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### Positive and Negative Interactions between Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law: What about Son-in-law?

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#### Abstract

Mother-in-law (MIL) and daughter-in-law (DIL) relationship is frequently studied due to its turbulent nature. Conflict with mother-in-law also contributes to poorer marital satisfaction. However, few researchers have included son-in-law (SIL) in their studies and neglected how this relationship contributes to couples' marital satisfaction. This study included son-in-law and investigated the relationships between couples' positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law and their relationships with marital satisfaction. A total of 197 Malaysian Chinese dual-earners (110 males and 87 females) reported on the following scales: positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law, and marital satisfaction. Gender differences are compared between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship. These variables were tested via four hypotheses, the relationship between positive interactions with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction, the relationship between negative interactions with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction, and gender differences in the associations tested. Gender differences were found in negative interactions with mothers-in-law and their associations with marital satisfaction. The results were discussed in regards to the importance of the inclusion of son-in-law in examining in-law relationships and marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** conflict with mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, in-law relationships, marital satisfaction

#### Introduction

##### *In-law Relationships in Marriage*

Marriage is formed of many types of relationships that can demand a lot of adjustments from all parties involved. Traditionally, marriage is not the union of two individuals, but two families among Asians (Huang, 2005). Adaptation phase of marriage lingers on the adjustments that one needs in establishing supportive and nurturing relationships with one own parents as well as the in-laws. According to Landis (1947), couples have to adjust in six different areas after marriage. The six areas were sex relations, financial planning and spending of the family income, social activities and recreation, relationship with in-laws, attending religious activities and practice, and maintaining friendships with mutual friends. Gender differences were reported on dissatisfactions toward different areas required adjustment. A larger percentage of wives reported adjustment involving in-law relationships had never been satisfactory. On the other hand, husbands did not report difficulties in adjusting with in-law relationships (Landis, 1947).

In-law relationship is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction (Wu et al., 2010). In addition, conflict with in-laws contributed to marital stability among Malaysians (National Population and Family Development Board [NPFDB], 2014). Given the important role of the in-law relationship played in marriage, this study examines how positive and negative interactions with mothers-in-law contribute to marital satisfaction.

### ***Marriage in Chinese Culture***

Confucianism is an essential part of the culture among Chinese migrants in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia (Lee, 2010). Practicing the Confucian values is deeply rooted among Malaysian Chinese (Tan, 1983). The Confucian values have a clear conception of gender distinction where women are in-charge of the domestic affairs while men are handling the external affairs (Chan, 2000). How Confucianism segregated the gender distinction is consistent with traditional gender role attitude proposed by the social role theory. Social role theory postulates that gender role attitude is formed in individuals during early year socialization. Therefore, the traditional gender role attitude assumes men as the provider of the family while women play a nurturing role of taking care of the family and child care (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2012). In addition, filial piety also formed part of the Chinese culture and identity. Filial piety is defined as children taking care of their old aging parents. This is an act of compensating what the parents have done to bring the children up (Chan & Tan, 2008). The responsibility of taking care of the old age parents often falls upon wives since women are in charge of the domestic affairs. It is a norm for elderly parents to stay with the eldest son and leave the house as an inheritance to the eldest son and his wife. In exchange, the aging parents expect their daughters-in-law to take care of them, completing household chores and childcare. This traditional Asian family norm originated from Confucian ideals is observed among Asian families (Oshio et al., 2013).

A similar trend is observed in Malaysia among Malaysian Chinese since Malaysia Chinese are living in a collectivist culture society (Hofstede, 2001; Ng et al., 2009) in addition to the Confucian culture (Tan, 1983). Culturally, Malaysian Chinese is a patriarchal society where men are expected to be the breadwinner of the family while women will take care of the family matters (Kamarudin, 1993). Among Malaysian Chinese women, their primary duty in the family is to maintain family harmony and taking care of their parents-in-law (Kamarudin, 1993; Wu et al., 2010). This clearly-defined and deeply-rooted gender division of labor within the family is a distinctive characteristic of East Asian families (Raymo et al., 2015). Filial piety is valued and Malaysian Chinese maintained a lifestyle that is closely knitted with their extended families. On the other hand, failure to maintain a harmonious relationship between family members, especially parents-in-law has a serious ramification. As mentioned previously, conflict with in-laws is one of the main reasons behind Malaysian's divorce (NPFDB, 2014). Marital stability is risked when one failed to fulfil their society's expectations and the cultural value of filial piety.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law Relationship in Asian Families***

In-law relationship is formed legally and artificially through marriage since they do not share a bloodline (Kim & Kim, 2015). One shall not underestimate the importance of the in-law relationship as the quality of this relationship contributes to the health and stability of the family to a large extent (Lim & Lim, 2012). This is consistent with a longitudinal study where discord with in-laws is found eroding marital satisfaction, success and commitment (Bryant et al., 2001).

Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is speculated as one of the most turbulent relationships in a family and it is frequently studied among family scholars cross-culturally (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Conflict with mother-in-law is a common issue in Asian and it was ranked as the third most stressful event in marriage (Zheng & Lin, 1994). As mentioned earlier, in-law issues, lack of understandings between couples, and trust issues were some of the main reasons of divorce among Malaysians (NPFDB, 2014). Yet, only less than one per cent of studies published in family and relationship journals studied

the in-law ties (Fingerman & Hay, 2002). In addition, limited studies investigated in-law relationships, especially across different racial and cultural groups (Fingerman et al., 2012).

Similarly, limited past research investigating in-law relationships among Malaysians is found. However, it is more commonly studied in other East Asian countries such as Taiwan, Korea, China, and Japan (Wu et al., 2010). Maintaining a harmonious and good relationship with mother-in-law is the responsibility of a daughter-in-law because it is closely related to the collectivist culture and the cultural value of being filial and fulfilling the social expectations (Lim & Lim, 2012; Marshall, 2008; Wu et al., 2010). This creates a lot of stress among married Taiwanese women because maintaining a good relationship with their mothers-in-law is being viewed as an obligation rather than a personal choice (Wu et al., 2010).

Conflicts with mother-in-law in a marriage is more frequently reported than the supportive role mother-in-law plays. According to Oshio et al. (2013), they argued that parents-in-law may be a resource for the household production. This is because they may show their support by taking care of the grandchildren and helping out in completing household chores. Parents-in-law are contributing to couples' marital satisfaction indirectly. Lim and Lim (2012) also proposed that some daughters-in-law consciously chose to maintain a peaceful relationship with their mothers-in-law. This is how daughters-in-law are showing their gratitude toward their mothers-in-law for providing childcare help and preparing dinner for their family especially among dual-earner couples. Among collectivist culture, group goals and cooperation are valued (Triandis et al., 1988). Maintaining harmonious relationships among family members are also prioritized in a collectivistic culture (Marshall, 2008). As a result, mothers-in-law may serve as a source of support within marriage among Malaysian Chinese dual-earners.

Social exchange theory posits that relationship satisfaction can be understood from the equation of rewards minus costs. Relationship satisfaction is a product of the individual's expectations and his or her partner's behaviours in meeting the expectations, individual's satisfaction level is high when the expectations are met by their partner's behaviours (Sabatelli, 1988). Among Asian's collectivist culture and patriarchal society, daughters-in-law are burdened with the expectation of taking care of the in-laws. When husbands held these expectations towards their wives, husbands' marital satisfaction might be negatively affected when their wives failed to fulfil their expectations. From wives' perspective, these additional responsibilities may be seen as extra costs of remaining in the marriage. The triangular theory of in-law relationships (Morr Serewicz, 2008) also proposed that mothers-in-law's behaviours such as inclusion and disclosure of information are also associated with couples' marital satisfaction. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the correlation between positive and negative interactions between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law and their associations with marital satisfaction.

Both qualitative (e.g. Kim & Kim, 2015) and quantitative studies (e.g. Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Wu et al., 2010) investigated the association between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and marital satisfaction have reported that conflict in this relationship is inherent. It is also concluded that conflicts in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship had a negative impact on marital satisfaction. Factors such as attribution towards mothers-in-law's messages are compared between husbands and wives. Subsequently, the attributions were used to predict marital satisfaction among daughters-in-law. Results showed that when daughters-in-law and their husbands shared similar attributions on mothers-in-law's behaviours and messages, it positively predicted daughters-in-law's marital satisfaction. However, when daughters-in-law held negative perceptions towards their mothers-in-law, it is negatively correlated to their marital satisfaction (Rittenour & Kellas, 2015). This implies that attributions are formed based on the day to day interactions and it had a significant impact on an individual's marital satisfaction level.

Past research has shown favouritism investigating mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship (Rittenour, 2012). However, conflict with mother-in-law is not limited to daughters-in-law where sons-in-law may experience conflict with their parents-in-law as well (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). The role of the son played in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship should not be downplayed since the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is established through the son (Woolley & Greif, 2018). Mothers-in-law's closeness to the son and son's level of happiness with the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship are found to be predictors of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship quality.

When mothers-in-law are close to their son and their son is happy with the relationship quality between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, mothers-in-law tend to have a closer relationship with their daughters-in-law (Woolley & Greif, 2018).

Besides, husband's supportive role (e.g. Kim & Kim, 2015; Wu et al., 2010) in moderating conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is being studied as well. Direct relationship between conflict with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction among daughters-in-law living with their mother-in-law was investigated and husbands' support was included as a moderator (Wu et al., 2010). Conflict with mother-in-law is a significant negative predictor of marital satisfaction among Taiwanese wives'. In addition, the moderator effect of husbands' support is significant, when husbands' showed supportive behaviours such as taking the wives' side and showed problem-solving behaviours, husbands' support is positively correlated with Taiwanese wives' marital satisfaction (Wu et al., 2010). This finding showed that son-in-law played a significant role in contributing to wife's marital satisfaction. Past studies mainly involved communication studies investigating mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction, but not how mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship correlates to marital satisfaction. Thus, this study aimed to investigate how external family relationship (mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship) affects marital satisfaction.

The direct association between mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship is not studied as extensively as compared to the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to investigate the direct relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law in addition to the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This study also aimed to examine the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law relationships between positive and negative interaction and their impact on marital satisfaction. Gender differences are further investigated.

Positive interaction is included in this study because mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship can be a positive relationship as opposed to the common assumption of a turbulent relationship (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). A mixed-method study completed among Caucasian Americans revealed contradictory findings on the direct perception and experiences of in-law relationship (Fingerman et al., 2012). Four family members from 60 families were recruited using convenient sampling in this study (groom, bride, groom's mother, and the bride's mother). Respondents in this study were interviewed six months before and after the marriage. They were required to complete the relationship quality questionnaire at the end of each interview. The results of this study did not conform to the typical expectations, the in-law relationship was not experienced negatively as commonly claimed by cultural stereotypes (Fingerman et al., 2012). The majority of the respondents in this study actually reported positive feelings in their in-law relationship experiences. This finding was consistent with several past qualitative studies reporting positive in-law relationship experiences (Fingerman et al., 2012).

Studies have examined husbands' behaviour in moderating the relationship between conflict with mother-in-law and daughters-in-law's marital satisfaction (Wu et al., 2010); daughters-in-law's perception on the level of agreeableness of their husbands on how they perceived mothers-in-law's hurtful messages and their association with marital satisfaction (Rittenour & Kellas, 2015). These findings investigated the underlying role of husbands' in contributing to their wives' marital satisfaction. However, these studies failed to address and investigate how both positive and negative interactions in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship play a role in their level of marital satisfaction. Also, the relationship between mother-in-law/son-in-law is not as frequently studied as compared to mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.

In addition, the contradictory findings from past research conducted in the United States as well as in Asian cultures such as Taiwan and Korea further complicated the understanding of the nature of in-law relationship. Furthermore, it is suggested that studies investigating the marital relationship should not only focus on investigating if Western findings can be generalized to East Asians, but unique Asian cultural phenomenon equally influence East Asian's marital lives in a unique way (Wu et al., 2010). Nonetheless, studies from both Western and Asian cultures revealed the important effects of the conflict with mother-in-law on daughters-in-law's level of marital satisfaction. In order to better understand the

relationship between positive and negative interactions and marital satisfaction in the context of Malaysian Chinese culture, this study recruited Malaysian Chinese dual-earners as the subject of the study. As Henrich et al. (2010) highlighted, studies involving non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) samples are needed as most people do not fall into the above category. Based on the previous findings, the hypotheses in this study are as follows:

### ***Hypotheses***

1. Positive interactions with mother-in-law is positively associated with daughters-in-law and sons-in-law's marital satisfaction.
2. Negative interactions with mother-in-law is negatively associated with daughters-in-law and sons-in-law's marital satisfaction.
3. Positive interactions with mother-in-law is significantly higher for sons-in-law as compared to daughters-in-law.
4. Negative interactions with mother-in-law is significantly higher for daughters-in-law as compared to sons-in-law.

### ***Methodology***

#### ***Participants***

Data were collected from 197 Malaysian Chinese dual-earners (110 males and 87 females) residing in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The sample in this study aged from 27 to 63 years with 39.59% of the sample aged between 40 to 49. The mean age for husbands was 45.78 (SD = 8.31) and the mean age for wives was 42.57 (SD = 7.82). The mean years of marriage was 15.73 years. More than half of the participants received tertiary and post-graduate education (64.4%) and the majority of the same sample had at least one child (88.8%). The majority of the sample (75.1%) is currently living with their children while 22.3% of the sample are currently staying with their mother-in-law. Meanwhile, 2.5% did not report on the housing arrangements.

#### ***Procedures***

Participants have to fulfil the following inclusion criteria in order to take part in this study, (1) couples are both Malaysian Chinese residing in Klang Valley, (2) couples are working full-time currently, (3) this is their first marriage, and (4) couples are currently staying in the same house.

Couples were recruited using purposive sampling and snowballing technique. Couples agreed to take part in the study were given two sets of consent forms and surveys. This is a paper and pencil survey. They were told to complete the survey independently without discussing with their partners. No monetary remuneration was offered to the couples. The final sample size was 197 Malaysian Chinese dual-earners (110 males and 87 females).

#### ***Measures***

##### ***Positive Interaction and Negative Interaction with Mother-in-law***

Positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law were measured using the Parent Adult Relationship Questionnaire (PARQ, Pitzer et al., 2011). The Parent Adult Relationship Questionnaire consists of two subscales, positive subscale and negative subscale with four items in each subscale. The subscales measure the relationship between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) for the positive subscale was .76 while for the negative subscale was .82. The items were rated with a five-point Likert scale from one being "never" to five being "always". A sample item from the positive subscale is "how often has your mother-in-law acted



thoughtful or considerate toward you?” The scores for each scale are summed where higher scores on the positive subscale reflect a more positive relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or son-in-law while higher scores on the negative subscale reflect a more negative relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or son-in-law answering the questionnaire. The minimum score on this scale is four and the maximum score is 20 in each subscale.

### *Marital Satisfaction*

Marital satisfaction was measured by the Quality Marriage Index (QMI, Norton, 1983). This instrument requires respondents to answer six items which measure a person’s global evaluation of one’s marriage. Respondents were required to rate the first five items on a seven-point Likert scale where one represents “I do not agree at all” while seven represents “perfect”. A sample item of the instrument is “We have a good marriage”. The last item was intended to measure the degree of happiness of the participant in their marriage and it was rated on a ten-point Likert scale. One was labelled as “very unhappy” while ten is “totally perfect”. A higher overall score in the Quality of Marriage Index reflects a higher level of marital satisfaction. The minimum score on this scale is six and the maximum score is 45.

## **Result**

Table 1 summarizes the mean and standard deviation of husbands and wives’ responses on the variables measured in this study. The Cronbach Alpha of the scale measured was also reported.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities of the Scales

Variable	M			SD			$\alpha$
	Total	Husbands	Wives	Total	Husbands	Wives	
Positive interaction	12.89	12.82	12.98	3.81	3.85	3.79	.76
Negative interaction	6.71	6.39	7.12	2.73	2.59	2.85	.82
Marital satisfaction	33.84	34.04	33.59	6.92	7.00	6.84	.96

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were examined using Pearson’s correlation, while hypotheses 3 and 4 were examined using independent t-test. The first hypothesis predicted a positive association between positive interactions with mothers-in-law and marital satisfaction of daughters and sons-in-law. This hypothesis was supported where Pearson product-moment correlations (one-tailed) revealed a significant positive relationship ( $r = .168, p = .009$ ). When the analysis was conducted based on gender, it was revealed that positive interactions with mothers-in-law is significantly (positive) associated with sons-in-law’s marital satisfaction ( $r = .209, p = .014$ ) but not significantly associated with daughters-in-law’s marital satisfaction ( $r = .116, p = .143$ ).

The second hypothesis of negative interaction with mothers-in-law is negatively associated with daughters-in-law and sons-in-law’s marital satisfaction was supported ( $r = -.146, p = .021$ ) as well. When the correlation was analyzed based on gender, the negative association between negative interactions and marital satisfaction was significant for daughters-in-law ( $r = -.237, p = .013$ ) but not for sons-in-law ( $r = -.063, p = .257$ ). Table 2 shows a summary of the findings.

Hypothesis 3 and 4 predicted that there is a significant gender difference in the positive and negative interactions with mothers-in-law. Results revealed that no significant gender differences in terms of positive interactions with mothers-in-law ( $t(195) = -.287, p = .388$ ). Hypothesis 3 is not supported. On the other hand, daughters-in-law showed significantly higher scores in negative interactions with mothers-in-law ( $t(195) = -1.87, p = .032$ ) as compared to sons-in-law. Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix between the Studied Variables

Variable	Son-in-law			Daughter-in-law		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Positive interaction with mother-in-law	1			1		
2. Negative interaction with mother-in-law	.120 (p =.105)	1		-.373** (p =.000)	1	
3. Marital satisfaction	.209* (p =.014)	-.063 (p =.257)	1	.116 (p =.143)	-.237* (p =.013)	1

\*p < .05; \*\*p< .001

## Discussion

Evidently, relationship with mother-in-law played a significant role in marital satisfaction among Malaysian Chinese dual-earners. The main objective of this study was to examine the associations of positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law on couples' marital satisfaction since mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship was speculated as one of the most turbulent relationships (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Contrary to the general assumptions, both positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law are associated with couples' marital satisfaction. Although not specifically tested, the findings illustrate some aspects of the triangular theory of in-law relationships (Morr Serewicz, 2008). According to the triangular theory of in-law relationships, communication between in-laws and spouses brings consequences on everyone involved in the relationship.

The impact of relationship with in-laws on marriage is not limited to marital success (Bryant et al., 2001) but to marital satisfaction. Both positive and negative interactions with mother-in-law are significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. The trend of positive relationships between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009) is supported in this study. The positive interactions sons-in-law experienced with their mothers-in-law is positively correlated with their level of marital satisfaction. On the other hand, negative interactions with mother-in-law is not significantly correlated to sons-in-law's level of marital satisfaction. As for daughters-in-law, positive interactions with their mothers-in-law is not significantly correlated with their level of marital satisfaction, but the negative interactions with mother-in-law do significantly (negatively) correlated with their level of marital satisfaction. The result of this study provided empirical support on the speculation of the turbulent nature of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. The difference between sons-in-law and daughters-in-law is that sons-in-law's marital satisfaction is significantly associated with positive interactions with mothers-in-law while daughters-in-law's marital satisfaction is significantly associated with negative interactions with mothers-in-law.

Studies conducted in the Western culture prioritized how relationship quality is experienced from the couples' perspective and parental involvement is often neglected (Bejanyan et al., 2015). Collectivist society values the relationship with the extended family, thus putting a lot of pressures onto the daughter-in-law in fulfilling this duty (Lim & Lim, 2012; Wu et al., 2010). The results showed marital satisfaction is no longer confined between the couples, but interactions (positive and negative) with mother-in-law played a role in couples' level of marital satisfaction. In addition, these results also coincide with past findings where conflict with mother-in-law is negatively associated with marital satisfaction (Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Wu et al., 2010). In Rittenour and Kellas's (2015) study, negative attribution towards mothers-in-law's messages and behaviours is negatively associated with marital satisfaction. Wu et al.'s (2010) study also measured conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and how it is associated with marital satisfaction, and the moderation of husbands' supportive behaviours. Taken together, these studies reflected negative attribution and conflicts are negatively associated with marital satisfaction. The results from this study supported the findings as negative interactions with mother-in-law is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction significantly. In addition, results from this study found that positive interactions with mother-in-law is positively associated to sons-in-law's level of marital

satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) suggestion where there seemed to be a positive shift in the in-laws' relationship patterns.

No significant gender difference was found in positive interactions with mothers-in-law. On the other hand, significant gender difference was found where daughters-in-law reported significantly higher levels of negative interactions with their mothers-in-law as compared to sons-in-law. This finding is consistent with Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) speculation where mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is a highly conflicting relationship. The expectations from a patriarchal society towards daughters-in-law in playing the role of being filial and maintaining family harmony (Lim & Lim, 2012) might have contributed to the pent up dissatisfaction among daughters-in-law. Eventually, this painted a negative perception towards the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Based on the findings of this study, it seems that marriage is no longer confined between two persons (i.e. the husband and wife) as the relationship with mothers-in-law was intruding into couples' level of marital satisfaction. Although not specifically tested and compared, this phenomenon illustrates some aspects of cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist culture and their effects on marital satisfaction.

Given the significant finding in positive interactions with mothers-in-law and its association with sons-in-law's marital satisfaction, future studies may examine how to shape positive interactions between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law in order to improve marital satisfaction. This is because according to Karney and Bradbury (1995), marital satisfaction is predictive of marital stability. The negative impacts of marital dissolution are not limited to the couples, but their children as well (Cordova et al., 2014). Therefore, as Cordova et al., (2014) had reported, "relationship health is a public health issue" (p.592). The results of this study offer many possibilities for future research. In addition to the overall positive and negative interactions with mothers-in-law, more specific studies measuring direct communication patterns, social interactions, how an individual behaves, and cognitive variables such as attribution of the communication as suggested by Rittenour (2012) can be done in order to understand the complex nature of in-law relationships. As the findings of this study provided empirical support for how in-law relationships between mother-in-law/son-in-law and mother-in-law/daughter-in-law are associated with couples' marital satisfaction level, future research in this area is helpful in preserving the marital relationship as marital dissolution is observed to be on the rise among Asian countries (Oshio et al., 2013).

### **Contribution, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research**

To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies investigated the mother-in-law/son-in-law and mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships within the same study among Malaysian Chinese. This study provides insights on the interaction patterns between Malaysian Chinese dual-earner couples and their mothers-in-law and how it is correlated with marital satisfaction. In addition, the contradictory finding on husbands and wives' association between positive interactions with mothers-in-law and marital satisfaction is worth further investigation. On the other hand, significant gender differences between negative interactions with mothers-in-law is found and it provides future studies to further investigate how culture might have played a role in couples' marital satisfaction. As an extension, the possibility of a negative in-law relationship contributing to marital dissolution can be further examined. By incorporating these suggestions, in-law and marital relationships might be improved. Inclusion of mothers-in-law in future studies examining in-law relationships might be able to provide a fuller picture on the nature of this relationship. Relationship with mother-in-law has always been associated with negative experiences. Meanwhile, this study reported contradictory finding, the relationship with mother-in-law can be a positive experience among sons-in-law. Therefore, more studies are needed in order to understand if there is a shift in the nature of this relationship. A limitation of this study is its inability to show the causal relationship between conflict with mother-in-law and marital satisfaction and future studies would benefit from directly addressing this issue.



## Conclusion

Working towards getting an initial understanding of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law relationships, this study addressed the positive and negative interactions between mother-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law/son-in-law and how it is related to marital satisfaction. Gender differences were also compared. These relationships were examined through four hypotheses where both positive and negative interactions with mothers-in-law are significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. In terms of gender differences, only daughters-in-law showed significantly higher levels of negative interactions with their mothers-in-law as compared to sons-in-law. No significant gender difference was found in terms of positive interactions with mothers-in-law. Taken together, these findings suggest that the relationship with mother-in-law plays an integral role in couples' marital satisfaction regardless of the type of interactions (i.e. positive and negative). It also incites future efforts to focus on the role of mother-in-law interfering with couples' marital satisfaction.

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