.

Actor effect – spillover effect:

HA18a: Husband/wife's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own work interfering with family conflict (work-to-family conflict) and own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect:

HA18b: Partner's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own work interfering with family conflict (work-to-family conflict) and own marital satisfaction.

HA19: Dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between family interfering with work conflict (family-to-work conflict) and marital satisfaction.

Actor effect – spillover effect:

HA19a: Husband/wife's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own family interfering with work conflict (family-to-work conflict) and own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect:

HA19b: Partner's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own family interfering with work conflict (family-to-work conflict) and own marital satisfaction.

HA20: Dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between conflict with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction.

Actor effect – spillover effect:

HA20a: Husband/wife's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own conflict with mother-in-law and own marital satisfaction.

Partner effect – crossover effect:

HA20b: Partner's dyadic coping significantly mediates the relationship between own conflict with mother-in-law and own marital satisfaction.

A detailed table summarising the research questions, research objectives, and the corresponding hypotheses is attached as Appendix F (page 215).

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of work-family conflict in three different ways. Firstly, it provides a non-Western context and a Malaysian Chinese perspective on how work-family conflict is experienced and affects their marriage. This study is extending existing models and theories and it builds upon previous research on marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese population where past research about this specific group is found to be scarce. It is achieved by utilising a theoretical framework proposed based on studies done in the Western culture. Secondly, this study assessed work-family conflict as bi-directional which was found to be lacking in the past research involving the Eastern culture (Bruck et al., 2002; Hassan et al., 2010). Thirdly, the spillover and crossover effects can be compared directly by utilising the dyadic data collection method.

Methodologically, this study employed a dyadic approach which was found to be lacking in marital satisfaction data (Jackson et al., 2014; Leach & Butterworth, 2012). This study goes beyond individual-oriented research and offers practical implications in understanding how marriage is a dynamic process and how couples' work-family experiences might influence their spouses' marital satisfaction. This helps couples to understand their marriage better and for them to be able to create a more satisfying marital relationship when they are aware of how struggling between work and family influences their marriage. Nonetheless, results generated in this study, which utilised local participants, may help to provide information for marriage counselling in the field of psychotherapy as the participants disclose information regarding marital satisfaction.

Past research has found that those who have a satisfying marriage tend to live longer, healthier, happier, and experience less psychological distress as compared to individuals who are never married, divorced, or widowed (Barrett, 2000; Waite & Gallagher, 2001). On the other hand, unsatisfying relationships have many negative consequences where it affects individuals' health both psychologically and physically (Ahmad Faizal et al., 2017; Bodenmann, 2005; Slatcher & Selcuk, 2017) such as eating disorders (Van den Broucke et al., 1997), depression (Beach et al., 1998; Gordon et al., 2013; Gordon & Chen, 2016; Maroufizadeh et al., 2018; Papp et al., 2010), anxiety (Ahmad Faizal et al., 2017; Lebow et al., 2012), specific diseases such as cancer, cardiac disease, chronic pain (Haase et al., 2016; Robles et al., 2014; Schmalting & Sher, 1997), sexual dysfunction (Ahmad Faizal et al., 2017), as well as the risk of mortality (Robles, 2014). Aside from these negative side effects, it was also reported that difficulties in relationships are one of the most common reasons for people to seek psychotherapy (Beach et al., 1998). Thus, this study aims to shed some light on how personal and environmental factors affect marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples.



In addition, research also showed that couple therapy has contributed a positive impact to 70% of couples who received treatment and the effectiveness of couple therapy is no less than individual therapy (Lebow et al., 2012). Cordova et al. (2014) reported that “relationship health is a public health issue” (p.592). Divorce has high social impact as individual and societal costs are involved (Anderson, 2014; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Mattson et al., 2011). Children experience emotional, security, and academic insecurities, and divorcees experience work productivity and issues in maintaining family relationship. At the society level, divorce contributes to higher crime rate, substance abuse, as well as emotional and mental health risk (i.e., suicide attempts) which increases the financial cost of maintaining the public health (Anderson, 2014). All these indicate that marital satisfaction and positive marriage experiences are an important to the area of both social sciences and the medical field.

Equally, this study also aims to extend the existing literature by incorporating a specific cultural component, namely gender role attitudes, using an understudied and culturally different sample. Furthermore, it was repeatedly mentioned in past research that work-family conflict interface research has been based heavily on the United States and Western sample and the development of culture-sensitive work-family interface theories is needed in order to expand the literature and the theory by adding novel knowledge (Hassan et al., 2010; Liu & Cheung, 2015; Powell et al., 2016). Likewise, there have been limited past research that incorporated cultural considerations in their study (Powell et al., 2016) and this study aims to address this issue not only by adding culturally unique variables (gender role attitudes and in-law relationship) but also by addressing the theoretical gap through the inclusion of a culturally specific and minority group in Malaysia.

To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, the novelty of this study is that it may be the first that investigates the direct comparison between the spillover and crossover effects of work-family conflict (work interfering with family/work-to-family conflict and family interfering with work/family-to-work conflict) among Malaysian Chinese and how it contributes to marital satisfaction. Direct comparison between the spillover and crossover effects of work-family conflict involving the Eastern and Western studies were found to be lacking in past research (Abdul Razak et al., 2011; Amstad & Semmer, 2011; Hassan et al., 2010; Nasurdin & O’Driscoll, 2012; Panatik et al., 2011). The results of this study contribute and add new knowledge to the work-family conflict literature and theory by comparing the results with past research primarily done in a Western context and highlight the work-family conflict experiences of Malaysian Chinese.

## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the current study where relationships between gender role attitudes, work interfering with family conflict and family interfering with work conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, and marital stability have been investigated.

Cross-sectional data were presented in this study where no causal relations can be drawn from the findings. However, the findings are valuable in understanding the relationship patterns among the sampled group. Furthermore, it provides useful information and insights in predicting the direction for future studies.

In addition, all measures used in this study are based on self-reported data, thus creating a risk of common method variance. Nevertheless, if the observed relationships between variables in this study are merely an effect of common method variance, these relationships would be significant (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). Yet, it did not happen in this study.

Thirdly, Hawthorne effect may have contributed potential bias on the findings of this study. Limited information is known about the circumstances in which Hawthorne effect operates as well as its mechanism of effect and magnitudes (McCambridge et al., 2014). Increasing response anonymity is found effective in mitigating Hawthorne effect (Fisher & Katz, 2000; King & Bruner, 2000). Participants in this study were allowed to complete the questionnaire privately without the presence of the researcher. Separate and sealed envelopes were provided for the participants to return the completed questionnaire while maintaining their privacy. Another step suggested to mitigate Hawthorne effect is by rejecting the data of participants with high standard deviation scores (van de Mortel, 2008). The data included in this study went through data cleaning process and participants with extreme data were improved. These are the steps taken to mitigate the Hawthorne effect in this study.

Fourth, since this study utilised a non-probability sampling, the results cannot be generalised to the population. No screening procedure was conducted due to the practical constraints of getting participants. However, the findings helped researchers to further understand the current sample of Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples residing in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor in examining marital satisfaction. The sample of this study is not representative of the population and no conclusion can be made on the population. Future studies using a probability sample is necessary.

This study defines marital satisfaction as a universal evaluation of marriage. Future studies may choose to investigate marital satisfaction as a multidimensional construct where other measures of marital satisfaction such as commitment, intimacy, passion, and sexual relationship can be included. The sample size is sufficient to measure the variables identified in this study, however, it is not large enough to investigate the variables suggested. Future studies with probability sampling, larger sample size and additional variables will provide more information in understanding marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples.

## **1.8 Definition of Terminologies**

### **1.8.1 Operational Definition**

#### **Marital Satisfaction**

Conceptual: Marital satisfaction is how an individual perceives his or her marriage and the level of happiness being in the marriage. It is defined as individuals' global assessment and feelings towards their marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Operational: Marital satisfaction is measured by the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI). A high score indicates a high level of marital satisfaction and happiness while a low score represents a low level of marital satisfaction and a low sense of happiness in the marriage. A total score is tabulated where the minimum score in this scale is six and the maximum score is 45 (Norton, 1983).

#### **Marital Stability**

Conceptual: Marital stability is an individual's emotional and cognitive conditions along with the behaviours exhibited prior to terminating a relationship (Booth et al., 1983). It also refers to a marital status whether couples are either currently continuing the marriage or separated or divorced (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Operational: Marital stability is measured by the Marital Instability Index developed by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983). A high score reflects a higher level of marital stability where couples are less likely to separate or divorce. On the other hand, a low score reflects high marital instability where couples have a higher likelihood of separation or divorce. A total score is tabulated from all the items after reversed scored. The minimum score in this scale is zero and the maximum score is 57 (Booth et al., 1983).

## **Gender Role Attitude**

Conceptual: Gender role attitude is defined as the attitudes that individuals hold on issues regarding division of household chores and childcare responsibility between men and women that stem from cultural norms and early socialisation within a society (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2012).

Operational: Gender role attitudes are measured by a single question where participants are required to answer their preferred attitudes towards the ideal division of work in families with preschool children. This question was adopted from Bernhardt and Goldscheider (2006). Depending on the response chosen, they will be grouped into either holding a traditional gender role attitude or an egalitarian gender role attitude (Olah & Gahler, 2014).

## **Work-Family Conflict**

Conceptual: Work-family conflict demarcates the inter-role conflict between work role and family role where the demands (time, strain, and behaviour) from one role (work/family) are interfering with performing another role's (work/family) responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Operational: Work-family conflict is measured by the Work-family and Family-work Conflict Scales with the two subscales of work-family conflict scale and family-work conflict scale (Netemeyer et al., 1996). A total score is tabulated for each subscale where a higher score equates to higher levels of work-family conflict while a low score shows low levels of work-family conflict. The minimum score in this scale is seven and the maximum score in each subscale is 35 (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

## **Conflict with Mother-in-Law**

Conceptual: Conflict with mother-in-law is theorised as the negative relationship qualities such as demanding and questioning behaviour, hostility, and unsympathetic experienced in the parent-adult relationship between adults and their mother-in-law (Pitzer et al., 2011).

Operational: The negative subscale in Parent Adult Relationship Questionnaire (PARQ, Pitzer et al., 2011) is used to measure the relationship between individuals and their mother-in-law where a total score for the subscale is tabulated. A high score reflects a more negative relationship between mother-in-law and the adult answering the subscale. The minimum score in this scale is four and the maximum score is 20.

## **Dyadic Coping**

Conceptual: Dyadic coping is the effort of a spouse in trying to alleviate the stress of their partner or a common effort between couples in managing common stressors affecting their relationship. Dyadic coping includes both communication and coping patterns such as supportive, delegated, negative, and joint coping (Bodenmann, 2008b).

Operational: The Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2008b) is used to measure the dyadic coping between couples. This scale evaluates how couples cope with stress. A total score is tabulated where a high score reflects effective coping with stressors experienced in marriage between couples. On the other hand, a low score reflects less adaptive coping between couples when faced with the stressors in their marriage. The range of scores for this scale is as follows: scores less than 111 represent "below average coping", scores between 111 to 145 represent "normal range", while scores more than 145 represent "above average level of coping". The minimum score in this scale is 37 and the maximum score is 185.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

### **1.9.1 A Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995)**

Karney and Bradbury (1995) proposed a Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage in understanding marital quality and marital stability after reviewing 115 longitudinal studies. The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage integrated the advantages of the Social Exchange Theory, Behavioural Theory, Attachment Theory, and Crisis Theory and addressed the weaknesses of each theory in understanding marital quality and marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Furthermore, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage was one of the most widely used model to explain marital satisfaction in research (Bradbury, 1995).

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage consists of five components with eight pathways. The components are enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events, adaptive processes, marital quality, and marital stability. This model highlights three factors (i.e, enduring vulnerabilities, stressful life events, adaptive processes) that influence marital quality and changes in marital satisfaction over time. Karney and Bradbury (1995) theorised that enduring vulnerabilities and stressful life events influence marital quality and marital stability through its effects on adaptive processes. The ways in which couples behave towards one another or how they resolve marital conflict (adaptive processes), are thought to be influenced by both pre-existing factors that each

individual brings to the relationship (enduring vulnerabilities) as well as the context in which couples are currently situated (stressful events).

The component of “enduring vulnerabilities” is based on the Attachment Theory which includes the stable factors such as demographic characteristics, personal history, personality traits, and experiential factors that individuals bring to the marriage. These variables are possessed by the individuals prior to their involvement in the marriage. As conceptualised by Karney and Bradbury (1995), each spouse brings their own set of enduring vulnerabilities into the marriage. Depending on their personal characteristics, individuals may react and cope differently in the marriage when problems arise.

In addition, stressful events originated from the Crisis Theory posit that external circumstances faced by couples will have an impact on their marriages. In this regard, stressful events like socioeconomic strain, health difficulties, and life transitions such as the chronic and acute circumstances encountered during their transition to parenthood will affect couples’ decision to stay together or to go separate ways. These stressful events are thought to be situations that spouses encounter together (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The Social Exchange Theory lies in the process of handling stressful events. It understands marital stability through intrapersonal perceptions of weighing the attractions and alternatives by either staying or leaving from the marriage. However, one of the critics on the Social Exchange Theory was it looked into individual’s perceptions but not the behavioural components on couples act in a marriage. Thus, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage integrated the Crisis Theory, Behavioural Theory, and Social Exchange Theory in understanding how these theories interact with one another, thus contributing to changes in marital quality and marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Furthermore, stressful events are closely related to the adaptive processes. Thus, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage also adapted the ABCX model in the Crisis Theory into the model. In the ABCX model, the adaptation of family to a stressful event depends on different levels of concrete resources, the nature of the crisis, and how the stressful event is defined. In addition, the adaptive processes are based on the Behavioural Theory where it is the central tenet in this model. How couples cope and react (behavioural exchanges) with stressful events such as marital difficulties and transitions have an impact on marital quality (path F) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

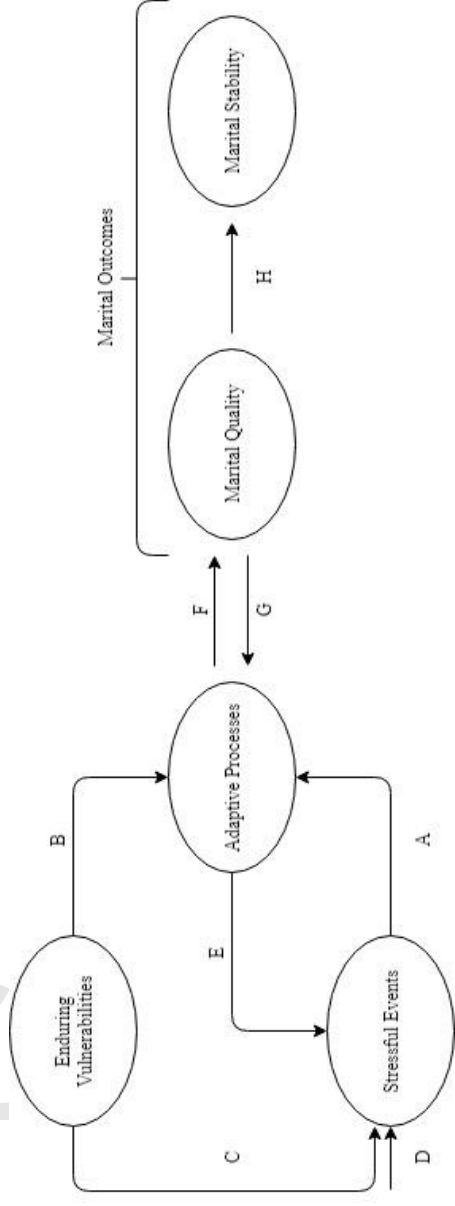


Figure 1.1: Theoretical framework: A Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage by Karney and Bradbury (1995)

Stressful events and adaptive processes have a reciprocal relationship where it is an on-going adaptation process (path A and E). The family unity is preserved when couples experience successful recovery from the stressful events while failure to recover from crisis will lead to a decline in marital quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

In addition, individuals' adaptive processes are affected by enduring vulnerabilities (path B) where personal history and characteristics are taken into consideration when resolving a crisis. Depending on the resources that couples have, they will have better marital quality and a more stable marriage when they have lesser stressful events in life and higher coping abilities. Depending on the appraisal of marital quality, couples will behave differently in resolving the difficulties and transitions faced in the marriage which contributes to the adaptive processes (path G) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The pathways are further described below:

Path A: stressors and difficulties faced.

Path B: how well couples adapt to individual & marital difficulties.

Path C: stable personal characteristics that can contribute to the stressful events to which couples must adapt or stressful events resulting from the enduring vulnerabilities, such as individuals' negative affectivity, is associated with experiencing life events as more stressful.

Path D: product of chance variables.

Path E: nature of how couples respond and adapt which may either exacerbate or alleviate the stressful events.

Path F: behaviours exchanged and appraisals of the interaction such as capacities to engage in effective marital problem solving and to provide emotional support.

Path G: perceived marital quality accounts for variation in marital behaviour.

Path H: the decline in marital quality will increase the probability of marital instability.



In understanding marital outcome, marital quality is closely related to marital stability which eventually leads to marital dissolution when a marriage is unstable (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The marital satisfaction construct is frequently used when assessing marital quality in research (Bradbury, 1995). Although marital quality and marital satisfaction are seemingly treated as two different constructs, how they are being measured and defined are similar (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Furthermore, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) also advocated for a clear definition on the construct of marital quality to enhance its conceptual clarity in marital studies and comparative studies can be done more efficiently since past studies have been using similar instruments to measure these two different constructs. In this regard, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) defined marital quality as “the global evaluation of one’s marriage” (p.799) and the construct of marital satisfaction is often measured and operationally defined similarly to marital quality (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Therefore, despite the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage has suggested marital quality in their model, marital satisfaction will be used interchangeably with marital quality in this study. This is justified by past research where marital “satisfaction”, “happiness”, and “quality” were widely used constructs in the marital relationship literature (Harper et al., 2000). The constructs were used interchangeably in most marital studies as well (Abidin et al., 2018; Razak et al., 2015).

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage was proposed after reviewing studies utilising longitudinal research design (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). It was found that no attention was devoted to how data collected within and across domains is best integrated (Bradbury, 1995). As mentioned, this model incorporated individual factors, contextual factors, and dyadic coping in understanding marital quality. Hence, it appears to be an appropriate model to be used in understanding marital satisfaction because it includes individual factors, contextual factors, and the dyadic coping process within the couple into consideration. Furthermore, in Bradbury (1995) and Karney and Bradbury (1995), there was no mentioning of this model cannot be applied in cross-sectional design studies. Aditya and Magno (2011) also used the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage model to guide their cross-sectional design study. Thus, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage model has been adapted as the guiding framework in the current research.

On top of that, this study also aims to test the applicability of this model by utilising a different sample since the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage was developed based on longitudinal studies that were mostly done in Western countries (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This model adopts a broader focus in understanding marital quality and marital stability, thus allowing researchers to incorporate and organize the variables according to the model. However, the disadvantage of the model is that its simplicity requires other theories to be incorporated to guide the research. Therefore, the Social Role Theory and Role Conflict Theory were used to complement the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

### **1.9.2 Social Role Theory**

The second theory applied in this study is the Social Role Theory by Eagly and Wood (1999, 2012). The origin of sex differences in human behaviour, particularly on the social roles of men and women, are largely due to natural biological differences endowed upon them. While men are born taller in size and with more physical strength; women are born with reproductive abilities, and socialisation takes place when the biological advantages interact with the culture and society's circumstances (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2012).

Through socialisation, society holds gender role attitudes/stereotypes on what is appropriate in male and female behaviours. Gender role attitude is defined as "people's perceptions of men and women's social roles in the society in which they live" (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p.459). Meanwhile, gender role is socially constructed and defined as the characteristics that each sex are expected to have in order to prepare them for the tasks that they typically carried out. It differentiates men and women into specific social roles, for example, women are into the housewife role while men are into the breadwinner's role (Eagly & Wood, 1999). By performing the sex-typical tasks, both men and women develop appropriate personality traits and skills which may reinforce the gender role attitudes. For instance, in industrialised societies, women are more likely to perform caretaking roles in employment and at home because of their communal and caring personality (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Due to the early socialisation, humans develop gender role attitudes on what are the things that males and females should do, including what each gender should do in a marriage.

There are two main types of gender roles, namely traditional and egalitarian (Kaufman, 2000). Traditional gender role attitude is defined as perceiving and associating men with being the breadwinner of the family by working and taking charge of the family finance while women are associated with family responsibilities and childcare. Individuals with egalitarian gender role attitude believe that both men and women are equally in charge at work and at home where social roles are not defined nor segregated by gender (Kaufman, 2000).

### **1.9.3 Role Conflict Theory**

Building upon the Role Conflict Theory by Kahn et al. (1964), Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) expanded the theory by focusing on the inter-role conflict between work role and family role while drawing elements of role strain from the theory of role strain by Goode (1960). Every human being has limited time, energy, and resources. When one aspect of life (work/family role) is taking up more time, humans have limited resources left for the other aspects of life (work/family role). Most importantly, work and family lives are interdependent (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Work-family conflict is defined as “a form of inter role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p.77). There are three major forms of work-family conflict: (a) time-based conflict, (b) strain-based conflict, and (c) behaviour-based conflict. The conflict between roles (work-family conflict) might build up when one role is more salient or central for the person especially when there is a negative consequence involved when the more salient role is unfulfilled (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

There are two directions of work-family conflict, which are work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW). The spillover effect and crossover effect are used to explain the WIF and FIW conflicts (Amstad et al., 2011). Spillover is defined and understood as the generalisation of behaviour, emotions, attitudes, or stress from one life domain to another life domain, i.e., work-to-family or family-to-work (Wilensky, 1960). Individuals' experience in one domain will extend or “spillover” to the other domain. For example, when a person experiences stress at work, the experienced stress will cause strain or stress in the family. Since work and family are the main domains in a person's life, spillover effect can occur in two different directions, namely from work-to-family and from family-to-work (Amstad & Semmer, 2011).

Furthermore, there are two types of crossover effects, which are same-domain crossover or cross-domain crossover (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). Same domain crossover happens when the emotions, stress, or strain experienced in the moment or over time are transmitted to another person in the same life domain (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). For example, when a person is feeling stressful because of family life, this stress is then transmitted to the spouse which makes the spouse feeling stressful on the family domain.

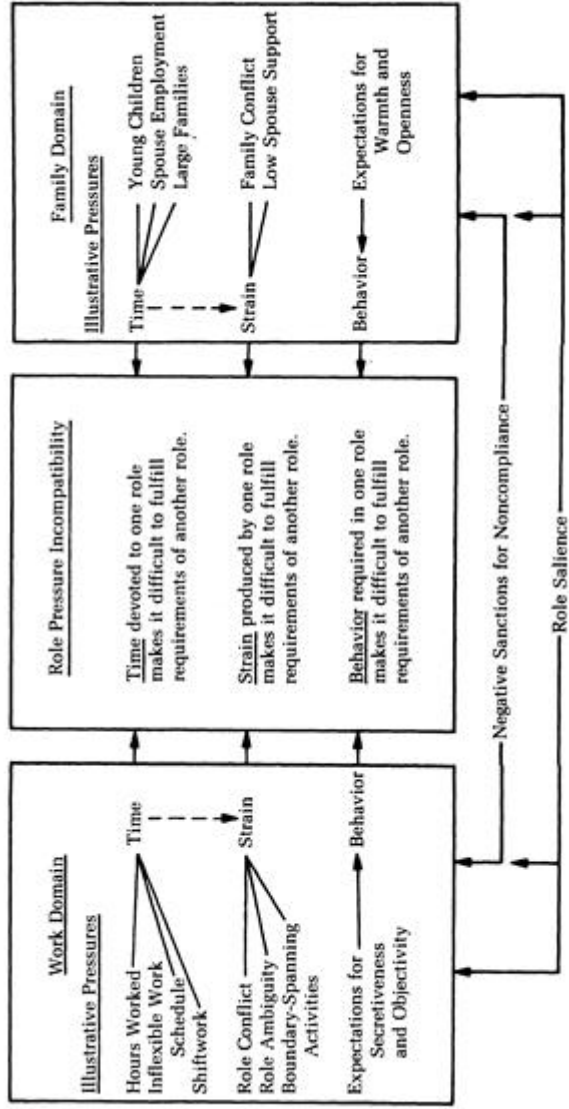


Figure 1.2: Work-family role pressure incompatibility model by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985)

Meanwhile, cross-domain crossover happens when the emotions, stress, or strain experienced in one life domain of a person lead to similar emotions, stress, or strain experienced by a close person in another life domain (Amstad & Semmer, 2011). For example, when an individual is feeling stressful at work, this work stresses, if transmitted to the spouse, will make them experience stress in the family domain.

The participants in this study are dual-earner couples who are constantly struggling with work and family roles. The work-family conflict serves as a stressful event in their life since they need to balance in between roles. In the family role, Asian women are faced with additional stress due to the cultural context and values. Therefore, conflict with mother-in-law is an additional stressful event faced in the marriage. Wives are expected to conduct household chores despite working full-time and contributing financially to the family (Oshio et al., 2013).

#### **1.9.4 Integration of Theories**

This study integrates one theoretical model (Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage) and two theories (Social Role Theory and Role Conflict Theory) in investigating marital satisfaction. It is because there is no theoretical approach available that can describe the relationships between gender role attitudes, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction (marital outcome), and marital stability in understanding marital satisfaction. The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage offers a framework to explain the multi-dimensions of functioning in marriage by integrating various theories. Meanwhile, the two theories are integrated into this multi-dimensional theoretical perspective as they complement each other. In addition, the model and two theories applied to conceptualise the framework of this study offer a richer and more meaningful context in understanding the impact of gender role attitudes, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, and dyadic coping on marital satisfaction and how marital satisfaction contributes to marital stability. The integrated relationship between the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage and the two theories in understanding marital satisfaction is shown in Figure 1.3.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage serves as the main framework that guides this study. This is because it was intentionally designed as a simple but reasonably comprehensive model which aims to organise marital research by including more constructs into the different components of the model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). On top of that, the model has received enough empirical support and its comprehensiveness (Aditya & Magno, 2011) justifies its application to guide the current research.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage incorporates the intrapersonal factors (enduring vulnerabilities), environmental factors (stressful events), and adaptive processes (person-environment interaction) in understanding marital quality and marital stability. This broader focus in understanding marital quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) allows researchers to incorporate and organise the variables according to the model where other theories can be incorporated to guide the research like the current study.

In this study, the Social Role Theory explains the enduring vulnerabilities in the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage. Due to early socialisation, individuals will develop different gender role attitudes (traditional or egalitarian) on what are the roles of men and women in a marriage. Such gender role attitudes refer to the personal characteristics that individuals brought into their marriage as gender roles are constructed since early childhood (Eagly & Wood, 2012), including the structural and cultural context as well as personal experiences (Boehnke, 2011). It also guides individuals' behaviours in the marriage. Research has reported that women in developed countries are still expected to take care of the family role despite working full time while men are less likely to help out in household chores (Oshio et al., 2013). Furthermore, gender role attitudes also influence marital satisfaction and marital stability (Kaufman, 2000). Therefore, the Social Role Theory is integrated into the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage in explaining the relationships between gender role attitudes, dyadic coping, and marital satisfaction.

When it comes to stressful events, the Role Conflict Theory is integrated into the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage. The rationale behind this is because the Social Role Theory and Role Conflict Theory complement each other since both work role and family role are social roles that an individual has to fulfil among dual-earner couples. When dual-earner couples are faced with demands from different social roles (i.e., work and family roles), it is closely related to the gender role attitudes that they held since it guides their behaviours in the marriage. At the same time, it also challenges their gender role attitudes. For example, men who hold a traditional gender role attitude might not help out in childcare and household chores while their spouses might have an egalitarian gender role attitude and expect them to take initiative in childcare and completing household chores. In addition, cultural values might necessitate married women to take care of their parents-in-law which adds on to their social roles and stressors in life.

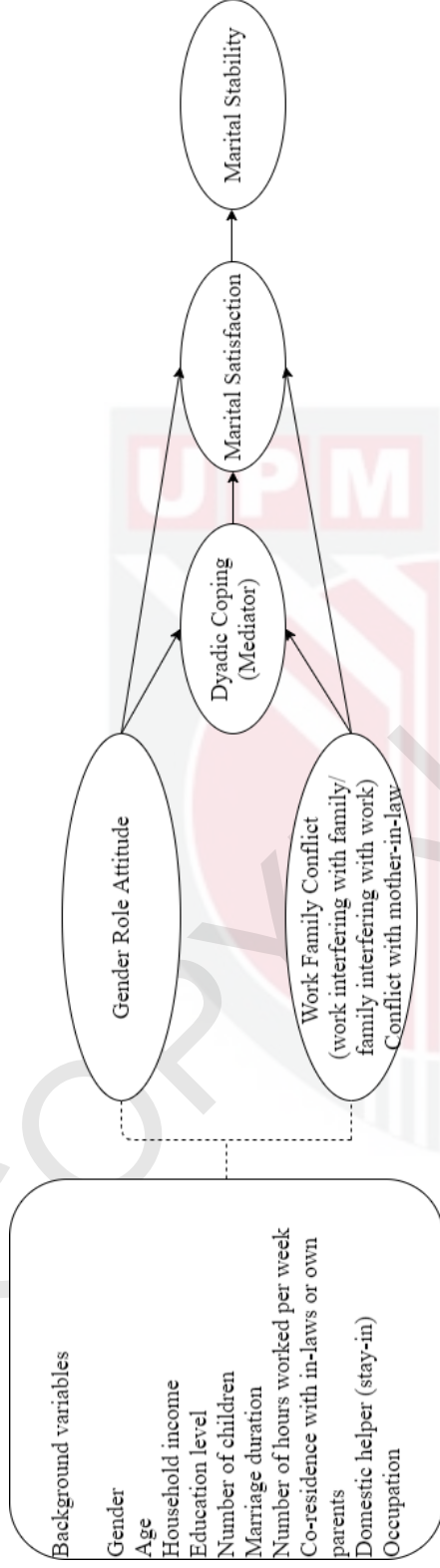
Based on the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage, couples adapt to stressful events before allowing it to affect their marital satisfaction. Therefore, this study examined the mediating role of dyadic coping between work-family conflict and marital satisfaction, and between conflict with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction among Malaysian dual-earner couples. In addition, a few background variables are included in this study based on the

recommendations by past research in order to understand the characteristics of the participants of this study.

### **1.10 Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The conceptual framework of this study (Figure 1.3) is based on the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model of Marriage, Social Role Theory, and Role Conflict Theory. The arrows show the relationships between the variables of the research where the independent variables (i.e., gender role attitudes, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, and dyadic coping) are tested for its influence on the dependent variable (i.e., marital satisfaction). Furthermore, the relationship between marital satisfaction as an independent variable with marital stability as the dependent variable is also tested.

This framework represents the research map and summarises the viewpoints from the theories used in this study to examine the correlations between gender role attitude, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, and marital stability among Malaysian Chinese dual-earners couples in Selangor.



**Figure 1.3: Research conceptual framework on gender role attitude, work-family conflict, conflict with mother-in-law, dyadic coping, marital satisfaction, and marital stability.**



## 1.11 Research Framework

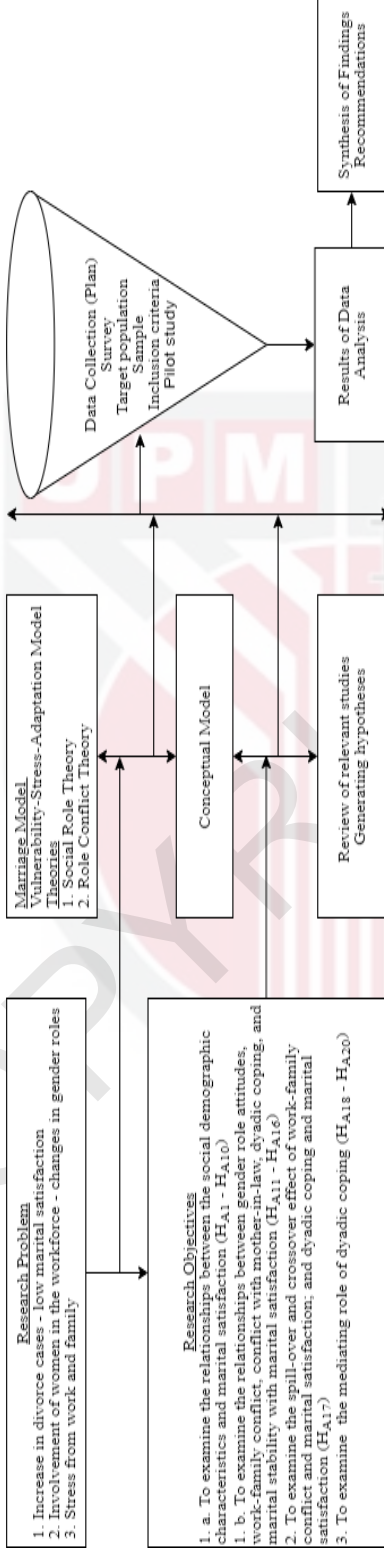


Figure 1.4: Research framework

## 1.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the statement of problems and gaps identified in the literature followed by the development of research questions that formed the objectives of the current study. Subsequently, the hypotheses and significance of the study were presented based on the research objectives. The theories used to conceptualise this study were further reported and discussed. In addition, the constructs investigated in this study were operationally defined as well.

The next chapter shall contain a systematic literature review that explores the determining factors of marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese as well as other relevant literature that explains about the gaps being addressed in this study. It is followed by the methodology chapter that will outline the design of this study, the population and sampling, materials used in the survey, and the data collection procedures. Chapter Four shall present the data analysis results along with thorough discussion on the findings. Finally, Chapter Five shall conclude this thesis by describing the implications, strengths, contributions, and limitations of the current study. The chapter shall conclude by discussing on how the research objectives are achieved before providing directions for future studies.

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## BIODATA OF STUDENT

Leong Mei San completed her Bachelor of Psychology (Hons) in 2010. She received her Master's degree in counselling in 2014 from University Malaya, Malaysia. Since then, she practices as a professional and licensed counsellor in private setting and works as a lecturer in a local private university. In 2015, she enrolled as a PhD student in family ecology at the University Putra Malaysia. Upon completion of the PhD, she plans to continue working as a lecturer and to conduct research in exploring the impact of individual, contextual, and cultural stressors on marital outcome (marital satisfaction and marital stability) among dual-earner families. Her interest is particularly in couples, marriage, and family therapy, and how coping with personal, contextual, and cultural stressors play a role in marital outcomes.

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Leong, M.S., & Juhari, R. (2019, November). Work vs. family: Mediating role of dyadic coping on marital satisfaction. Paper presented at the meeting of 2nd International Conference on Psychology, Counselling, and Education, Sabah, MY. ISSN: 2515-138X.
- Leong, M.S. & Juhari, R. (2021). Positive and negative interactions between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law: What about son-in-law? *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(5). doi: <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v6i5.778>.
- Leong, M.S. & Juhari, R. (2021). Work-family conflict, marital satisfaction, and marital stability among Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples. Manuscript accepted for publication.
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