Religiosity and the Marital Satisfaction of Malaysian Christians: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT
Amid the challenges experienced by married couples and families, the need to examine the factors associated with marital satisfaction is recognised across various communities and backgrounds. Nevertheless, research on Malaysian Christians remains limited, especially concerning religiosity and marital satisfaction. Therefore, this study provides a deeper understanding of marital satisfaction among Malaysian Christians, focusing on its association with the factor of religiosity. 62 participants responded to self-report scales – including the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 – and open-ended questions on marital satisfaction experience and marital views, values, and attitudes development. A one-sample t-test analysed the marital satisfaction level of Malaysian Christians and some amount of marital distress was indicated. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis established that religiosity significantly predicted marital satisfaction. The open-ended responses were analysed thematically and the identified themes pertaining to how married Malaysian Christians experience marital satisfaction and religiosity complemented the quantitative findings. These findings could inform the development of programmes on marriage and family life and assist marriage counsellors, family therapists and other mental health professionals to work more effectively with the Malaysian community. Couples and families may also gain awareness, insights and inspiration towards enriching their experiences within marriage and family life.

1. INTRODUCTION
Marriage is well-acknowledged as a legally, socially and ritually-binding union that affords rights, privileges and obligations to all parties involved (i.e. spouses, children, family) (Aman et al., 2019; Drahman & Yusof, 2018). In marriage, the marital relationship and the satisfaction experienced may be strained by various life crises and challenging situations such as bereavement (Joronen et al., 2015), financial difficulties (Copur & Eker, 2014), family illness or mental health issues (Nogueira et al., 2019) and even the recent Covid-19 global health crisis (Williamson, 2020).

Religiosity – the degree of one’s religious beliefs, values and practices (Sauerheber et al., 2021) – and the family-of-origin – the unit in which one has developed physiologically, psychologically, and emotionally during formative years (Hovestadt et al., 1985; Rovers, 2004) have been identified among the factors associated with marital satisfaction maintenance (Monk et al., 2021, Worthington et al., 2003). This study explores marital satisfaction among Malaysian Christians, focusing and its association with religiosity and experiences, both personal and within the family-of-origin.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Christian View of Marriage
Among Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, marriage is generally viewed as a union that is sacred and sanctified (David & Stafford, 2015). Within the Catholic Church, marriage is recognised as a Sacrament – a visible sign of God’s grace and invitation to participate in the divine life – for unitive and procreative purposes (Yarhouse & Norwacki, 2007, Catholic Church, 2014). According to Catholics, marriage is deemed indissoluble, and hence, divorce and remarriage are staunchly disapproved; separation may be allowed, and annulment can be granted only in certain instances of marital distress (Yarhouse & Norwacki, 2007).

For most Protestants, marriage – although not recognised as a sacrament – is highlighted as a sacred, covenantal bond between spouses, symbolising the relationship between God and His people as well as Christ and the Church (Yarhouse & Norwacki, 2007). It is imperative that the covenantal bond be upheld with the active maintenance of marital quality and thus, divorce among Protestants is only acceptable as a final resort after all preventative and restorative efforts have been exhausted (Yarhouse & Norwacki, 2007). It is evident that all streams of Christianity, notwithstanding the minor denominational differences, collectively hold marriage in high regard.

2.2 Marital Satisfaction
Marriage is often regarded as successful when the satisfaction experienced within the marriage transcends all conflict, be it verbalised or suppressed (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012). In highly satisfying marriages, spouses demonstrate a positive attitude towards their marital relationship (Fincham & Beach, 2010; King, 2016).

Marital satisfaction has been linked to overall life satisfaction, positive physical and mental health outcomes, family well-being and family functioning (Faizal et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2009). Declining marital satisfaction was previously associated with feelings of isolation and loneliness, impaired social interactions and challenges to children’s growth and development (Amato, 2000; Anahita et al., 2016; Ismail et al., 2015) as well as divorce, which, in itself, poses emotional, behavioural and interpersonal stressors and strains (Amato, 2010; Rosand et al., 2014) to the separated spouses and their children.

In efforts to adequately characterise marital satisfaction, various terms such as marital quality, adjustment, and happiness have been used interchangeably with marital satisfaction in research (Graham et al., 2011). Previous definitions include the perceived quality of married life (Omani-Samani et al., 2018; Schumm et al., 1983), the attitudes of the spouses towards the marital relationship (King, 2016), the strength and happiness of the marriage (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015), the measurement of benefits received and costs incurred (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) as well as the extent to which personal needs are fulfilled in the marriage (Tummala, 2008; Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015).

2.3 Religiosity as a Factor of Marital Satisfaction
Religiosity encompasses the beliefs, experiences, attitudes, practices, and commitment in arranging one’s life according to the search for a sacred transcendent being (Archour et al., 2014). Religiosity could also be operationalised as religious commitment – the level of commitment to one’s religious affiliation – according to Worthington’s (1988) model of Religious Values. Based on this model, evaluating the world through the lenses of religion – in other words, integrating the belief in God and religious values into daily life – would signify high levels of religiosity (Worthington et al., 2003). Christians high in religiosity are suggested to be highly orientated to Christian beliefs, teachings and values (Kamomoe et al., 2017). Hence, their spousal interactions may reflect this personal religious commitment.

With strong religious commitment, married Christians may integrate into their marriage the religious values or schema adopted from the value dimensions of (i) scripture or sacred writings, (ii) ecclesiastical leaders and (iii) norms of the religious community, as theorised by Worthington’s (1988) model. Past studies suggest that these integrated elements of religiosity (i.e. beliefs, values, practices) contribute to marital satisfaction through shared religious activities (e.g. church attendance, scripture-reading, couple prayer), religious communication (e.g. discussing God’s role in marriage, discussing scriptural teachings), increased marital commitment and faith-inspired conflict-coping strategies (Aditya & Magno, 2011; David & Stafford, 2015; Ellison et al., 2010 Goddard et al., 2012; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

2.4 Religiosity, Marital Satisfaction and the Family-of-Origin
The family of origin may also play a significant role in how religious beliefs contribute to marital satisfaction.
Parental actions could reflect how religious beliefs are integrated into daily living (e.g. being less likely to engage in abusive behaviour, functioning better as parents, being more likely to show affection in words and actions to spouse and children) (Lambert & Dollahite, 2010). Through parental religious socialisation, religious parents send consistent messages about religion and its teachings to their children (Krauss et al., 2012). Religious socialisation among married Christians – as with individuals of other religions – may involve social or observational learning of religious beliefs and attitudes through spiritual modelling (Bandura, 2003; Oman, 2013; Oman & Thoresen, 2003b).

In Malaysia, religiosity is mostly cultivated from a young age through adherence to shared religious beliefs and faith practices emphasised within the family and religious education at respective places of worship (Kasmo et al., 2015). High involvement in the activities of religious communities – often encouraged by parents or caregivers (Schwartz, 2006) – also predicts higher levels of religious commitment (Krauss et al., 2012), which, as discussed in previous sections, is associated with marital satisfaction. From the Christian tradition standpoint, parents bear the primary responsibility of teaching children to behave appropriately and raising them according to religious tenets (Miller, 2005).

In addition to the experience of religiosity, the family-of-origin may also play a significant role in facilitating marital satisfaction. As the family-of-origin is often the primary setting where norms, beliefs and values – including those related to religiosity and relationships – are perpetuated (Schwartz, 2006), recollections of the practices and interactions within a spouse’s family-of-origin may be carried into their current marriage and family life, impacting their own level of marital satisfaction. Married Christians, inspired by their family and religious backgrounds, could develop relational values, attitudes, and qualities that reduce marital conflict and enhance relationship quality (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Bandura’s (1978) social learning theory explains this intergenerational transmission of religiosity and marital satisfaction. Past research indicated that parental faith modelling predicted faith development (Schwartz, 2006) and that higher parental religiosity indicated higher religiosity in children, especially for religiously conservative families (Smith, 2021). Experiences of destructive conflict within the family-of-origin were found to be negatively associated with marital quality through the enactment of conflict behaviours (Monk et al., 2021).

During early critical learning periods, children – facilitated by social learning (Rhoades et al., 2012) – adopt the values, traditions, beliefs, behaviours and even family roles and conflicts transmitted inter-generationally within the family (Lieberman, 1979; Min, Silverstein, & Lendon, 2012). Therefore, observing parental marital interactions during childhood, adults may internalise many memories and representations from their parents' marriage and learn how to treat their spouses (Curran et al., 2005).

2.5 Research Aims
This pilot study examined the marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians and its association with religiosity, paving the way for in-depth research on marital satisfaction primarily focusing on Malaysian Christians. Most of the links between religiosity, marriage and family in previous Malaysian research were primarily established among the Malay-Muslim community (Archour et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2017; Hoesni et al., 2013; Hoesni et al., 2016). Research data on Malaysian Christians is limited to Christians as some of the participants in marital research (Ng et al., 2009; 2013; Tam et al., 2011) but not the central research focus. Therefore, this preliminary research could significantly add to the literature on the marital satisfaction experienced by Malaysian Christians, imparting insights that could benefit Christian couples and families, counsellors, family therapists or other mental health professionals and also Churches and Christian communities.

2.6 Research Questions
1. What is the level of marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians?
2. Does religiosity predict marital satisfaction among Malaysian Christians?
3. In what ways have the family-of-origin of married Malaysian Christians contributed to their experience of religiosity?
4. In what ways have the family-of-origin of married Malaysian Christians contributed to their experience of marital satisfaction?
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants
A total of 62 married Christians (34 female, 28 males; Mage = 51.79, SD = 10.38, range = 29 to 70) responded to the online questionnaire on Google Forms. Prior to data collection, the G* Power 3.1.9.7 software was used to carry out an A-priori sample size estimation with the selection of the F-test, a linear multiple regression with a fixed model, and a R2 deviation from zero. This power analysis for sample size estimation demonstrated that the sample size was sufficient to detect a significant effect size with 80% power ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed). Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the university (MUHREC Project 18290). The participants were recruited based on these criteria: (i) Malaysian, (ii) identifies as being a Christian of any denomination, (iii) married for at least one year and currently living with spouse, (iv) at least 18 years of age, which is the legal minimum age for marriage in Malaysia for both male and female and (iv) able to read, understand and write in English.

3.2 Research Design
This study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component featured a cross-sectional, correlational design where the predictive value of religious commitment (predictor variable) on perceived marital satisfaction (outcome variable) was examined. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were thematically analysed to examine the experiences of Malaysian Christians in regards to marital satisfaction, religious commitment and the impact of the family-of-origin.

3.3 Assessments
Data on marital satisfaction, religious commitment and the impact of the family-of-origin were collected quantitatively and qualitatively through a self-report questionnaire on Google Forms.

3.3.1 Demographic Information
Non-identifying demographic information such as age, sex, state of residence, location of residence (i.e. urban or rural), Christian denomination and marriage duration in years were collected in the first section of the study. Participants were also required to indicate if their family of origin and spouse also shared the same Christian beliefs. Those whose family of origin and spouse differed from them in terms of religious beliefs are requested to provide information on the religious beliefs held by their family of origin and spouse.

3.3.2 Marital Satisfaction
The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, KMSS (Schumm et al., 1983) is a three-item self-report measure of marital quality. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = extremely dissatisfied" to "7 = extremely satisfied. The total range of scores are from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating higher marital quality. Ng et al. (2013) reported evidence for strong score reliability, with a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ value of .85, when utilising the scale among married or cohabiting Malaysian respondents, with 50.8% of the Chinese and 35.4% of the Indians being Christians. In this present study, the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ value was .97.

3.3.3 Religiosity
Religiosity, in the context of personal adherence to religious beliefs, values and practices as well as the integration of religious beliefs in daily life, was measured using the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) (Worthington et al., 2003). A five-point Likert scale, from “1 = not at all true of me” to “5 = totally true of me”, was used to rate intrapersonal (cognitive) and interpersonal (behavioural) religious commitment. Worthington et al. (2003) reported strong internal consistency, three-week and five-month test-retest reliability, construct validity, and discriminant validity among samples of married adults and Christians. In Malaysia, Foo et al. (2014), Jamaludin (2013) as well as Mokhlis and Sparks (2007) have previously utilised the RCI-10 among Christians. High internal consistencies and reliability within an acceptable range were reported by Mokhlis and Sparks (2007). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ values of .85 and .68 for the dimensions of intrapersonal (cognitive) and interpersonal (behavioural) religious commitment, respectively. In this research, the $\alpha$ value for religious commitment was .97.
2.3.4 Experiences within the Family-Of-Origin
The experiences within the family of origin associated with current personal marital satisfaction and religiosity were assessed using open-ended questions: “In what ways did your experiences within your family-of-origin impact your experience of religious commitment?” “In what ways did your experiences within your family-of-origin impact your experience of satisfaction within your own marriage?”. These questions explored participants’ subjective experience of the perceived contribution of their family-of-origin towards their current levels of religiosity and marital satisfaction.

2.3.5 Procedure
Married Malaysian Christians were invited to participate through the online link to this 15-minute online questionnaire circulated to personal contacts, church ministries and communities, Christian-based groups and social media. Through the explanatory statement, individuals were briefed on the research aims, tasks, risks and benefits. Those consenting to participate signed consent form and provided non-identifying demographic details.

General instructions were provided before the start of the questionnaire. The questionnaire included different sections assessing marital satisfaction, religiosity and the impact of family of origin. Detailed instructions preceded each section of the questionnaire. The participants were encouraged to contact the student researcher should they have any questions or feedback regarding the questionnaire.

Participants were permitted to withdraw from participating at any point in the questionnaire without having to provide an explanation. As the questionnaire prompted the recollection of past experiences, which may sometimes be negative, participants were provided with details on ways to obtain assistance if they encounter discomfort or distress. After the responses from the participants have been collected, the data was cleaned, calculated and prepared for further statistical analyses.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics
The frequencies and percentages based on gender and similarity of religious beliefs are displayed in Table 1. The means and standard deviations for marital satisfaction and religiosity are listed in Table 2.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages for gender as well as similarity of religious beliefs with family of origin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity of religious beliefs with the family-of-origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The means and standard deviations for the study variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32.42</td>
<td>10.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Quantitative Analyses

4.2.1 Research Question 1: What is the level of marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians?
A one-sample t test was used to compare the mean KMSS score of Malaysian Christians ($M = 16.37, SD = 4.58$) against the KMSS cut-off score of 17 proposed by Crane et al. (2000). The mean level of marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians was 1.44 points, 95% CI [-2.72, -.15], below the KMSS cut-off score. This difference was found to be not significantly different, $t(61) = -2.23, p = .03$, and small, $d = .28$. Violation of the normality assumption ($p < .001$) was disregarded as the sample size was large enough (> 30 or 40) for justification using the central limit theorem (Field, 2013; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

4.2.2 Research Question 2: Does religiosity predict marital satisfaction among Malaysian Christians?
A simple linear regression was used to predict the proportion of variance in marital satisfaction that can be accounted for by religious commitment. Pearson’s correlations reveal a moderate linear relationship between religious commitment and marital satisfaction, $r(60) = .55, p < .001$. Outcome and predictor variables were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values and outliers. A missing value analysis revealed that there were no missing values in the dataset. Univariate outliers, scores which exceeded the z-score limit of +/-3.29, were managed through winsorisation (Field, 2013). A final sample size of 62 was deemed adequate for this regression analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Several assumptions were tested prior to conducting the regression analysis. Assumption of normality for marital satisfaction was violated as indicated by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic being significant, $p < .01$. Nevertheless, this violation can be disregarded and parametric tests can be utilised as the central limit theorem indicates that with large sample sizes (> 30 or 40), the sample means tend to approach a normal distribution (Field, 2013; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Examination of scatterplots of standardised residuals against standardised predicted values also revealed that the data met the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals.

Religiosity significantly predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = .25, 95\%$ CI (.15, .35), $p < .01$, accounting for a significant 30% of the variance in marital satisfaction, $R^2 = .30, F (1, 60) = 25.42, p < .001$. By Cohen’s (1988) conventions, the effect size is considered large ($f^2 = .36$). Therefore, marital satisfaction is suggested to be higher among Malaysian Christians with higher religious commitment.

4.3 Qualitative Analyses

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis
The responses to Research Question 3 (“In what ways have the family-of-origin of married Malaysian Christians contributed to their experience of religiosity?”) and Research Question 4 (“How has the family-of-origin impacted the marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians?”) were thematically analysed by two independent coders. The coders respectively adhered to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis procedure of (i) data familiarisation, (ii) initial code generation, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) assigning names and definitions to themes and (vi) report writing.

Themes for Research Question 3: In what ways have the family-of-origin of married Malaysian Christians contributed to their experience of religiosity?

4.3.2 Family-centred Religious Practices
The responses indicated that the family-of-origin, often through the examples of significant family members (e.g. Mum, Dad) observing various religious practices, contributed to the experience of religiosity. These religious practices demonstrated and instilled within the family include praying at home, going to Church as a family, reading the Bible, fasting and adhering to other religious observances, attending Sunday school for formal faith education and deepening religious knowledge. The practice of being united when prayer was a practice implemented even within the families of differing religious beliefs.

R20, a 46-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“They gave me a good head start by instilling good religious beliefs and practices.”
R1, a 53-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Go to church together & prayed together when we were children. Mum bought & read to us stories from the children’s bible.”

R34, a 45-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Family prayer, compulsory going to church on Sundays, serious practices during Lent (Good Friday is a day of fasting).”

R38, a 38-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Mom & Dad had always reminded us of the 10 commandments & John 3:16. Therefore, I had always kept it in my heart in everything I do.”

R48, a 66-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“By example, mum is always praying in the evening.”

R16, a 57-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Going to church regularly as a family. Attendance of Sunday school for religious knowledge. Excuses were not accepted”

R26, a 62-year-old female who differs in religious beliefs from her family-of-origin:
“We pray together as one family.”

Sharing about their experience of these family-centred religious practices, the respondents highlighted the togetherness in those experiences: “We go to church together & prayed together…” (R1), “Going to church regularly as a family.” (R16), “We pray together as one family.” (R26). The seriousness of upholding these practices were emphasised within the family-of-origin: “Excuses were not accepted” (R16), “… compulsory…serious practices” (R34), “… always reminded us…” (R38) and these efforts left a lasting impression on the respondents: “Therefore, I had always kept it in my heart in everything I do.” (R38)

4.3.3 Family-inspired Deepening of Faith and Belief in God
Respondents indicated that their family-of-origin facilitated their experience of religiosity by laying the foundation for a strong sense of faith and an acknowledgement of God in their lives.

R30, a 58-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Sowed the seed of the Catholic faith.”

The responses alluded to how this faith and belief were inspired by family and this included gaining clarity and strengthening beliefs and trust in God through guidance and teaching, examples of faith lived out, and evidence of family well-being.

R23, a 40-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“From the values learned from them, by guidance in the faith, learning and experiencing their faith in God and through their examples in life taught me to trust and belief in God.”

R22, a 53-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“My mother is a very prayerful person and her mantra was ‘All for thee, Oh my God’.”

R2, a 57-year-old male who differs in religious beliefs from his family-of-origin:
“The proof/testimonies of my family’s well-being has open up my eyes and deepen my beliefs in God.”

Some respondents made the active effort in turning toward God and the Christian faith after encountering their family’s inspiration during their childhood: “We grew up lifting everything we do to God.” (R22), “As I grew up my religion became fundamental to my existence. I grabbed opportunities to learn about my faith and become involved with church activities to keep my faith alive.” (R60, a 61-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin).

Themes for Research Question 4: In what ways have the family-of-origin of married Malaysian Christians contributed to their experience of marital satisfaction?

4.3.4 Parents’ Marriage as a Benchmark
Respondents stated that benchmarking experiences within their family-of-origin, especially the interactions between their parents, contributed to their respective experiences of marital satisfaction. There was a sense of motivation to emulate and also grow from these interactions witnessed.

R60, a 61-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“I suppose I saw my parents as a respectful couple and I have always wanted that in my marriage.”
R15, a 70-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“Trying to be like them”
Experiencing life as a family with loving parents provided a basis for the respondents to grow towards satisfaction in their married life.
R21, a 66-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“Many small and daily experiences as a family with loving parents has been that foundation that brings about my own acceptance and happiness to my married life.”

4.3.5 Resolution to Change and Improve
Respondents reported that they felt a sense of conviction and determination to do better than their parents to ensure the satisfaction of their own marriages. The areas of change and improvement highlighted were forgiveness, understanding, unconditional love, truthfulness and open communication.
R35, a 57-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“I try to do better than my parents. Be more understanding and loving towards my spouse.”
R15, a 70-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“...striving to be even better.”
R50, a 50-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“Telling myself that my marriage would be different and better.”
R23, a 40-year-old male with similar religious beliefs as his family-of-origin:
“I’m trying and putting all those experiences learned from my family into my own marriage life. It may be tough at times but I know that if we put God in the centre of our family life, He will help and guide us through it.”
R3, a 43-year-old female who differs in religious beliefs from her family-of-origin:
“My mum couldn’t seem to forgive my dad for many things in their younger days which then resulted to much bitterness in their present marriage. I wanted different and I believed that through Christ, I learnt to love unselfishly and forgive graciously – which is important in my marriage.”
R45, a 48-year-old female with similar religious beliefs as her family-of-origin:
“I choose the opposite way from my parents. I choose honesty instead of lying/kept secrets. I choose fairness instead of biasness. I choose to say sorry instead of being stubborn. I choose to tell my husband he is wrong instead of just being a victim.”
The responses also featured amidst this conviction to change and enhance their experience of marital satisfaction within their respective marriages “…through Christ, I learnt to love unselfishly and forgive graciously…” (R3), “…if we put God in the centre of our family life, He will help and guide us through it” (R23).

5. DISCUSSIONS
This pilot study sought to preliminarily examine the marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians and its association with religiosity, answering research questions pertaining to the level of marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians, the predictive value of religiosity on marital satisfaction and the contribution of the family-of-origin to the experiences of religiosity and marital satisfaction.
Malaysian Christians score lower in marital satisfaction when compared to the cut-off score of 17 proposed by Crane et al. (2000) for the KMSS, although this difference was non-significant. This result could be interpreted as the level of satisfaction of the Malaysian Christians in this sample lies at the threshold indicative of marital distress. Nevertheless, these findings could serve as prompt height research into the factors that could contribute towards the maintenance and enhancement of marital satisfaction experienced by married Malaysian Christians.
Results of the linear regression suggested that religiosity significantly predicts marital satisfaction, supporting the findings of past research which highlighted the role of religiosity in maintaining marital satisfaction (Aditya & Magno, 2011; David & Stafford, 2015; Ellison et al., 2010; Goddard et al., 2012; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).
Within this sample of Malaysian Christians, this association between religiosity and marital satisfaction mirrored that found among the Malay Muslim community (Archour et al., 2014; Hoesni et al., 2013; Hoesni et
al., 2016). However, as religiosity only explained a percentage (30%) of the variance in marital satisfaction, perhaps the additional variance unexplained could be attributed to the role of other factors worth exploring (Copur & Eker, 2014; Joronen et al., 2015; Nogueira et al., 2019).

Through thematically analysing the open-ended question on the family-of-origin's contribution to the experience of religiosity, the themes of family-centred religious practices and family-inspired deepening of faith and belief in God emerged. These themes were in line with how the family-of-origin, especially parents, play a pivotal role in how religious beliefs are integrated into daily living (Lambert & Dollahite, 2010, Kasmo et al., 2015). The respondents' description of learning from their parents reflected religious socialisation and spiritual modelling through the family-of-origin (Bandura, 2003; Krauss et al., 2012; Oman, 2013; Oman & Thoresen, 2003b). The responses indicated that the family-of-origin contributed to religiosity through the emphasis on religious beliefs and faith practices (Kasmo et al., 2015), parent-encouraged involvement in religious activities (Schwartz, 2006) and exercised parental responsibility in imparting knowledge of Christian religious tenets (Miller, 2005). The thematic analysis indicated that the family-of-origin contributes to the experience of marital satisfaction through setting parents' marriage as a benchmark and having the resolution to change and improve. These themes from the responses provided support for the social transmission of functional relationship behaviours and healthy conflict management strategies (Monk et al., 2021; Weber & Kahn, 2005) through social learning (Bandura, 1978) from the other significant relationships in a couple’s life (e.g., parents, family members). The responses indicated learning from the parental interactions and choosing to similarly emulate those the positive beliefs, values and actions (e.g. forgiving, communicating, turning to the belief in God) and refrain from the negative ones. From the responses, the belief in God and elements of religiosity were also mentioned as a source of assistance for change and improvement, further highlighting the association of religiosity with marital satisfaction and the family of origin.

5.1 Limitations and Future Directions
The results of this study need to be interpreted with careful consideration of its current sample size. In view of the role of this study as preliminary research, the sample size needs to be expanded in future research to improve its generalisability. As this pilot study was carried out just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the findings may not be entirely reflective of the marital experiences during the current phase of the pandemic.

This current study could be expanded to perform extensive research of quantitative and qualitative methods with a larger sample size. The experiences of married Malaysian Christians during times of heightened crisis (e.g. COVID 19 pandemic) (Williamson, 2020) could be explored in follow-up studies to further understand the association between these currently examined factors (i.e. religiosity, family-of-origin) as well as other factors and marital satisfaction.

Future research could also include the assessment of other factors of marital satisfaction (e.g. interactions between spouses) beyond that of religiosity and the impact of the family-of-origin investigated in this study. Collecting qualitative responses on the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in extended studies could provide further understand how religiosity enriches marriage and family life. Additional open-ended questions could be incorporated to identify various other factors perceived as contributing to their personal level of satisfaction, opening avenues to collect richer and more insightful information on the experiences of married Malaysian Christians.

6. CONCLUSION
In conclusion, this pilot study presented that the marital satisfaction of Malaysian Christians was at the threshold between distressed and non-distressed couples and that religiosity significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Qualitative responses shed light upon how Malaysian Christians’ experiences of religiosity featured contributions family-of-origin, evident in the identified themes of family-centred religious practices and family-inspired deepening of faith and belief in God. The family-of-origin also contributed towards the experience of marital satisfaction, with setting parents’ marriage as a benchmark and having the resolution to change and improve emerging as themes from the responses of married Malaysian Christians.

These preliminary findings highlighted the role of religion in family experiences, especially in marriage, paving the way for more extensive research on religiosity, marital satisfaction and the family-of-origin to be conducted among Malaysian Christians. This study provides a precursory gauge of Malaysian Christian marital
satisfaction, encouraging more attention to be given to maintaining and enhancing satisfaction within marriage. The experiences shared by the respondents in this current study may inspire Christian couples and families to reflect upon how their religious beliefs, values and practices have been inherited from their family-of-origin and can potentially contribute to the marital satisfaction of future generations. With this awareness and the thematic insights shared by other Christian couples, married Christians may find direction to consciously work towards meaningfully experiencing their religious faith and marital satisfaction.

Recognising how the family-of-origin may be a model worthy of emulation for some and a catalyst for change and improvement for others, family therapists and counsellors working with Christian couples may adopt these findings on the family-of-origin in pre-marital counselling or marriage and family therapy. For Churches and Christian communities, the themes from this present research may guide the development of Church-based programmes for couples and families, focusing on the essential areas relevant to faith formation and Christian marriage and family life. The insights gained from this study on the factors Malaysian Christians may potentially be applicable also to married Christians in other countries of this South-East Asian region.

REFERENCES


