

Marriage Intention among Malaysian Chinese Young Adults: The Roles of Family Relationships, Filial Piety, and Perceived Social Support

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To cite this article: Xin-Yee Lim, Keat-Yi Chong and Sarvarubini Nainee (2026). Marriage Intention among Malaysian Chinese Young Adults: The Roles of Family Relationships, Filial Piety, and Perceived Social Support. *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies* 15(1): 17–40. [https://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202606_15\(1\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202606_15(1).0002)

To link to this article: [https://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202606_15\(1\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202606_15(1).0002)

Abstract

The decline in marriage intention is a growing trend in Malaysia. Among Malaysian Chinese, this trend is highly visible as evidenced by the low fertility rate of 0.8 birth per woman. This study explores how family relationships, filial piety, and perceived social support predict marriage intention among young Chinese adults in Malaysia. A quantitative cross-sectional online survey was conducted using purposive and convenience sampling to recruit unmarried Malaysian Chinese individuals aged 18 to 26. The Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS), Filial Behaviour Scale (FBS), Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MSPSS), and Intent to Marry Scale (IMS) were administered. A total of 324 participants took part ($M = 22.27$ years; $SD = 1.71$ years). Pearson correlation indicated a significant positive correlation between filial piety, perceived social support, family relationships, and marriage intention. However, the results of multiple linear regression analysis indicated that only perceived social support and filial piety were substantial predictors of marriage intention. These findings provide an interesting perspective on marriage intentions and provide empirical evidence that can be used by policymakers to develop evidence-based initiatives aimed at increasing marriage intentions among Malaysian Chinese young adults and emphasise the role of social support and filial values in enhancing marriage intentions in this population.

Keywords: Malaysia Chinese young adults, marriage intention, family relationships, filial piety, social support

Introduction

Marriage patterns are changing worldwide as young adults are rethinking what marriage means to them. Fewer young people see marriage as a necessary milestone, and many are choosing to opt out entirely in countries such as Korea, the United States, and Singapore (An et al., 2022; Ang, 2024). This shift is often characterised by delayed marriage, increased singlehood, and the rise of non-marriage as a socially acceptable life choice (Jones, 2017). Similar trends are also emerging in Malaysia, where marriage rates have gradually decreased despite modern shifts toward more egalitarian partnerships. Recent national statistics show declining crude marriage rates, and a growing proportion of Malaysian youths are either reluctant or uncertain about marriage, with Chinese young adults forming the largest group reporting no intention to marry. Despite these trends, existing studies in Malaysia have widely focused on marriage attitudes within the general population with limited attention given to ethnic-specific groups, especially when Malaysian Chinese exhibit lowest fertility rates and the strongest flight from marriage.

The decline in marriage intention has been frequently linked with late marriage behaviour and fertility outcomes. Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) suggests that intentions are the most vital predictor of a behaviour, including the decision to marry (Ajzen, 1991). Past studies also indicate that people with low marriage intentions are likely to delay marriage which then contributes to other issues such as lower fertility rates (Hiekel & Castro- Martin, 2014). The flight from marriage can be explained by several social and cultural factors. Reduced societal pressure to marry, changing family norms, and increasing acceptance of alternative lifestyles have all contributed to weakening marriage motivation among young adults (Abdullah et al., 2021). Economic constraints, career chasing and rising living costs have been identified as the utmost barrier that stops young adults from getting married in Asia (Jones, 2017). In the Malaysian Chinese cultural context, however, traditional values such as filial piety still emphasises marriage as a way of fulfilling familial expectations and continuing family lineage. For some young adults, these obligations may influence marital decisions, even when their personal preferences differ (Eklund, 2018). This creates a cultural tension between traditional obligations and modern individualistic values, which may make decisions on marriage more complex for this age group.

Family relationships are also significant in shaping the way in which young people perceive marriage. Positive parental relationships may cultivate optimistic expectations toward married life,

while interparental conflict may lead to fear, avoidance, or negative attitudes (Kewalramani & Hazra, 2022; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019). In addition, perceived social support—an individual's sense that they can rely on friends, family, and significant others has been shown to positively influence readiness and desire for marriage (Esmaeily et al., 2019). These factors highlight the importance of understanding the social environments that shape marriage intention among today's youth. However, there have been limited studies that integrate these social environments (i.e. filial piety, social support) within a single framework, particularly in the Malaysian Chinese context.

In view of Malaysia's ageing population and declining fertility rates, the rising preference to remain single among young adults has significant long-term implications. Lower marriage intentions may contribute to shrinking households, reduced population growth, and greater social and economic pressures in the future. Therefore, it is essential to examine the predictors of marriage intention among young adults and to address the gap in explaining marriage intention determinants from culturally contextualised perspectives, which remains underexplored in existing Malaysian studies.

Literature Review

The review of the literature relevant to this study is largely confined to findings on the relations between family relationships, filial piety, and perceived social support on the one hand and marriage intention on the other.

Most of the studies were conducted outside Malaysia, and research establishing a direct correlation between family relationships and marriage intentions is notably limited, especially in relation to Malaysia. In Korea, An et al. (2022) found that individuals who positively valued their family relationships had greater marriage intentions. Those with moderate or poor family relationships had neutral or negative marriage intentions.

Parental ties were identified as a major aspect of family relationships. Research conducted in Jakarta found that those who saw their parents' relationship as happy, even if they lived apart, were more likely to marry. Those who believed their parents were unhappy and separated were less likely to marry (Suryadi et al., 2023). Li (2024) suggests that women who have experienced stable parental marriages are more likely to pursue stable and fulfilling marital relationships. A stable and harmonious family environment may help women develop good marital and relationship values.

Interparental conflicts can also reveal family relationship patterns. Research indicates that interparental conflicts negatively impact children's intentions and attitudes toward marriage (Arain et al., 2021; Cahaya et al., 2020; Van Eldik et al., 2020). Another study further demonstrated that childhood exposure to interparental conflicts may hinder an individual's ability to accurately assess expectations from a romantic partner in the future and their expectations towards marriage (Tolmacz et al., 2022). Conversely, Brauner-Otto et al. (2020) found that parental conflicts

accelerate the transition to marriage, indicating a higher marital intention among children. Discord between parents lowers the quality of the family environment, making young people more likely to leave their homes. Marriage is usually the only socially accepted way for young people to leave their parents' home.

Jamison and Lo (2020) also found that young adults who perceive their family relationships as weak are more motivated to marry in hopes of creating a better family environment for themselves. This finding suggests that children may either try to recreate positive family experiences and avoid repeating the negative experiences they faced in their family of origin. These individuals attempt to avoid their parents' relational patterns in their intimate relationships. Another conflicting conclusion revealed by Kewalramani and Hazra (2022) is that family conflict negatively affects marriage attitudes and positively affects marital expectations. Oswald (2022) found no significant connection between the present quality of parental relationships and views on marriage.

Numerous studies have shown that filial piety is significantly correlated with marriage intention. Xie and Hong (2022) found that subjective norms, a component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), significantly influence Chinese college students' marriage intention. In particular, parents' views and comments were classified under subjective norms and were found to matter the most.

Moreover, a narrative study by Eklund (2021) reported that marriage and children were widely mentioned when examining intergenerational relationships and parents' filial piety expectations. The most crucial filial deed is sustaining the family line, which is both a personal goal and a filial obligation. Failure to marry may result in parental embarrassment and social ostracism. Since one of the key duties of filial piety is to have a child, participants from the study by Dai and Chilson (2021) overwhelmingly agreed that marriage is the best option for beginning a family and having children. Participants felt that marriage provides stability for children and families and reported that they would consider marriage if they wish to have children.

However, other research has indicated that filial piety negatively affects marital intention. Tang (2022) found that well-educated individuals tend to reject family intervention in their personal lives. Parents' enforcement of conventional values, especially marriage, can cause tension since many women view marriage as a private matter. Therefore, family obligations, gender roles, and power dynamics are shifting as family and social institutions evolve in Chinese society. More people are considering whether to follow societal norms or pursue alternative life choices.

Additionally, some contradictory findings show no significant correlation. According to Tsai et al. (2023), younger people in Taiwan have become increasingly inclined toward the idea that marriage is optional. This is true even though traditional Confucian values are still widely observed in Taiwan compared to other East Asian countries. This reflects parents' reduced engagement in their children's family and life choices (Tsai & Wang, 2019).

Few studies have indicated that perceived social support correlates positively with individual intentions to marry. A study by Esmaeily et al. (2019), which examined marriage intention among academic students in Iran, found a strong link between students' marriage intentions and their perception of social support and its various dimensions. According to the authors, social support promotes healthy human growth and in appropriate settings, enhances personal and social functioning. Adolescents and young adults are more likely to consider marriage when they receive social support from those they cared about.

Additionally, the study by Alfawair et al. (2023) demonstrated that perceived social support affects marriage-related decisions. Families and close friends may emotional encouragement, guidance and reassurance that influence individual's attitude towards marriage. Given that receiving social support may shape confidence and perception about marriage, this study suggests that perceived social support could also influence marriage intentions. However, there is currently limited research specially examining this relationship among Malaysian Chinese young adults, indicating a gap in the local literature.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

SET, developed by Blau (1964), posits that human behaviour arises from an exchange process aimed at maximising benefits and minimising costs. Individuals are motivated to engage in behaviours when perceived rewards outweigh the associated costs, whereas they are less inclined to act when costs exceed rewards (Jonason & Middleton, 2015). Rewards in SET may include money, information, status, love, and tangible goods (Foa & Foa, 1980, as cited in Davlembayeva & Alamanos, 2025), while costs may involve time, investment, conflict, misunderstandings, and financial strain.

This study applies SET by conceptualising positive family relationships and perceived social support as rewards, while viewing marriage intention as influenced by the perceived costs of marriage. Marriage is a long-term commitment that may involve loss of autonomy, reduce personal benefits, and increase financial obligations (Cintulová & Radková, 2021; Sya'ima et al., 2024). Higher perceived costs have been shown to reduce marriage entry, marriage intentions, and expectations (McGinnis, 2003). Individuals may therefore evaluate whether remaining single or entering a committed relationship is more adventurous (Byers & Wang, 2004; Lewis & Gurung, 2003, as cited in Clark, 2023). When perceived costs outweigh rewards, marriage intention is likely to diminish.

Positive family relationships may be perceived as rewards as they provide love, care, and emotional stability, which foster a sense of security in committing to marriage (Jabbari et al., 2023). Observing successful parental or family marriages also offers positive marital role models,

reducing fear and uncertainty associated with marriage (Jamison & Lo, 2020). Accordingly, young adults are more likely to report stronger marriage intentions when rewards from family relationships exceed perceived marital costs. Conversely, those with weaker family relationships may fail to offset these costs, resulting in lower marriage intention. Within the present study, SET is helpful in explaining the individual's cost-benefit evaluation process underlying their decision to marry. It focuses on how personal experiences and perceived relational rewards shape their intention towards marriage.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

This study also applies TPB to examine the relationship between filial piety and marriage intention. TPB posits that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are the determinants of behavioural intention, which in turn is impacted by rational evaluation (Ajzen, 1991; Boslaugh, 2022). Generally, greater behavioural intentions are linked to more positive attitudes, subjective norms, and a better level of perceived behavioural control.

Filial piety, a Confucian concept rooted in Chinese culture, emphasises moral obligations such as honouring and caring for one's parents (Li et al., 2021). Within the TPB framework, filial piety is conceptualised as a subjective norm that exerts social pressure on young adults' marriage intentions. Sappor (2021) noted that TPB provides a structured framework for operationalising cultural values such as filial piety through subjective norms. Similarly, Xie and Hong (2022) classified parents' views or comments as subjective norms and highlighted their influence on marriage intention. Therefore, filial piety may shape a young adult's marriage intentions through perceived parental expectations and social pressure surrounding marriage. In this study, TPB complements SET by accounting for the normative and social influence for marriage intention, specifically through subjective norms derived from cultural expectations such as filial piety.

SET and TPB are conceptualised within a single model for this study. SET explains how individual from personal evaluations form individuals' evaluation about marriage based on perceived cost-rewards (i.e., their perception of their family relationship), whereas TPB explains how external social factors and cultural expectations (i.e., filial piety) shape these intentions through subjective norms. While SET emphasises the attitudinal components of relationships, TPB emphasises the social factors that reinforce the intentions towards building new relationships through marriage. Thus, marriage intention is a result of both individuals' evaluations (cost-reward analysis) and social expectations that direct the decision-making of an individual towards marriage.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach to examine the predictors of marriage intention among Malaysian Chinese young adults. Data were collected through an

online survey distributed via social media platforms, enabling nationwide participation without geographical constraints.

Sampling Procedures

Participants were recruited using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of individuals according to predetermined criteria (Magnone & Yeziarski, 2024). In contrast, convenience sampling is the selection of individuals who are easily accessible within a certain time frame for the investigation (Golzar et al., 2022). The sample comprises Malaysian Chinese young adults aged 18 to 26, consistent with definition of young adulthood of Bonnie et al. (2015). Only individuals who were single or currently in a romantic relationship were included. Married, divorced, or widowed individuals were excluded because their marital decisions had already been made and did not align with the study's focus on marriage intention. This study does not include additional demographic variables such as schooling status, economic level, or educational attainment, as these factors have already been extensively examined in prior research.

The sample size was calculated using G-Power 3.1 statistical power analysis software. A priori power analysis was run for linear multiple regression (fixed model, R², deviation from zero) with three predictors. Using a medium effect size ($f^2=0.15$), an alpha level of .05, and statistical power of .80, the minimum sample size required was 77. However, data from a larger sample ($n = 340$) was collected in order to improve the robustness and generalisability of the results. Upon data cleaning, 16 responses were removed due to missing data, and also did not adhere to the inclusion criterion, resulting in a total sample size of 324.

Research Instruments

The survey contained an information sheet detailing the study's goal, confidentiality assurances, and informed consent. The questionnaire consists of the following sections:

- *Demographic information*: Participants reported their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, state of residence, relationship status, and education level.
- *Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS)*: The BFRS (Fok et al., 2014) consisted of sixteen items. The instrument consists of three subscales—coherence, expressiveness, and conflict, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot). Higher scores on the whole scale indicated a favourable family environment. The overall score was obtained by adding the subscale scores. According to Fok et al. (2014), the BFRS might be used with various non-Western and collectivist cultural groups, such as those from East and South Asia, as well as those from Western cultures.

The internal consistency was acceptable for expressiveness ($\alpha = .65$), but it was good for the full scale BFRS ($\alpha = .88$), cohesiveness ($\alpha = .83$), and conflict ($\alpha = .80$).

- *Filial Behaviour Scale (FBS)*: Filial piety was measured using the 25-item FBS (Chen et al., 2007). A 5-point Likert scale was used for scoring the items, with 2 items having their scores reversed. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score suggests a greater level of filial conduct. A high score (averaged over 25 items) implied a greater likelihood of engaging in filial behaviours. The coefficient alpha for the scale in the Malaysian context was 0.85 (Nainee et al., 2016). The scale was reliable and valid in Chinese samples, with a positive correlation with filial attitudes and interdependent self-concept (Chen et al., 2007, as cited in Zong et al., 2022).

- *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)*: Zimet et al. (1988) developed the 12-item MSPSS to measure perceived social support. The scale uses a 7-point scale, with 1 representing very strong disagreement and 7 representing very strong agreement, to quantify the level of support from family, friends, and significant others. A low, moderate, or high total score indicates a level of perceived support. In the context of the Malaysian young adults' study, this scale demonstrated good internal consistency, which was .91 (Khodarahimi et al., 2016). The Cronbach's alpha for these three components was .87, .85, and .91, respectively, while the overall instrument had an alpha of .88 (GabardoMartins et al., 2017). The MSPSS has shown good validity (Faisal et al., 2022).

- *Intend to Marry Scale (IMS)*: Marriage intention was measured using the three-item IMS, a subscale of the Marital Scales developed by Park and Rosén (2013). There is one item that is one reverse-scored item, while the others are assessed on a 7-point scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A more optimistic intention to get married was indicated by higher scores (Park & Rosén, 2013). The subscale reliability value was 0.80 for IMS (Prosser & Rosén, 2018).

Reliability of Research Instruments

Table 1 shows the value of reliability for the instruments applied in this study. Both the FBS and MSPSS reported values of .886 and .885, which are regarded as good, while the BFRS and IMS reported values of .917 and .902, respectively, which are regarded as excellent. According to George and Mallery (2019), a reliability benchmark score between 0.8 and 0.89 is regarded as good, while a score higher than 0.9 is excellent. As a result, all of the scales demonstrated good and excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .885 to .917

Table 1*Reliability of Research Instruments*

Research Instruments	Cronbach's alpha
BFRS	.917
FBS	.886
MSPSS	.885
IMS	.902

Note. N=324

Ethical approval was obtained from the Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (SERC) prior to data collection. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23). Demographic characteristics were summarised using descriptive statistics. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among family relationships, filial piety, perceived social support, and marriage intention. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the strongest predictors of marriage intention.

Results

Table 2 presents participants' ages, genders, ethnicities, religions, educational levels, and relationship statuses. A total of 324 participants were included. Participants were aged 18–26, with a mean of 22.27 years (SD = 1.70). The sample was composed of 250 females (77.2%), 70 males (21.6%), and 4 participants who preferred not to disclose their gender (1.2%). In terms of relationship status, 219 of the participants were single (67.6%), and 105 of them were in a relationship (32.4%). Regarding religion, 258 participants identified as Buddhist (79.6%), while the least represented religious group was Muslims, with just one respondent (0.3%). Regarding educational level, the data showed that the vast majority of participants held a bachelor's degree (n=259, 79.9%), and only one respondent held a lower secondary qualification (0.3%).

Table 2*Demographic Information of Participants (N=324)*

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Age			22.27	1.70	18	26
Gender						
Male	70	21.6				
Female	250	77.2				
Prefer not to say	4	1.2				
Relationship Status						
Single	219	67.6				
In a Relationship	105	32.4				
Religion						
Islam	1	0.3				
Buddhism	258	79.6				
Christianity	46	14.2				
No Religion	19	5.9				
Educational Level						
Primary School	2	0.6				
Lower Secondary (PMR/PT3)	1	0.3				
Upper Secondary (SPM)	10	3.1				
Pre-University (STPM/Matriculation/Foundation)	18	5.6				
Diploma/Certificate	18	5.6				
Bachelor's Degree	259	79.9				
Master's Degree	16	4.9				

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of topic-specific traits such as filial piety, perceived social support, family ties, and marriage intention. In this study, the 33rd, 66th, and 100th percentiles were used to categorise BFRS, FBS, and IMS scores as low, moderate, or high, whereas MSPSS followed the authors' categorisation criteria.

Based on the findings, 37% of the participants (n=120) reported a moderate family relationship, 34% reported a low family relationship (n=110), and 29% reported a high family relationship (n=94). Regarding filial piety, 35.8% of participants (n=116) exhibit poor filial piety, 33.6% (n=109) display great filial piety concurrently, and 30.6% of participants (n=99) express intermediate filial piety. Additionally, the majority of participants (n=255, 78.7%) expressed high perceived social support, while 20.4% (n=66) indicated medium perceived social support, and 0.9% (n=3) reported

low perceived social support. Regarding marital intention, 40.7% of participants (n=132) indicated low intention, 29.9% (n=97) of participants indicated moderate intention, and 29.3% (n=95) of participants indicated high intention.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Key Study Variables (N=324)

Variable	N	%	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Family Relationships			62.66	11.05	27	80
Low (≤ 58)	110	34.0				
Moderate ($58 < \text{score} \leq 70$)	120	37.0				
High ($70 < \text{score} \leq 80$)	94	29.0				
Filial Piety			93.64	12.30	62	123
Low (≤ 89)	116	35.8				
Moderate ($89 < \text{score} \leq 100$)	99	30.6				
High ($100 < \text{score} \leq 125$)	109	33.6				
Perceived Social Support			67.21	10.30	32	84
Low ($12 < \text{score} \leq 35$)	3	0.9				
Moderate ($36 < \text{score} \leq 60$)	66	20.4				
High ($61 < \text{score} \leq 84$)	255	78.7				
Marriage Intention			10.27	5.12	0	18
Low (≤ 9)	132	40.7				
Moderate ($9 < \text{score} \leq 13$)	97	29.9				
High ($13 < \text{score} \leq 18$)	95	29.3				

Note. n = number of cases; % = percentage; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum value; Max = maximum value

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- H1: Family relationships are positively associated with marriage intention.
- H2: Filial piety is positively associated with marriage intention.
- H3: Perceived social support is positively associated with marriage intention.
- H4: Family relationships significantly predict marriage intention.
- H5: Filial piety significantly predicts marriage intention.
- H6: Perceived social support significantly predicts marriage intention.

Relationships Between Tested Variables

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlations between family relationships, filial piety, perceived social support, and marriage intention. Pearson's correlation results indicated that the relationship between family relationships and marriage intention is significantly and positively correlated ($r = .218, p < .01$). According to the rule of thumb, a range of 0.20 to 0.40 signifies a low positive relationship (Guilford & Fruchter, 1973). Therefore, family relationships and marriage intentions have a significantly low positive relationship. To conclude, hypothesis 1 in this study is supported.

Secondly, the Pearson correlation also demonstrated a significant and positive correlation between filial piety and marriage intention among young adults in Malaysia ($r = .295, p < .01$). Besides, filial piety and marriage intention have a significantly low positive relationship (Guilford & Fruchter, 1973). Therefore, hypothesis 2 in this study is supported.

In addition, the Pearson correlation showed that perceived social support and marriage intention were positively and significantly correlated ($r = .341, p < .01$). The correlation between perceived social support and marital intention is also regarded as poor (Guilford & Fruchter, 1973). To conclude, hypothesis 3 in this study is supported.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	Marriage Intention (r)
Family Relationships	.218**
Filial Piety	.295**
Perceived Social Support	.341**

Note. $N = 324, p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Predictors of Marriage Intention

Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to test whether the family relationship, filial piety, and perceived social support predicted young adults' marriage intention in Malaysia. A diagnostic test was run to ensure the assumptions of multiple regression were met. Multicollinearity was checked using Variance Inflation Error (VIF) and tolerance values, with VIF below 5 and tolerance values above .20 indicating no multicollinearity issue present. Residual analysis was run and confirmed that assumption of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity were satisfied. The results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 5. The model was statistically significant, $F(3, 320) = 15.738, p < .001$, and accounted for 12.9% of the variance in marriage intention ($R^2 = .129, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .120$). However, family relationships did not significantly predict the marriage intention of young adults in Malaysia ($\beta = -.006, p = .931$). Therefore, hypothesis 4

is rejected. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = -.003$, $SE = .031$) indicates that family relationship had a negligible effect on marriage intention. Additionally, marriage intention is significantly predicted by filial piety among young adults in Malaysia ($\beta = .14$, $p = .04$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 is accepted. Finally, the analysis showed that perceived social support is a significant predictor of marriage intention among young people in Malaysia ($\beta = .258$, $p < .001$). Consequently, hypothesis 6 is accepted. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = .128$, $SE = .064$) shows that perceived social support is the strongest predictor among other variables tested. Overall, these findings suggest that while filial piety and perceived social support play vital roles, family relationships do not independently contribute to predict marriage intention among Chinese young adults.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Marriage Intention

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-3.726	2.167		-1.719	.086	-	-
Family Relationship	-.003	.031	-.006	-.087	.931	.612	1.633
Filial Piety	.059	.029	.14	2.060	.040*	.574	1.742
Perceived Social Support	.128	.064	.258	3.692	<.001*	.556	1.799

Note. $N = 324$, $R^2 = .129$, Adjusted $R^2 = .120$, $F(3,320) = 15.738$, $p < .001$. B= unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient, VIF=Variance Inflation Factor

Discussion

Family Relationships and Marriage Intention

This study demonstrates that family relationships are positively correlated with marriage intentions among Malaysian Chinese young adults. This relationship is associative and not causal due to the cross-sectional design of the study. The results are in line with those of research by Suryadi et al. (2023) which found that people's perceptions of their parents' happiness and conflict levels are associated with reduced marriage intentions. Sağkal and Özdemir (2019) also reported that interparental conflict was associated with a less favourable attitude towards marriage. One possible explanation is that observing family members' dissatisfaction in their marriages is linked to a reluctance towards marriage and may shape individuals' expectations of marital life. Young women may be particularly afraid to make the same mistakes as others, which is further exacerbated by personal experiences such as witnessing unsuccessful marriages or family members being pressured into marriage (Tabkhi et al., 2025). In addition, the role of supportive families in fostering a positive marital relationship model is another possible explanation. Sulfinadia et

al. (2025) concluded that promoting an optimistic view of marriage and serving as a role model is a critical responsibility of the family, as it represents the initial pillar in the development of individual values and perceptions. Similarly, another study revealed that participants who assessed their parents' marriages as positive reported a favourable attitude towards marriage and a stronger desire to find "Mr Right" to form a happy family (Gui, 2023).

Although family relationships were highly connected with marriage intention, they did not predict marriage intention. The finding contradicts past research, which suggests family relationships significantly predict marriage intention (An et al., 2022; Rabenda-Nowak & Wylęty, 2022). This might be due to the reason that the study's target sample is an age range from 18 to 26 years old, which falls within Generation Z. It is possible that individuals within this age group place priority on personal readiness and autonomy, however, these factors were not directly measured in the present study and therefore, this interpretation remains speculative. A good family relationship may not necessarily lead to high marriage intentions since they place a greater focus on individual readiness. Generation Z has been described as valuing a strong personality and the ability to make independent decisions as the true indicators of maturity, rather than marriage (Herawati et al., 2023).

Besides, the possible reason might be that the majority of research respondents do not come from a culture that places as much emphasis on family relations as Islam does. Whether in kinship or marriage, Islam emphasises the virtues that bind family relations and its network (Mohadi, 2023). In this study, most of the respondents (79.6%) are Buddhist, followed by Christians (14.2%), while Muslims (0.3%) make up the smallest percentage. As the Muslim respondents' portion in this study is very small compared to Buddhism and Christianity, meaningful comparison across religious groups cannot be made.

Filial Piety and Marriage Intention

The discussion proceeds to the next variable, and the results show that filial piety positively correlated and significantly predicts marriage intention. The discovery is in accordance with the research conducted by Xie and Hong (2022), which indicated that subjective norms were positively correlated with the marriage intentions of students. Additionally, Ye et al. (2024) demonstrated a positive correlation between attitudes toward marriage and cultural values. The results may be explained by filial piety being conceptually regarded as a "cornerstone" of the Malaysian family structure (Ismail et al., 2009). In recent years, filial piety has emerged as a moral standard that influences the family lives of individuals and restricts their freedom of marriage, particularly for women (Davis, 2021; Lamont, 2020; Xie, 2021). Furthermore, filial piety is also seen as a way of repaying parents for their care and guidance of young adults. According to Li et al. (2021), the Confucian principles of favouring the intimacy and repaying parents for their generous act

of bearing and rearing children are the foundation of reciprocal filial piety. These principles are interpreted as a natural disclosure of human nature, emphasising the repayment of intergenerational intimate affection and love. Therefore, young adults with a strong sense of filial piety may be more inclined to consider marriage as part of fulfilling familial expectations.

In addition, young adults may prioritise parental expectations over personal preferences, increasing their intention to marry. In Southeast Asian contexts, filial piety and familial pressure may be associated with higher marriage intention despite initial reluctance (Izharuddin, 2023; Himawan & Suriyah, 2023). Other than that, remaining unmarried beyond a socially expected age is often viewed negatively and may harm family reputation, particularly for women. The term such as “leftover women” reflects the stigma faced by unmarried women, which can lead to feelings of social exclusion (Liu, 2024; Alias et al., 2022). According to Confucian philosophy, the absence of offspring and marriage is the most unfilial to one’s parents (To, 2013, as cited in Xu, 2021).

Perceived Social Support and Marriage Intention

Perceived social support and marriage intention among young adults in Malaysia are significantly positively correlated, which is consistent with past studies (Alfawair et al., 2023; Esmaily et al., 2019; Ramdani et al., 2023). Moreover, perceived social support was found to significantly predict marriage intention, further supporting prior research (Pavithran et al., 2025; Silalahi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these findings are interpreted as indicative of relationship rather than direct effects.

The study by Esmaily et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of social support in the overall development of human beings. The way in which an individual perceives social support can have a significant impact on their point of view on life. Marriage represents a critical life decision, presenting distinct challenges that require the emotional and practical support of family, friends, and close confidants to navigate effectively. Ultimately, the more support one receives from social sources, the more confidently and adaptively individuals may respond to marital considerations. The support received further may strengthen the desire to establish meaningful relationships with others.

In terms of peer support, the presence of encouragement or pressure from peers can either accelerate or postpone an individual’s marriage intentions, depending on the actions or statements of their peers (Pavithran et al., 2025). According to Tabkhi et al. (2025), issues of trust are particularly apparent when an individual perceives insufficient support from family or friends, or when their advice does not correspond with the individual’s personal needs. A lack of trust in external support systems may lead to isolation in their decision-making. This isolation and accompanying uncertainty, particularly in significant issues such as marriage, may result in doubts and mistrust towards the process of selecting a life partner and initiating a family.

Despite the fact that family relationships, filial piety, and perceived social support are important predictors of marriage intention, the model explains just 12% of the variance, suggesting the possibility of additional explanatory factors (Gao, 2023). This suggests that the findings should be interpreted with caution and that some other factors may also play a role in determining marriage intention. Besides, the use of purposive and convenience sampling that targets the homogeneous sample of Malaysian Chinese young adults limits the generalisability of the findings to the general Malaysian young adult population. As such, the findings may not be representative of other cultural or age groups. In Malaysia, young women's perspectives on marriage are shaped by their attitudes towards childbearing (Choo et al., 2024), whereas young men's decisions regarding marriage are frequently influenced by economic factors, particularly financial stability (Pavithran et al., 2025). Thus, marriage intention is influenced by multiple factors beyond family relationships, filial piety, and perceived social support. Future studies should consider examining a broader range of variables by reviewing a wider body of prior studies.

Implications

As the majority of previous research was conducted in foreign contexts, this study addresses the research void in the context of marriage in Malaysia. Additionally, the findings further strengthen the theory of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). SET is strengthened by the fact that an individual can mitigate the perceived costs of marriage and develop a higher intention to marry when there is sufficient perceived social support. From a TPB perspective, a greater willingness to engage in marriage should be associated with a stronger subjective norm, represented by filial piety. However, the finding that family relationships did not significantly predict marriage intention contradicts certain assumptions of SET. Since most of the participants in this study are female and have a higher education, they may view family relationships as insufficient rewards to compensate for the perceived higher costs of marriage. This may be attributed to the fact that Malaysia has made significant progress in enhancing women's status. Women's empowerment has also reshaped attitudes towards traditional gender roles and family values, including marriage and reproduction. (Abdullah et al., 2021).

This research offers preliminary insights into variables correlated with young persons' intentions to get married, which may serve as a foundation for future legislators to address related problems. Additionally, it allows scholars to delve deeper into related topics. According to Liu et al. (2024), several societal issues may arise from delayed or non-marriage, such as an ageing population, a declining fertility rate, and a weakened national economy. Moreover, these findings are advantageous for educators and parents, who may influence the attitudes of young adults towards marriage through formal and informal education efforts.

Limitations

The over-representation of certain demographics in this research is its first limitation as it could not be a precise representation of the Malaysian Chinese young adult population. A total of 77.2% of the participants were women, while 79.6% identified as Buddhists. This demographic imbalance limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader Malaysian young adult populations, which comprises individuals from diverse gender and religious backgrounds, including Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Bahais, and atheists.

Furthermore, other important variables that may influence marriage intention have not been taken into consideration in this research, since this study presented low explained variance in regression and poor correlations between filial piety, familial relationships, and perceived social support. Consequently, it is crucial to take into account other critical factors that will influence marriage intention, such as individualistic values and educational attainment.

Finally, the convenience and purpose sampling strategies used in this study raised the risk of sample errors and inadequate population representation. This is due to the reason that, according to Tajik et al. (2024), convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily accessible to the researcher, whereas purposive sampling involves recruiting participants who meet specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. Although these non-probability sampling strategies are commonly used in social science research, they may reduce the generalisability of the findings of the target participants. Overall, future studies should adopt more representative sampling strategies and examine additional factors that may influence marriage intention to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings.

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Acknowledgment

The authors thank Ms. Michi Ting-Yin Tay [郑婷尹] for her assistance in data collection.

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