

FRIENDSHIP MAINTENANCE BEHAVIOUR BASED ON WORKING POSITION AND MARITAL STATUS AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, friend play an important role in women's life especially with the consideration that more women are working and not only rely on family for social supports. This research examined impact of working position and marital status on friendship maintenance behavior among working women in Malaysia, particularly on how women maintained their friendship based on the position of working and marital status. This study conducted using a survey involving 500 women who work at public university in Malaysia. Data was collected using the Friendship Maintenance Scale. The data collection procedure involved three steps, beginning with preparation of the instrument, then obtaining approval from related organizations, followed by online data collection via email. The collected data were analysed using SPSS 23 and the data were interpreted using descriptive analyses. The findings of the study found that women have different behavior on how they maintained their friendship based on position of working and marital status. The findings of this study contributed to the developments of literatures regarding women's friendship especially for better understanding regarding the nature of friendship among working women in Malaysia. A better understanding of the nature could provide a suitable social support for maintaining working women relationships as well as their psychological well-being.

Keywords: working women, friendship, friendship maintenance behaviour

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women's psychological well-being can benefit greatly from meaningful relationships (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006). Living in a social environment with mutual relationships increases a person's sense of social connectedness and belonging, which improves their well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Williams & Galliher, 2006). Meaningful relationships can provide significant social and emotional support, as well as act as a protective factor against depression (Park et al., 2013; Santini et al., 2016). Women's meaningful relationships can include their relationships with many significant people, such as their spouse, children, and family members, but another type of significant relationship in women's lives is their relationship with their friends.

Friendship has been found to be a significant contributor to women's well-being, with women having deeper, affectively richer, and more intimate friendships than men (Demir & Orthel, 2011). In general, research on female friendships discovered that they are primarily based on intimacy (Canter et al., 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that friendships help to strengthen women's well-being when conflicts arise at work and at home (Zakaria et al., 2018). Female friendships improve mental health (Han et al., 2017), happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002), loneliness (Steptoe et al., 2013), and physical frailty (Wang et al., 2021). Furthermore, positive and healthy friendships can increase self-confidence (Markiewicz et al., 2000) and motivation (Nelson & Debacker, 2008). Friends can play the role of a supporter who will provide not only emotional support but also fresh perspectives to help women face challenges in life. Thus, having emotionally and intellectually supportive same-sex friends is positively associated with women's psychological well-being.

Relationships, on the other hand, evolve and change as humans do. Friendships can be fragile without a formal structure and commitment. Working and marriage, in particular, may erode women's friendships. Women may become less involved with their friends as a result of their increased workload when managing their roles in the family and at work (Offer & Bear, 2020), and friends may be perceived as less important (Pahl & Pevalin, 2015). Meanwhile, despite the fact that being single has traditionally been associated with loneliness due to the absence of a spouse, recent research has found that being single increases women's social connections, including with friends (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Given that single women are able to keep investing in friendships, the quality of their friendships can be maintained, and this also helps to bolster their self-esteem, sense of belonging (Fisher et al., 2021), and ultimately their well-being.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the behaviour of single and married working women on friendship. In particular on how working women maintain their friendships with their women's best friend.

2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To determine the difference in friendship maintenance behavior based on marital status among working women in Malaysia
- 2) To determine the difference in friendship maintenance behavior based on working position among working women in Malaysia

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Friendship maintenance behaviour can be defined as "behaviours that individuals engage in to maintain acceptable levels of satisfaction and commitment" (Oswald et al., 2004, p. 418). These behaviours include a variety of routines and strategic behaviours to keep friendships at a satisfying level. The concept of these behaviours is derived from relational maintenance conceptual.

Dindia and Canary (1993) highlighted four popular definitions of relational maintenance: keeping a relationship 1) in existence, 2) in a certain state, 3) in a satisfactory condition, and 4) in repair. The four common definitions were summarized and expanded upon during the conversation. First, relational maintenance tries to secure the partnership's survival because any relationship will terminate if there is no contact or if nothing holds them together any more. Second, to maintain a connection means to keep it in a specific state, even if it is the status quo, such as keeping sentiments of love and intimacy in the relationship. Third, relational maintenance focuses on attempts to maintain or develop the relationship in order to achieve desired results. Finally, relational maintenance refers to keeping the relationship in good working order when individuals and environments change, which can lead to disputes and difficulties in partnerships. As a result, relational maintenance serves to reset the connection so that it might become what the persons involved desire.

In accordance with the foregoing, Stafford and Canary (1991) created a well-known typology of relational maintenance, which is initially based on the assumption that maintenance behavior can be defined as the effort to sustain a relationship by making the relationship continuously perceived as equitable and rewarding, adjusting efforts so that it is suitable to keep, maintain, or develop the relationship to the person's satisfaction. Accordingly, in order to systematically measure maintenance behaviours, different typologies of maintenance behaviour have been developed over the years (Stafford & Canary, 1991). The first wave of maintenance behaviours was initiated by Stafford and Canary (1991), where they factor analysed over 80 behaviours of married couples perceived as maintenance behaviours.

The results of the factor analysis yielded five maintenance strategies: positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and sharing tasks (five-strategy typology). To begin, positivity involves strategies such as being cheery (even when you don't want to be), refraining from criticism, participating in spontaneous and entertaining events, and others. Following that, openness refers to addressing the existing and future direction of the relationship, as well as sharing one's relationship goals. It is critical to remember that disclosure during maintenance focuses on the relationship rather than on personal difficulties or sentiments. Third, assurances are behaviors that show one's commitment and faithfulness to one's partner while also providing support to the partner. Surprisingly, studies show that married couples employ reassurance more than dating or engaged partners. Fourth, social networks involve behaviors that rely on friends and family as resources to assist maintain the relationship's stability.

However, decline in friendship quality could occur due to major life transition (Roberts and Dunbar, 2015). In addition, according to Oswald & Clark, (2003), as individuals enter college, high school best friendships become more costly and less rewarding, hence causing a decline in friendship satisfaction and commitment. However, interestingly, the changes are not due to proximity factors but may instead be due to the lack of access for friends to talk with each other. Study carried out by McEwan and Guerrero (2012), also emphasize on the importance of maintenance behaviours in friendship where the study indicated that best friendships are still intact and satisfying if it still engages in maintenance behaviours such as frequent interaction and giving support.

Study by Roberts and Dunbar (2015) also indicates that friendship can be prevented from decaying through the investment of efforts to keep the interaction alive in the relationship. The best mode of interaction, according to Roberts and Dunbar (2015), differs based on gender. Engaging in activities together seems to work best for men, while talking to each other is crucial for women. The study also indicates that distance is not the factor that leads to changes in emotional closeness during the occurrence of a transition. Interestingly, Johnson et al., (2004) reports that women more often cited the element of conflict and activities together as types of turning points in terminated same-sex friendships, while men cite common interest. Johnson et al., (2004) also reported that increase in distance is not found to be a factor contributing to friendship termination.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative survey methods to collect and analyse numerical data in order to achieve the research objectives. In particular, the cross-sectional survey method was employed in this study to conduct this study.

The population in this study involves women who work in public universities in Malaysia. The reason for selecting public universities is because public universities are locations that have diverse types of jobs and positions mainly related to the professional, service, and clerical sectors. Moreover, working women in public universities are government servants who must usually have graduated from tertiary education or at least obtained a certificate. Therefore, they may represent working women in Malaysia, as most working women have obtained such qualifications (KPWKM, 2015).

According to the database from Ministry of Education (MOE) 2019, the total number of Malaysian women academic staff was 17,335 from 20 public universities (MOE, 2019). However, the database for total number of non-academic staff was unavailable publicly, thus the researcher could not estimate the exact number of units in the population for this study. Nevertheless, based on ratios indication in University Transformation Programme Silver Book (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE), 2017), student to academic staff ratio was 9 staff to 23 students and the student to non-academic staff ratio was 8 staff to 36 students. Thus, the researcher estimated

that the population of non-academic women staff would be at least half than the recorded numbers for academic women staff which was 8,667.5. According to the statistics, ratios and considerations, the value of 26,002.5 (17,335 + 8,667.5) was the population frame for this study.

Therefore, according to the table of sample sizes by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if the population is greater than 20,000 and 100,000, the sample size is 377 and 384. In this study, the researcher obtained 500 qualified respondents, which was more than required and valid for this study. The instrument used in this study consisted of two sections: section A demographic profile, and section B a friendship maintenance behavior (FMB) scale developed by Oswald et al. (2004).

5.0 FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the marital status distribution of respondents in this study. Based on Table 1, the 295 (59%) out of 500 respondents were married and 205(41%) respondents were single women involved in this study.

Table 1: Respondent’s Marital Status

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Married	295	59
Single	205	41

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the distribution of working position of the respondents in this study. As the location of this study was public universities, the position of the working is categorized into two categories only in order to have better and fair distribution. Based on Table 2, total of 350 (70%) respondents were academicians. The remaining 150 respondents (30%) worked as non-academician.

Table 2: Respondent’s Working Position

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academician	350	70
Non-academician	150	30

The independent sample t-test analysis was performed to determine the differences in the studied variable of friendship maintenance behavior and the dimensions with different group of marital status (single & married) and working position (academician & non-academician).

Overall, the differences in the friendship maintenance behaviour (FMB) between married and single groups were found to be statistically significant. Specifically, the t-test analysis of FMB in overall was found to be statistically significant ($t(500) = -3.18, p < .05$). While, all dimensions of FMB were also found to be statistically significant: positivity ($t(500) = -2.81, p < .05$); openness ($t(500) = -2.73, p < .05$); supportiveness ($t(500) = -2.22, p < .05$); and interaction ($t(500) = -3.21, p < .001$).

These results indicated that respondents in the married group ($M = 7.92, SD = 1.04$) practiced fewer friendship maintenance behaviours than those in the single group ($M = 8.23, SD = 1.09$). Similarly, for all dimensions of FMB, the results indicated that those in the married group practiced lesser positivity ($M = 8.29, SD = 1.06$), openness ($M = 7.97, SD = 1.14$), supportiveness ($M = 8.07, SD = 1.27$), and interaction ($M = 7.38, SD = 1.36$). On the other hand, respondents in the single group practiced more positivity ($M = 8.56, SD = 1.06$), openness ($M = 8.26, SD = 1.22$), supportiveness ($M = 8.32, SD = 1.29$), and interaction ($M = 7.78, SD = 1.44$). Table 3 shows the independent t-test analysis for friendship maintenance behavior based on the group of marital status.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis for FMB based on the group of marital status

Variable	Dimensions	Married		Single		t-test (t)	Sig. (p)
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Friendship Maintenance Behaviour	Combine All	7.92	1.04	8.23	1.09	-3.18	0.002**
	Positivity	8.29	1.06	8.56	1.06	-2.81	0.005**
	Openness	7.97	1.14	8.26	1.22	-2.73	0.007**
	Supportiveness	8.07	1.27	8.32	1.29	-2.22	0.03*
	Interaction	7.38	1.36	7.78	1.44	-3.21	0.00***

However, the differences in the friendship maintenance behaviour (FMB) between academician and non-academician groups were found to be not statistically significant. Specifically, the difference of FMB in overall was found not statistically significant ($t(500) = -1.12, p=0.26$). Thus, all dimensions of FMB were also found to be not statistically significant: positivity ($t(500) = -0.55, p=0.58$); openness ($t(500) = -0.33, p=0.74$), supportiveness ($t(500) = -1.70, p =0.89$); and interaction ($t(500) = -1.15, p = 0.25$).

These results indicated that respondents in the academician group ($M = 8.01, SD = 1.06$) practiced similar friendship maintenance behaviours with those in the non-academician group ($M = 8.13, SD = 1.08$). Similarly, for all dimensions of FMB, the results indicated that those in the married group practiced similar in positivity ($M = 8.38, SD = 1.06$), openness ($M = 8.07, SD = 1.16$), supportiveness ($M = 8.11, SD = 1.31$), and interaction ($M = 7.49, SD = 1.37$). Similarly, respondents in the non-academician group practiced similar positivity ($M = 8.44, SD = 1.07$), openness ($M = 8.11, SD = 1.22$), supportiveness ($M = 8.32, SD = 1.22$), and interaction ($M = 7.66, SD = 1.48$). Table 3 shows the independent t-test analysis for friendship maintenance behavior based on the group of working position. These results indicated that respondents in the academician group practiced similar friendship maintenance behaviours with those in the non-academician group. Table 4 shows the independent t-test analysis for friendship maintenance behavior based on the group of working position.

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis for FMB based on the group of working position

Variable	Dimensions	Academician		Non-Academician		t-test (t)	Sig. (p)
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Friendship Maintenance Behaviour	Combine All	8.01	1.06	8.13	1.08	-1.12	0.26
	Positivity	8.38	1.06	8.44	1.07	-0.55	0.58
	Openness	8.07	1.16	8.11	1.22	-0.33	0.74
	Supportiveness	8.11	1.31	8.32	1.22	-1.70	0.89
	Interaction	7.49	1.37	7.66	1.48	-1.15	0.25

6.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study found that friendship maintenance behaviour (FMB) between married and single groups were found to be statistically significant. In particular, all dimensions of FMB were found to be statistically differences. It is best to said that single and married women practice differently on maintaining their friendship. This study also found that in general single working

women maintained their friendship more than married working women. This finding was in line with the study finding by Fisher et al., (2021) which show single individuals invested more in the relationship with their best friend compared to those who were in a romantic relationship. In addition, according to Ermer and Matera (2020) marriage could change women's friendship dynamics as being married will change the priority in an individual's social relationship, that could cause friendships to be left behind. Roberts and Dunbar (2015) also concurred that a decline in friendship quality occurs due to major life transition such as marriage.

However, the findings of the study did not find a statistically difference of FMB based on the group of working position. This study indicates, regardless of whether the women are academician or non-academician, both of them practice similarly in maintaining friendship. This finding was consistent with the description of women's friendship by Becker (1987), women's friendship can be described as a loving relationship based on care, sharing, and equality. In other word, women friendship does not depend on the difference of position in working. Women friendship commonly are build based on emotional bond as well as intimacy (Gedeon & Robert-Demontrond, 2019). Therefore, difference in working position does not affect women on maintaining the friendship.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that married working women practiced differently in maintaining their friendship compared to single working women. However, position of working did not cause women to act differently in maintaining their friendship. Regardless the group differences, all respondents were show to be actively maintain their relationship with friends. This is because friends serve as their moral and physical support and play an importance role on women's psychological well-being. To have the ability to maintain the friendship can positively impact the quality of life of individual.

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