

## **CHAPTER 1 - BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia has made great strides in socio-economic development since independence Day in 1957. Such development has brought about profound social changes. The educational level has improved considerably over the years, and the gender gap in educational and employment opportunities have narrowed. According to the 1991 Population Census, 50.6% of the population aged 17 years and older had at least completed secondary schooling, up from 16.9% reported in the 1980 Population Census. The proportion of those aged more than 23 years who had tertiary education was about 1.5% in 1980, but it had increased to 8.0% for the same age group in 1991. It is also interesting to note that female students outnumber male students in a number of disciplines in institutions of higher learning. Consequent upon educational improvement, more and more women are now entering the modern labour market. According to the 1970, 1980 and 1991 Population Censuses, the labour force participation rate for women aged between 15-64 years were 38.9%, 42% and 41.9% respectively.

Concomitant with social changes, the family system has been changing rapidly. The extended family has gradually given way to nuclear family. Marriage postponement and non-marriage are becoming more and more common, particularly among the better-educated segments of the population. Past studies also showed a trend towards later marriage among all ethnic groups. Tan et al. (1988: 19-21) found that among women aged 30-34 years in 1980, more than half of the Malays and 46% of the Indians were

ried by age nineteen, compared to only 15% for the Chinese. As for the younger  
ort, aged 20-24 years, only 32% of Malay women and 26% of Indian women had  
ried by age 19. This clearly indicates a trend towards delayed marriage for the  
nger cohort. Among Chinese women aged 20-24 years, the proportion who were  
ried by age 19 hovered around 14%, as in the case of those aged 30-34 years. These  
res show that while significant changes in the age at first marriage have occurred  
ong the Malays and Indians, the Chinese have experienced a more gradual increase in  
at first marriage.

Influenced by Western culture, traditional marriage arrangements have also  
largone changes. Arranged marriages are becoming less and less common. A study  
Nurul Islam and Ashraf in Bangladesh (1998) found that daughters in traditional  
ieties were married off early before they could bring disgrace to the family through  
er being pregnant out of wedlock or ended up as spinsters. The Western ideas of  
ividualism, independence and freedom of choice of partners are now increasingly  
ning grounds in Asia. With better educational attainment, Malaysian women of the  
eties are now more independent, career-minded and are more assertive. Gaining better  
ntrol of their lives has led directly to profound changes in marital behaviour. As such,  
is not surprising that an increasing number of women, especially the better-educated  
es, have opted to marry later or remain single.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY**

This study is aimed at ascertaining the differentials in age at first marriage among the various sub-groups of the population, and factors that account for the differentials in the timing of marriage. Specifically, the aim of this study is to:

1. Observe the trends and patterns of age at first marriage among Malaysian women.
2. Examine the socio-cultural and economic factors affecting the age at first marriage among Malaysian women.
3. To gain further insights into factors associated with marriage postponement.
4. To examine the relationships between early marriage (i.e. marrying before age 21 and between ages 21-25 inclusive) and a number of variables -- ethnicity, religion, educational attainment, pre-marital and current work status, childhood and current residence, husband's education and age difference between husband and wife.
5. To discuss some policy implications and make recommendations for the formulation and implementation of family development programmes for a better quality of life.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Malaysia has been and is still experiencing rapid social and economic transformation and such changes have affected the lives of the Malaysian people and in particular the Malaysian women in many different ways. Significant social changes would have profound impacts on women's perspectives towards marriages. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century women generally are more in control of the development of their families and being pregnant is one of them. Majority of Malaysian women still prefer to start a family after marriage instead of outside the wedlock even though pre-marital sexual relationship is not uncommon. This is in sharp contrast with some Western societies, where marriage is not necessarily the precursor of childbearing (Nurul Islam and Ashraf, 1998). Since marriage marks the beginning of a women's exposure to the risk of childbearing, the continuing rise in age at first marriage in the last few decades has changed the demographics and social structure of our country. Marriage postponement consequent upon dramatic social transformation has influenced the reproductive behavior of our women. Women tend to delay having children to a much later stage in their lives and these have resulted in low fertility rate and changes in family structures.

The direct implication of marriage postponement would be on the care of the elderly. Due to the rise in the age of marriage and later childbirth, the next generation would still be dependent whilst their parents are approaching retirement age or possibly would have retired. When couples reach their post-retirement age, their children may still

chooling or starting their own families, and thus making it difficult for them to take of their elderly parents. The children of tomorrow would be concentrating on their s more, and some might forget their responsibilities towards their elderly parents who in need of financial, emotional or physical support. In light of marriage ponement and family formation, there is a growing concern as to whether future eration would be able to take care of their parents in their golden years.

The younger generation, in pursuing higher education and better paying jobs in a nly competitive environment, has put aside marriage to a later stage of their lives. ents also have high expectations on whom their children would marry. They set high dards and some of these children are not able to live up to those expectations. As a ult, many would be living together instead, and there are increasing reports of unwed thers. Some of them would keep the babies and were forced to marry even if they are financially, mentally and psychologically ready. Others would resort to abortion as an ernative and in the worst scenario some of these people would be abandoning the ies as soon as they are born as the girls are unwilling to face up to responsibilities of planned motherhood. These acts are also results of trying to escape the capital nishments of the Islamic law for “berzina” (sexual activities outside marriage), which a serious offence. One thing leads to another, the family loses face and some would own the children. The parents’ subsequent response to the shame brought about by wed daughters then causes family break-up.

In some countries, the proportion remaining single and age at first marriage have increased substantially. Consequent upon changes in marital structure and widespread use of contraception, the fertility level in a few countries has dipped below replacement level. Former Singapore premier Lee Kuan Yew, in his 1983 National Day Speech, expressed concern that if graduates continue to delay or forego marriage and children for their careers, the "thinning of the gene pool" would occur amongst the better-educated as a result of the decline in birth rate. On the other hand, a better understanding of marriage behaviour may be used for programme formulation to bring about delayed marriage and lowering of fertility in countries that are grappling over problems of high fertility and over-population.

Loneliness is another consequence of the flight from marriage. Career women who delay marriages may find that as they climb up the corporate ladder, their choices of mates have become more limited. This probably explains the increasing number of non-married women.

In the manufacturing sector such as the electronic and textile industries where male workers make up the majority of the work force, the chance of finding marriage partners within the working environment would be slim due to occupational segregation. As women become better educated, an increasing number are finding difficulty in finding a "compatible" marriage partner, as traditionally women tend to marry men who are better qualified than themselves. All these social changes have led to delayed marriages.

increase in non-marriage, particularly among the better-educated segments of the population.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **General**

Numerous studies have been conducted to ascertain the determinants of age at marriage among women in Malaysia and other parts of the world. Among the determinants examined were ethnicity, education, current place of residence, childhood place of residence, premarital work experience and religion (Chander et al., 1977; Von Elm and Hirschman, 1979; Anderson and Hill, 1980, Jones, 1981; Lee, 1981; Siti, 1981; Siti, 1983; Tan et al., 1988; Tan and Jones, 1991; Khalipah, 1992; Quah, 1993, Syahputra, 1993, Jones, 1994, and Nurul Islam and Ashraf, 1998).

Past studies have also shown that husband's socio-economic backgrounds are also important factors in determining age at first marriage (Anderson and Hill, 1980). The husband's socio-economic background was proxied by father's occupation (Von Elm and Hirschman, 1979). Some studies have examined the effects of place of origin as indexed by type of longest pre-marital place of residence on age at marriage (Von Elm and Hirschman, 1979). Women's family background was also studied using proxy such as father's income and mother's schooling (Anderson and Hill, 1980). Other variables, which have been studied in relation to marriage, include wife's value of time (Anderson and Hill, 1980), shortages of potential spouses, freedom of choice of husbands and

ening beliefs in marrying off the daughters early to preserve the family honour (Tan et al., 1981), age differences between spouses (Tan et al., 1988), religiosity and frequency of prayer (Nurul Islam and Ashraf, 1998).

Apart from the variables covered in previous studies, age at marriage may also be related to the changing status of women. Modern women now have greater say in the choice of marriage partner. As mentioned earlier, arranged marriages are gradually giving way to own choice. While all the variables examined in previous studies and information on the choice of marriage partner are pertinent to the study on marriage patterns, all this information is available for the present study. In the following sub-sections, relationships between age at marriage and some selected variables, as documented in previous studies, will be discussed.

## **2 Educational effects on age at first marriage**

Past studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between education level and age at first marriage. In 1979, Von Elm and Hirschman found that primary education (5 years) has only a slight effect over those with no schooling. The difference in age at first marriage between those with primary and those with no schooling, net of social origin, is about 0.4 and 0.2 year for the Malay and Indian women respectively. Chinese women with primary schooling married about a year later than their counterparts with no schooling. Women with lower secondary schooling postponed their marriage even much longer than those with primary schooling, by 4 to 5 years for the Malays and the Indians.



he Chinese, however, the effect of post-primary schooling is much smaller but still antial.

According to the 1974 Malaysian Fertility and Family Survey, among women 25-29 years, those with more than 12 years of education entered marriage five years than those with no schooling (Chander et al., 1977). Using education as a measure tergenerational transfer of human capital, Anderson and Hill (1980) found a positive elation between age at first marriage and educational attainment. They found that if women's schooling were to double from 3.8 years to 7.6 years, age at marriage would ease by an average of approximately 8 months. Lee (1981) argued that a woman with ndary education would require her to spend additional years in schools as an native to early marriage. Jones (1981) observed that as more and more Malay women completing high schools and entering institutions of higher learning, their age at first riage has increased correspondingly.

Tan (1983) postulated that it is not just education but the amount of education is main determinant of marriage postponement. The amount of education needed to y age at marriage possibly increases from older to younger birth cohorts. In her earch, she also found that illiterate women married much earlier than those who are rate. Tan et al. (1988) concluded that low educational level was an important tributory factor in the early marriages of the Malays and Chinese.

A Thai study by Wayachut (1993) attributed the rising age at marriage to the rise in the proportion of women with more than 4 years of schooling and the decline in the proportion of women in the group with less than 4 years of education. In Bangladesh, Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998) observed that the Muslim, the uneducated and rural women are more likely to marry earlier than the Hindus, the educated and urban women. They also found husband's education to have smaller impact on women's age at marriage as compared to women's own education.

Interestingly, Anderson and Hill (1980) found that husband's education had a significantly negative effect on wife's age at first marriage if the wage variable was included but a positive determinant if the wage variable was excluded. When the wage variable was included, the husband's schooling measures wealth and efficiency effects net of the wage effect. Thus, they explained that an increase in husband's education would increase the wealth that he brought to the marriage and could raise his efficiency in household production and hence encouraged an earlier marriage for the wife. On the other hand, when the wage variable was excluded, husband's education was mainly capturing the effect of wealth efficiency as well as the wage efficiency that led to the positive relationship between age at first marriage and husband's education.

Quah (1993) noted that as the proportion of single women in Singapore with tertiary education had increased from 42.4% in 1980 to 53.1% in 1990, the average age at first marriage among Singaporean women had increased correspondingly from 24.7 years in 1980 to 26.6 years in 1990. She suggested that the tendency to be economically secure,

ined with the desire to obtain higher educational qualifications had led more Korean women to delay marriage.

### **Ethnic differentials and age at first marriage**

Von Elm and Hirschman (1979) attributed the reasons for Malays to marry early to the fact that they are more likely to live in rural areas, and have lower educational attainment than the Chinese and Indians. Also, they postulated that the differences in cultural values or value orientation are the primary reason for earlier Malay marriages. They also found, however, that the ethnicity effects are mostly mediated through their differences in educational attainment.

Lee (1981) also concluded that Chinese women married later than their Malay and Indonesian counterparts, on account of the fact that the former are relatively more urbanized, more educated, and were more likely to work for longer period prior to marriage as compared to the latter. In examining ethnic differentials in age at first marriage across birth cohorts, Tan (1983) found that the mean age at first marriage of the Chinese was higher than that for the Malays by about 3-4 years. In her study, she also found that a Malay woman with at least seven years of schooling married on average five years later than one with no education. A Chinese woman with seven years or more of schooling married on average 3 years later than one who had no education.

Using data from the 1988 Malaysian and Family Life Survey, Khalipah (1992) found that different socio-economic and cultural factors have varied effects on the timing

riage for each ethnic group. She found a strong positive correlation between urban  
nce and women's age at first marriage for Malays and Indians, but not for Chinese.  
Malays married 1.8 years earlier than their urban counterparts while the rural  
is married 1.0 year earlier than the urban Indians. She also found that the ethnic  
ences in age at first marriage are more pronounced in the rural areas as compared to  
ban areas. The rural Chinese married 2.5 years later than the rural Indian women  
more than 3 years later than rural Malay women.

Jones (1994) indicated that education makes far more difference to age at first  
age for Malays than for Chinese, with the Indians in between. He explained that this  
ars to reflect the institutionalization of a later marriage norm for Chinese, whereas  
Malay age at first marriage was in a state of flux, with sharp rises mediated mainly  
igh increasing levels of education. Controlling for a range of other independent  
bles using multiple classification analysis (MCA), he found that the net effects of  
ation remains highly significant.

#### **4 Religious differentials and age at first marriage**

As stated in Chander et al. (1977), there is a very high degree of ethno-religious  
itification. In Peninsular Malaysia, Muslims are made up mostly of Malays, Buddhists  
by and large Chinese and Hindus are almost exclusively Indians; whereas Christians  
made up of Chinese, Indians and other races. Therefore, similar in results to ethnicity,  
slims, whom are made up almost entirely of Malays, have the lowest mean age at  
riage followed by Indians and Chinese. While differences in age at first marriage

religious groupings persist for all age groups, there has been a general increase in an age at first marriage among the younger age groups.

In Thailand, Wayachut (1993) explained that the difference in women's age at age between Buddhists and Muslims might be explained merely by differences en the two religions and/or by the dissimilarity in educational composition between rist and Muslim women. The age at marriage of Buddhist is approximately two higher than that of Muslims. She concluded that the lower educational attainment g the Muslim women resulted in lower age at first marriage as compared to hist who on average is more likely to be better educated. Cultural differences are dentified to be an important factor in the differing age at marriage among women.

Jones (1994) noted that Muslim women in several ASEAN countries tend to enter age at younger age as compared to those from other religious denominations. im women in Indonesia, Philippines and Sabah (Malaysia) tend to marry earlier than stian women; while Muslim women in Southern Thailand marry earlier than Thai lhistis. The influence of Islamic religion on early marriage was also found in gladesh. Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998) found that Muslims have a lower age at iage compared to Hindu women. Also half of the Hindus in Bangladesh are from duled castes whose average age at marriage is lower than that of caste Hindus.

## **.5 Premarital work experience and age at first marriage**

Von Elm and Hirschman (1979) pre-marital work experience increases women's age at first marriage. Those who worked tended to marry some 1.6 years later compared to those who did not work. Chander et al. (1977) found that women who worked prior to first marriage tended to marry later while unpaid family workers married earliest. They also examined type of occupation before the women's first marriage. Those who were engaged in the more prestigious white-collar work were found to have higher mean age at marriage than those who were engaged in the manual work, especially those engaged in agriculture. The white-collar workers are the professionals, technical, administrative and managerial position while the manual workers are the farmers, farm managers and general farm workers.

Jones (1981) attributed the employment of Malay women in the manufacturing sectors in the early 1970's as opposed to the usual farming jobs to the rise in age at first marriage. There are more job opportunities in factories for women as compared to men, as the former are paid lower than the latter. Furthermore, he acknowledged the New Economic Policy, which requires that not less than 30% of the work force in every industry to be Malays as the reason for the upsurge in Malay female employment. Similarly, Tan (1983) concluded that those who were in paid employment tended to marry later. Lee (1981) found premarital work status to have only a moderate influence on age at first marriage for the Malays and the Chinese, but the influence is statistically insignificant among the Indians.

Tan et al. (1988) found that the Malays and Indians tend to marry early if they not working. They argued that later marriages would allow greater opportunity for women to work prior to marriages.

In contrast, Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998) found no significant effect of pre-tal work on age at first marriage of Bangladeshi women. This may be attributed to fact that most of the women are involved in agriculture and this type of job does not n to be incompatible with early marriage.

## **5 Childhood place of residence and age at first marriage**

Chander et al. (1977), Von Elm and Hirschman (1979) hypothesized that growing n an urban area tends to be associated with marriage postponement. Their studies w that higher education and job opportunities in urban areas have led to marriage tponement among women. They suggested that urban society might also cherish new ial norms that later marriage is an acceptable behaviour for young women. They nd that the mean age at first marriage among those who spent their childhood in ages was 17.3 years as compared to 18.9 years for women who lived in towns up to age of 12 years. They postulated that the urban environment seemed to result in late rriage.

Lee (1981), however, found that childhood place of residence has no effect on age first marriage. His findings concur with that of Von Elm who observed that most of the fect of childhood place residence on age at first marriage is largely mediated through

ional attainment. Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998) found that women who were born in rural areas and currently living in urban areas had the highest mean age at first marriage (15.9 years). The lowest mean age at first marriage was noted for those who were born and currently staying in the rural areas to be 14.8 years.

### **Current place of residence and age at first marriage**

In the 1970s, there was an influx of Malay migrants to urban areas. Jones (1981) stated that marriage was delayed to provide some space and time for them to establish themselves. Tan (1983) found that women currently living in metropolitan or town areas tended to marry later than women living in the rural areas and in both localities the Malays tended to marry earlier than the Chinese. In assessing the effects of migration on age at first marriage, she found that Malay and Chinese migrants in towns married earlier than non-migrants in towns. On the other hand, both rural-bound Malay and Chinese migrants generally married later than non-migrants in rural areas. She also found that migrants in urban areas had the highest mean age at first marriage as compared to non-migrants in rural area who had the lowest age.

Wayachut (1993) stated that marriage postponement is much more evident in Bangkok and the central region, as compared to other regions. The rate of increase in age at first marriage is faster in Bangkok than the central region. A lower age at marriage was observed in rural northeast, south and north regions. In Bangladesh, Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998) found that the average age at first marriage among urban women was 15.7 years, compared to 15.1 years among their rural counterparts. They observed that those



ere born and grew up in urban areas married on average, at 16 years, while their counterparts married at 15.2 years.

### **Effects of age differences between spouses**

Tan et al. (1988) mentioned in their study that the timing of the first marriage of a young woman may occur early if the husband is very much older than her, controlling education, degrees of freedom in mate selection, work status prior to marriage and hood/current residence. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that marriages between a young girl and a man much older is one that is arranged rather than own choice.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF NUPTIALITY PATTERNS AMONG WOMEN IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

This section presents some salient findings on age at first marriage in Malaysia. The trend in rising age at first marriage prevails globally and this trend is set to continue. The age at first marriage among the younger cohort is increasingly higher than the older cohorts, indicating a rising trend in the age at first marriage.

Table 1.1 shows the changes in the percentages of women in Peninsular Malaysia who had ever married and currently married by age group from 1947 to 1991. It shows that the percentages of women who had ever-married and who were currently married, particularly among the younger age groups, have declined over the years. For example,

those in the age group 15-19, the percentage currently married had dropped from 1947 to 11% in 1974 and only 6.3% in 1991. The same goes to the 20-24 age group where the percentage of women currently married had dropped from 79% in 1947 to 48% in 1974 and 37.1% in 1991. However, the decline in the percentage ever married among those aged 35-39 years has been much more gradual, indicating a trend towards the postponement rather than non-marriage. The proportion of women in this age group who were ever married dropped from 98% in 1947 to 94% in 1974 and 92.1% in 1991.

Table 1.1: Percentages of women who had ever-married and were currently married by five-year age group

Percentage Ever – Married						
Age Group	1947	1957	1970	1974	1980	1991
15-19	42	37	16	11	8	6
20-24	87	79	57	50	46	38
25-29	96	94	86	79	78	73
30-34	98	98	94	90	90	88
35-39	98	99	98	94	95	92

Percentage Currently Married						
Age Group	1947	1957	1970	1974	1980	1991
15-19	38	35	15	10	8	6
20-24	79	75	55	48	45	37
25-29	88	90	83	76	76	72
30-34	87	91	90	85	87	85
35-39	77	81	86	82	89	88

Source: Chander et al. (1977: Table 5.4), based on the Malaysian Fertility and Family Survey, 1974; Calculations based on the data from the Population Census, 1980 and 1991.

Table 1.2 shows substantial increase in the singulate mean age at first marriage). The SMAM of Malaysian women had risen from 18.5 years in 1947 to 22.3 in 1970 and 24.7 years in 1991.

Table 1.2: Singulate mean age at first marriage (SMAM) for Malaysian women in 1947, 1957, 1970, 1980 and 1991

Age at first marriage	Year 1947	Year 1957	Year 1970	Year 1980	Year 1991
Overall	18.5	19.4	22.3	23.5	24.7

(Von Elm and Hirschman (1974: Table 2); Department of Statistics (1995, p. 1:73))

The singulate mean age at first marriage represents the age at first marriage of ultimately marrying by age 50 for a hypothetical cohort experiencing the same age-specific probabilities of remaining single that are represented in the cross-sectional distributions never marrying (Nurul Islam and Ashraf, 1998). It takes into account persons who are not married but who may marry later. However, it was noted that the limitations of using SMAM to analyze changes in the timing of marriage because the measure uses data for older and younger cohorts whose life experiences were different (Michael, cited in Wayachut 1993:294). To avoid these limitations, cohort trends analysis was used in the analysis.

Table 1.3 presents the singulate mean age at marriage for several Asian countries. Among the South East Asian countries, Malaysia seems to have one of the highest SMAM. Among the countries in South Asia, the SMAM is lowest in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In East Asia, SMAM is highest among Hong Kong, while it is lowest among women in mainland China.

Table 1.3: Singulate mean age at first marriage for selected Asian countries

Countries In South Asia	Year	SMAM	Countries In East-Asia	Year	SMAM
Bangladesh	1981	16.7	China	1987	22.0
Bangladesh	1991	18.0	Hong Kong	1986	26.8
India	1981	18.7	Japan	1985	25.7
Maldives	1985	17.9	Korea	1985	24.5
Nepal	1981	17.9			
Pakistan	1981	19.8			
Sri Lanka	1981	24.4			

Source: Nurul Islam and Ashraf (1998: Table 3)

Table 1.4 shows that for each cohort there is a substantial increase in mean age at marriage among Malaysian women. For the 15-24 cohorts, an increase of 1.3 years was observed between the 1966/67 Malaysian Family Survey and the 1974 Malaysian Family Survey. Considerable increase in mean age at first marriage can also be observed for those in the 25-34 age group and the 35-44 age group.

Table 1.5: Mean age at first marriage by current age for currently married women – 1974

MFFS and Malaysian Family Survey 1966/1967

Current Age	Mean age at first marriage	
	1974 MFFS	Malaysian Family Survey 1966/67
15 – 24	17.9	16.6
25 – 34	19.5	17.8
35 – 44	18.8	17.5

Chander et al. (1977: Table 5.3) based on the Malaysian Family and Fertility Survey 1974.

Further evidence of a rising trend in the age at first marriage among Malaysian women could be found from Table 1.5. For instance, among the Malay women, the mean age at first marriage for the 1925 – 1929 birth cohort was 15.7 years. Since then the mean age at first marriage has been rising during the 25 years interval, reaching 17.9 years for the 1950 – 1954 birth cohort, rising 2.2 years over the 25-year period. Similarly, among the Chinese women, there was a rise of 2.2 years between the 1925 – 1929 and 1945 – 1949 birth cohort.

Marriage cohorts also demonstrated a rising trend in age at first marriage for both sexes. For the women age 25 years and over who married before age 25, the Malays showed a sharp rise of 6.2 years from 16.3 years old for the 1950 – 1954 marriage cohort to 22.5 years old for the 1970 – 1974 marriage cohort. As for the Chinese, a slightly smaller difference of 3.7 years was observed for the same marriage cohorts.

Table 1.5: Mean age at first marriage for women aged 25 years and over who married before age 25 years by ethnic groups for various birth and marriage cohorts

1974 MFFS Birth Cohort	Ethnic groups	
	Malays	Chinese
1945 – 1949	17.9 (n avail.)	21 (n. avail)
1940 – 1944	17.1 (17.6)	20.5 (21.8)
1935 – 1939	16.6 (17.0)	19.6 (21.1)
1930 – 1934	16.1 (16.5)	19.3 (20.3)
1925 – 1929	15.7 (15.9)	18.8 (19.3)
1974 MFFS marriage cohort		
1970 – 1974	22.5 (*)	22.9 (*)
1965 – 1969	19.7 (24.3)	21.3 (24.8)
1960 – 1964	17.7 (20.1)	20.4 (22.1)
1955 – 1959	16.7 (17.2)	19.6 (20.3)
1950 – 1954	16.3 (16.4)	19.2 (19.6)

Tan (1983; Table 5.1) based on the Malaysian Family and Fertility Survey, 1974.

Values in parentheses indicate the mean age at first marriage of women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years.  
(\*) Less than 30 cases

Evidence of work effects on age at first marriage can be seen in Table 1.6. An increase in age at marriage can be seen for the working women as compared to those who were either unemployed or working but not paid. The mean age of women who worked as employees was 19.2 years while it was 17 years for those who were not working, and an even lower age of 16.8 years for those who were unpaid family workers. The influence of type of occupation before the women's first marriage also provides significant differentials in age at first marriage. For the professionals, technical, administrative and managerial employees, the mean age at first marriage was 21.7 whereas it was only 17 years for the general farm workers, a clear difference of more than 4 years.

5: Mean age at first marriage by work status and selected occupation for all ever-married women who were married before age 25 years

	Current Age		
	All women	25 – 29	45 and over
	17.6	18.8	16.7
atus			
king	17.0	18.0	16.5
family worker	16.8	18.1	16.3
count worker	18.0	18.8**	17.1**
ee	19.2	19.9	17.9
ion of ER before First			
3			
ional, technical,	21.7	22.0**	*
trative and managerial.			
l and related occupations.	22.0	22.0**	*
ltural workers			
ners and farm managers	16.8	*	16.5**
eral farm workers	17.3	18.2	16.5

Chander et al. (1977: Table 5.8) based on the Malaysian Family and Fertility 1974.

than 20 cases

than 50 cases

Table 1.7 shows that women with higher level of education delayed their marriage. A difference of almost six years can be observed for the women with no schooling and those with more than 12 years of schooling.

Table 1.7: Mean age at first marriage by education levels for ever-married women aged 25 years and above who were married before age 25 years

Education level	Mean age at first marriage		
	All ages	25 – 29	45 and over
No schooling	16.7	17.5	16.2
Less than 7 years	17.9	18.4	17.3
7 to 11 years	20.8	21.3	18.7**
12 years and above	22.4**	22.5**	*

Source: Chander et al. (1977: Table 5.5) based on the Malaysian Family and Fertility Survey, 1974.

\* Less than 20 cases  
 \*\* Less than 50 cases

Generally, studies have found that the increase in age at first marriage has been attributed to the improvement in educational level and women's entry into the modern labor market. Other factors such as urbanization and modernization have also been found to affect age at first marriage.