

The Role of Domestic Violence in Malaysia's Rising Divorce Rates: A Review of Contributing Factors and Trends

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Abstract: *This chapter explores the alarming rise in divorce rates in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the contributing role of domestic violence. Drawing from multiple sources, including government statistics and recent case studies, it outlines the environmental, social, legal, and psychological dimensions of abuse. It also connects the spike in reported cases of violence, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased marital breakdowns. Through this synthesis, the chapter underscores the urgency of addressing the root causes of domestic violence in order to mitigate its destructive effects on Malaysian families.*

Keywords: domestic violence, divorce rate, Malaysia, gender inequality, pandemic stress

1. Literature Review

Domestic Violence Factors

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the link between domestic violence and the rising divorce rate in Malaysia by analysing contributing factors through secondary data. Domestic violence is the act of direct or indirect violence or abuse (including acts of coercion or preventing or withholding the spouse's access to their needs and rights) that is exercised by a person within the domestic environment to gain control and power over another partner (Anastasha Abraham & Natasha Franklin, 2024). According to a study by (Firdaus Abdul Gani, 2020), various factors could be associated with domestic violence, and they can be divided into two major categories, which is environmental and individual factors. Environmental factor refers to the environment or surroundings, or circumstances in which the perpetrator was raised as a witness to violence or a victim of abuse. These individuals were raised in an environment that normalized viewing women as inferior, and it is fine to be disrespectful towards them. Vice versa, Individual factor refers to individuals with a lack of self-discipline, alcoholics and drug addicts, who can also commit violence since their minds are not in control.

On the other end, there are a few more factors that have been published by (WCC, 2020), such as *Power, Family, Social, and Psychological*.

Power Factor

The individual or abuser is usually self-centred or selfish, who prioritizes themselves over others or their spouse, in every situation, and does not care about others' feelings and emotions. These individuals gain control and power over their spouse or family members by exerting violence or abuse, and make all the major decisions without consulting anyone in the family. They also practice to be always disrespectful and mistreating their partner or spouse.

Family Factor

Certain abusers would have been raised or grown up in an abusive surrounding or home environment. The abuser would

have witnessed the father or mother performing violent acts on each other or the abuser would have been the victim of abuse. Their past childhood experience in a violent environment could contribute to their current abusive act where they have learnt it from their family's violent behaviour.

Social Factor

Abusers basically have olden-day or traditional ideas about women's roles and men's roles. They assume and believe that women always have to obey a men instruction and they are always inferior to men where men are the supreme power. Abusers often cannot accept that women have equal rights as men, and they too have the freedom of speech and making decisions for themselves.

Psychological Factor

Abusers would have psychological issues followed by personality disorders, which contribute to the development of lying, mood swings, sex addiction, or sex violence, and suicidal behaviour. These individuals tend to abuse the victims physically and manipulate them while justifying their behaviour is due to the victim's fault. They always try to blame the victim for their abusive act.

Besides this, an article by (Sanjana Gupta, 2024), discussed about few different contributing factors of domestic violence, including *Legal, Cultural, Substance Abuse, and Economical* factors.

Legal factor

Domestic violence act is treated with leniency, compared with other crimes committed by strangers. Even to this date, in many cultures, sexual violence by the spouse is not recognized as a crime since it is believed that the partner has full rights to do anything to the married person.

Cultural Factor

Since the olden days, various patriarchal cultural practices and normalised punishing and beating women, where they are considered as men's property or assets. In addition, women's behaviour, body, and virginity are often related to family pride and honour. In this case, if any woman in the family believes

to act or behave, as dishonouring the family pride, it is compulsory to punish them as a judgment in the form of abuse.

Substance Abuse Factor

The excessive use or addiction to a substance such as drugs and alcohol, can interfere with normal mental function and lead to domestic abuse. The individual who is addicted to the substance will lose the ability to think and make decisions rationally. Thus, a lack of mental stability and they may get triggered easily, which may lead to violence.

Economical Factor

Lack of financial stability eventually leads to domestic abuse as it creates stress and depression, which interfere with mental wellness and peace. When the expectations and needs of the family or spouse cannot be fulfilled, there is where mental disturbance occurs out of frustration. The urge to solve the issue causes multiple conflicts with the spouse or family.

Overall, factors contributing to domestic violence vary person to person, and it involves multiple factors which can be divided into 2 major categories, individual factors and environmental factors, as revealed in the study by (Firdaus Abdul Gani,2020). Each factor contributing to domestic violence has its own definition, and elaboration about it is circumstances or personal impact.

Domestic Violence and Divorce Cases

An article by (Ming Teoh,2023), reveals multiple cases of domestic violence or intimate partner violence that occurred almost every month from April 2023 until August 2023. One of the example cases that this article published was, in August, a 38-year-old woman was tragically killed by her husband. The woman passed away in Hospital Kajang, Selangor, during treatment hours, and it is believed that the cause of death is physical violence (beaten). Not only in this case, but all the cases from April – August have been done by males (perpetrators) and all the victims were females. In addition, in the same article, Lawyer Rachel Suppiah mentioned, in olden days, the male role of being the provider for women was used to be the norm, where men were seen as hunters and providers for the family. In contrast, women were caretakers of the people in the house, including the elderly and children. Still, the concept has sadly made into a misconception by certain societies as time goes by, where men are considered superior to women and can never be equal. This statement by her best reveals that gender-based violence or domestic violence by the gender males is more prominent in Malaysia, where the misconception of inequality of gender female (inferior) to male (superior) causes disharmony in the family or marital relationship. Understanding these contributing factors is crucial to designing preventive strategies and legal frameworks that can protect vulnerable individuals and reduce the rate of marital breakdown in Malaysian society.

Adding up, last year, an article by (Nur Ifitah Rozlan,2023), a lawyer, states “the second major factor to divorce is emotional stress build up and loss of self-control at a point. This sequence of series of stress will lead directly to domestic violence, followed by emotional and physical abuse of the spouse”. During the covid -19 pandemic year 2022, there was a 43.1 percentage of spike in divorce cases, which is a drastic increase from 43,936 in 2021 to 62,890, as an outcome of

Covid-19 lockdown. (CNA Singapore,2022). Besides this, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM,2023) reports that the divorce cases increased by 43.1 percent in 2022 compared to the year before, with a majority of Muslim divorce cases making up the first place. Out of 62,890 divorce cases recorded by the year 2022, a total of 46,138 cases were Muslim couples' divorce cases. It can be observed a 45.8 percentage increase compared to the year 2021. Other than that, there was a 36.4 percent rise in the non-Muslim divorces, which is from 12,286 cases in 2021 to 16,752 cases in 2022.

According to a recent research study by (Zuraimy. A, Noraini. I, Azizi. AB, Khader.A,2023), states there was an increase in reported cases of domestic violence that happened during the Covid-19 pandemic, the implementation of the movement control order (MCO). This is possibly due to the problems experienced by the individuals, such as work stress or financial issues, because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of various factors such as race, gender, religion, age, and family or social background, domestic violence can happen to anyone. The study reveals the data by Royal Malaysian Police (Luqman Arif, 2021), the highest number of domestic violence cases has been recorded in the country during Covid-19 pandemic. Besides this, (Baharin,2020), states that restricted movements of the domestic violence victims during Covid-19 pandemic could be another reason of domestic violence cases increases drastically. Victims are mostly forced to stay together with the abuser almost no way out, which causes an increased risk of abuse and violence committed against the victim. In most cases, boredom is the primary cause of violence by abusers. It can be observed that when domestic violence increases, the divorce cases increase together, which shows there is always a strong relationship between these two issues.

On the other end, an article by (Bernama,2023). Selangor records increase in domestic violence cases since 2017- police chief Datuk Hussein Omar Khan, which indicates particularly Selangor among other cities, has recorded the highest number of domestic violence since 2017 until 2021, although the rate decrease in 2022, with total 466 cases, in 2023 from January until August itself, the total number of cases recorded reached 813 within eight months period. In contrast, statistics recorded by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM,2021). Marriage and Divorce Statistics Malaysia showed the highest number of divorces, which is 8,939, in the state of Selangor, compared to other states. This study once again shows there is a link in between domestic violence and the increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. Thus, it is important to address the actual root cause of domestic violence, which directly or indirectly leads to divorce among Malaysians. In detailed study of types of domestic violence and the phases of domestic violence that lead to divorce is equally important for the victim to identify and break the cycle of abuse before it leads to marriage breakdown or even death.

2. Methodology

A qualitative method was applied to perform the research, which allows the research to be carried out in an explorative aspect, essential to gather detailed insights into real-world issues related to the current topic of the study. Secondary data was collected, referring to the available but not limited to

books, news, articles, journals, magazines, and websites related to the current research topic outside and within the country.

Theoretical Framework

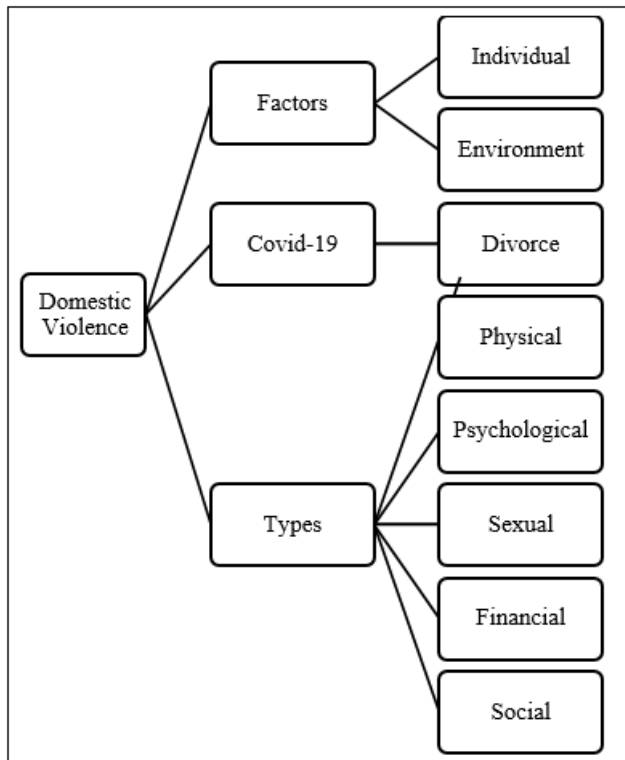


Figure 1: Shows the theoretical framework created based on secondary data

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, domestic violence emerges as a significant and complex contributor to Malaysia's growing divorce rates. This chapter highlights how various factors, ranging from psychological and cultural issues to economic and legal gaps, intertwine to perpetuate abuse. Addressing these root causes, particularly in vulnerable periods like the pandemic, is essential to protect families, reduce marital breakdowns, and uphold the rights and dignity of individuals in domestic settings.

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