

3 – THE CHANGING TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE AMONG MALAYSIAN WOMEN

Chapter presents the main findings of the analysis on the effects of the socio-economic factors on age at first marriage by using the cohort approach. It describes the trend in age at first marriage in relation to various socio-economic and demographic variables across birth and marriage cohorts. It also attempts to explain the effect of socio-economic variables on the age at first marriage among Malaysian women.

VARIATE ANALYSIS OF AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE AMONG MALAYSIAN WOMEN

This section begins with exploratory analysis of the distribution of age at first marriage among ever-married women aged 30 years and over who were married before 1970. Figure 3.1 shows the frequency distribution of the age at first marriage ranging from 15 to age 29 years. The P-P plot in Figure 3.1 confirms the normal distribution shown earlier in Figure 2.1. Finally the section ends with a box plot of the age at first marriage in Figure 3.2, which indicates that no outliers are visible in the distribution.

Table 3.1: Frequency and percentage distribution of ever-married Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who were married before age 30 years by age at first marriage

Age at first marriage	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
11	3	0.1	0.1
12	8	0.3	0.4
13	39	1.3	1.7
14	49	1.6	3.3
15	137	4.5	7.8
16	165	5.5	13.3
17	251	8.3	21.6
18	229	7.6	29.1
19	283	9.4	38.5
20	281	9.3	47.8
21	273	9.0	56.8
22	250	8.3	65.1
23	239	7.9	73.0
24	215	7.1	80.1
25	180	6.0	86.0
26	168	5.6	91.6
27	123	4.1	95.6
28	78	2.6	98.2
29	54	1.8	100.0
Total	3025	100.0	

Figure 3.1: The P-P plot of the age at first marriage among the ever-married Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years

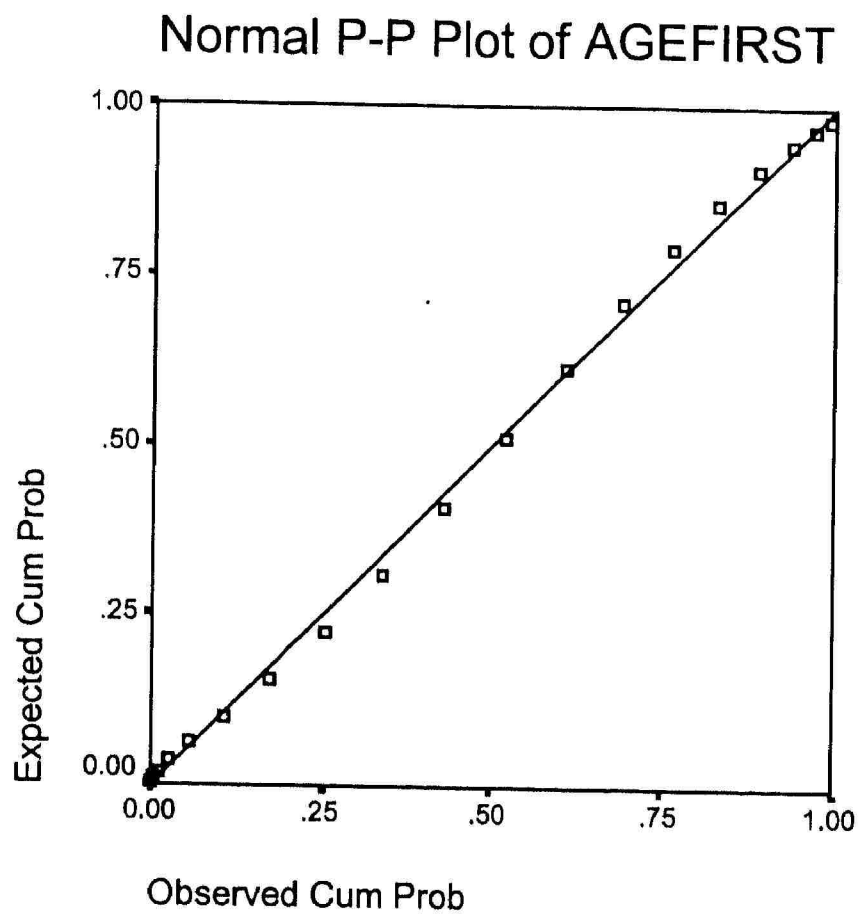
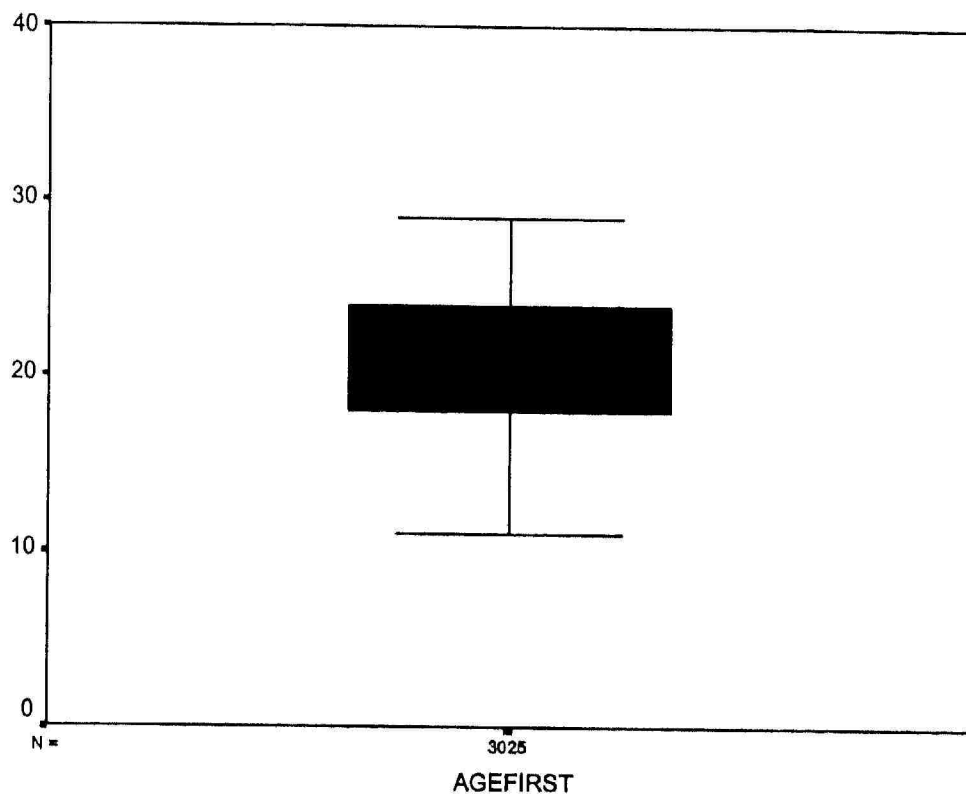


Figure 3.2: The Box plot of the distribution of the age at first marriage among ever-married Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years



.2 EXPLAINING BIRTH AND MARRIAGE COHORTS EFFECTS ON AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Some 50 years ago, Malaysian women entered marriage at a very young age. However, studies have shown a continuing rise in age at first marriage. In this study, differentials in mean age at first marriage according to several socio-economic and demographic variables will be examined across birth and marriage cohorts. This approach is used because those who were born or married in the same cohort generally experienced the same events. Thus, comparing the age at first marriage of such cohorts gives a clearer picture of time trends than does the synthetic mean or median estimates. However, in using such measures, care must be taken to avoid censoring biases, which arise when some of the cohorts have not yet had the chance to experience the event being analyzed (Jones, 1994:62). Hence, the following analyses will be based on women aged 30 years and over who married before the age of 30 years.

Table 3.2 shows that age at first marriage has been rising among Malaysian women. Within a time span of some 10-20 years, the women's mean age at first marriage had risen by 1.5 years from 20.1 years among those born before 1951 to 21.6 years among those born between 1961-1965. These figures show that the younger women are marrying later than the older women.

Table 3.2: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by birth cohorts

Birth cohort	Sample size, n	Mean age	Median age
Before 1951	664	20.1	20.0
1951 – 1955	770	20.7	20.0
1956 – 1960	880	21.1	21.0
1961 – 1965	711	21.6	22.0
All cohorts	3025	20.9	21.0

Marriage postponement can also be observed by marriage cohorts. Table 3.3 shows that the mean age at first marriage of women who were married between 1986 – 1995 was 24.5 years, up from 17.7 years among those who were married before 1971. This represents a very a substantial increase of about 7 years over a relatively short time interval. The median age at first marriage shows a slightly bigger gap of 8 years between the two cohorts over the same interval.

Table 3.3: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by marriage cohorts

Marriage cohort	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Before 1971	605	17.7	17.0
1971 – 1975	617	19.9	20.0
1976 – 1980	741	20.9	21.0
1981 – 1985	666	22.6	22.0
1986 – 1995	394	24.5	25.0
All cohorts	3023	20.9	21.0

ETHNIC DIFFERENTIALS IN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Past studies show that Malay women in Peninsular Malaysian have always been married the earliest, and the Chinese the latest, with Indians in-between. Data from the 1974 Malaysian Population and Family Survey show that while the ethnic differentials in age at first marriage can still be observed, the differentials have narrowed somewhat. This convergence may be attributed to rapid socio-economic development, which has brought about improvement in the status of women of all ethnic groups.

Traditions and cultures of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia have also been assimilated to become a unique Malaysian culture. As Malaysia is a melting pot of several different ethnic groups, it is a natural process for their cultures and traditions to blend and complement each other. These effects by and large, have more or less changed marriage behaviour among these three main ethnic groups. The diversity in their cultural values before may have probably merged in the assimilation process. Hence, the narrower gap in age at first marriage across the three main ethnic groups.

Table 3.4 shows that the Malays married the earliest at 20.4 years, followed by Indians at 20.8 years and the Chinese the latest at 22.2 years, that is a range of 1.8 years. In comparison, the difference in mean age at first marriage between the Chinese and Malays in the 1974 Malaysian Fertility and Family Survey was 3 years. Hence, it is evident that the differential in age at first marriage between the two ethnic groups has

narrowed. Note that the remaining 80 respondents in the sample whom were excluded from the analysis come from the other minority ethnic groups.

Table 3.4: Mean age at first marriage among women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by ethnic groups

Ethnic group	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Malay	1776	20.4	20.0
Chinese	825	22.2	22.0
Indian	344	20.8	20.5

Among the Malay women, Table 3.5 shows that there has been a rise of about 2 years in the age at first marriage for the 1961-65 cohort as compared to those who were born some one to two decades earlier. The 2-year increment in age at marriage for those born in 1961-65 as compared to those born before 1951 is quite comparable to Tan's estimate (1983:145).

As for the Chinese, Tan (1983:145) found that those who were born in 1945-1949 married at 21 years, that is, some 2 years later as compared to those who were born in 1925-1929. The 1994 survey, however, shows that the mean age at marriage among Chinese women has been hovering at around 22 years for those born between the period 1951 and 1965. This may be explained by the fact that while non-marriage has become more prevalent among Chinese women, there has been no further postponement in entry to marriage among those who chose to marry.

Comparing the mean age at first marriage for the cohort of women who were born before 1951 and those born between 1961 and 1965, the Indian women clearly experienced the sharpest rise of about 4 years in their mean age at first marriage, and an even bigger 6-year gap in the median age at first marriage. The pronounced difference could be due to their increased opportunities in education and employment. Consequently these have resulted in improvements in their social status. Table 3.5 also shows that the difference in age at first marriage between the ethnic groups has narrowed for younger women. The widest ethnic differential in age at first marriage among those women born before 1951 was about 4 years, whereas it was 2.2 years, 1.6 years and 1.2 years for those born in 1951-1955, 1956-1960, and 1961-1965 respectively.

Narrower gap which was observed in the more recent birth cohorts, indicating that the assimilation process that had taken place among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia might have influenced the same desire towards later age at marriage.

Table 3.5: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by ethnic groups by birth cohorts

Ethnic group	Birth cohort	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Malay	Before 1951	377	19.3	19.0
	1951 – 1955	445	20.1	20.0
	1956 – 1960	513	20.5	20.0
	1961 – 1965	441	21.4	21.0
	Total	1776	20.4	20.0
Chinese	Before 1951	205	22.2	22.0
	1951 – 1955	225	22.3	22.0
	1956 – 1960	226	22.3	22.0
	1961 – 1965	169	22.1	23.0
	Total	825	22.2	22.0
Indian	Before 1951	71	18.3	17.0
	1951 – 1955	86	20.7	20.0
	1956 – 1960	115	21.5	22.0
	1961 – 1965	72	22.2	23.0
	Total	344	20.8	20.5

Similar patterns of the changing trends in age at first marriage can also be observed across the marriage cohorts for all the three main ethnic groups. As can be seen in Table 3.6, Malay women who married before 1971 had a mean age at first marriage of 17.5 years and it had increased to 24.3 years for those who married between 1986-1995, an increase of about 7 years. As for the Chinese and the Indians the increase in age at marriage across these cohorts was about 6-7 years. This further shows that women tend to marry much later in the recent years. Data shows that the magnitude in the increase of median age at first marriage is rather similar to that of the mean age at first marriage.

Table 3.6: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over
who married before age 30 years by ethnic groups by marriage cohorts

Ethnic group	Marriage cohort	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Malay	Before 1971	404	17.5	17.0
	1971 – 1975	358	19.4	19.0
	1976 – 1980	418	20.4	20.0
	1981 – 1985	388	22.2	22.0
	1986 – 1995	206	24.3	25.0
	Total	1774	20.4	20.0
Chinese	Before 1971	125	19.2	19.0
	1971 – 1975	169	21.5	21.0
	1976 – 1980	238	22.2	22.0
	1981 – 1985	182	23.3	23.0
	1986 – 1995	111	25.1	25.0
	Total	825	22.2	22.0
Indian	Before 1971	59	16.7	17.0
	1971 – 1975	75	19.1	19.0
	1976 – 1980	65	20.4	20.0
	1981 – 1985	76	23.0	23.0
	1986 – 1995	69	24.0	25.0
	Total	344	20.8	20.5

3.4 EDUCATIONAL EFFECTS ON AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Previous studies have shown a high positive correlation between age at first marriage and education levels. In fact, many researchers have found education to be the most important factor in determining the age at first marriage among all the independent variables. In recent years, more women were given opportunities to complete up to tertiary level education. As a result, women are postponing marriage to pursue higher education. Data from the 1994 Malaysian Population and Family Survey show that the trends towards marriage postponement have persisted. This further confirms that the more educated women tend to delay marriage to a later age. Table 3.7 shows that women with no formal education had a mean age at first marriage of 19 years, as compared to 24.2 years among those with tertiary education, that is a difference of more than 5 years between the uneducated and the highly educated women. In contrast, a modest difference of 0.8 of a year occurred between those who were uneducated and the women with primary schooling. A sharper rise of more than 2 years in the age at first marriage can be observed between those with primary and secondary schooling. Similarly, the sharp rise between those with secondary and tertiary education persisted.

Table 3.7: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by education levels

Education level	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
No formal education	291	19.1	19.0
Primary	1398	19.9	19.0
Secondary	1137	22.0	22.0
Tertiary	197	24.2	24.0
Total	3023	20.9	21.0

Table 3.8 further confirms that women with no formal education married the earliest. Among those without any formal education, it can be seen that the Malays still marry the earliest compared to the other two ethnic groups. Educational differentials in age at first marriage range from 3 – 5 years for all ethnic groups. The widest ethnic differential in age at first marriage is estimated at 2.4 years, 2.4 years and 1.4 years for those with primary, secondary and tertiary education respectively. This indicates that the ethnic differentials in age at first marriage have narrowed as educational level increases.

Among Malay women, primary education delays marriage by 0.8 year relative to those with no formal education. For the Chinese and Indians, primary schooling delays entry into marriage by only 0.1 and 0.7 year respectively. Secondary education has a more profound delaying effect relative to primary schooling -- differences of 2.4 and 3.2 years for the Malays and the Indians respectively, but only 1.6 years for the Chinese. Similar pronounced delaying effect can be seen for those with tertiary education compared to those with secondary education. Tertiary-educated Chinese delay their marriage only on average 1.5 years relative to their counterparts with secondary education. Whereas, the Malays and Indians with tertiary education delayed marriage by a substantial 2.4 years as compared to those with secondary schooling (see Table 3.8). It is apparent that the delaying effect of education on age at first marriage is quite small among the Chinese while it is much more pronounced for the Indians. Overall, the transition from primary to secondary schooling has led to a more pronounced increase in the age at first marriage.

The ethnic differentials in median age at first marriage also shows a range of three years among those with no formal education, a range of 2 years among those with primary and secondary education, and only one year among those with tertiary education. This shows that age at marriage is likely to converge with improvement in education level.

Table 3.8: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by education levels by ethnic groups

Education level	Ethnic group	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
No formal education	Malay	149	18.3	18.0
	Chinese	72	21.4	21.0
	Indian	46	19.0	18.5
Primary	Malay	770	19.1	19.0
	Chinese	418	21.5	21.0
	Indian	172	19.7	19.0
Secondary	Malay	724	21.5	21.0
	Chinese	284	23.1	23.0
	Indian	116	22.9	23.0
Tertiary	Malay	132	23.9	24.0
	Chinese	50	24.6	25.0
	Indian	10	25.3	25.0

From Table 3.9, it is again apparent that the age at first marriage is lower for women with no formal education compared to women with primary, secondary and tertiary education for all the birth cohorts. As expected, the women with tertiary education have the highest age at first marriage across the birth cohorts. For those who were born before 1951, the difference between those without formal education and those with tertiary education was 4.4 years. The differential in age at marriage by educational level widened to 5 years for the 1951-1955 cohort and 5.9 years for those born between

1956-1960. This could be due to the rapid expansion of opportunities for tertiary education and employment in the modern sector economy in the more recent years, and hence delaying entry into marriage.

Table 3.9: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by birth cohorts by education levels

Birth cohort	Education level	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Before 1951	No formal education	119	19.2	19
	Primary	405	19.7	19
	Secondary	119	21.9	22
	Tertiary	20*	23.6	24
1951 – 1955	No formal education	87	19.8	19
	Primary	383	19.9	20
	Secondary	270	21.8	22
	Tertiary	29*	24.7	25
1956 – 1960	No formal education	63	18.0	17
	Primary	390	20.0	20
	Secondary	351	22.2	22
	Tertiary	76	23.9	24
1961 – 1965	No formal education	22*	19.6	19
	Primary	220	20.0	19
	Secondary	397	22.1	22
	Tertiary	72	24.4	25

* Less than 30 cases

As expected, the 1994 MPFS data shows that women with the lowest age at marriage were the ones without formal education and were married before 1971 (see Table 3.10). Opportunity for higher education was then not widely available, as can be seen in this marriage cohort, with only 7 respondents having tertiary education. Even then the age at first marriage for the highly educated women was already 3 years later than their counterparts with no schooling. Within each marriage cohort, there is a rather significant increase in age at marriage between those with no schooling and those with tertiary education. A consistent difference of about 3 years can be seen for the first three marriage cohorts followed by smaller difference of about 1 year in the 1981 – 1985 cohort.

Across the marriage cohorts (i.e. those who were married before 1971 and those who were married between 1986 and 1995), the mean age at marriage among women whom had no schooling increased by 3 years from 17.5 to 20.5 years. For those with primary schooling, the age at first marriage had increased by about 6 years from 17.5 to 23.3 years. Similarly, for those with secondary education, the age at first marriage had increased by 6 years across the marriage cohorts. During the same period, a smaller increase in age at marriage of about 4 years can be observed for those with tertiary education. Among women who were married before 1986, the sharpest differential in age at first marriage was observed between those who had completed secondary education and those with tertiary education.

Table 3.10: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over
who married before age 30 years by marriage cohorts by education levels

Marriage cohort	Education level	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Married before 1971	No formal education	121	17.5	17
	Primary	391	17.5	17
	Secondary	85	18.9	19
	Tertiary	7	20.6*	21*
1971 – 1975	No formal education	80	19.5	19
	Primary	325	19.7	19
	Secondary	195	20.2	20
	Tertiary	16	22.6*	23*
1976 – 1980	No formal education	54	20.3	19
	Primary	377	20.5	20
	Secondary	274	21.3	21
	Tertiary	36	23.4	23
1981 – 1985	No formal education	22	23.0*	23.5*
	Primary	211	22.0	21
	Secondary	371	22.6	22
	Tertiary	62	24.4	24
1986 – 1995	No formal education	14	20.5*	22*
	Primary	92	23.3	24.5
	Secondary	212	25.0	25
	Tertiary	76	25.0	25

* Less than 30 cases

3.5 EFFECTS OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE ON AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Past studies showed that urban residence tends to be positively associated with delayed marriage. Table 3.11 shows that women who are currently living in the urban areas have a mean age at marriage of 21.7 years, that is some 1.7 years later than that of rural women.

Table 3.11: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by current place of residence

Current place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Urban	1631	21.7	22.0
Rural	1394	20.0	20.0
Total	3025	20.9	21.0

Women who grew up in the rural area would tend to marry earlier than those who grow up in the urban area. Table 3.12 shows that those who were brought up in the rural environment would marry about 1.1 years earlier than those who grew up in urban areas.

Table 3.12: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by childhood place of residence

Childhood place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Urban	1283	21.4	21.0
Rural	1742	20.5	20.0
Total	3025	20.9	21.0

Generally, urban areas offer numerous facilities and opportunities in terms of education, jobs and entertainment that would have direct impact in postponing marriage to a later age. Table 3.13 presents some results to show the effects of growing up in different social background. Women who grew up in the rural areas are more likely to have no schooling, and have the lowest age at marriage at 18.9 years. On the other hand, those who grew up in the urban areas are more likely to have tertiary education, and on average, entered marriage at 24.5 years. Growing up in the rural areas and having primary education on average, postponed marriage by 0.7 years while those with secondary and tertiary education, a postponement of 2.9 and 5.0 years as compared to those with no schooling. Correspondingly, growing up in the urban areas and having primary schooling, on average, delayed marriage by 0.9 years also and a further 2.6 and 4.2 years delay for those with secondary and tertiary education as compared to those with no schooling. It appears that even though the age at marriage is slightly higher for those who were born and reared in the urban areas, the delaying effects mediated through the educational variable is quite consistent for both urban and rural areas. This might be due to modernization of the rural areas in recent years somehow has affected and influence the rural women to postpone their marriage later the same way that it is influencing the urban women.

Table 3.13: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by education levels by childhood place of residence

Education level	Childhood place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
No formal education	Urban	100	19.7	19.0
	Rural	191	18.9	18.0
Primary	Urban	547	20.4	20.0
	Rural	861	19.6	19.0
Secondary	Urban	536	22.3	22.0
	Rural	601	21.8	22.0
Tertiary	Urban	99	24.5	25.0
	Rural	98	23.9	24.0

Women currently living in the urban areas tended to marry later, and this is true for all education levels as shown in Table 3.14. The effects of education on age at first marriage can be observed in both rural and urban areas. In the rural areas, women with primary, secondary and tertiary education would marry 0.5, 2.3 and 4.6 years later than those with no formal education. In the urban areas, the comparable figures are 1.0, 2.9 and 4.9 years respectively.

Table 3.14: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by education levels by current place of residence

Education level	Current place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
No formal education	Urban	106	19.5	19.0
	Rural	185	18.9	18.0
Primary	Urban	617	20.5	20.0
	Rural	781	19.4	19.0
Secondary	Urban	761	22.4	22.0
	Rural	376	21.2	21.0
Tertiary	Urban	146	24.4	25.0
	Rural	51	23.5	24.0

Could the difference in age at first marriage between the three main ethnic groups be due to differences in educational attainment and place of residence? Tables 3.15 shows that within each educational and place of residence category, Malay women generally marry the earliest. The mean age at marriage for a Malay woman without formal education and was brought up in the rural area is 18.1 years, compared to her Chinese and Indian counterparts having similar traits marrying at an average age of 21.0 and 19.3 years respectively. Among those with primary education, it can be seen that the rural Malays have the lowest age at first marriage at 19.1 years followed closely by the Indians at 19.4 years. For a combined¹ secondary and tertiary educated rural women, the pattern is still the same with the Malays having the lowest age at 21.8 years and the Chinese the highest at 23.2 years. As for the urban women, similar picture emerges except for the secondary and tertiary educated women. Trend towards later marriage is more pronounced for the highly educated urban Indians who have the highest age at first marriage at 23.6 years, followed by the Chinese at 23.4 years and the Malays still married the earliest with mean age at first marriage of 22.0 years.

¹ There are too few cases for the Chinese and Indians with tertiary education. Hence those with secondary and tertiary education are combined together.

Table 3.15: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by ethnic groups by education levels by childhood place of residence

Ethnic group	Education level	Childhood place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean
Malay	No formal education	Urban	47	18.7
		Rural	102	18.1
	Primary	Urban	224	19.3
		Rural	546	19.1
	Secondary and Tertiary	Urban	353	22.0
		Rural	503	21.8
Chinese	No formal education	Urban	31	21.9
		Rural	41	21.0
	Primary	Urban	238	21.7
		Rural	180	21.3
	Secondary and Tertiary	Urban	204	23.4
		Rural	130	23.2
Indian	No formal education	Urban	21*	18.7
		Rural	25*	19.3
	Primary	Urban	81	20.0
		Rural	91	19.4
	Secondary and Tertiary	Urban	75	23.6
		Rural	51	22.0

* Less than 30 cases

Table 3.16 shows that for all birth cohorts, urban women married on average 2 years later than their rural counterparts. A trend towards older age at marriage is evident for women residing in both urban and rural areas.

Table 3.16: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by birth cohorts by current place of residence

Birth cohort	Current place of residence	Sample size, n	Mean
Before 1951	Urban	349	20.8
	Rural	315	19.3
1951 – 1955	Urban	399	21.6
	Rural	371	19.8
1956 – 1960	Urban	484	21.9
	Rural	396	20.1
1961 – 1965	Urban	399	22.3
	Rural	312	20.7

3.6 EFFECTS OF WORK EXPERIENCE ON AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Work experience prior to marriage has always resulted in the delay in marriage as evident in Table 3.17. Data from the 1994 MPFS show that pre-marital work increased age at first marriage by about 3 years from 18.8 years to 21.9 years. In terms of median age, the effect of premarital work is a postponement of marriage by about 4 years. Working women may not find marriage as attractive as much as those who are not working, in terms of financial security. With rapid industrialization, a lot of job opportunities are available to women. Most women nowadays work before they get married in order to gain experience or simply for economic reasons, which in turn results in marriage postponement.

Table 3.17: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by pre-marital work status

Pre-marital work status	Mean	Sample size, n	Median
Never worked before marriage	18.8	961	18.0
Worked before marriage	21.9	2062	22.0
Total	20.9	3023	21.0

3.7 DIFFERENTIALS ON AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Universally, researchers have found that Muslim women have the lowest mean age at first marriage compared to other religions. Table 3.18 shows that Muslim women married earliest at 20.4 years followed by the Hindus, Buddhist and the Christians at 22.6 being the highest. In the 1974 Malaysian Fertility and Family Survey, the maximum difference in the mean age at marriage between various religions was 3 years, but it has decreased to 2.2 years in the present survey. In view of the close associations between ethnicity and religion, the difference in the age at marriage between women of different religions might again be due to similar factors, which explain the ethnic differences in age at first marriage. Owing to the spread of modernization, a narrower gap in the mean age at first marriage can also be observed across religions. Note that there are 290 respondents who either belong to other minority religious groups or without any religion are excluded in the analysis.

Table 3.18: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by religions

Religion	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Islam	1843	20.4	20.0
Christianity	98	22.6	23.0
Hinduism	292	20.6	20.0
Buddhism	502	22.2	22.0
Total	2735	20.9	21.0

3.8 EFFECTS OF HUSBAND'S BACKGROUND ON WOMEN'S AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Age difference between the spouses is calculated by taking the difference between wife's age from husband's age. A negative value indicates that the husband is younger than the wife. There is an inverse relationship between the age at first marriage and the age gap between the husband and wife. It can be seen that the women who married to younger men tend to marry later than those whose husbands are of the same age or older as shown in Table 3.19. In other words, women's age at marriage is inversely related with the spousal age difference.

Table 3.19: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by age difference between spouses

Age difference between spouses	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
Less than zero	211	24.4	25.0
0 – 5 years	1583	21.6	22.0
6 –10 years	768	19.5	19.0
More than 10 years	294	18.7	18.0
Total	2856 ^a	20.9	21.0

^a 169 of the respondents' husbands did not reveal their ages at their wives' first marriage hence their corresponding age differences were not able to be calculated.

There is a positive relationship between age at first marriage and the educational attainment of the husband, as shown in Table 3.20. This may be explained by the fact that these couples would meet when they were pursuing their studies. Those with higher education tend to choose partners with similar interest and intellectual levels. For men with no formal education, they would also choose women who normally do not pursue higher learning. Therefore the women who married men who are not educated would tend to be young and uneducated too.

Table 3.20: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by husband's education levels

Husband's education level	Sample size, n	Mean	Median
No formal education	112	18.8	18.0
Primary	1249	19.8	19.0
Secondary	1248	21.7	22.0
Tertiary	293	23.3	24.0
Total	2902	21.0	21.0

Looking at the pairing of couples according to their educational levels in Table 21, educational effects are seen as a strong differentiating factor for age at first marriage. Uneducated couple compared to a couple where both are highly educated has a difference of about six years between them.

Table 3.21: Mean age at first marriage among Malaysian women aged 30 years and over who married before age 30 years by respondent's and husband's education levels

Respondent's education level	Husband's education level	Sample size, n	Mean
No formal education	No formal education	59	18.4
	Primary	164	19.4
	Secondary	43	19.7
	Tertiary	2*	19.0
Primary	No formal education	46	19.1
	Primary	838	19.5
	Secondary	420	20.8
	Tertiary	16*	21.7
Secondary	No formal education	6*	21.2
	Primary	243	21.1
	Secondary	729	22.2
	Tertiary	139	22.7
Tertiary	No formal education	-	-
	Primary	4*	22.5
	Secondary	55	24.3
	Tertiary	136	24.2