

Inequality at Play in Community: Stigmatization of and Discrimination against Older Ever- single (Wo)Men

(Ketidaksamaan Layanan Dalam Komuniti:
Stigma Dan Diskriminasi Terhadap Individu Berusia Yang Tidak Pernah
Berkahwin)

NOOR AZIMA AHMAD & JARIAH MASUD

Institute of Gerontology, Universiti Putra Malaysia
Email: azim7@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article discusses inequality faced by the ever-singles which is common yet generally unrecognized as such. While both ever-single men and women face inequality because of their marital status, it is essentially prevalent among women past marriageable age due to societal gender norms and expectations. Thus, the focus is on ever-single women's experiences. The article lays the historical path towards gender equality and provides a brief theoretical outlook on why inequality towards women is pervasive, and why sometimes it is condoned by the community. Inequality is discussed in relation to stigma and discrimination (or singlism) posed upon the ever-singles men and women in daily life. Examples of stigma and discrimination towards this specific group are presented.

Keywords: *Inequality, ever-single, women, stigma and discrimination, aging.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membincangkan kewujudan ketidaksamaan layanan yang sering berlaku terhadap mereka yang tidak berkahwin. Walaupun kedua-dua golongan lelaki dan wanita menghadapi ketidaksamaan layanan akibat status perkahwinan, wanita selepas umur yang layak berkahwin lebih terdedah kepada perkara ini berikutan dengan kebiasaan dan ekspektasi gender dalam kalangan masyarakat. Sehubungan itu, penekanan perbincangan adalah kepada pengalaman golongan wanita yang tidak berkahwin. Sejarah perjuangan ke arah kesaksamaan gender, berserta asas teori yang boleh menjelaskan mengapa ketidaksamaan gender sering berlaku, dan

mengapa adakalanya perkara ini dibenarkan oleh masyarakat dibincangkan. Ketidaksamaan diketengahkan berasas kepada stigma dan diskriminasi (atau singlism) yang dihadapi dalam kehidupan seharian oleh mereka yang tidak berkahwin. Contoh-contoh stigma dan diskriminasi terhadap golongan ini akan dikemukakan.

Kata kunci: Ketidaksamaan, tidak pernah berkahwin, stigma dan diskriminasi, berusia

Introduction

Despite the increasing number of ever-single women and men all over the world, many books on family and community issues have forgotten to include discussions on them because remaining unmarried is still viewed as ‘deviant’ (Allen & Pickett, 1987). Generally, singlehood is not accepted as the normal human life cycle (Haber, 2006). To address gaps of knowledge in this specific area, many researchers are starting to focus their attention on the group. In March of 2010, two researchers announced findings on ever-single women entitled “I’m a Loser, I’m Not Married, Let’s All Just Look at Me”. Needless to say, the catchy title and the scant abstract provided in the press release went viral overnight. Many women (and very few men), majority of whom were themselves singles, vented their anger and frustration at the whole idea of yet another demeaning article on single women. Months went by before the article was finally published with a more lucid title “I’m a Loser, I’m Not Married, Let’s All Just Look at Me”: Ever-Single Women’s Perceptions of Their Social Environment” (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Only then did people realise the title partly originated from one of the 32 respondents’ own words on how she saw herself as an ever-single woman.

The next questions arise: Why did it become so hotly-debated? Are single women so very sensitive of their marital (or rather, the non-marital) state? Or is there more to that status? Does that marital status come with extra baggage such as inequality of treatment towards the unmarried? One would tend to ask, why is that only the single *women* are seen as ‘losers’? By logic, aren’t single *men* ‘losers’, as well? Why until now there is hardly even one study on single men’s thoughts and perceptions of their singlehood? The best answer to that, according to Levitt (2010) is because single men are seen as free to do what they want, including staying outside of wedlock.

Studies show that even with the ever-growing numbers of single men and women, singles are still being marginalized (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). The present discussion touches both on men and women. However, literatures confirm that great majority of stigma and discrimination involved women: singles or otherwise (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Sharifah Zarah, 2005; Falk, 2001). Thus, ‘she’ is very much the appropriate pronoun when victim

of marital-status stigma is discussed, just as in many other types of gender violence and discrimination. On hand is the issue of being stigmatized against by the community because of their sex, age and marital status. Hence, certain parts of the discussion will focus entirely on women. The discussion begins with history of the struggles towards gender equality and the fight to end discrimination against women. It follows by some related theories that could explain the phenomenon of stigmatization against single women (widowed, divorced or ever-single), especially the ever-single women by defining stigma and how stigmatization would eventually leads to discrimination. Some examples of the instances of stigmatization of and discrimination against single men and women, both globally and locally will then presented. These will be followed by arguments of why it is important for the whole community to be aware of these stigma and discrimination. The terms 'ever-single', 'single' and 'never-married' are used interchangeably in this article.

The Long Struggle Towards Gender Equality

The issues of gender equality and equity have been discussed and fought for long and hard before the United Nations (UN) conferences started focusing on the need to give recognition to women's contributions, both in the public and private spheres (Sharifah Zarah, 2005). The first International Conference on Women in Mexico City or the Conference of the International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975 was the historic event that produced the fundamental international public policy to mainstream and address the unequal treatment of women. Following that momentous year, many more initiatives were undertaken by the UN to rectify the gender imbalances. Women all over the world rejoiced the introduction of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Copenhagen in 1980. This is because Article 1 of CEDAW (1979:1) defines discrimination against women as:

“...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their **marital status**, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or other fields”.

(Emphasis added)

However, many signatories of CEDAW seem to have forgotten the group with that particular trait; the singles- divorced, widowed or never-married ones - either those who are unmarried by choice or dealt by fate.

In Malaysia, when the amendment was made to Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution to add the word 'gender' in discussing discrimination, no thought was given to the need to stop discrimination based on marital status, and none is given until now. Many people have not given any attention to that at all as marriage is seen the best situation for everyone. No one is exactly the same as the next person even among twins. People have various personalities and peculiarities. Those discrepancies are well-accepted by the community. But when it comes to people within specific marital status, they seem to be treated differently. For majority of people, marriage is seen as a *must* for everyone (Connidis, 2001). One size fits all is the accepted mantra especially when the ever-singles are women over the normal marriageable age.

This is consistent with the development history of women. Even from the early years of civilisation, history has proven that there were many forms and degrees of dominance of males over females. Dominance of the father, especially, has been recorded in ancient civilisations such as the Romans, Greeks and Babylonians (Berns, 2001). Garbarino (1992) posits that gender inequality is the manifestation of the extent of the society's overriding adherence to patriarchy or the domination of the males based on societal definition that men are far better than women. This dominance can be shown via various channels: explicitly realized via rape and physical abuse, or stated in formal policies. Dominance can also come subtly via jokes that women are first and foremost rightful place is in the kitchen or on the bed, good only as the reproductive agents and only second class workers. The deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, beliefs and culture which favour men are very hard to dispel, including when dealing with singles and never-married women. The stigmatization of women in everyday life, such as the negative-labelling of singles and never-married women is generally accepted (Rozita & Zaharah, 2009) and rarely questioned. Why is that so?

Some Theoretical Outlook

To present a picture of why gender inequality is condoned and normally accepted, a few theoretical perspectives are presented. The answer to why inequality continues is important to fully comprehend the experiences of women, and is also very important in guiding social scientists in seeking redress to the persistence of gender injustice (Allen & Walker, 1992). In understanding gender issues such as why women in general, and the singles and never-married specifically are stigmatized and discriminated daily, theoretical approaches that could be applied are Power and feminist theories. Generally, all these theories address how inequality takes place in everyday events because of the existence of the patriarchal-based view that sees women as the weaker sex. The Power Perspective proponents believe human societies are primarily masculine and have been built on an assumed devaluation of women.

The status of women is seen less than that of men, and societies are patriarchal because women are normally tied down with giving birth and raising children. Smith (2002) believes that majority group members who occupy positions of power at societal and working arena (whom in many cases, are men), have a vested interest in maintaining the hegemony over such positions. This is done so by excluding candidates who differ from them, including in age, gender identity and marital status. These reinforce women's powerlessness in the family, at the workplace and within the community.

For the present discussion, feminist theories may fit perfectly. Liberal Feminist theory provide the lens to study women's issues (Lay, 2007) and are able to point out that mainstream social and political thought has commonly accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life. In Liberal Feminist perspective, the families are seen as gendered institutions that reflect the gender hierarchy in the society. Family is depicted as the primary agent in which gender socialization are undertaken. Within the families, proponents of this theory believe that there are power imbalance between the men and women, and changes can only occur in families when the families evolve to be less egalitarian. Feminists oppose the sexist arrangements where men are seen as more instrumental in daily lives and are more functional for families and communities. This is because putting limitation to the roles of men and women are seen as dysfunctional to both, men and women, the families and ultimately, the communities (Anderson & Taylor, 2007).

For Hooks (2000), women are discriminated against as they are marginalized daily especially at work. To be in a margin is to be a part of the whole, but outside the main body. While women are admitted into the work arena, women normally are not promoted to higher management accordingly despite performing better than men as men are usually considered as having the managerial criteria (Naff, 1994). This is the basis of argument for the feminist theories. Acker (1987) noted that feminist theoretical frameworks address, above all, the question of women's subordination to men: how this arose, how and why it is perpetuated, how it might be changed and (sometimes) what life would be like without it. A central tenet of modern feminist theory thought has been the assertion that all women are 'oppressed'. Being oppressed means the absolute absence of choices. However, in real life, many women do have choices no matter how inadequate. Therefore, instead of oppression, exploitation and discrimination are terms that can best describe what is happening to the modern women. In patriarchal society, sexism is structured so that it restricts women's behaviour in some realms, while freedom from limitation is allowed in various other spheres. The absence of extreme restrictions leads many women to ignore areas in which they are exploited, and also lead them to imagine that no women are discriminated against (Hooks, 2000). In the study of aging and the elderly, the feminist perspective can

explain why the singles, generally, and specifically the never-married women over certain age are relatively stigmatized, in comparison to the single and never-married men of the same age.

Stigma Defined

Falk (2001) believes that stigma is usually a negative belief about a group of people that are seen as non-conformers. Stigmas are not based on the knowledge of an individual's character, but people are grouped because of the trait they all share that is acquired through action or has minimal ability to change. It could be an endless number of things, including race, sex, marital status, disability and body size. It is "an invisible sign of disapproval which permits insiders to draw a line around 'outsiders' in order to demarcate the limits of inclusion in any group" (Falk, 2001: 17). The concept of stigma is not new, and throughout history people have been stigmatized and stigmatization is normally followed by discrimination (Falk, 2001). People associated with certain stigma could internalize the belief that they are unworthy or undesirable and consequently have a compromised sense of self-esteem as a result (Bell & Yans, 2008).

Stigma can cause a decrease in individuals' self-satisfaction with themselves and could lead to depression (Rush et al., 2009). In the case of the singles and the never-married, society puts pressure on unmarried people to conform and engage themselves into a marriage (Wulf, 2000). Individuals may suffer psychologically because they are not getting married around the same age of others that they know, thus not fitting into the accepted societal norms. Consequently, being stigmatized includes being ostracised, belittled, and disempowered (Bell & Yan, 2008). Through stigmatization, norms and what is morally correct is developed and adhered to by the community. Stigmatized individuals are judged by others and looked down upon because they are different or because of the specific situation that they are in (Koro-Ljungberg & Bussing, 2009). It can be manifested and displayed in many ways including using demeaning terms in languages, and quite effectively via the media. *Sex and the City*, the hugely-followed television series is a good example of how the single women are pictured as the ultimate husband-hunters. More prominently as mentioned above, stigma can be displayed via terms and languages, and via actions against others. A single woman is generally considered pitiful, unwanted and sad. As they become older, single women are generally seen as cold and lonely old spinsters (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

This perception goes way back in the history of mankind. Single women including widows and divorcees in the 17th century were seen as corrupted and caused trouble, and the middle-aged ones were normally

considered as witches. These women therefore needed to be excluded from society, even hanged for their lack of husbands (Chambers-Schiller, 1984). By the 19th century, women started to be seen as a separate entity from men and starting in that late century, women themselves saw being single as an option because of the greater work opportunities. However, marriage is still seen as the widely-appropriate place for an adult woman (Maeda, 2006). While the situation has greatly improved from the witch-hanging days, these related beliefs are still rampant.

Stigmatization And Discrimination Of Ever-Single (Wo)Men

Singlism is the term coined by DePaulo and Morris (2005) in describing the stigma and discrimination attached to the never-married (men and women). It takes place where pervasive ideology of marriage and family is manifested in everyday thoughts, interactions, laws, and social policies that favour couples over singles (Sharp & Ganong, 2011; DePaulo, 2006; DePaulo & Morris, 2005). These incidents are mostly gone unrecognized as stigma and discrimination. Even with the increasing numbers of singles throughout the world, studies continuously show that being single is seen as a negative status (DePaulo & Morris, 2006) where traditionally,

“... singleness has operated as a marginalised status while heterosexual couples have occupied a privileged position that confers upon its inhabitants a range of social, economic and symbolic rewards”

(Budgeon, 2008:301).

Researchers believe that *singlism* is pervasive in America because of the strong ideology of marriage and family pathways (Calasanti, 2008; DePaulo and Morris, 2005). The same could be said to Malaysia, as almost all religious and cultural traditions in the Asian region have influenced the way a society socialized women to be shy, unassertive and obedient to men. Asian women are generally socialized to be unassertive, always soft-spoken and proper in any conduct (Mi, 1984). Malay women, in particular, are raised to be passive and traditionally seen as second class citizens who enjoy flirting, but Malay men are often viewed otherwise (Badriyah, 1988). Any patriarchal society views marriage and motherhood as still crucial phases in a woman's life (Maeda, 2006). This is more so among Muslims in Malaysia, as the Islamic teachings promote marriages (Rozita & Zaharah, 2009). Hence, ever-single women are negatively labelled as ‘anak dara lanjut usia’, or ‘anak dara tua’ in Malaysia (literally translated into ‘old virgin’) or the equivalent of spinsters. The same group of women are called ‘old maids’, ‘spinsters’, ‘losers’ in the United States (Maeda, 2006), and as ‘leftover’, or ‘parasite single’ in Japan

(Yoshido, 2010). These specific, somewhat-demeaning terms are missing in any of the languages when it comes to describing men in the same specific situation. Hence, the manifestation of gender inequality at play via demeaning terms in languages.

In various experimental research to assess stereotypes and stigmatization of singles (Maeda, 2006; DePaulo, 2006; Etaugh & Birdoes, 1991), singles are judged harshly by single, married men and women alike. Singles were perceived as being socially immature and maladjusted than the married people, generally more irresponsible, unhappy and lonely. Bell & Yans (2008) reported surveys and quasi-experimental studies where single women were evaluated as less attractive, morally and emotionally unstable, less responsible and dependable compared to their married peers, and single women have been subjected to interpersonal discrimination and given differential treatment. Thus, it is important to realise that stigmatization can lead to discrimination (Bell & Yans, 2008; Koro-Ljungberg & Bussing, 2009).

In another study, Morris, Sinclair and DePaulo (2007) experimented on housing discrimination faced by singles, recruiting both rental agents and undergraduates as participants. The questions asked were: (i) Whether participants prefer leasing properties to married couples versus singles when presented with equally qualified applicants including in terms of race, age, income and occupation; and (ii) Whether participants perceive discrimination against single as legitimate. Overall, the findings confirm the stigmatization and discrimination of single people. Rental agents strongly preferred to lease to married couple over a single woman, a single man, a cohabiting romantic couple, and a pair of opposite-sex friends. The assumption behind the choice is that singles are more likely to be delinquent in payment of rental, less responsible and immature compared to the married couple. As for question (ii), stereotyping and discrimination against singles were not objectionable, even among the single participants themselves who might not even be aware of the stigmatization. Generally, Morris et. al (2007) believe that people are more accepting towards stigmatization and discrimination against singles. This is because marital status is perceived to be controllable or changeable if compared to race and sex, but it might not be true to all singles who wanted to marry yet unable to do so. Hence, the participants thoughts discrimination against singles were legitimate than discrimination against, for examples, an African American or an obese person. The researchers concluded that perceptions and treatment of married and singles are the manifestation of the ideology of marriage and family. People unreservedly values marriage and maintains that married adults are more valuable, important, and worthy than single adults, regardless of other personal achievements, including at the workplace.

In Malaysia, instances of stigmatization and discrimination against never-married are prevalent, yet unrecognized as such. For example, like in many other countries around the world, various tax exemptions are given to married people (DePaulo, 2006) especially those with children. Yet very limited initiatives are given to the singles who are also contributors to the Country's advancement. A scrutiny of the Malaysian tax return form can easily confirm this practice. This is despite research findings that many never-married women are the main caregivers of and financial contributors to their elderly parents and grandparents (Rozita & Zaharah, 2009; Connidis, 2001). It could be deduced from the existing personal taxation framework the existence of the underlying belief where singles are entities on their own and are not supporting anyone else in the family, besides the parents. In reality, Malaysians are still relatively very much close-knitted and have extended family traditions of caring for family of origin, besides the family of creation. Personal communications with several other agencies and scrutiny of their official websites also revealed some of the instances below that could be used interpreted as stigmatizing and discriminating the singles:

- (i) Adoption of children can be done through the National Registration Department [*Registration Of Adoption Act 1952 (ACT 253)*] or through the Court [*Adoption Act 1952 (ACT 257)*]. A married couple can easily adopt a child if they are eligible, but a widow or widower or an unmarried or divorced person who fulfils the strict requirements still need to get a special consent from the Ministers of Health, and Welfare, (The Malaysian Bar, 2012). In good faith to ensure safety and welfare of a child, unintentionally the singles are judged on a different platform than the married ones. It could be deduced that they are judged as not mature enough to care for a child, despite the fact that they are competent enough in other spheres: mentally, psychologically, spiritually and financially stable and may have extensive family networks;
- (ii) While single mothers (and fathers) receive many assistance from the Government including renting and buying a flat in the Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory (DBKL)'s People's Housing Projects (PPR), the never-married ones would find it almost impossible to do so. This is simply because to be eligible for consideration, one has to be married with children, be above 21 years old and whose household income is below RM2,000 (Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, 2012; The Star, 2011). With price of properties soaring in the Klang Valley, many singles are forking out extra money renting or buying houses from private developers as they are deemed ineligible for government-funded housing because of their marital status;

- (iii) Public servants in Malaysia are given housing allowances according to their grades. In lieu of that, they may choose to stay in Government's quarters. In Putrajaya, Government quarters come in various forms: from landed property (bungalows to terrace houses) to apartments and flats. Generally, the Management and Professional group and above are given landed properties which have three or more rooms according to their eligibility. However, an officer of the Government from the Management and Professional group who is not married will not be given a landed property and only be eligible for the apartments that are originally designated for the supporting staff. To be eligible for landed properties as their married friends, one needs a valid reason for example by having a disabled parent living with her/him. This is the standard operating procedure, despite the fact that the officer's substantial amount of housing allowance which is equivalent to his/her married friends' is deducted from his/her salary monthly, or even when there are vacancies in the landed housing areas (Personal Communication, 2012). One wonders: Shouldn't the amount of allowance be deducted appropriately according to the type of housing, then?. On the other hand, married couple may choose to stay in apartments if they wish to do so and later move to landed property when they want to. Is that not clearly discriminatory towards the singles?; and
- (iv) Retirees of the Public Service of Malaysia are also treated differently if they have different marital status. Many perks and extensive coverage including health coverage are given to married people upon retirement and/or in the event of death of the officers, while in service or during retirement. Their surviving parents, spouses and eligible children are entitled to get derivative pensions and numerous perks (Pensions Act 1980, Act 227). In 2012 alone, RM175,467,165.62 was spent on health coverage for retirees and their families (Public Service Department, 2013). For the never-married, derivative pensions can only be extended to legally adopted children within eligible age. Due to discrimination discussed before in (i), not many never-married have legally adopted children. If the never-married do not have legally adopted children, there will not be recipients for the derivative pensions and health coverage as enjoyed by the married people. The philosophy behind extended coverage for spouses and family members is to acknowledge the family's contribution to retirees during their long working years. However, are never-married in Malaysia not supported by extended family members? The question is why the coverage cannot be extended to their chosen immediate family member like a sibling who may be their main caregiver once the retirees are unable to care for themselves? Or, is it not possible for the Government to have a policy to compensate for their lack of family of creation? It could be done by giving them extra perks in lieu of the absence of nuclear family members like

the married people have that cost the Government a huge amount of allocation over a long period of time.

All the above instances show how the universal ideology of marriage and family pathways are fervently and sometimes unconsciously incorporated into daily lives. This is done so at the expense of the singles and the never-married. However, with the global latest trend of delaying and non-marriages, the stigma and discrimination are beginning to be studied (Morris et. al, 2007). Are those practices fair and just? Does anyone deserve less just by staying single?

Conclusion

Flying solo in a married world is hard, with all the perks attached to the married status. It is even harder for those who did not voluntarily choose to be one of the statistics. While marriage is celebrated, rejoiced and embraced, why singlehood cannot be accommodated? It is only just for the singles to be accorded the rights to be treated and respected much like the rest of the married population. Due to the ever-increasing number, voices of the singles and the never-married women should be better heard and understood. Instead of being viewed problematic and in need of a 'fixed', some of these women could be happy and not lonely, and psychologically healthier than married women especially those in abusive relationships (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). The single status could afford them freedom as portrayed in the Oscar-award winning film of the 1940s *The Best Years of Our Lives*, very fulfilling to them as they may have achieved self-actualization (Ferguson, 2000). Marginalising the singles and the never-married group by nurturing and promoting the stigmas and discrimination subtly and explicitly will not be beneficial to any country or society because it would only foster disconnection between this group and their families, societies and governments (Sarbeck, 2005).

Singles generally, and never-married women specifically, are citizens of a nation. Along with the rise in the phenomenon of remaining single among aging women throughout the world, there are specific needs such as having adequate infrastructure to age in place, and ensuring that support and caregiving elements are readily available. The state, the community, the family and the individuals alike are players in making these possible. Thus, specific needs of the never-married should be taken into consideration in the design of development policy, especially as they aged to avoid putting them in jeopardy especially in later life: because of their sex, age and marital status. The increasing number of older women remaining single (with longer life span than men) should be an indicator that more research should be conducted to have better understanding of individuals in this group and the above discussion is an attempt to create awareness on this issue.

References

- Acker, S. 1987. Feminist theory and the study of gender and education. *International Review of Education*, XXXIII, 419-435.
- Allen, K.R. and Walker, A.J. 1992. Attentive love: A feminist perspective on the caregiving of adults daughters. *Family Relations*. 41, 284-289.
- Allen, K.R. & Pickett, R.S 1987. Forgotten streams in the family life course: Utilization of qualitative retrospective interviews in the analysis of lifelong single women's family careers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 49, 517-526.
- Anderson, M.L. and Taylor, H.R. 2007. *Sociology: Understanding a diverse society*. CA: Thomson Learning Inc.
- Badriyah Hj. Salleh 1988. *Kajian jangka pendek USM Pulau Pinang 1986-1988. Kejadian gangguan seksual di dalam kampus USM*. Unpublished Paper. Persatuan Kakitangan Islam USM: Penang.
- Bell, R.M., and Yans, V. 2008. *Women and their own: Interdisciplinary perspectives on being single*. NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Berns, M.R. 2001. *Child, family, school, community, socialization and support* (5th ed). Washington: Earl McPeck Harcourt.
- Budgeon, S. 2008. Couple culture and the production of singleness. *Sexualities*, 11 (3), 301-325.
- Calasanti, T.M. 2008. A feminist confronts ageism. *Journal of Aging Studies*. 22, 152-157.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). New York, 18 December 1979.
- Chambers-Schiller, K.V. 1984. *Liberty, a better husband: Single women in America. The Generation of 1780-1840*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Connidis, I.A. 2001. *Family ties & aging*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- DePaulo, B. 2006. *Singled out: How singles are stereotyped, stigmatised, and ignored, and still live happily ever after*. New York: St Martina Press
- DePaulo, B., and Morris, W. 2005. Singles in society and in science. *Psychological Inquiry*. 16 (2 & 3), 57-83.
- Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur 2012. Borang Permohonan Membeli / Menyewa Rumah. Retrieved on January 4, 2012 from http://eperumahan.dbkl.gov.my/sistem/index.php?option=com_jualan&Itemid=177
- Etaugh, C. and Birdoes, L. 1991. Effects of age, sex, and marital status on person perception. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 72, 491-497.
- Falk, G. 2001. *Stigma: How we treat outsiders*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Ferguson, S.J. 2000. Challenging traditional marriage: Never-married Chinese American and Japanese American women. *Gender & Society*. 14 (1), 136-159.

- Garbarino, J. 1992. *Children and families in the social environment*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Haber, C. 2006. Old age through the lens of family history. In *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (6th ed). Edited by Robert H. Binstock and Linda K George. Pp. 60-75. London: Academic Press.
- Hawkins, D.N. And Booth, A 2005. Unhappily ever after: Effects of long-term, low-quality marriages on wellbeing. *Social Forces*, 84 (1), 451-471.
- Hooks, B. 2000. *Feminist theory: From margin to centre*. London: Pluto Press.
- Koro-Ljungberg, M., and Bussing, R. 2009. The management of courtesy stigma in the lives of families with teenagers with ADHD. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30 (9): 1175-1200.
- Lay, K. 2007. A critique of feminist theory. *Advances in Social Work*, 8 (1): 49-61.
- Levitt, A. 2010. Never-married women in their 30s are total losers, Mizzou study reveals. Retrieved January 18, 2012 from <http://blogs.riverfronttimes.com>
- Maeda, E. 2006. *Exploration of Japanese single women's identities in Japan*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Pennsylvania State University.
- Mi, M.K. 1984. *The world of the Burmese women*. Singapore: Times Books.
- Morris, W.L., Sinclair, S., and DePaulo, B.M. 2007. No shelter for singles: The perceived legitimacy of marital status discrimination. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 10 (4), 457-470.
- Naff, K.C. 1994. Through the glass ceiling: Prospects for advancement of women in the federal civil service. *Public Administration Review*, 54 (6): 507-514.
- Pensions Act 1980, Act 227. Kuala Lumpur: Government of Malaysia
- Personal Communication 2012. Bahagian Perumahan Kerajaan, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, Malaysia.
- Public Service Department of Malaysia 2013. Laporan perbelanjaan Bahagian Pasca Perkhidmatan sehingga tahun 2012. Putrajaya: Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam.
- Rozita Ibrahim and Zaharah Hassan 2009. Understanding singlehood from the experiences of never-married Malay Muslim women in Malaysia: Some preliminary findings. *European Journal of Social Sciences*. 8 (3). 395-405.
- Rush, N. , Corrigan, P., Powell, K., Rajah, A., Olschewski, M., and Wilkins, S. 2009. Stress coping of mental illness stigma: Emotional stress responses, coping behaviour and outcome. *Schizophrenia Research*, 110 (1-3): 65-71.

- Sarbeck, D. 2005. *Voluntary disenfranchised*. Unpublished MA Thesis. University of Southern California.
- Sharifah Zarah Syed Ahmad 2005. *Engendering the public sector*. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.
- Sharp, E. and Ganong, L. 2011. "I'm a loser, I'm not married, Let's all look at me": Ever-single women's perceptions of their social environment. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(7), 956-980.
- Smith, R.A. 2002. Race, gender, and authority in the workplace: Theory and research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 539-550.
- The Malaysian Bar. Adoption. Retrieved January, 8 2012 from <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/adoption.html>.
- The Star. New flats to be built in Segambut, Retrieved January 8, 2012 from <http://www.starproperty.my/PropertyScene/TheStarOnlineHighlightBox/9987/0/0>
- Wulf, K.A. 2000. *Not all wives: Women of colonial Philadelphia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Yoshido, A. 2010. *Cultural lag, anomie and single women in Japan*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Howard University.