

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW MALAY MIDDLE CLASS FAMILY

This chapter examines several inter-related questions pertaining to the impact of modernization, industrialization and urbanization on the new Malay middle class family. First, what is the pattern of marriage and parenthood among new Malay middle class? Second, is the Malay middle class family becoming more egalitarian, with power shared between husbands and wives? Third, is the new Malay middle class family preoccupied with class reproduction? Fourth, does the new Malay middle class family becoming nuclear, lead to its isolation and break up of extended kin networks? These four questions are discussed based on our empirical study among the new Malay middle class in the Kelang Valley and in the two provincial towns of Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu. In the course of the discussion, comparisons will be drawn, wherever possible, with other studies of the new middle class as well as the working class.

Marriage and Parenthood among the New Malay Middle Class

Marriage Patterns

It is argued here that modernization and new middle class lifestyles have not meant rejection of marriage, and parenthood continues to be highly valued in the private lives of both modern middle class Malays in the metropolitan city as well as in the

provincial towns. This can be seen, among other things, from the percentage of married respondents, their age at first marriage and choice of spouse as well as the number of children they have or would like to have.

Table 5.1 Respondents' Marital Status

Marital status	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All respondents (N=284)
Married	74.1	87.5	84.4	81.3 (n=231)
Widowed	2.8	-	1.0	1.0 (n=3)
Divorced	0.9	-	-	0.4 (n=1)
Single	22.2	12.5	14.6	17.3 (n=49)

Source: Survey data 1996

The percentage of ever married respondents in the sample was high. Of the 284 respondents in the study, 231 or 81.3 per cent were married, 1.0 per cent widowed, 0.4 per cent divorced, and 17.3 per cent still single (Table 5.1). The percentage of ever-married respondents was highest in Kota Bharu (87.5 per cent) and Kuala Trengganu (84.4 per cent), and though lower by comparison, was still high in the Kelang Valley (74.1 per cent).

The universal trend in the increase in age at first marriage in Malaysia noted by other scholars (e.g. Jones 1994)¹ is also found in this study. The mean age at first marriage of the respondents was 25.9 years old, with the highest being among respondents in the Kelang Valley (26.7), followed by Kuala Trengganu (26.0 per cent) and Kota Bharu (25.6) (Table 5.2). The mean age for Malay men was higher, i.e.

¹ Using data from national census reports, Jones (1994: Chapter 3) noted the increase in age at first marriage among Malays and highlighted the dramatic reduction in the numbers who married young. According to him, while almost 54 per cent of Malays in Peninsular Malaysia between the ages of 15 and 19 were already married in 1957, the percentage of ever-married individuals in the same age group had been reduced to only about 7 per cent in 1985. Among those aged 20 to 24 years old, the percentage of ever-married fell from 90.6 per cent to 51.3 per cent over the same period.

in the Kelang Valley shows that their mean age at first marriage was much lower, i.e. 24.3, while it was 27.3 and 27.9 respectively among Chinese and Indian middle class respondents (Abdul Rahman 1998a).²

Another tendency found in our study is the phenomenon of late marriages among a section of new Malay middle class respondents. As shown in Table 5.2, while 45.2 per cent were already married at 25 or younger, another 45.1 per cent married between the ages of 26 and 30, and about 10 per cent married after reaching 30. The proportion marrying after 30 was highest in the Kelang Valley (10.8 per cent), followed by Kuala Trengganu (9.7 per cent) and Kota Bharu (8.5 per cent). This tendency can be corroborated further when we examine the age of 49 respondents -- 28 male and 21 female -- who were still single at the time of the study (Table 5.3). Of this figure, 36.7 per cent were aged 25 and below, 42.9 per cent were in the 26-30 age group, while the remaining 20.4 per cent were 31 and above. By gender, there was a higher proportion of older unmarried female than unmarried male respondents. 89.3 per cent of unmarried males were 30 and below compared to only 66.6 per cent unmarried females; only 10.7 per cent of unmarried males were in the older age group of 31 and above compared to 33.4 per cent of unmarried females, giving a ratio of 1:2.3. Among unmarried female respondents, a small proportion of 4.8 per cent was still single in their forties.

² The average age at first marriage among new Malay middle class and working class respondents in our study is quite comparable with that in some developed countries. In the United States, for example,

Table 5.3
Unmarried Respondents by Age and Sex

AGE GROUPS (YEARS)	MALE (n=28)	FEMALE (n=21)	TOTAL (N=49)
25 & below	39.3	33.3	36.7
26 – 30	50.0	33.3	42.9
31 – 40	10.7	28.6	18.4
41 – 50	-	4.8	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Late marriages, however, do not mean rejection of marriage, but only marriage delayed.³ Though our study did not go deeply into their reasons for delaying marriage, our interviews suggest that among men, it was a matter of establishing themselves in their careers before marriage. There is a difference for women because they have usually been more passive in choosing spouses and settling down. When it comes to marriage and divorce in Malay culture, Malays invoke *jodoh*, meaning ‘fated match’, or the lack of it. Thus, when they are not yet married after a certain age, they always attribute it to *tiada jodoh* (no appropriate match) and not some other reason, e.g. not wanting to settle down.

As Muslims, many Malays regard marriage as a sacred social institution to enter into once one comes of age. Nevertheless, this does not mean that divorces are uncommon. Of all our respondents, about 10 per cent had experienced divorce in their marital lives (Table 5.4). This was highest in Kota Bharu (11.4 per cent), followed by

women married at 20.2 and men at 22.5 in the mid-1950s. In 1994, the average age of marriage for young women had increased to 24.5, and for men, to 26.7 (Shehan & Kammeyer 1997: 137).

³ In her study of families (including the middle class) in modern cosmopolitan Singapore, Quah (1990a; 1990b) noted that even highly educated women saw marriage and motherhood as major goals in their personal lives.

the Kelang Valley (9.6 per cent) and Kuala Trengganu (9.8 per cent). However, the overwhelming majority of respondents had remained in marriage, and all those who divorced had since remarried, except for one respondent (0.4 per cent) who was still not remarried at the time of the study (Table 5.1).

Table 5.4
Respondents Who Had Experienced Divorce

Have you ever experienced divorce?	KELANG VALLEY (n=83)*	KOTA BHARU (n=70)*	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=82)*	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=235)*
No	90.4	88.6	91.5	90.2
Yes	9.6	11.4	8.5	9.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Marriage among new Malay middle class respondents tends to be homogamous, i.e. marrying within the same class. However, though intra-class marriages are quite common, men tend to marry lower, while women marry higher. As shown in Table 5.5, among male respondents, 47.8 per cent of their spouses were housewives, 29.1 per cent were in new middle class occupations as professionals and managers, and another 23.1 per cent were in the marginal middle class, comprising lower white-collar employees (e.g. clerks, nurses, etc.). The opposite picture, however, prevailed among female respondents. The majority (60.6 per cent) of their husbands were from the new middle class of professionals and managers whose job rankings were higher than theirs and 10.6 per cent of their husbands had retired from

their previous jobs as professionals. However, 28.8 per cent had married downwards, i.e. to members of the marginal middle class.

Table 5.5
Class Position of Spouses of Respondents by Sex of Respondents

RESPONDENTS ' CLASS POSITION	CLASS POSITION OF SPOUSES				TOTAL (N=235)*
	New Middle Class	Marginal Middle Class	Housewives	Retired	
Male New Middle Class	29.1	23.1	47.8	-	100.0 (n=169)
Female New Middle Class	60.6	28.8	-	10.6	100.0 (n=66)

Source: Survey data 1996

* Married respondents only

There is a clear difference between the educational levels of the spouses of male and female respondents. While men tended to marry lower, women tended to marry those with higher or the same education. Overall, among all male respondents, 68.6 per cent had tertiary education, while among their spouses, the proportion with tertiary education was much lower (35.1 per cent). Among female respondents, the opposite is true. While 75.7 per cent had tertiary education, 74.3 per cent of their spouses also had tertiary education (Table 5.6). Among men, the higher their qualification, the greater the mismatch between their educational levels and those of their spouses. For example, among 78 male respondents with college qualifications, more than a third (36.7 per cent) of their spouses had the same qualifications, 13.3 per cent had a first degree, while 50 per cent had lower education. However, among 30 male respondents with a first degree, almost two-thirds (64.1 per cent) of their spouses had college education or less; only 35.9 per cent had the same qualifications.

Among the eight male respondents with post-graduate degrees, only one of their spouses had the same level of qualification, while the remaining seven (87.5 per cent) only had college or secondary school qualifications. Among the 53 male respondents with lower or upper secondary education, the majority of their spouses (94.4 per cent) had the same qualifications. In short, among men, though proportions married those with the same qualifications, the majority tended to marry lower.

The picture is quite different among female middle class respondents. Among the 30 who were college graduates, 50 per cent of their husbands were also college graduates, while another 31.2 per cent had graduated from universities. Among the 16 with first degrees, 80 per cent of their husbands also had the same qualifications, but the remaining 20 per cent were high school or college graduates. All those with post-graduate degrees also had husbands with the same qualifications. These facts suggest that the majority of female new Malay middle class respondents married those with the same educational qualifications or higher, and only a small proportion married downwards.

Family Size

Age at first marriage of women affects fertility and hence the number of children. However, as shown in Table 5.6, while 8.9 per cent of married respondents at the time of study had no children, 29.4 per cent had one to two, 34.4 per cent had three to four, and another 26 per cent had five or more children. In fact, the percentage with four children or more, was much higher, i.e. 43.4 per cent. The overall mean number of children per family at the time of study was 3.2, with the highest in Kota Bharu (3.5), followed by Kuala Trengganu (3.3) and the Kelang Valley (3.1).

Table 5.6
Comparison of Educational Levels of Male and Female Respondents and their Spouses*

Level of education of respondents	Level of education of spouses								Total
	No schooling	Primary school	Secondary school	MCE/SPM/SPVM	HSC/STPM	College	First degree	Post graduate degree	
Secondary school									
• Male	-	33.3	44.4	22.2	-	-	-	-	100.0 (n=10)
• Female	-	-	66.7	-	-	33.3	-	-	100.0 (n=4)
MCE/SPM/SPVM									
• Male	-	13.3	20.0	53.3	6.7	3.3	3.3	-	100.0 (n=30)
• Female	-	-	33.3	-	16.7	33.3	16.7	-	100.0 (n=6)
HSC/STPM									
• Male	7.7	7.7	-	38.5	38.5	-	7.7	-	100.0 (n=13)
• Female	-	16.7	-	50.0	16.7	16.7	-	-	100.0 (n=6)
College									
• Male	-	-	16.7	23.3	10.0	36.7	13.3	-	100.0 (n=78)
• Female	-	-	-	12.5	6.2	50.0	31.2	-	100.0 (n=30)
First degree									
• Male	-	-	10.3	35.9	7.7	10.2	35.9	-	100.0 (n=30)
• Female	-	-	-	-	10.0	7.0	80.0	-	100.0 (n=16)
Post-graduate degree									
• Male	-	-	25.0	25.0	12.5	25.0	-	12.5	100.0 (n=8)
• Female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100.0	100.0 (n=4)
TOTAL									
• Male	1 (0.6)	8 (4.7)	29 (17.1)	54 (31.9)	18 (10.6)	35 (20.7)	23 (13.8)	1 (0.6)	169 (100.0)
• Female	-	1 (1.5)	3 (4.5)	7 (10.6)	6 (9.1)	21 (31.8)	24 (36.5)	4 (6.0)	66 (100.0)

Source: Survey data 1996

* Married respondents only

There is a strong possibility that the number of children would have increased since the study because most respondents and their spouses were not only still of reproductive age, but also preferred large families. The overall mean for the total preferred number of children was 4.9, with the highest number again being in Kota Bharu (5.2), followed by Kuala Trengganu (5.1), and the Kelang Valley (4.2) (Table 5.7). Of all married respondents, 57.4 per cent wanted large families of five or more children. This was especially so in Kota Bharu, where 70 per cent wanted five or more children, while in Kuala Trengganu, the percentage, though slightly lower, was still high (66.7 per cent). Only in the Kelang Valley, do we have a much lower, but still a substantial proportion of 37.5 per cent. If we include those who preferred four or more children, the percentage was much higher (76.6 per cent).

Table 5.7
Respondents' Current and Preferred Number of Children*

Number of Children Per Family	KELANG VALLEY (n=83)		KOTA BHARU (n=70)		KUALA TERENGGANU (n=82)		ALL RESPONDENTS (N=235)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
None	6.0	-	7.1	-	13.4	-	8.9	-
One	15.7	1.3	17.2	-	12.2	-	14.0	0.4
Two	19.3	13.8	10.2	1.4	15.8	3.7	15.4	6.5
Three	15.7	20.0	22.85	14.3	10.9	13.6	17.4	16.0
Four	25.3	27.5	7.1	14.3	18.3	16.0	17.4	19.5
Five & above	18.0	37.5	35.6	70.0	29.4	66.7	26.0	57.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	3.1	4.2	3.5	5.2	3.3	5.1	3.2	4.9

Source: Survey data 1996

* Including ever married, divorced or widowed

Note: 1 = Current number of children

2 = Preferred number of children

It is interesting to compare family size among the new Malay middle class over the last three decades to see whether it has tended towards becoming smaller, bigger or remaining the same. Nordin's study (1976: 168, 176) of 105 Malay administrative middle class respondents in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya in the early seventies found that the number of children that respondents had was slightly smaller than the number in our sample, while the respondents' ages, were slightly older by comparison.⁴ For example, the average number of children per family in Nordin's sample was 2.85, compared to 3.1 in our Kelang Valley sample or 3.2 in the three urban centres in our study. In terms of percentage distribution, those with five or more children were only 14.3 per cent in Nordin's sample, compared to almost double the figure (26 per cent) in our overall sample, while those with three to four children comprised 36.2 per cent of his sample, only slightly higher than the 34.8 per cent in our sample. Taking all respondents with three or more children per family, the figure was much higher in our sample (60.8 per cent), compared to 50.2 per cent in his sample. It is true that metropolitan middle class families, such as those in the Kelang Valley, tend to have smaller family sizes than their counterparts in provincial towns. Nevertheless, even if compare the Kelang Valley sample in our study with Nordin's, our respondents still had a bigger family size, with 59 per cent having three or more children, compared to 50.2 per cent in Nordin's study. Even the preferred mean number of children among respondents in Nordin's study was only 3.1, compared to 4.2 in our Kelang Valley sample.

⁴ In Nordin's sample, 9.5 per cent were aged 51 and above, compared to our 4.9 per cent, while those aged 41-50 constituted 19 per cent (compared to 23.6 per cent in our study). The largest group in his sample were those aged 31-40 which made up 62.9 per cent (compared to 42.2 per cent in our sample), while the youngest (30 and below) comprised 8.6 per cent, compared to 29.2 per cent in our sample.

These findings correspond to those in Fatimah's study of 200 new Malay middle class families conducted in the early 1990s in Taman Tun Dr. Ismail, Kuala Lumpur (Fatimah Abdullah 1994). In her study, the mean number of children per family was 2.7. By percentage distribution, 10.7 per cent had large families with five or more children, 45.4 per cent had 3 to 4 children, 36.2 per cent had 1 to 2 children, while 7.7 per cent had none. These figures suggest that a majority (56.1 per cent) had three or more children (Fatimah 1994: 130),⁵ which was still bigger than Nordin's sample.

However, the samples in all three studies were too 'purposive' to enable us to draw any broad conclusions regarding general trends in marriage and parenthood among the new Malay middle class. Nevertheless, the three studies suggest that members of the new Malay middle class today tend to prefer large families, and that their family sizes have not been decreasing despite modernization.⁶ Two major developments could be adduced as reasons for this apparent paradox. While there was strong emphasis on family planning and birth control in the 1960s and 1970s (the National Family Planning Board was set up in 1966), there was a policy reversal in 1984, when Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad introduced the 70 million population target to be achieved by the year 2100 (Azizah Kassim 1984; Abdul Majid Mat Salleh 1989).

⁵ In Fatimah's study, those with no children comprised recently married couples (three years or less). In terms of the preferred number of children per family, 16.2 per cent of her respondents preferred five or more, almost two-fifths (37.7 per cent) wanted four, while 23.4 per cent wanted three children. These figures suggest that the majority wanted large families of four or more children, which is quite consistent with our finding above.

⁶ Studies in Western societies show that it is part of new middle class values to prefer small nuclear families (Edgell 1980; Shehan & Kammeyer 1997). In Malaysia, this is true among the new Chinese middle class, while the new Malay middle class and, to a certain extent, the new Indian middle class,

Table 5.8
Correlation Between Preferred Number Of Children and Religiosity of Respondents*

Preferred Number of Children	Membership of religious or organizations		Self-assessment of religiosity			Participation in religion activities			
	Yes (n=76)	No (n=159)	'Warak' ** (n=36)	Moderate (n=185)	Not religiously inclined (n=14)	Very often (n=53)	Often (n=97)	Sometimes (n=56)	Seldom (n=29)
One	-	0.6	-	0.5	-	-	-	-	3.4
Two	6.6	8.8	-	8.6	21.4	1.9	7.2	14.3	10.3
Three	19.7	13.8	13.9	16.7	14.3	20.8	13.4	10.7	24.1
Four	13.2	22.0	8.3	21.6	21.4	1.9	19.6	25.0	37.9
Five and above	60.5	54.7	77.9	52.6	42.8	75.5	59.8	50.0	24.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	4.3	4.1	4.6	4.2	3.8	4.6	4.3	4.1	3.7

Source: Survey data 1996

* Married respondents only

** Fervently religious

At the same time, the period since the 1970s also witnessed the growing influence of the *dakwah* (Islamic revivalist) movement among Malays and Muslims (Chandra Muzaffar 1987; Zainah Anwar 1987; Hussin Mutalib 1990). Regarding children as gifts of God, it is not uncommon today to find members of the Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) or other Muslim new Malay middle class groups having large families. There seems to be a positive correlation between religiosity and large family size. As shown in Table 5.8, the mean number of children preferred by respondents who were members of religious movements was 4.3, i.e. higher than among non-members, which was 4.1. Also, when the respondents' self-assessment of religiosity as well as participation in religious activities are considered, the preferred mean number of children among the most religiously-inclined respondents was 4.6, compared to 3.7 among those considered more secular. In fact, when we examine the distribution of respondents who preferred five children or more, it is clear that the

prefer larger families. A recent study of the new Malaysian middle class shows that the preferred mean for the new Chinese middle class was 3.4, Indian 4 and Malays 5.2 (Abdul Rahman 1998: 258).

more fervently religious topped the list. Thus, it may be concluded that both the 70 million policy and more so the *dakwah* movement could have reinforced the traditional Malay preference for large families despite rapid modernization of society in the last three decades.

Power-sharing between New Malay Middle Class Couples

It has been argued that with urbanization, industrialization and modernization, the middle class family tends towards greater equalisation of power between husband and wife, with both becoming partners in a more egalitarian or symmetrical relationship (Willmott 1969; Young & Willmott 1973; Edgell 1980; Bell 1968).⁷ To what extent was this true among our new Malay middle class respondents? Are new Malay middle class women merely duty-bound wives at the command of their husbands, or are they partners?

The answer to these questions may be gleaned from the information in Table 5.9, which shows the role of husbands, wives and children in making decisions -- such as purchasing daily necessities, buying houses and expensive household items, and children's education -- among new Malay middle class families. In all four instances, the most common practice has been for both husbands and wives to discuss and make decisions together, showing a certain degree of partnership and

⁷ Willmott's (1969) 'symmetrical family' thesis claimed that partnership between husband and wife is expressed in three major forms. First, partnership in power, with major decisions being discussed and made together; second, partnership in the division of labour within the household as old distinctions between men's and women's jobs (though still made) become increasingly blurred; and third, it is a partnership in social life, with couples spending more of their free time together and with their children. He concluded that despite continuing sexual inequalities, women today enjoy higher status in the family and society.

egalitarianism between the couple. For example, when it comes to buying houses and expensive household items as well as children's education, about four-fifths of respondents said they made decisions together (in some cases, they involved their children as well). When buying daily necessities, wives expectedly had greater say than their husbands.

However, despite joint decision-making in most cases, there is still the tendency of husbands to have a greater say, especially when it comes to major decisions such as buying the family house and expensive household items. For example, when buying the family house, while 75.8 per cent of the respondents reported that both husbands and wives made decisions together, another 20.3 per cent reported that it was the husbands who made such decisions; in the case of buying expensive household items, while 77.4 per cent made decisions together, another 16 per cent only involved the husbands. The tendency of male-dominance in decision-making was more pronounced among Kelang Valley respondents than those in Kota Bharu or Kuala Trengganu. This may be due to the fact that many spouses of Kelang Valley male respondents were full-time housewives financially dependent on their husbands, while East Coast women especially in Kota Bharu had traditionally been more independent. Nevertheless, it does not mean that wives had no say in such cases. As cautioned by Banks (1983) over a decade ago in his ethnographic study of Malay kinship, "one should not underplay the great freedom and power of women in Malay society, particularly among the rural poor and among educated urbanites. Women will have an important say in all of the major decisions that their husbands make, and through their passive role, they will have the prerogative of criticizing bad

decisions once they have been made, although they should never do so in public” (Banks 1983: 96).

Our findings above and Banks’ observation suggest that while there is male dominance to some extent, there is some degree of balance of power within marriage in the Malay middle class family. Though in the main, wives have to defer to their husbands’ wishes in major decisions, their views have to be heeded. This study, however, is not able to probe deeper into power relationships within families, which would require a more detailed ethnographic approach than adopted here.

Class Reproduction among the New Malay Middle Class

One major concern of the middle class family is class reproduction. Will the younger generation be able to reproduce their parents’ class position? Will they go up or go down? As shown in earlier chapters, in Malaysia, educational success is perceived as the key avenue for social mobility. Given the ‘credential explosion’ in Malaysia in the last decade or so, with intense competition among young students to enter tertiary education, new Malay middle class respondents manifested a ‘fear of falling’ with regard to their children’s future. They were aware that the ability of their children to reproduce their class position was not assured, and thus put tremendous pressure on them to excel in their studies.

[ATTENTION: Technical Error -- Table 5.9 is repeated in pages 143 and 144]

Table 5.9
Decision-making in Families of Married Respondents

	KELANG VALLEY (n=83)				KOTA BHARU (n=70)				KUALA TRENGGANU (n=82)				ALL RESPONDENTS (N=235)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Husband only	20.0	28.8	25.0	16.3	11.4	17.1	14.3	15.7	11.1	14.8	8.6	6.2	14.3	20.3	16.0	12.6
Wife only	31.3	2.5	2.5	6.3	31.4	-	1.4	5.7	22.2	1.2	2.5	3.7	28.1	1.3	2.2	5.2
Husband & wife	47.5	66.3	68.8	76.3	55.7	81.4	81.4	72.9	65.4	80.2	81.5	87.7	56.3	75.8	77.4	79.2
All family members	1.3	2.5	3.8	1.3	1.4	1.4	2.9	5.7	1.2	3.7	7.4	2.5	1.3	2.6	4.8	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Married respondents only

Note: 1 = When buying daily household necessities

2 = When buying houses

3 = When buying expensive household items (cars, television sets, refrigerators, etc.)

4 = When planning children's education

Table 5.9
Decision-making in Families of Married Respondents

	KELANG VALLEY (n=83)				KOTA BHARU (n=70)				KUALA TRENGGANU (n=82)				ALL RESPONDENTS (N=235)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Husband only	20.0	28.8	25.0	16.3	11.4	17.1	14.3	15.7	11.1	14.8	8.6	6.2	14.3	20.3	16.0	12.6
Wife only	31.3	2.5	2.5	6.3	31.4	-	1.4	5.7	22.2	1.2	2.5	3.7	28.1	1.3	2.2	5.2
Husband & wife	47.5	66.3	68.8	76.3	55.7	81.4	81.4	72.9	65.4	80.2	81.5	87.7	56.3	75.8	77.4	79.2
All family members	1.3	2.5	3.8	1.3	1.4	1.4	2.9	5.7	1.2	3.7	7.4	2.5	1.3	2.6	4.8	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Married respondents only

Note: 1 = When buying daily household necessities

2 = When buying houses

3 = When buying expensive household items (cars, television sets, refrigerators, etc.)

4 = When planning children's education

As Malaysia gradually moved up the technological ladder, education in science- and technology-related subjects have been accorded greater emphasis in school curriculum. Among the subjects emphasized are English and mathematics (and also computer studies) in which students were expected to do well so that they could pursue tertiary level courses considered to be in great demand in the market. To score good results in public examinations, many parents feel their children cannot merely rely on formal teaching and coaching from their school teachers. Thus, private tuition has become a flourishing industry, thriving on the insecurity of parents, especially those from the middle class.

Our respondents took particular interest in their children's education in the hope that they would do well. In our study, it was found that two-thirds of new Malay middle class parents with school-going children sent the latter for English and mathematics tuition, while another 58.1 per cent had computer studies (Table 5.10). The reliance on private tuition in these three subjects was highest in the Kelang Valley sample, involving more than three-fourths of respondents, compared to much lower percentages in the Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu samples.

Besides tuition in curricular subjects, it has become a trend among middle class parents, especially in metropolitan cities, to also send their children for art lessons (such as music, dancing or painting) because of the belief that such lessons would inculcate finer qualities in them. Such a trend is pronounced in the Kelang Valley, where 60.7 per cent of our respondents with school-going children sent their children for art lessons. In the two provincial towns, however, this trend had not really

caught on. In Kota Bharu, only 25 per cent of the parents sent their children for art lessons, while in Kuala Trengganu, the percentage was higher (36.7 per cent).

Table 5.10
Comparison of Malay Middle Class and Working Class Respondents
Tuition and Other Outside School Lessons/Activities for Children

Tuition/ Activities	MALAY MIDDLE CLASS RESPONDENTS				Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=57)*
	Kelang Valley (n=61)*	Kota Bharu (n=48)*	Kuala Trengganu (n=44)*	All Malay Middle Class Respondents (N=158)*	
English tuition					
• Yes	75.4	64.6	56.3	66.2	40.8
• No	24.6	35.4	43.8	33.8	59.2
Mathematics tuition					
• Yes	78.7	58.3	59.6	66.7	40.8
• No	21.3	41.7	40.4	33.3	59.2
Computer lessons					
• Yes	75.4	48.9	40.4	58.1	40.8
• No	24.6	51.1	59.6	41.9	59.2
Art lessons					
• Yes	60.7	25.0	36.7	42.4	22.4
• No	39.3	75.0	63.3	57.6	77.6
Religious instruction					
• Instruction by religious teacher	98.4	70.8	81.6	84.8	57.1
• Left to parents' discretion	1.6	29.2	18.4	15.2	42.9
Join Summer Camp					
• Yes	32.8	15.2	14.9	22.1	-
• No	67.2	84.8	85.1	77.9	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents with school-going children only

Malay parents, especially in big cities, are very anxious about the religious and moral upbringing of their children. Among Malays, the traditional practice has been for every child to be taught the basic tenets of Islam and to become a practising Muslim by the time he or she reached puberty. In the past, children’s religious and

moral upbringing was the responsibility of parents, while religious teachers in the community played a very important role in teaching children how to read the Qu'ran. Today, much of this role has been transferred to other institutions such as schools, religious instructors and motivation 'experts'. While Islamic Studies has already been made compulsory for Muslim students in government schools,⁸ many Malay parents still do not have enough confidence that school teaching is sufficiently effective to instill moral and religious values in their children. This issue has been thrown into sharp focus in recent years, following pronouncements by ministers and other public figures about moral problems among youth that has triggered moral panic in the country.⁹

The concern with the moral crisis was clearly reflected among our respondents in the three urban centres. Many new Malay middle class parents in our study responded to these challenges by sending their children to attend religious instructions outside school hours, and by sending them to 'summer camps', organized by self-proclaimed motivation 'experts' over and above the Islamic Studies already taught in schools. While a few parents, especially those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, took it upon themselves to guide their children as far as religion was concerned, the overwhelming majority relied on *ustaz* or *ustazah* (religious teachers) for various types of religious instruction, such as Qu'ran reading, reciting and performing prayers, etc.. The heavy reliance on outside institutions was most pronounced among Kelang Valley middle class respondents, whereby 98.4 per cent sent their children for

⁸ For non-Muslim students, Moral Education has been made a compulsory subject.

⁹ The moral panic led to a study commissioned by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1994 on *lepak* (loafing) among youth and the ensuing *Rakan Muda* (Young Friends) programme being implemented based on the study's recommendations.

religious instruction, while 32.8 per cent also sent them for short motivation courses held during weekends or school holidays. In Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, though many parents sent their children for religious instruction, none sent them to attend motivation courses (Table 5.10).

The extent of interest in their children's education shown by many new Malay middle class parents by sending them to additional and tuition classes so that they will excel in their studies suggests that they had high expectations of their children. Such high expectations can also be seen in their preferences for their children's future careers. Compared to Malay working class parents, new Malay middle class parents tended to be more definitive regarding career choices for their children. This is evidenced by the fact that only about a quarter of new Malay middle class respondents in this study would leave such decisions to their children (Tables 5.11 & 5.12), compared to more than two-fifths of Malay working class parents who would do so (Table 5.14). This tendency reflects middle class greater concerns for class reproduction, while working class respondents were more likely to leave their children to make such choices since they themselves were not highly educated. Nevertheless, many Malay working class respondents also had high expectations of their children, as suggested by the fact that two-fifths sent their children for tuition in English, mathematics and computer studies (Table 5.10).

Table 5.11 shows parents' career preferences for their male children, many of whom preferring their sons to be doctors (24.9 per cent), engineers (21.8 per cent), businessmen (10.2 per cent), and a career in information technology (9.1 per cent), while an extremely small proportion (2.5 per cent) would want their children to be

educationists or teachers. Even as a second choice, education still attracted a very small number (4.7 per cent). When preference for occupational sector is examined, the government sector has become a sector of last resort in both first and second choices (Table 5.12), attracting less than 20 per cent of the respondents. While in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, about a quarter to a fifth of the new Malay middle class respondents preferred their children to work with the government, in the Kelang Valley, the proportion was only 4.7 per cent. The majority of parents wanted their children to set up their own businesses (39.5 per cent), or to join the private sector (43 per cent). Preference for work in the private sector or for setting up their own businesses and being independent was very strong in all three urban centres.

Table 5.11
Parents' Preference for Son's Career*

	KELANG VALLEY (n=62)		KOTA BHARU (n=66)		KUALA TRENGGANU (n=69)		ALL RESPONDENTS (N=197)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Medicine	19.4	3.3	18.2	6.2	36.2	7.4	24.9	5.7
Engineering	32.3	11.7	16.7	7.7	17.4	16.2	21.8	11.9
Information Technology	14.5	26.7	1.5	9.2	11.6	8.8	9.1	14.5
Accountancy	9.7	23.3	10.6	10.8	1.4	7.4	7.1	13.5
Education	-	5.0	7.6	3.1	-	5.9	2.5	4.7
Business	19.4	23.3	6.1	10.8	5.8	20.6	10.2	18.1
Let children decide	4.8	6.7	39.4	52.3	27.5	33.9	24.4	31.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996
 * Respondents with male school-going children only
 Note: 1 = First choice
 2 = Second choice

Table 5.12
Parents' Preference for Son's Occupational Sector*

SECTOR	KELANG VALLEY (n=64)		KOTA BHARU (n=66)		KUALA TRENGGANU (n=70)		ALL RESPONDENTS (N=200)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Government sector	7.4	20.0	28.8	18.5	18.6	17.6	17.5	18.1
Private sector	57.8	36.7	27.3	36.9	44.3	38.2	43.0	36.8
Set up own business	37.5	43.3	43.9	44.6	37.1	44.1	39.5	45.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents with male school-going children only

Note: 1 = First choice
2 = Second choice

There is, however, some difference among new Malay middle class respondents with regard to career preferences for their daughters. While 22 per cent preferred their daughters to be doctors as a first choice, just as for their sons, only one per cent wanted them to be engineers (Table 5.13). However, a substantial number of parents regarded education and accountancy as suitable for girls. For example, 24.6 per cent of parents preferred their daughters to be educationists, and another 11.5 per cent to be accountants, while only 6.3 per cent were prepared to allow them to be businesswomen. In terms of occupational sector, the tendency of moving out of the government was also strong (only 36.1 per cent preferred the government sector) (Table 5.14), though for sons, the tendency was stronger. The majority of parents preferred their female children to work with the private sector (33 per cent) or to venture on their own (30.9 per cent).

Table 5.13
Parents' Preference for Daughter's Career*

	KELANG VALLEY (n=60)		KOTA BHARU (n=67)		KUALA TRENGGANU (n=67)		ALL RESPONDENTS (N=194)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Medicine	24.6	7.7	14.9	1.6	26.9	7.7	22.0	5.5
Engineering	1.8	1.9	1.5	-	-	3.1	1.0	1.6
Information Technology	8.8	11.5	7.5	3.1	4.5	9.2	6.8	7.7
Accountancy	24.6	32.7	6.0	12.5	6.0	7.7	11.5	16.6
Education	21.1	23.1	26.9	25.0	25.4	20.0	24.6	22.6
Business	12.3	15.4	4.5	4.7	3.0	10.8	6.3	9.9
Let children decide	7.0	7.7	38.8	53.2	34.4	41.5	27.7	35.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents with female school-going children only

Note: 1 = First choice
2 = Second choice

Table 5.14
Parents' Preference for Daughter's Occupational Sector*

SECTOR	KELANG VALLEY (n=60)		KOTA BHARU (n=67)		KUALA TRENGGANU (n=67)		ALL RESPONDENTS (N=194)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Government sector	20.0	23.2	50.7	18.5	35.8	18.2	36.1	19.8
Private sector	50.0	48.2	17.9	36.9	32.8	47.0	33.0	43.8
Set up own business	30.0	28.6	31.3	44.6	31.3	34.8	30.9	36.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents with female school-going children only

Note: 1 = First choice
2 = Second choice

Unlike new Malay middle class parents, many (about two-fifths to half) Malay working class respondents would rather let their children choose their own careers

(Table 5.15). However, among those who indicated career preferences for their children, there were also gender differences. Many working class respondents (33.3 per cent) preferred their daughters to be teachers, while for sons, the corresponding percentage was very low (3.6 per cent), since they preferred the latter to be engineers (16.4 per cent) or doctors (10.9 per cent). By sector too, only a small proportion (27.3 per cent) preferred their male children work for the government, but for female children, the percentage was much bigger (42.1 per cent). Nevertheless, for both male and female children, the majority of Malay working class parents preferred their children to work with the private sector or to be on their own.

Table 5.15
 Malay Workers in the Kelang Valley:
 Parents' Preference for Children's Careers (first choice only)

(A) CAREER IN	SON (N=55)*	DAUGHTER (N=57)**
• Medicine	10.9	5.3
• Engineering	16.4	3.5
• Information technology	5.5	3.5
• Accountancy	7.3	8.8
• Education	3.6	33.3
• Business	7.3	5.3
• Let children decide	49.0	40.3
(B) OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR		
• Government sector	27.3	42.1
• Private sector	58.2	47.4
• Set up own business	14.5	10.5

Source: Survey data 1997
 * Those with male children only
 ** Those with female children only

The above data suggest that a transformation of values regarding career preferences among Malays has taken place over the last three decades. While in the 1960s, careers as government administrators and politicians were considered the 'in-thing' among Malays (Alatas 1966: Chapter 5), today, doctors, engineers, managers and other professionals working in the private sector or on their own have come to be regarded as prestigious and preferable. This is true among the new Malay middle class as well as working class. The value transformations among Malays, however, could already be detected since the 1970s with the implementation of the NEP from 1971. In Nordin's study (1976: 270), while one third of his Malay administrative middle class respondents left it to their children to decide their careers, 61 per cent wanted their children to become professionals (such as doctors, engineers, architects, accountants and lawyers), including a small proportion (7.6 per cent) who wanted them to go into business. While the 1970s was a decade during which such values germinated, the 1990s has been characterized by the consolidation of these values.

Nuclear Family and Relationships with Extended Kin

Has the emergence of the nuclear family and the attendant concern of the new Malay middle class for their children affected their relations with their extended kin? This chapter questions the notion that the emergence of the conjugal nuclear family leads to its isolation and break up of extended kin relations. It is argued here that though nuclearisation is the dominant trend and the nuclear family¹⁰ is the dominant family form among the new Malay middle class, members of the new middle class

¹⁰ The nuclear family refers to any family comprising two generations of husband and wife, and their dependent children. Extended family refers to any persistent kinship grouping of persons related by descent, marriage or adoption, which is wider than the nuclear family, comprising at least three generations from grandparents (one or both) to grandchildren (Bell 1968).

nevertheless maintain close links with their extended kin, as extended family relations are being reconstituted and reaffirmed continuously, transforming them into what Litwak (1960a, 1960b) termed a ‘modified extended family’.¹¹

Table 5.16
Place of Stay of Respondents’ Parents*

	KELANG VALLEY (n=91)	KOTA BHARU (n=66)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=73)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=230)
Stay with respondents**	16.5	24.2	27.4	22.2
Stay alone (husband & wife)	36.3	43.9	32.9	37.4
Stay with single sons	8.8	4.5	4.1	6.1
Stay with single daughters	7.7	4.5	5.5	6.1
Stay with married sons	6.6	3.0	1.4	3.9
Stay with married daughters	5.5	3.0	8.2	5.6
Rotate among children	18.7	16.7	20.5	18.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents whose parents (one or both) were still alive

** This figure is taken to show the proportion of extended families among Malay middle class respondents

Based on official census reports, there has been a general trend towards family nuclearisation in the last few decades accompanying urbanization and industrialization in Malaysia. Taking Malaysia as a whole, it is found that nuclear families, which made up 55 per cent in 1980, had increased to 60 per cent in 1991 (Department of Statistics 1995: 160), while extended families declined from 28 per

¹¹ Litwak distinguishes between the classical extended family and the modified extended family. His ‘modified extended family’ thesis suggests that extended family relations are possible in an urban industrial society, at least among the middle class, but in modified form. The modified extended family is a series of nuclear families joined together -- on an equalitarian basis -- for mutual aid, not bound by demands for geographic propinquity or occupational similarity. He argues that geographical propinquity is not a prerequisite for these relationships and that such extended kin relations do not impede occupational mobility. Litwak states further that neither the classical extended family of rural

cent to 26 per cent during the same period. In our study, the percentage of nuclear families was not unexpectedly much higher than the national figure, with 78 per cent being nuclear, while extended families with one or both parents staying with the respondents, comprised only 22 per cent. The proportion of extended families was lowest in the Kelang Valley (16.5 per cent), and highest in Kuala Trengganu (27.4 per cent) (Table 5.16).

Among respondents' parents who were still alive, only a small proportion (22.2 per cent) stayed with the respondents, while quite a substantial proportion (40.4 per cent) stayed with respondents' siblings, while 37.4 per cent stayed on their own (with their spouses), mostly in their original home towns or villages. Nevertheless, the respondents maintained links with their parents through regular financial support for and visits to their parents during *Hari Raya* (*id* celebration at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan) and on other occasions. As shown in Table 5.17, over 90 percent of the respondents gave financial support to their parents, either monthly or once in a few months, with the majority (63.8 per cent) giving between RM100 to RM300 a month. The majority of respondents stated that their relationship with both their parents, especially with their mothers, were very good.

Their relationships with elderly parents and relatives were continuously reconstituted and reaffirmed through the practice of *baliġ kampung* (literally meaning returning to the home village) during *Hari Raya* festival. Every year, with the ending of Ramadan, Malays who had migrated to towns and cities would return home in

droves. In our study, 89.8 per cent of respondents *balik kampung* or visited their kith and kin regularly during *Hari Raya* (Table 5.18). Such trips -- always looked forward to by respondents and more so by their children -- not only contain strong emotional content and nostalgia, but are also considered by Malays as means of reaffirming their roots and identity. (See also Chapter 7 which discusses the *Hari Raya* ‘open house’).

Table 5.17
Respondents' Relationship with and Financial Support for Parents

	KELANG VALLEY (n=108)	KOTA BHARU (n=80)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=96)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=284)*
Relationship with:				
FATHER				
• Very good	56.2	70.0	57.3	61.0
• Good	32.9	11.3	29.2	24.5
• Average	10.9	18.7	13.5	14.4
MOTHER				
• Very good	63.0	82.5	64.6	69.9
• Good	28.8	8.8	24.0	20.5
• Average	8.2	8.7	11.4	9.6
Do you give money to your parents?				
• No	8.3	15.0	7.3	9.8 (n=28)
• Yes, every month	66.7	70.0	80.2	72.2 (n=205)
• Yes, several times a year	25.0	15.0	12.5	18.0 (n=51)
Amount per month				
• RM100 & below	21.9	27.5	31.2	27.3
• RM101- RM200	45.2	58.7	43.7	49.0
• RM201-RM300	13.7	10.0	19.8	14.8
• RM301-RM400	9.6	-	2.1	3.6
• RM401-RM500	5.5	-	2.1	2.4
• RM501-RM600	4.1	3.8	1.0	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Including those whose parents had passed away

Table 5.18
Respondents' Activities during *Hari Raya**

Activities	KELANG VALLEY (n=108)	KOTA BHARU (n=80)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=96)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=284)
<i>Balik kampung</i> **	25.0	18.8	26.0	23.6 (n=67)
<i>Balik kampung</i> & holiday with family	7.4	2.5	7.3	6.0 (n=17)
<i>Balik kampung</i> & hold open houses	30.6	42.5	34.4	35.2 (n=100)
<i>Balik kampung</i> , holiday & hold open house	28.7	23.8	21.9	25.0 (n=71)
Holiday with family	0.9	2.5	-	1.0 (n=3)
Hold open house	1.9	7.5	9.4	6.0 (n=17)
Holiday with family & hold open house	5.6	2.5	1.0	3.2 (n=9)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Muslim *Id* celebration held after end of fasting month of Ramadan

** Return to original home village or town

Besides the annual *balik kampung* for *Hari Raya*, the majority of new Malay middle class respondents also kept in touch with close relatives. As shown in Table 5.19, well over 95 per cent of the respondents, who still had close relatives in their original birth place maintained links with them either by telephone, visits or other means. Almost three-quarters (73.2 per cent) contacted them regularly, while more than a fifth (22.9 per cent) did so once or twice a year. At the same time, they also kept in touch with close relatives who lived in the same city or town as them, as well as those in other states. The majority of them (81.7 per cent) kept renewing such contacts regularly. There is no significant difference between the practice among new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley and those in the two provincial towns.

Table 5.19
Do You Keep in Touch with Close Relatives in
Your Place of Origin and in Other Places?

	KELANG VALLEY	KOTA BHARU	KUALA TRENGGANU	ALL RESPONDENTS
Do you keep in touch with close relatives from your place of origin?	(n=103)	(n=35)	(n=45)	(N=183)*
• Never	1.0	5.7	2.2	2.2
• Once or twice a year	72.8	77.1	71.1	73.2
• Often	23.3	17.1	26.7	22.9
• No close relatives anymore	2.9	-	-	1.6
Do you keep in touch with close relatives in your present place of residence and in other places?	(n=108)	(n=80)	(n=96)	(N=284)
• Never	3.7	1.3	2.1	2.5
• Once or twice a year	10.2	12.5	7.3	9.8
• Often	80.6	83.8	81.3	81.7
• No close relatives here or other places	5.6	2.5	9.4	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

* Respondents who migrated to present urban centres only

The practices and attitudes of the new Malay middle class respondents in the three urban centres studied suggest that extended kin networks -- though disrupted by urbanization and migration -- are being reconstituted and reaffirmed through family gatherings during *balik kampung* for *Hari Raya* and other occasions, financial support for elderly parents as well as regular contacts with close relatives in their original birth place or in other places. In this respect, the new Malay middle class family, though nuclear in form, is not isolated or alienated. While members of the original family 'break out' through migration, this does not necessarily lead to the break up of family relations. The practices among the new Malay middle class

respondents and their kin suggest that kin relations are an important source of companionship and support (emotional, financial, etc.) in the heart of the modern city.

Table 5.20

Respondents' Attitude Regarding Ideal Living Arrangements for Elderly Parents

	KELANG VALLEY (n=108)	KOTA BHARU (n=80)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=96)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=284)
Stay with married sons	6.5	6.3	9.4	7.4 (n=21)
Stay with married daughters	13.0	15.0	6.3	11.3 (n=32)
Rotating among married sons	4.6	2.5	1.0	2.8 (n=8)
Rotating among married daughters	2.8	1.3	2.1	2.1 (n=6)
Rotating among children	18.6	28.8	36.5	27.4 (n=78)
Stay on their own but near children	29.6	23.8	26.0	26.8 (n=76)
Let parents decide	13.9	15.0	9.4	12.7 (n=36)
Old folks home	0.9	1.3	-	0.7 (n=2)
Others	10.2	6.3	9.4	8.8 (n=25)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

This proposition may be validated when we examine the family values of respondents. As shown in Table 5.20, the family values of respondents were still strong, which helped to nurture and strengthen the practices discussed above. When asked their views regarding ideal living arrangements for elderly parents, many (51 per cent) felt that they should stay with their children, slightly more than a quarter (26.8 per cent) felt that they should stay on their own but near their children, and 12.7 per cent would leave it to their parents to decide. Only two respondents or 0.7 per cent felt that they should stay in an old folks home.

Strong family values were also reflected in the new Malay middle class respondents' attitudes regarding responsibility towards elderly parents. In this study, 90 per cent of respondents agreed that it is the responsibility of children to look after elderly parents, while only 4.6 per cent disagreed (Table 5.21). Many also did not regard the husband-wife relationship as antithetical to relationships with parents. While 24 per cent agreed that the husband-wife relationship was more important than relationships with parents, 58.4 per cent disagreed, and another 17.6 per cent were unsure.

Table 5.21
Respondents' Perceptions Regarding the Family

	KELANG VALLEY (n=108)	KOTA BHARU (n=80)	KUALA TRENGGANU (n=96)	ALL RESPONDENTS (N=284)
Do you agree that it is the responsibility of children to look after their elderly parents?				
• Strongly agree	63.0	72.5	66.7	66.9
• Agree	23.1	16.3	28.1	22.9
• Not sure	9.3	6.3	1.0	5.6
• Disagree	2.8	5.0	3.1	3.5
• Strongly disagree	1.9	-	1.0	1.1
Do you agree that husband & wife relationship is more important than relationship with elderly parents?				
• Strongly agree	4.6	8.8	3.1	5.3
• Agree	18.5	20.0	17.7	18.7
• Not sure	21.3	11.3	18.8	17.6
• Disagree	48.1	52.5	52.1	50.7
• Strongly disagree	7.4	10.8	8.3	7.7
Do you agree that work is more important than family?				
• Strongly agree	-	2.5	2.1	1.4
• Agree	6.5	6.3	3.1	5.3
• Not sure	16.7	11.3	9.4	12.7
• Disagree	61.1	63.7	62.5	62.3
• Strongly disagree	15.7	16.3	22.9	18.3
Do you agree that family members are the best persons to turn to when one is in financial difficulty?				
• Strongly agree	23.1	36.3	30.2	29.2
• Agree	25.0	35.0	44.8	34.5
• Not sure	24.1	16.3	12.5	18.0
• Disagree	25.0	12.5	11.4	16.9
• Strongly disagree	2.8	-	1.0	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Most respondents felt that the family is a very important institution as a support system, and should not to be sidelined by career commitments. For example, when asked whether they considered work as more important than family, only 6.7 per cent agreed, while the overwhelming majority (80.6 per cent) disagreed, and 12.7 per cent were undecided. In times of difficulties, including financial difficulty, almost two-thirds (63.7 per cent) of respondents felt that family members were the best persons to rely on, 18 per cent were unsure, and only 18.3 per cent disagreed with the idea (Table 5.21).

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the new Malay middle class family is predominantly a nuclear family with strong emphasis on the marriage relationship. The marriage pattern is primarily homogamous, though men tend to marry lower, and women higher. Despite age at first marriage being higher than for Malay workers, or the Malay middle class in the 1970s, our respondents had relatively larger family sizes, and preferred more children. Though there is male dominance in some families when it comes to major decisions especially in the Kelang Valley, there is generally a tendency towards equalisation in power within marriage, suggesting greater independence of Malay middle class women. While Malay middle class respondents were concerned for their children's future, they were not isolated from their families of origin. Their extended kin networks were reconstituted and reaffirmed continuously in various ways, thus holding kin relations together despite industrialization and urbanization. These continuous relationships with their extended kin could, in part, be due to the fact that our respondents were mainly first generation

middle class. The findings presented in this chapter cast serious doubt on the notion of the isolation of the conjugal nuclear family and break up with other kin. Rather, they support Litwak's thesis that the modern urban middle class family exists within a modified extended family framework adapted to urban conditions.

NEW MALAY MIDDLE CLASS LIFESTYLES AND CULTURE

In Chapter 4, we discussed the making of the new Malay middle class by examining intergenerational mobility based on several objective indicators such as occupation, income and education; we showed that the new Malay middle class is a new or first generation middle class. In Chapter 5, we discussed the new Malay middle class family; we showed that while its members paid emphasis to class reproduction, they continuously reaffirmed their links with their extended kin, and that the new Malay middle class nuclear family existed within a 'modified extended family' framework adapted to urban conditions. This chapter builds on earlier chapters by examining several inter-related issues pertaining to the new Malay middle class lifestyles and culture, such as living conditions (namely housing status and types), asset ownership, consumption patterns (such as shopping and dining) and leisure activities (such as television viewing, reading, and participation in social clubs, travel and tourism). This part examines the respondents' self-evaluation of their own class position as well as their subjective evaluations which are objective indicators of the new middle class. This chapter aims to show that the new Malay middle class lifestyles and culture preferences are not homogeneous and that while the more affluent members of the new Malay middle class have developed distinct high material aspirations and tastes,