**Editorial Statement**
*Human Behavior, Development and Society* is a refereed multidisciplinary journal that explores a wide range of scholarly topics, especially in fields relating to the humanities and social sciences. It is published online three times a year and is available free of charge through the ThaiJo and Asia-Pacific International University (AIU) websites, with a limited number of hard copies available. The journal, originally entitled *Catalyst*, has been published since 2006 by Asia-Pacific International University, Muak Lek, Thailand, through its publishing arm *Institute Press*.

The journal has the following objectives:

a). To stimulate the creation and synthesis of beneficial information, as well as its broad dissemination, especially in the varied fields of the humanities and social sciences,

b). To foster a deeper understanding regarding the impact of business policies and practices on society, and

c). To promote the adoption of best practices in communities through education, and to aid in the resolution of community issues for the betterment of society; this represents the development aspect referred to in its name.

**Editorial Objectives**
The editorial objectives are to advance knowledge through use of classical–or the creation of innovative–methods of investigation, and to foster the examination of cross-cultural issues to increase mutual understandings among diverse social groups. Encouraging cooperative studies and scholarly exchange across borders, as well as within Thailand, remains one of its aims. The application of theoretical considerations to the field, business, or community situations is also an outcome that is sought.

**Journal Positioning**

The journal is broadly based and has the potential to impact thinking and practices across a range of subject areas, dealing with substantive issues that arise in both developing and developed countries. It will likely appeal to readers with a broad appreciation of the social issues facing organizations, communities, and governments operating under varied challenges and constraints. Its contents are meant to appeal to both the academic community and practitioners in numerous areas of interest.

The positioning of the journal means that a variety of topics is covered in most issues. These, in turn, differ in their philosophical content, academic appeal, and practical implications.

**Appropriate Content**

The journal covers a broad spectrum of topics. These include, but are not limited to, anthropology, allied health focused on community issues and health education, education from the primary to the tertiary levels, literature, language use and acquisition, business, management, finance, geography, psychology, social sciences, philosophy, and theology. Review essays and seminar/forum papers are also accepted when appropriately focused. Well-executed studies that address interesting and significant topics in the areas mentioned above are particularly welcomed. All articles accepted should make significant contributions to understanding and add to the corpus of knowledge in their respective fields.

The following constitutes a partial list of topics that are considered potentially suitable for publication:

1. Applied linguistic or linguistic studies that examine issues related to communication, language pedagogy and use, as well as theories and meaning of language.
2. Religious or biblical studies that explore historical, philosophical, sociological, as well as hermeneutical issues.
3. Anthropological or ethnographic studies which seek to reflect cultural nuances of communities for a better understanding of the society.
4. Cultural/intercultural issues and diversity, including how tensions involving these parameters might be handled to achieve social justice and acceptance.
5. Review articles or studies in the fields of marketing, business, stock market trading, and auditing practices, and their significance to the business and broader community.
6. Organizational behavior, resilience, and the creation of a positive psychological work environment and job satisfaction.
7. Teaching strategies, interventions, assessment, and other issues to the betterment of society.
8. Policies and political movements, and their impact on educational development.
9. Violence, discrimination, and marginalization: how these issues are viewed in contemporary society, and the factors contributing to their emergence.
10. Social trends in addictive behavior; how to address such issues creatively.
11. Impact of specific policies and interventions on health care, including how to promote positive health outcomes in communities.
12. Innovative and cost-effective approaches to health care and education in poor, rural communities.

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**From the Editor**

*Human Behavior, Development and Society (HBDS)* is an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Asia-Pacific International University (AIU). *HBDS* publishes findings and discussions regarding most aspects of human behavior, development, and society. The journal's scope is to advance knowledge through the use of classical methods of investigation and to foster the examination of cross-cultural issues that increase mutual understanding among diverse social groups within the international community, with a particular emphasis on Southeast Asia. All articles in the journal are indexed with the Thai-Journal Citation Index Centre (TCI) and with the EBSCO database. The editorial team is committed to maintaining meticulous peer-review standards and the highest level of ethical integrity, ensuring consistency and scientific rigor in each research article.

This issue of HBDS is the first issue of 2022. It contains 10 articles, seven of which were written by researchers external to the university, and three that were authored by AIU researchers. We are delighted to see reports and findings from various disciplines including business, education, psychology, religion, and sociology. All articles in this issue reflect studies conducted in Asian contexts, including China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Palestine, and Thailand. We hope that this issue of HBDS will contribute to the development of society and serve as a source of information for various academic fields and research projects.

We would like to invite our readers to publish your valuable papers with us. More information may be found on our website, *https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hbds*. We also appreciate comments or suggestions from you to help us improve the journal. Finally, we appreciate the hard work of authors, reviewers, editorial board members, executive board members, and journal staff members who have contributed to make this achievement a reality.


Assistant Professor Dr. Damrong Sattayawaksakul, Editor

*Human Behavior, Development and Society*

Asia-Pacific International University

# Studying Families in Southeast Asia: Exploring Polygamy and Its Dynamics in Indonesia

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## Abstract

As one of the most fundamental parts of social structure, marriage significantly influences society. In Indonesia, the complexity of issues in a marriage is increased considerably by the practice of polygamy. Historically, polygamy has been a part of Indonesian society. Nonetheless, as Indonesia progresses to become more democratic society, women's rights in polygamous households has become a topic of tension among Indonesians. The effort to address women's rights in polygamy is confronted with a sensitive hurdle due to the close association of polygamy with religious beliefs, particularly within Islam. As defined by the faith, polygamy was designed to be the social welfare protection system for a widow and her children. However, the modern practice has deviated from its original intention and is at risk of harming women's rights. As such, establishing a broader perspective of polygamy with an approach that leans more towards accepting Indonesian plurality and tolerance is critical for protecting women's rights.

**Keywords:** *Polygamy, women's rights, marriage, Indonesia, family studies*

## Introduction

Marriage remains a critical foundation of societies across the world, including in Indonesia. For example, Indonesians tend to perceive that being unmarried, especially when a person is at their productive age, as something that is against the cultural norm (Himawan et al., 2018). Conversely, weddings are often celebrated grandiosely to express the importance of marriage in a person's life. Even a conversation with strangers often will start with questions about family, with an emphasis on the number of children and time since a couple got married. At the national level, family relationships are regarded as a significant issue, as seen through one of Indonesia's most important legal papers, the *Kartu Keluarga* (Family Welfare Card), which records family linkages.

Like marriage, religion is another critical part of Indonesian society. In almost every area of Indonesian social life, religion has a special place that others cannot replace. For instance, a political candidate's religious background alone can be the most crucial factor determining their chance of being elected despite questionable leadership qualities (Sumaktoyo, 2021). This is an example of how intertwined religion is with the functions of Indonesian society.

Therefore, Indonesians face a tough dilemma when marriage and religion are combined to regulate certain social matters. The difficulty is particularly prominent in the case of men having multiple wives, known as polygamy. Being one of the countries where polygamy is legal under certain conditions, the issue of marriage in Indonesia can no longer be viewed as just a simple issue about the relationship between one man and one woman.

Many at present, especially those who are concerned about women's rights in Indonesia, remain concerned about polygamy, arguing that the practice is unjust towards women and thus requires more robust regulation. However, for the proponents of polygamy, being in a polygamous marriage is often associated with religious beliefs. The idea of prohibiting polygamy tends to be perceived as a restriction of religious freedom and even persecution of people of faith. Therefore, while polygamy tends to be rejected by many western countries (Faisol, 2016), the issue of polygamy remains a tough issue in Indonesia.

In this paper the aim is to show the complexity of polygamy in Indonesia. The discussion is divided into several sections. The first section deals with the historical context of polygamy, with particular attention given to the role of Islam in the practice of polygamy. In the second section, the discussion shifts to the present situation, focusing on the legal provisions in Indonesia concerning polygamy. The

paper explores gaps in the existing regulation. Also, the paper will show how the religious ideal of polygamy differs from the practice observed in society. Lastly, some suggestions are given on how polygamy should be handled as Indonesia continues to develop its democracy.

**Polygamy in Indonesia: The Historical and Religious Context**

Pinpointing the time when the practice of polygamy began in Indonesia can be a difficult task. Based on historical record, the two earliest kingdoms in Indonesia, Kutai and Tarumanegara, did not appear to have adopted the practice. Existing historical records suggest that the earliest polygamy practice may have started in the sixth century of this era in a Javanese kingdom called Kalinga (Kustiani, 2020). Polygamy at that time was also limited to royalty. For example, King Airlangga (Kahuripan kingdom) and King Ken Arok (Singashari kingdom) were engaged in polygamous marriages (Ja'far et al., 2020). The practice of polygamy limited to royalty remained until the end of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom era of Indonesia.

As the civilization in Indonesia continued to progress, based upon the theory proposed by Abdullah et al. (2018), Islam then came as the next influential power through the large migration of Muslims in the thirteenth century. Upon its arrival, Islam went through an assimilation process among the people in Indonesia through trading and marriage (Sunarso, 2018), which resulted in some shifts on how religion was practiced. At that time, the people of Indonesia perceived Hinduism and Buddhism as the religions of royalty (Maarif, 2018). The former placed emphasis on the implementation of the caste system, while Islam expressed the importance of equality and brotherhood. Therefore, Islam and its practice were met with lesser resistance, particularly among the commoners. This assimilation included the practice of polygamy. For example, polygamy was practiced in the Islamic Sultanate of Mataram (Akun & Ernawati, 2012). However, historical records from the same era show that commoners also practiced polygamy (Kustiani, 2012). Such a practice is significant since no similar description is available from the earlier part of Indonesian history. Commoners today also practice polygamy. It is no longer perceived as a practice restricted to royalty. Polygamy is associated with Islam as part of its teaching and practice.

The colonial Dutch power, which occupied Indonesia for the 350 years, set the issue of polygamy in Indonesia on another level. One significant shift that the Dutch brought with them was the opportunity for Indonesian women to be exposed to the culture and practice of marriage in the western world. As they learned from their Dutch counterpart, Indonesian women began to realize the critical issue of women's rights, including their rights in marriage (Coté, 2017). Individuals such as Raden Ajeng Kartini and Dewi Sartika were pioneers among Indonesians and promoted women's rights in all areas of life, including their reservations over polygamy. Kartini (1879–1904) saw polygamy as a threat to women's rights, since women in Indonesia at that time were often expected to follow the decisions of their husbands. Such expectations included a husband's decision to take another woman as a second wife. In Islam, women were taught that their role in life was to be excellent and loyal servants to their husbands and dedicate their lives to them (Dewi, 2012). However, Kartini believed that every woman should have equal rights in marriage instead of only obeying their husbands' demands. Such rights also include choosing to marry the person they loved and not to share their husband with another woman (Woodward, 2015)

Similarly, Sartika (1884–1947) opposed polygamy when she received a proposal to be the second wife of an Indonesian man (Labibatussolihah et al., 2019). Sartika then used education as the channel to fight for women's rights. She believed that educating women would provide them with independence in determining their future, instead of being dependent on their husbands. By having an equal level of knowledge, women may have a greater position in expressing their needs and defending their rights.

The impact of these individuals in voicing women's right encouraged organized movements to emerge in Indonesia. For example, in 1928, an Indonesian women's congress was held where one agenda item was to discuss the issue of polygamy (Qibtiyah, 2009). As Indonesian women became vocal in fighting for their rights, enough pressure was exerted on the Dutch colonial government to

pass legislation regarding marriage. In 1937, the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia issued an ordinance to allow indigenous Indonesian to register their marriage (Trigiyatno, 2011). The intention was to provide the Dutch with the authority to interfere in the marital matters of the local Indonesians. The Dutch, however, made the law only to recognize monogamous marriages as the type of marriage that could be registered (Bedner & Van Huis, 2010). By doing so, the Dutch indirectly rendered polygamous marriages illegal, which brought intense opposition from the Indonesians. Strong opposition came especially from conservative Islamic groups (Trigiyatno, 2011). They perceived that such rules were a threat to the religious beliefs of Islam. Due to the strong opposition, the ordinance was eventually withdrawn (Trigiyatno, 2011).

As Indonesia became independent, it gained the freedom to decide its future direction. Indonesia's forefathers, such as Soekarno and Hatta, had their own perspective in understanding what marriage was all about. Soekarno was well known to have been married at least nine times throughout his life (Suwirta, 2009). Further, though Soekarno did not claim that he was a polygamist, often he did not divorce the earlier spouse before marrying the next. The image of Soekarno as a man with multiple love interests becomes prominent, which was always portrayed in movies and media (Hernawati, 2018). While Soekarno may not officially have promoted polygamy and a law about polygamy was not established, his lifestyle gave room for the interpretation that such a practice was acceptable.

In the era of Soeharto, regulations on the practice of polygamy were resurrected through the establishment of laws regarding marriage in 1975 (Jones, 2010). To ensure a strong political control exercised by the Islamic group, Soeharto introduced the idea of "islamization" in which Islamic teachings were to be integrated into all aspects of culture that governed Indonesian society (van Wichelen, 2005), including marriage (Susanto & Zhang, 2017). Due to this political movement, the marital law of 1974 now contained a specific, written regulation about polygamy. The establishment of the marital law of 1974 brought significant progress to the Indonesian legal system over marriage ever since the Dutch's retraction of the marital law. In Brenner's (2006) perspective, the New Order regime's move to regulate polygamy did make the practice of polygamy much more difficult. In other words, the practice had become restricted. However, at the same time, it was not necessarily beneficial for democracy (Brenner, 2006). When the issue of marriage is tightly controlled by the government, abuse of power can go unchecked. Such situation did happen during the New Order era when the rights of women, including in the issue of polygamy, were neglected (Brenner, 2006).

After the New Order regime fell, Indonesia entered the Reform era and human rights became a primary focus among Indonesians. This focus on human rights issues covers women's rights, including in the context of marriage. Questions over women's marriage rights in polygamy regained momentum as women's rights activists primarily raised it. However, on the other side, certain Islamic religious groups continued to perceive the question on polygamy as a threat to religious practice (Kholis et al., 2017) and responded with equally intense resistance towards any form of force that tried to make polygamy too restrictively.

As such, it is challenging to further discuss polygamy in Indonesia without identifying the role of Islam in it. However, it should be noted that the purpose of this paper is not to provide an exhaustive exegetical analysis on polygamy in the Qur'an, nor does it try to establish a complete Islamic theological position on polygamy. Instead, it simply attempts to provide an adequate understanding of the basic premise of polygamy in Islam and how it influences the practice of polygamy in the Indonesian context.

Like all other religious teachings, the foundation for understanding polygamy in Islam is derived from their holy scripture, the Quran. In the Qur'an, polygamy was mentioned in the Al Nisa:

> And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hands possess [i.e., enslaved people]. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]. (Qur'an 4:3, Saheeh International)

As indicated in this text, Islam permits polygamy. However, strict conditions are mentioned surrounding the practice. First, doing justice for any orphans should be the driving force for taking

another wife. Second, a maximum of up to four wives are allowed for a man. Lastly, if the man cannot be just to all the wives, then he should stay married to only one wife.

The Al Nisa is considered the most distinctive verse in the Qur'an where specific instruction regarding polygamy was given (Sunaryo, 2010). This implies that the practice is not part of Islam's fundamental religious practice, nor is it considered *sunnah* (Mukri, 2018).

In a deeper examination of the Al Nisa letter, Basyar (2017) indicated that a Muslim man must abide by two main conditions in a polygamous marriage. First, all the subsequent wives must be a widow with orphans (Basyar, 2017). In other words, the instruction does not say that men can marry any wife of their choice. Only women who had been married before and have a child can be second, third, and fourth wives. Second, there is a chance for the man to be unfair in treating all the orphans if the man does not marry the mother of those orphans (Basyar, 2017). The consistent emphasis on taking care of orphans suggests that polygamy was designed to afford social protection to women and children when they lose their source of income due to the death of the man of the house.

Further evidence to support the argument that polygamy in the Qur'an was intended to protect widows and orphans can be seen in the following verse:

> And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful. (Qur'an 4:129, Saheeh International)

The word "hanging" was used to emphasize the intention of polygamy that justice is more important than any other consideration in embarking into polygamy (Hasan, 2012). Polygamy is not designed for legalizing the need of men for extramarital sexual desire, nor for the sake of men's domination over women. Instead, its aim is to provide adequate support to widows and orphans.

Lastly, Mukri (2018) indicates that a hadith such as *Naufal ibn Muawiyah* and *Qais ibn Tsabit* mentioned Muḥammad's instruction for an individual only to keep four among their existing wives. This limitation further showed that boundaries are being set for men even when they are already in a polygamous relationship. Such a rule indicates that polygamy is not the license for men to marry anyone they like. Instead, it reconfirms the initial idea of polygamy as the social support system for protecting widows and orphans.

In summary, Wartini (2013) argued that Islam establishes strict and specific conditions for polygamy. For a man who wants to engage in polygamy, he must be just to all his wives. Second, the man needs to be able to ensure the welfare of all the wives. Also, polygamy was established as a way to administer justice in the culture where women did not have any form of protection as a widow (Husain et al., 2019). Historically, polygamy was established for protecting women's right (Baihaqi, 2019). However, like all religious movements, modernization and globalization pose a challenge towards the theological ideal of polygamy. There are many emerging new contexts in society that may not be the same as at the time when the statement was written in the Qur'an. As Islam becomes a global religious movement, interpretation of polygamy is now being affected by different interpretations by various scholars who are either supportive or against the practice (Cahyani, 2018).

**Polygamy in Indonesia at Present: The Challenge of Maintaining the Ideal in Practice**

While as a country Indonesia considers itself a secular democracy, the influence of religion had always been present in society and the legal system. When it comes to the legal issue of polygamy, the constant struggle between different parts of society created difficulties in establishing such a law. Since the religious aspect of polygamy has been considered, the legal aspect of marriage, especially polygamy in law about marital regulation, also must be explored.

The primary law about marriage is contained into a section known as Law No.1 of 1975. Marriage is defined as a monogamous relationship between one husband and one wife (Santoso, 2021). However, the law is expanded in articles 4 and 5 to accommodate practices that are known as open polygamy (Rizki et al., 2020). The main requirement of a man allowed to engage in a polygamous relationship is when the wife provides written consent allowing it (Nasution, 2008). Second, he shall

give an affidavit to deliver the needs of all the wives and children. Third, he must act justly to all his wives (Jaman, 2020). Fourth, certain conditions are included as reasons for polygamy, namely, when the wife cannot perform her duties, suffers from an incurable illness, and is barred from having a child. Lastly, the decision for polygamy must be conferred by a judge in court and both witnessed and registered (Setiyanto, 2017).

The concept of marriage in Law No.1 of 1975 was then reinforced through Law No.2 of the Islamic Law Compilation. It indicates marriage as *mithaqan galidzah*. This can be defined as an unbreakable bond between a husband and wife (Ainiya, 2017). The regulation implies that marriage was intended as a monogamous relationship since adding another wife may break the existing bond and polygamy is an exception to the norm. When holding certain official positions, such as being a civil servant, a specific regulation for polygamy also applies beyond the regular law that includes permission from their superior (Nurcahaya et al., 2018; Wartini, 2013). This is specified in order to emphasize the idea that while polygamy is permissible it should be done according to the guidance of the Qur'an.

While the present law provides a fair regulation on marriage, including accommodating polygamy, there are several gaps. First, in the context of polygamy, the law leans too heavily towards discussing the material welfare of the wife and children. The law only requires the husband to provide income reports to the court for the judge to decide whether the man has the financial ability to take care of all the family members adequately (Ainiya, 2017). However, for a complete family to function healthily, ensuring the psychological needs of the wife and children to be met is also essential. Basic emotional satisfaction of the wife and children such as the sense of peace, contentment, feeling secure and other forms of emotional well-being are critical to a happy marriage. Unfortunately, the law does not cover such obligations for the men to fulfil. A study conducted by Fahmi (2016) indicates that women who engage in polygamy tend to suffer from psychological problems such as a sense of inferiority, insecurities, jealousy, and anger. Other findings by Anggraini (2015) had shown that the adjustment period in polygamous marriage takes about one year from the time the husband introduces a second wife to the family. The first wife went through an adjustment period that often brought negative emotions such as doubt, jealousy, low self-esteem, and a sense of betrayal (Anggraini, 2015). With the present existing law, a husband engaging in polygamy has no legal responsibility to fulfil his first wife's emotional needs.

Second, as defined by the existing law, the concept of fairness in marriage tends to favor the man. The law was designed to provide a leeway for men to engage in polygamy and not the other way around (Nurhidayatuloh et al., 2018). Such a legal position is against the concept of equality between men and women in marriage, as indicated by the international law on marriage (Nurhidayatuloh et al., 2018). Furthermore, a woman's consent for being in a polygamous relationship may be driven by a self-preservation intent and not because of the approval of sharing a husband with other women. Fear of losing a source of income can be overwhelming for women (Jannah & Izzati, 2020). Therefore, calling the marriage off to show disapproval of the husband's decision to get another wife leads to the fear of losing social support. Fahmi (2016) further argues that many women decide to accept another wife by the husband instead of calling for a divorce. Such a decision to stay married despite disapproval over polygamy is one thing that tends to be overlooked in discussions about polygamy law.

Additionally, cultural factors tend to overrule the legal intention of the law. In most Asian cultures, women tend to be expected to be submissive to their husbands (Sultana, 2010–2011). Such submission may include when their husband decides to get another wife. Often the wife whose husband wants to practice polygamy is pressed by society through peer pressure and religious guilt-tripping to accept the decision without much resistance (Rahmawati, 2013). Such acceptance is often expected as part of the wife's devotion to the husband, even if it results in emotional turmoil (Anggraini, 2015).

In the context of justice, it is often argued that the existing law does not have equality between man and woman as its basic premise (Basyar, 2017; Kholis et al., 2017). For example, while men can legally marry another wife if the first is physically disabled or not able to provide an offspring, it is not possible for a woman to do so (Alkhanif, 2019).

Therefore, Hafiz and Lestari (2019) pointed out that the challenge of polygamy in Indonesia is somewhat located at the practical level. As discussed earlier, sufficient effort has been given to address its theological and legal issues and on paper, polygamy can have its place in Indonesian society. However, when it comes to its practice in the society, the gap between what is ideal as written in the Qur'an and how scholars interpret it and with what is practiced tends to be wide.

To provide some data on how polygamy is practiced in Indonesia, several case studies have been recorded. For example, among the Madurese community, cultural influences give unique power to religious leaders that encourages the practice of polygamy in a direction not necessarily according to the initial intention (Sa'dan, 2015). *Kiai* or Muslim clerics command a particular reverence in Indonesian communities, particularly among the Javanese (Wajiran, 2018). These clerics often run an Islamic boarding school where many male and female students live together in the school compound. Often female students are expected to provide domestic help for the *Kiai* and his family in their house. Such exposure creates a potential romantic or sexual attraction between the cleric and their female students. Some *Kiai*s will use polygamy to establish a morally acceptable relationship with the student they like (Sa'dan, 2015). In such cases, the community members tend not to go against the decision, including the girl's parents. For them, going against a *Kiai*'s request is considered sacrilegious. It is rational to conclude that such practices deviate from the original purpose of polygamy and are considered a form of power abuse for personal gain in the name of religion.

In another study conducted by Darmawijaya (2019), interviewing several polygamous couples in Cigugurgirang, West Java, it was found that the motives of a man to be in a polygamous relationship may deviate from the idea of protecting widows and orphans. Some personal factors such as fulfilling sexual need, increasing social influence, showing masculinity, and exploring new things in marriage are listed as the main reasons a man entered a polygamous marriage (Darmawijaya, 2019). Also, in many practices of polygamy, due to the fear of rejection of approval from the first wife, many men keep their second marriage a secret (Darmawijaya, 2019). This fear leads to legal and welfare issues that are not representative of what polygamy was initially meant to be.

It has been observed that despite the intention for polygamy to be driven by the need to provide economic support for women, financial problems remain significant in many polygamous marriages. As Nurmila (2016) shows in her study, women often suffer economic loss in a polygamous marriage. These forms of loss of income from divided financial support may even include having to pay legal fees for the divorce if the polygamous relationship failed (Nurmila, 2016).

In contrast to these studies, in the survey conducted by Ahmadi et al. (2019), it was shown that not all Indonesians perceived polygamy in a negative light. Some argue that the practice of polygamy should even be promoted instead of supressed. One of the well-known movements was led by Puspo Wardoyo. He established a group known as the Indonesian Polygamy Society (Nurmila, 2020). In Wardoyo's argument, polygamy was perceived as the legal and safe way to accommodate men's sexual desire that may not be able to be handled by one wife alone (van Wichelen, 2005). Such a view expands the understanding of polygamy from its original protection role for women and children. This view gives allowances for men to channel their sexual desire in a way that is legal (Tarigan et al., 2021). In other words, through polygamy, men will not have to seek for illegal sexual services or be involved in illicit relationships with another women. Furthermore, in a study by Azhari (2021) among an Islamic community in Banjar, South Kalimantan, it was reported that a harmonious relationship between the husband and his wives was achieved when the full consent of the first wife was obtained prior to the man marrying the second wife. Azhari's findings provide evidence that polygamy ideals can be achieved if the practitioner is willing to abide by the existing regulation. In a larger context, groups such as Indonesian Global *Ikhwan* ("brethren" or "brotherhood") perceive that polygamy is the best counter-cultural movement against the western promiscuity culture (Ahmadi et al., 2019). In their perspective, polygamy provides the morally acceptable answer to the issues of fulfilling a man's sexual need in a way that is not degrading to the women (Ahmadi et al., 2019). While data from field studies on polygamy continue to provide further information on the dynamics of polygamy in Indonesia, at this present time polygamy seems to be workable, yet its dynamics remains complicated.

**Polygamy in Indonesia: Future Endeavours**

The earlier sections it has been established how complex the issue of polygamy is in Indonesia, thus requiring a more in-depth look. Issues about polygamy, such as the religious interpretation of it, a more comprehensive legal system to protect women, and its practice in other countries, should be considered in Indonesia's handling of polygamy. Islamic countries such as Jordan and Morroco have adopted a more protective law for the wife whose husband has a polygamous relationship (Hasan, 2012). In these countries, the wife can sign a prenuptial agreement that she does not want polygamy in her marriage (Abdullah, 2008). Any breach of the contract can be used as a basis for an immediate divorce. A similar clause could be considered for Indonesia.

As Indonesia continues to develop its democratic understanding of society, the issue of polygamy will remain a challenge if it remains to stand on the Islamic concept of marriage alone. Ideologically, Indonesia established its national consensus upon the idea of *Bhinneka tunggal ika,* which means "though different, all remain as one" (Nurhayati et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to reflect that unity is not uniformity. Such an application may need to be carefully planned and implemented so that Indonesia can establish a concept and law about polygamy that is more inclusive of perspectives and culture beyond a specific religion. Furthermore, prominent Indonesian Islamic scholars such as Quraish Shihab argue that polygamy is permissible if it remains faithful to the instruction about it in the Qur'an (Norcahyono, 2017). That is why in Shihab's perspective polygamy debates in Indonesia should move beyond the discussion of its validity (Setiyanto, 2017). Instead, the fact that polygamy exists indicates that marital relationships are complex, and adaptation to this problematic situation is inevitable. In this way, Shihab tries to expand the issue of polygamy so that it is based on more pragmatic considerations than theological ones. Shihab is more interested in its proper, fair practice than in the debate of its existence as one of the Islamic practices in the Qur'an. Shihab does this by emphasizing the need for men who practice polygamy to reflect on why they want to be in a polygamous relationship. In Shihab's perspective, there is a moral danger for a man in polygamy if done from ulterior motives, such as lust or desire for other women (Norcahyono, 2017).

Other Indonesian Islamic scholars such as Abdurrahman Wahid have suggested that Islam in Indonesia must embrace the uniqueness of its local context (Fuad, 2005). Wahid proposed that since Indonesia is constructed from multiple cultures and religions, Islam needs to consider Indonesia's cultural context without losing its fundamental theological position (Qomar, 2019). If Wahid's proposal is considered, one possible suggestion will be that it is sensible to expand the issue of polygamy beyond relying on the Islamic understanding of what polygamy is. It is time to start considering polygamy a unique cultural problem of Indonesia rather than a religious one. Historically, polygamy had become a part of Indonesian society before Islam became prominent in Indonesia. In some regions, such as Bali and Papua, where Islam is not the main religion, polygamy is still practiced (Wajiran, 2018). In some parts of Indonesia, despite having much of its population practicing Islam, the people do not perceive polygamy as culturally acceptable. This applies to the Konawe community in Southeast Sulawesi (Ipandang, 2020). Therefore, Indonesia should reconsider how the law about polygamy should be constructed. Clauses about polygamy in the marriage law need to be considered carefully from the perspective of how different cultures in Indonesia perceive justice and equality in marriage. As Murniati et al. (2020) pointed out, in places where patriarchal culture tends to dominate the social dynamics (as in Indonesia), what people perceive as just and fair can be biased towards one gender alone. Therefore, strengthening marital law with a balanced clause for both genders is crucial for Indonesia, since legal system in Indonesia needs to consider not only the religious context of justice, but cultural factors as well (Alwy, 2018; Jaman, 2020).

The objectives of an ideal democracy, as Morlino (2004) defines it, is represented by freedom and equality. These objectives must be applied to the issue of polygamy as well. As the most basic social structure, marriage and the family unit carry a critical role in building a society. Historically, as explained by Aundra Saa Meroe (2014), family dynamics provide the primary learning platform for understanding democracy. Some models of democracy are even built upon family dynamics theory, such as the work of Feinberg and Wehling (2018).

Further, how democracy is practiced in the family context affects how democracy runs in society. For example, in the study of Miklikowska and Hurme (2011), how democracy is practiced at home correlates significantly with the perspectives of the young on democracy as they entered adolescence. At the same time, Parra et al. (2021) and Nolas et al. (2017) argued that children learn democratic values such as conflict resolution, justice, meritocracy, and equality through day-to-day experiences such as playground activities and political conversation at home. Age-wise, children at the stage of their early childhood education can grasp the concept of democracy well (Moss, 2021). Therefore, ensuring that justice and equality are practiced in the way most beneficial to the development of a democratic society, it is critical to practice these principles in the family.

Lastly, Rinaldo (2008) argued that a strong indicator of a mature democracy is the significant role of women in vital areas of life such as religion and politics. Therefore, women's voices over the issue of polygamy should be given broader exposure allowing them to show their concerns particularly including the issue of women's rights. There is a need to challenge the present position in which women's role in marriage is associated with inferior expectations compared to that of the husband (Robinson, 2006). Often women in Indonesia are taught to believe that their place is to deal with domestic matters (Chin, 2012). Such a perception may not be entirely detrimental, since the struggle for women rights often emerge in such places, including in the issue of polygamy.

## Conclusion

The issue of polygamy will remain a continual social challenge in Indonesia, with religion being a potent contributing factor. While polygamy was initially designed for a noble purpose, the actual practice may have fallen far short of the goal. Through this, women's rights in marriage have been at risk of being abused in the name of religious beliefs. Hence, creating more balanced regulations on polygamy are critical in understanding and accepting women's rights in Indonesia. However, implementing democracy in Indonesia is indeed not straightforward. The tension between religious principles and the democratic ideals of human rights and justice will conflict with each other.

Marriage will remain a fundamental institution of human society. Therefore, ensuring that adequate protection of human rights exists is critical in marriage. As a country, the future of Indonesia is influenced by how the community is built, and a strong family structure must be a foundational part of the strategy adopted. With the complexity of polygamy, Indonesia needs to take a bolder direction in deciding how this practice should or should not be carried out.

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# Homeschooling among Families Living in Thailand:
# Exploring Experiences through a Phenomenological Approach

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## Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of homeschooling families living in Thailand. The study's objectives were to establish reasons for homeschooling and analyze the challenges faced. Ten families participated in the study. Data collection methods included individual and focus group interview sessions. The data analysis showed that parents were dissatisfied with public and private school systems because of the inadequate moral and religious instruction and the perceived negative psychosocial influences on their children's development. Parents also homeschool because of their sense of self-efficacy, which is shaped by three factors: their level of education, their passion for providing a holistic education that includes academic, spiritual, social, and emotional development, and the availability of appropriate homeschooling curricula.

## Introduction

Many parents choose to homeschool due to the perceived diminishing quality of public education and adverse school environments manifested by some students' low academic achievements and poor psychosocial development (Ray, 2013). Other parents homeschool because they are interested in nurturing their children's spirituality. Globally, homeschooling has been growing steadily at the rate of 3% to 8% (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019; Pandurov, 2021). Homeschooling is an alternative approach to educating children, especially for parents who want to take control of their children's education. Ray (2017) defines homeschooling as a private home-based education where parents are the teachers who lead and control the educational process. Learning for homeschoolers involves being in an environment where they can observe, interact, and have hands-on experience with other homeschool families and people in their community (McDonald, 2018; Murphy, 2014).

### Homeschooling in Thailand

The Thai education system consists of formal, non-formal, and informal education. In the formal sector, traditional basic education is comprised of three levels: one year of pre-school, five years of elementary school, and six years of secondary education. In addition, Thailand provides vocational education, which begins at the upper high school level and lasts for three years. Students who graduate from secondary education can either continue in college/university or gain more vocational skills. Furthermore, Thailand offers non-formal and informal—less structured education to provide lifelong learning and increase literacy for out-of-school and disadvantaged citizens (Michael & Trines, 2018; OECD/UNESCO, 2016). Within these contexts, the Thai education system supports alternative formal schooling that allows parents to take responsibility for teaching their children (Wangklekeaw, 2020).

Homeschooling in Thailand was legalized in 1992, and a law was passed in 2004 which gave families permission to homeschool. Parents must apply for permission to homeschool and are subject to an annual assessment. In 2007, Thailand's educational law under the constitution of Sections 49 and 50 permitted organizations or the private sector to offer alternative education. The policy includes child-centered learning experiences, and focuses on family and culture as the central pillars of learning. Since legalizing homeschooling, the number of families who are teaching their children at home has increased. More families are recognizing that homeschooling is a viable formal education alternative that meets the educational needs of their children (Chansaengsee et al., 2017). In 2015 there were 100 homeschooling parents (Kitcharoen, 2015). This increased to 474 homeschooling parents in the

following year (Office of Basic Education Commission, 2016). This increase reflects parents' interest in teaching their children at home.

### Determining Factors for Homeschooling

The determining factors for homeschooling vary from one family to another (Wearne, 2016). Nonetheless, the following are several general determinants that have been reported in studies across the globe: a) Parents' dissatisfaction with public school systems (Butcher, 2019; Kritiyapichartkul, 2003; Neuman, 2018); b) the benefits of homeschooling in providing children with a holistic education (Brewer & Lubinski, 2017; Rahma et al., 2018; Ray, 2021); and c) Parental motivation to homeschool (Ray, 2017; Engchun et al., 2017).

### Parents' Dissatisfaction with Public Schools

Some parents are dissatisfied with how the public school system educates their children (Butcher, 2019; Neuman, 2018), the quality of academic education, and their children's safety (Dumas, et al., 2005). Findings from the National Household Education Surveys Program conducted in the USA reveal that parents' most important reason for homeschooling in 2012 and 2016 was their concern about the school environment itself (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2022). The second highest reason in 2016 was the desire to provide moral instruction, and the third was dissatisfaction with academic instruction. In 2019, these concerns were still evident. Bullying is another concern for parents because it causes ill mental health and emotional disturbances. Recent media reports tell of many instances where children subjected to bullyingeventually committed suicide. A study of 221 Columbian children and adolescents revealed that bullied children become depressed, which explained "between 25% to 41% of the variance in suicide attempts" (Gómez-Tabares, 2021, p. 259).

In addition, parents perceive that schooling systems do not provide sufficient grounds for moral education or quality academic education due to poor learning conditions, including large class sizes with the teacher-student ratios of 1:25 or 1:30. Furthermore, teachers lack appropriate strategies for managing the diverse needs of students in large classes or those with special needs (Dumas, et al., 2005). Unfortunately, instructional methods are predominantly teacher-centered, and are not conducive to teaching critical thinking or problem-solving (Kaewdang, 1998; Kritiyapichartkul, 2003). Other parents are concerned with negative peer socialization in schools, leading to student depression (Schwartz et al., 2012) and experimentation with drugs (McCabe et al., 2007).

### The Benefits of Homeschooling

Homeschooling offers numerous advantages for cognitive, psychosocial, and physical wellbeing. The literature shows that children who are homeschooled generally earned high grades. A meta-analysis of homeschooling studies on academic achievement conducted by Ray (2017) in the USA showed that homeschooled children scored higher than public school students in academic, social, and emotional skills by 15% to 30%, with 50% being the average public school percentile (Brewer & Lubinski, 2017, Ray, 2021). Homeschooled children also had an advantage over those in public school in cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development (Bennet et al., 2019; Ray 2021). A meta-analysis of homeschool peer-reviewed studies reveals that 87% of the studies on social-emotional and psychological development showed that homeschool students performed significantly better than those in conventional schools (Ray, 2017). Consequently, many parents have concluded that teaching their children is a task that they should undertake.

Many parents believe that they have a responsibility to train children to be emotionally intelligent. Emotional intelligence refers to feelings for and about other people, objects, situations, and experiences. Children develop emotionally when parents pay attention to their children based on one-on-one interactions that produce a healthy, stable emotional environment (Rahma et al., 2018). Saarni (2011) argues that homeschooled children are likely emotionally stable and considerate of other people's feelings.

Furthermore, learning at home protects children from being bullied, a trend found in many schools, and provides a measure of safety for children (Brewer & Lubienski, 2017). Homeschooling also reduces children's negative behavior. Parents can monitor their children's interactions with others and TV viewing, which increases aggression and violence (Natwarsinh, 2019).

In addition, some studies have shown that Christian parents find it advantageous to homeschool their children because they can instill moral values and nurture their children's spiritual development. They believe that public schools do not address their religious beliefs and values. Consequently, these parents desire to get involved in their children's education to give them a foundation to keep their faith in God throughout their lives (Nur Icmi & Suryono, 2019; Universal Life Church Blog, 2015). An American study in 2007 revealed that conservative Christian parents approved of the character development curriculum provided in public schools, but felt that it did not address Biblical values and doctrines (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Another factor less mentioned in homeschool studies is that parents want to bond with their children. Family time with children is curtailed because children spend long hours at school, further exacerbated by too much homework (Marzano & Pickering, 2007; Galloway et al., 2013). Homeschooling is a means for strengthening family bonds, particularly between mothers and children (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Strong family ties promote good moral values and help combat negative influences (Andrabi, 2019).

A frequently asked question of any homeschooling family is about children's competency in socialization (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). In homeschooling, children develop socially when interacting with their parents and the family circle. There is also an argument that homeschoolers have limited extracurricular activities and lack the skills to perform and fit well into a pluralistic society. On the contrary, homeschoolers have real-life experiences in which they are exposed to different situations, identify with people, and flourish in different environments and settings (Burke, 2019; Rahma et al., 2018). Their socialization skills develop in an environment where they communicate freely with people of different ages beyond the walls of their homes.

The social development of homeschoolers goes beyond socialization with others. A study commissioned by the Home School Legal Defense Association in the United States found that 71% of homeschooled adults participated in ongoing community service, which was 37% higher than public schooled adults. Home-educated adults read more magazines than 89% of public schooled adults, and were more politically engaged than the public-schooled population (Ray, 2003).

### Parents' Motivation to Homeschool

Homeschooling is more manageable when parents have a sense of self-efficacy for teaching their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Bandura (1989) defines self-efficacy as an individual's innate belief in his or her abilities to execute and achieve a specific goal. Parents with high self-efficacy have better success in homeschooling because of their aspiration and determination to impart knowledge to their children (Green & Hooper-Dempsey, 2007). Education and experience play a significant part in building parents' self-efficacy for homeschooling. However, the United States National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) demographic data from 1999 to 2016 showed that homeschooling parents' level of education varied. In 2016, the number of parents with less than a high school education who homeschooled increased by 14%. However, the same data also showed that more parents with bachelor's degrees were opting for homeschooling—an increase of 5%.

Nevertheless, the literature indicates that parental educational levels or lack of a teaching certificate were not related to children's academic achievements. Parents were successful because they were willing to learn teaching methods to enhance their children's educational outcomes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In a study of 45 participants conducted in Australia, Reaburn and Roberts (2018) reported that two interviewees lacked mathematics ability, but spent time improving their skills to teach their children more effectively.

### Availability of Resources for the Homeschooling Curriculum

Resources for curriculum implementation include theories that help parents understand pedagogical methods, along with a variety of homeschool curricula and a wide range of teaching and learning materials.

A curriculum's viability and implementation depend on pedagogical theories that inform homeschooling practices. Knowledge of these theories and procedures is critical for teaching and learning. Two specific theories inform homeschooling parents include:

a) Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory posits that cognitive development occurs in social contexts where the learner interacts with others in specific cultures or environments (McLeod, 2018). In this case, children construct their knowledge as they interact and collaborate with others in solving problems. For example, children learn morality or good behavior as they interact with peers and adults. Parents can provide learning activities that promote social interaction to acquire social skills and emotional intelligence (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012).

b) Gardner's Seven Multiple Intelligences comprise linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, musical, and intrapersonal learning styles. Gardner's theory indicates that learning is best experienced when teaching strategies are tailored to the individual's specific learning style (Davis et al., 2011). An awareness of these learning styles helps parents to ensure that they diversify their teaching strategies to fit their children's learning needs. In addition to the theories, parents use various teaching methods and learning and teaching resources.

Parents commonly use two student-centered methods for homeschooling (Duffy, 2005). The Waldorf Homeschooling Method (Dawson & Nicol, 2008) focuses on holistic education for body, mind, and soul, while teaching arts and crafts, music, and movement. The Waldorf method helps children develop self-awareness and judgment (Uhrmacher, 2014). The Montessori Method focuses on the human spirit, values a child's development, and promotes learning through play and manipulatives.

### Statement of Problem

Despite the increase in homeschooling, its implementation is hampered by the following concerns: Lack of parents' experience in homeschooling made more difficult because parents have inadequate pedagogical knowledge (Engchun et al., 2017); parents' inadequate knowledge of a curriculum, resulting in poor choices; consequently, they become negligent in teaching and managing instructional content (Lines, 2000). Furthermore, there is little or no support for parents engaged in homeschooling (Bosetti & Pelt, 2017)

Homeschooling may become a problem as children mature. Parents find it challenging to handle teenagers experiencing rapid physical, psychological, and emotional changes. For example, teenagers are often at loggerheads with their parents because they want to avoid their rules and control. They prefer to be with their peers and friends in school than to be taught by their parents. Erikson (1994) discusses the identity crisis that adolescents experience and the challenges it brings to both parents and youths.

The issues discussed above are common to parents worldwide who wish to homeschool their children. While these may be experienced by parents in Thailand, cultural or societal expectations might differentiate the homeschooling experiences.

### Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the experiences of homeschooling families in Thailand. The study sought to establish why parents homeschool, analyze challenges parents face during homeschooling, and determine the effects of homeschooling on child development as perceived by the parents.

### Research Questions

1. What are the potential factors that influence parents to homeschool?
2. What challenges do parents experience in the homeschooling of their children?

### *Significance of the Study*

While there is a plethora of literature on homeschooling in general, there are few studies on this topic conducted in Asia, particularly in Thailand. This has resulted in a lack of understanding in regards to this education system (Engchun et al, 2017). This study hopes to contribute to the Asian homeschooling literature. In addition, the results may play a role in encouraging government policymakers to develop clear policies for homeschooling and provide better support to the homeschooling community. Moreover, the findings may provide better guidelines for parents who homeschool.

### **Research Methods and Design**

This qualitative research used a phenomenological design, an approach that focuses on and examines the experiences of a particular group, and helps researchers to understand the reasons behind participant issues. The primary purpose of using this approach was to allow participants to describe their homeschooling phenomena and discuss their reality (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Participants included members of ten families from various parts of Thailand identified through a purposeful sampling method. Only current and former homeschooling parents were chosen for this study.

### *Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

Data collection methods included interviews, a focus group session, and an open-ended questionnaire. Interviews aimed at determining participants' views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations for homeschooling. Interviews are the most appropriate method where little is known about a phenomenon or where detailed knowledge is required from individual participants (Ranney, et al., 2015). An interview protocol with open-ended questions served as a prompt, providing the researchers with an opportunity to include more questions during interviews if needed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face over three weeks. Four couples were interviewed separately, but only one parent was interviewed from each of the other six families. The length of interviews varied depending on the parents' availability. The interviews were designed to last approximately 30 minutes to one hour.

One focus group session was conducted after the individual interviews. The purpose of the focus group was threefold: to allow for member-checking, to clarify or expand what had been said in the initial interview, and to collect more data in case there were other emergent themes from the focus group. The attendees for the focus group were three mothers and one father. Because of the different geographical locations and travel restrictions due to COVID-19, the focus group session was done online via Zoom. The questions for the focus group came from the analyzed data collected from the interviews. All the interview sessions and the focus group were recorded to provide a permanent record. Each interview was transcribed verbatim (Gill et al., 2008). In addition, all the participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

Data analysis began with the first interview. During transcription of the interviews and the coding process, memos were written to capture ideas that needed to be explored later. Leading words and phrases were highlighted for easy categorization of emergent themes. The content analysis included a comparison of messages heard and identifying themes. The coding process included repeated reading, listening, and watching for themes, categorizing, labeling the themes, and looking for relationships (Creswell, 2015; Medelyan, 2019). These categories were finally organized into research findings. The findings were verified during the focus group to confirm their accuracy.

### **Findings and Discussion of Findings**

The research findings section begins with analyzing participants' demographics, followed by findings categorized by research question. However, phenomenological research focuses on individual experiences. Therefore, different reasons or experiences are clustered around the research question as themes that discuss the same issue even though they may not be participants' points of agreement or disagreement.

The data analysis of the ten families showed that the participants were all Christians except for one Buddhist family. The participants were expatriates living and working in Thailand except for two Thai families. The families included four mixed families (Russian/Filipina, American/Filipina, American/Thai, and Indian/Filipina) and six families originating from the following countries: Indonesia, America, Philippines (two families), and Thailand (two families). It is not surprising that most of these homeschooling parents were expatriates. Wei and Mhunpiew (2020) argued that many expatriates in Thailand homeschool because they want to ensure the children use curricula accepted in their home countries for easy adjustment after they return.

All the families participating in the study had college degrees ranging from undergraduate (55%), master's (20%), and doctorate (25%). In addition, 60% of the homeschooling parents had a teaching degree, 20% had a nursing degree, two parents had TESOL degrees, and two others had business degrees. It seems from this data that the parents' education level contributed to their decision to homeschool. Countering this notion, Engchun et al. (2017) argued that parents with lower educational levels did not affect their motivation to homeschool. While the data shows that all the parents were educated, the responsibility for teaching the children fell on the mothers except for one family, the father of the children was the teacher. This finding echoes Ray's (2005) findings that mothers are usually the primary educators.

The following is a discussion of the findings related to each research question.

*1. What are the potential factors that influence parents to homeschool?*

Parents homeschooled their children for a variety of reasons, with the primary reasons being their dissatisfaction with the public-school system associated with a) Parents discontent with values and religious education in public schools, b) perceived negative influences that affect cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional development, and c) the need to control their children's education which included providing better academic outcomes, and the development of social and emotional skills

### *Parents Dissatisfaction with Values and Religious Education in Public Schools*

Nine out of ten participants in this study are Christians. The Thanakit family planned to homeschool before they married because of their beliefs and work environment. Parents shared their preference for teaching and applying Biblical principles to ensure the spiritual development of their children. A quote from Mrs. Smith, one of the participants, captures the parents' beliefs: "I want them to be grounded in our beliefs, and for the children to explore their faith ... they need to explore by themselves why they should be a Christian." These parents believed that if children were taught to obey God, they would achieve academically and be moral influencers in society.

All participants expressed their concern that schools might not meet their need for their brand of religion and values instruction. This understanding stemmed from the fact that there are philosophical differences between what are deemed as Christian and societal values. While Christians want teaching of Biblical principles, society and other religions focus on different values (Christian, 2014; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Although values and character building are taught in many public schools in different countries, the focus of religious studies is usually on religion's role in society, but not teaching of religious beliefs (Anti-Defamation League, 2012). In Thai public schools, however, religious classes are mandatory and focus on Buddhism (Ahn, 2021), a reason why some Christian parents prefer not to enroll their children in the Thai school system.

### *Negative Influence in Public Schools*

The parents discussed a variety of negative influences in public schools. Worth mentioning is the parents' perception that curricula offered in schools might not prepare their children to become responsible citizens. Some parents were concerned about negative peer influences and family bonding because of long school hours and homework. A growing concern for parents was the teacher-centered instruction used in many schools in Thailand, and whether their children would adequately learn problem-solving and critical thinking skills in a Thai public school educational environment. Sessoms

(2018) indicated that teacher-centered instruction is prevalent in Thailand, which is one reason why homeschooling is compelling (Chansaengsee et al., 2017).

Peer influence was another issue discussed as it affects young people socially, especially when they form cliques. While there may be some positive effects of finding membership with a group of peers, the presence of cliques and peer pressure makes it difficult to adhere to values children learn at home. Ellis and Zarbatany (2017) argue that cliques can introduce poor socialization skills, leading to misbehavior. For this reason, four families decided to homeschool. One family had enrolled their daughter in a private school but was discouraged by her negative behavior. They decided to homeschool her instead. Mrs. Aaron captured what other participants felt regarding negative influences when she stated, "we decided not to allow outside influence, whether it is negative or positive, to interfere with the values we want to instill in our children." This sentence portrayed parents' ideology and desire to let nothing degrade the Biblical and moral values which are the foundation for a Christian's life.

In addition, Mrs. Romeo expressed her concern about the long hours children spend at school and home doing homework which shortens family bonding time, an issue facing many parents with children in public schools (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Bennett and Kalish (2006) found that family activities, socialization, and leisure time were curtailed because of school activities. School schedules also disrupted family weekend time together. The Thanakit family chose to homeschool because school events fell on Saturday, the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath.

### Parental Control

Taking complete control of their children's education was of paramount importance to many participants. This enabled them to control the curriculum, its instruction, and the teaching and learning resources, pacing children's learning according to their needs, controlling their schedules, and enabling them to socialize and bond as a family.

In taking control of their children's education, participants believed that they were responsible for their wellbeing, a factor brought up in other studies (Ceka & Murati, 2016; Liu et al., 2020). Mrs. Jimmy, one of the participants, summarized their sentiments when she stated that parents were "to instill a healthy sense of security, confidence in learning, and social awareness." It is possible that Mrs. Jimmy, who is a Christian, may have been speaking from the premise that the Bible commands parents to "nurture them (children) in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) and "to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Parents took their responsibility seriously and chose to develop their skills in homeschool teaching. The findings revealed that parents who did not have a teaching background put effort into studying pedagogical methods. Mrs. Gary obtained a diploma while Mr. Somchai researched different approaches to teaching. This finding was similar to Faulconer (2019), who encouraged parents to buy books on homeschooling and to attend conferences where they can acquire specific skills they need for homeschooling.

Furthermore, six out of the ten participants in this study believed that the curricula offered in the public school system did not encourage their children to be independent learners. Therefore, the choice to homeschool was to ensure that their children learned critical thinking skills that would help them solve problems and become responsible citizens. All the parents chose curricula that seemed suitable for their children's needs. Specifically, six parents chose student-centered curricula that focused on practical skills. These curricula, i.e., the Waldorf Homeschooling Methods, the Montessori, and the Sonlight curriculum, are promoted because they encourage critical thinking. Parents concluded that the more child-centered the curriculum and the learning environment, the more consistent was their children's academic progress.

Choosing a curriculum meant parents had to search online for suitable curricula. The Somchai family did thorough research on homeschooling before embarking on their home-based learning, and they found a curriculum that helped them focus on their child's interests. Most of the parents chose a curriculum according to homeschool methods. The Thanakit and Romeo families bought *Robinson's*

*Self-Teaching Curriculum* because it encourages children to be independent learners. The data also revealed that the type of curriculum parents purchased included the literature-based Sonlight Curriculum, the Griggs Online Learning with traditional print-based instructional guides, the Good and Beautiful curriculum, which combines several subjects, and the Montessori curriculum, which encourages creativity.

Nine of the participants modified their curriculum to meet the needs of their individual children. Mr. Terrence adjusted the curriculum to fit his child's pace of learning. Mrs. Smith, a teacher, simply stated that she did not follow the curriculum step by step. Parents' actions were consistent with the literature on curriculum modification. Drake and Sherine (2006) argued that teachers use curriculum adaptations to fit students' needs and prepare them for active learning that fosters independence. According to Silva (2009), the curriculum in the 21$^{st}$ century should underscore the knowledge and skills students can use, and not units of knowledge.

### Socialization

Parents who homeschool are often asked about their children's social skills. Nine participants indicated that their children were competent in socialization and could interact well with people from all age groups. The children's involvement in activities that provided opportunities to engage with other children and adults in the community resulted in a positive attitude. Although parents in this study felt that their children were socially competent, prior studies have maintained that it is difficult for homeschooled children to gain social skills. The Coalition for Responsible Home Education (2022) indicates that parents in other countries who face this dilemma should enroll their children in conventional schools for music, sports, and other subjects to meet their children's social needs.

### 2. What challenges do parents experience in the homeschooling of their children?

Homeschooling, like public schools, has its downside. A significant problem of homeschooling is financial constraints because finances only come from one breadwinner in the home. Parents have to tighten their budgets (Pabis, 2013). However, participants believed that God would provide for them and help them manage their finances. To save money, two out of the ten families in this study used online homeschooling resources for most of their worksheets, educational videos, and articles to compensate for the lack of textbooks. These findings contradicted a study by Dimarco (2018), which indicated that homeschooling reduced educational costs.

Another problem was highlighted by Mrs. Aaron, who discussed the challenges parents face regarding the over-familiarity of older children. Over-familiarity is when a person lacks restraint or modesty due to being too comfortable with the setting, the person, or the routine. This is an emotional reaction of adolescents during their identity crises (Erikson, 1994) which plague many families. Older children may resent parents for forcing them to learn at home. Faulconer (2021 urges parents not to ignore these challenges but to discuss them with the child and find solutions collaboratively.

### Limitations and Recommendations

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to travel restrictions, most of the interviews were done via Zoom instead of face to face. In-person interviews would have provided an opportunity for observing the families' homeschool dynamics. Furthermore, not all the couples were present for interviews. A more complete homeschooling perspective could have been drawn if all the couples had participated.

Parents who homeschool should consider the effect of homeschooling on family finances. The decision to homeschool should be made with a clear purpose and objectives and have long-term plans. It would be prudent for the homeschool parents to research local homeschool providers who are less expensive than those from Western countries.

A future study should use a mixed methods research design to capture a comprehensive view of homeschooling. In addition, data collection should include observations and document analysis of children's academic achievements. To widen the scope of the research, both parents and—if possible—older homeschool children should also be included.

## Conclusion

In this study, homeschooling is an alternative educational system that parents choose for their children. Participants homeschooled their children because they were dissatisfied with the public schooling system. In addition, participants had the desire to control their children's education because it was perceived that public schools would not cater to their preferred values and religious education that were deemed essential to prepare their children for the future. Academic knowledge is necessary, but they believed that a focus on holistic education emphasizing character and psychosocial development must be placed at the forefront of every child's learning experience. It can be deduced that parents' level of education mediated their sense of self-efficacy and affected parents' choice to homeschool their children. According to Ceka (2016), the educational level of children depends more on the level of their parents' education. This statement remains true in this study—all the participants had a college education. Their education motivated them to homeschool and seek better instructional methods to improve their children's educational outcomes.

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**Demographic Factors Influencing Tolerance towards LGBT Individuals among Malaysians[1]**

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**Abstract**

This study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBT in Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were: (1) views on LGBT sexual orientation; (2) views on rights of LGBT individuals; and (3) relationships between demographic characteristics and views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights. Questionnaire data were collected from 413 respondents living in Malaysia (88.1% heterosexuals; 11.9% LGBT). A majority of respondents were degree holders (82.8%) in their twenties (82.3%) and of Chinese descent (71.7%). The results showed moderate tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation where some respondents felt that heterosexuality is best because of religion and morality, while others believed that people are born with LGBT tendencies and need not keep their sexual orientation a secret. Interestingly, the respondents were receptive towards LGBT rights, including the right to organise public events, adopt a child, and have same-sex marriage. ANOVA results showed that age, ethnic group, religious background, and sexual orientation influenced tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation and rights. Older individuals, Malay and Sabah indigenous, Muslims, Christians, and heterosexuals seemed to be the least supportive of LGBT. The study suggests that openness towards LGBT is growing among the younger generation.

**Introduction**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons are known as sexual minorities who represent a subset of the general population. Social acceptance of LGBT people in different settings vary, ranging from acceptance to rejection (Herek, 2007). Acceptance helps in generating respect for LGBT individuals, acknowledgement of LGBT rights, and promotion of equality in laws and policies (Flores, 2019). Rejection is reflected in exclusion of LGBT people from various dimensions of community life (Herek, 2009). Moreover, anti-LGBT stigma has caused LGBT people to be misfits in society along with other negative consequences, such as discrimination and unfair treatment by laws and policies (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009). Whether people have positive or negative beliefs about LGBTs is influenced by religion, tradition, family upbringing, and media (Adamczyk, 2017).

Recently, attitudes toward LGBT communities have shifted. For example, in Southeast Asia, Taiwan became the first Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2018 (Lee & Lin, 2020). In Malaysia, LGBT remains a sensitive issue ethically, culturally and religiously. Some segments of society believe that LGBT culture will affect human civilisation, the family structure, health, and education (Abdullah & Amat, 2019). Furthermore, same-sex marriage is considered a crime punishable by Syariah laws and the Penal Code, Sections 377(A) and 377(B). Islam, being the official religion in Malaysia, also prohibits same-sex relationships (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Mokhtar et al., 2019). In fact, LGBT is often a taboo topic among Malaysians (Cheah & Singaravelu, 2017).

In addition, the Malaysian media is not supportive of LGBT. Media framing studies by Ting et al. (2021) found negative portrayals of LGBT, particularly in local news reports. However, using textual analytics, Ting et al. (2021) revealed that some alternative newspapers and The Star Online balanced negative and positive coverage of LGBT. The negative coverage focussed on the legal, moral and religious issues confronting LGBTs, whereas the positive coverage highlighted LGBT rights. If media coverage is an indication of societal attitudes towards LGBTs, it is not surprising that LGBT

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individuals encounter rejection and discrimination. Felix (2014) reported that many LGBT people constantly face prejudice and harassment in different social contexts. Jerome et al.'s (2021a) interviews with LGBT individuals revealed their wish to be treated with respect and to be accepted on the basis that they are human beings. Religious background influenced tolerance towards LGBT. Yeo et al.'s (2021) interviews also showed that Muslims and Christians are more inclined to reject LGBTs than Buddhists. Individual differences and cultural backgrounds are additional factors that influence attitudes towards LGBTs (Jerome et al., 2021b). In addition, Jerome et al. (2021b) identified relationships and experiences with LGBT individuals as a powerful factor that enables heterosexuals to look beyond their normative religious beliefs to accept LGBT as fellow human beings (see also Jerome et al., 2021c). Thus far, these studies on LGBTs in Malaysia were small-scale; there is a need to understand the prevailing attitudes towards LGBTs on a larger scale, and the influence of demographic factors.

Research on how various factors influence tolerance towards LGBTs has focussed on religion, age, and beliefs regarding sexual orientation. In studies about LGBT attitudes from Christian and Muslim perspectives, researchers found a relationship between being Christian and lower tolerance towards LGBTs (Holland et al., 2013), but others found no association (O'Pry, 2012). Similarly, some studies showed an association between being Muslim and non-acceptance of homosexuality (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Foong et al., 2019; Muhammad, 2000; Özdemir & Büyükgöze, 2016), but Astuti and Kurniati (2018) did not find an association. As for age, studies have consistently shown greater tolerance towards LGBT among the younger people in Western countries (Copp & Koehler, 2017; Helms & Waters, 2016; Herek, 2002; Horn, 2006) and in Southeast Asia (Manalastas et al., 2017), with the exception of Vijay et al. (2018). As for sexual orientation, there are different beliefs on the origins of homosexuality (Sheldon et al., 2007), but the beliefs can be divided into biological origins and choice. Research has shown that people who hold biological beliefs are more tolerant of LGBT compared to those who believe that homosexuality is a choice (Antoszewski et al., 2007; Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Horn & Heinze, 2011; Jayaratne et al., 2006). These findings on factors influencing tolerance towards LGBT were mostly conducted outside of Malaysia. The studies in Malaysia mostly focused on either the LGBT experiences (Felix, 2014; Jerome et al., 2021a; Owoyemi & Sabri, 2013; Sahri et al., 2014; Teh, 2001) or the heterosexuals' reactions to LGBT (Yeo et al., 2021). Little is known about the influence of demographic backgrounds on tolerance towards LGBTs.

Therefore, this study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBT individuals among Malaysians. The specific aspects studied were: (1) views on LGBT sexual orientation; (2) views on rights of LGBT individuals; and (3) relationships between demographic characteristics and views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights.

The hypotheses tested in the study were:

$H_1$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among different age groups.
$H_2$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among different ethnic groups.
$H_3$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents from different religious backgrounds.
$H_4$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different educational levels.
$H_5$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different sexual orientations.
$H_6$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different gender identities.

$H_7$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different age groups.
$H_8$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different ethnic groups.
$H_9$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents from different religious backgrounds.

$H_{10}$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different educational levels.

$H_{11}$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different sexual orientations.

$H_{12}$: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different gender identities.

**Literature Review**

Tolerance towards LGBT people indicates the degree to which the public shows support for this minority group and by "allowing" the *other* (LGBTs) to exist without full recognition of their rights and protection (Arat & Nunez, 2017). In this paper, past literature on the influence of religion, age, and beliefs about sexuality are reviewed.

***Religion and Tolerance of LGBTs***

In terms of religion, past studies (Reygan & Moane, 2014; Woodford et al., 2012) have shown that religion significantly affects views on LGBT individuals. Specifically, Islam and Christianity have been the two major religions linked to low tolerance for LGBTs.

There have been mixed findings on the association between Christianity and low tolerance of LGBTs. Holland et al. (2013) found that among college students in the United States, students who identified as non-religious or non-Christian reported greater tolerance towards homosexual individuals. However, O'Pry (2012) found no association between Christianity and tolerance of LGBT youth among Louisiana social workers, but there was a significant relationship between religious commitment and homophobia and transphobia.

As for Islam, findings have also been inconsistent regarding Muslims' tolerance for LGBTs. In Turkey, Özdemir and Büyükgöze (2016) found that Muslim pre-service teachers did not accept homosexuality as normal, and they also lacked interaction with LGBT individuals. Abdullah and Amat's (2019) study in Malaysia showed that the college students viewed LGBT culture as illegal and against Islamic teachings on God's creation of man and woman for reproduction. Also, LGBT is considered a taboo topic to be discussed in Malaysia's social media platforms, as LGBT values were against the Islamic principles and seen as illegal in an Islamic country (Muhammad, 2000; as cited in Zawawi, 2020). However, Astuti and Kurniati's (2018) study among teenagers from a small village in Indonesia showed Islamic beliefs did not cause a negative stigma and perception of LGBT.

Other researchers have suggested that it is insufficient to study a person's religious affiliation, because it is the depth of one's religiosity that affects perceptions of LGBTs. Ryan et al. (2010) reported respondents with childhood religious affiliation and born in highly religious families had lower acceptance towards LGBT adolescents. The stronger the religious adherence, the more negative the attitude towards LGBTs (Roggemans et al., 2015). Arli et al. (2019) did not study the influence of specific religions on attitudes towards gays and lesbians but examined religiosity. They found that Indonesians with intrinsic religiosity (focussing on a close spiritual relationship with God) were more negative towards gays, but not lesbians. Arli et al. (2019) also found that extrinsic religiousness (participating in religious activities) did not influence perceptions of LGBT individuals, while religious fundamentalism was associated with viewing LGBTs as immoral and dangerous.

***Age and Tolerance of LGBTs***

As age increases, views on LGBT rights become more conservative (Helms & Waters, 2016). This hypothesis was supported by several past studies indicating that younger individuals were more positive towards LGBT civil rights compared to middle-aged and older individuals (Herek, 2002). In Horn's (2006) study, older respondents (aged 16 to 26) were more accepting towards gay and lesbian peers, and more comfortable interacting with homosexual peers in school. Copp and Koehler (2017) found that undergraduates' attitudes towards LGBTs improved with the time spent at the university.

Moreover, in Southeast Asia, Manalastas et al. (2017) reported that an older age predicted more homonegative attitudes in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, but not in

Vietnam. However, Vijay et al. (2018) found that age is not a relevant factor in influencing medical doctors' intent to discriminate against transgender patients in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### *Beliefs about Sexuality and Tolerance of LGBTs*

In regards to beliefs about sexuality, it has been long debated whether people are born LGBT or if it is a conscious choice made by LGBT individuals. People who believe that individuals are born with homosexual tendencies have more positive attitudes towards LGBTs than those who believe that homosexuality is a choice (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Jayaratne et al., 2006). Antoszewski et al.'s (2007) study in Poland found that college students who believed that transgenderism is a natural expression showed rather positive attitudes toward transgender individuals compared to those who believed transgenderism is caused by environmental factors. Eliason (1997) found mixed responses towards biphobia among heterosexual undergraduate students.

In America, Sheldon et al. (2007) showed that participants had different beliefs about the origins of homosexuality, including genetics, upbringing, bad experiences, the influence of other homosexuals, and personal choice. Horn and Heinze (2011) found that adolescents who attributed homosexuality to biological beliefs reported less sexual prejudice towards LGBTs.

In Malaysia, transgender individuals receive minimal acceptance from society, especially from their families (Teh, 2001), with discrimination in the workplace or from authorities (Sahri et al., 2014). Owoyemi and Sabri (2013) stated that transgenderism is commonly misunderstood, with allegations that such sexual orientation and identity are abnormal and unethical. Also, Owoyemi and Sabri (2013) claimed that transgenderism is due to environmental factors, such as contact with the "wrong circle" and lack of religious practices. However, these factors were inferred and not directly studied.

### Methodology

This current study took a descriptive approach, and it involved 413 respondents aged 18–60 living in different states in Malaysia, consisting of 88.1% heterosexuals and 11.9% LGBTs. Purposive sampling was carried out, whereby the first researcher invited Malaysians in her social networks to participate in this study. A majority of the respondents were degree holders (82.8%) in their twenties (82.3%) and of Chinese descent (71.7%). Table 1 shows the demographic background of respondents. Admittedly, the sample does not proportionally reflect the general Malaysian population where the majority are Malay and Muslims, and this limits the generalisability of the results.

**Table 1** *Demographic Backgrounds of Respondents (N = 413)*

| Demographic Variable | Details | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Age (year range) | 18–20 | 3.9 |
| | 21–30 | 82.3 |
| | 31–40 | 7.3 |
| | 41–50 | 1.5 |
| | 51–60 | 4.1 |
| | 61–70 | 1.0 |
| Ethnic Group | Chinese | 71.7 |
| | Indian | 2.2 |
| | Malay | 18.6 |
| | Others | 1.7 |
| | Sabah indigenous | 1.2 |
| | Sarawak indigenous | 4.6 |
| Educational Background | Degree | 82.8 |
| | Diploma | 8.5 |
| | Form 3/PT3/PMR/LCE | 1.7 |
| | Form 5/SPM/MCE/Certificate | 4.1 |
| | Form 6 | 2.7 |
| | Primary 6 or lower | 0.2 |

**Table 1** *Demographic Backgrounds of Respondents (Cont.)*

| Demographic Variable | Details | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Religion | Buddhism | 30.8 |
| | Christianity | 42.4 |
| | Hinduism | 1.7 |
| | Islam | 19.6 |
| | No religion | 5.1 |
| | Others | 0.5 |
| Sexual Orientation | Heterosexual (Female or Male) | 88.1 |
| | Lesbian | 1.9 |
| | Gay | 2.7 |
| | Bisexual | 3.4 |
| | Other | 3.9 |
| Gender Identity | Female | 68.0 |
| | Male | 31.0 |
| | Intersex Female | 0.2 |
| | Transgender Male | 0.2 |
| | Other | 0.5 |

The questionnaire on tolerance towards LGBTs was formulated with reference to other instruments (Bidell, 2005; Friedman et al., 2014; Herek, 1988; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lannutti & Lachlan, 2007; Larsen et al., 1980; Passani & Debicki, 2016; Raja & Stoke, 1998). In the questionnaire, the term "LGBT" was used although other researchers used "homosexual," "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" in their questionnaires. The questionnaire comprised three sections eliciting demographic information, views on LGBT individuals (13 items), and views on LGBT rights (nine items). The items were seven-point Likert scale to enhance granularity in assessing respondents' views (Bertram, 2007). The questionnaire was examined by content experts in LGBT research for content validity, following Thorn and Deitz (1989). The pilot test of the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.931 and 0.970 respectively for two sections.

For data collection, the questionnaire was constructed through Google Forms with the consent form provided on the first page. The link to the questionnaire was distributed nationwide through different online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Besides posting the link on public platforms, the first researcher also sent the link personally to people in her social network to obtain a higher response rate.

For the data analysis, SPSS v26 was used to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, a one-way ANOVA test, and post hoc analyses.

**Results**

This section presents the descriptive results on respondents' views of LGBT sexual orientation and rights of LGBT individuals. On a seven-point Likert scale, mean scores above four are considered high, and mean scores below four are considered low.

*Respondents' Views on LGBT Sexual Orientation*

The results showed mixed responses, with an average mean score of 3.97 (*SD* = 1.55); please see Table 2 on the following page. Some respondents were heteronormative, feeling that being heterosexual (i.e. being either female or male) is the best (*M* = 5.54), as they believed that LGBT tendencies are not a trait that a person is born with (*M* = 4.37). Given that 62% of the respondents were Christians and Muslims, and another 33% had other religious beliefs, many of them believed LGBT practices are against religion (*M* = 4.85) and sex-change operations are against morality (*M* = 4.33). These results suggest that religious beliefs influence tolerance towards LGBTs.

Given that most respondents were heteronormative, results on marginal agreement that individuals should get out of LGBT tendencies were expected. The respondents agreed that LGBT

individuals should control their feelings from becoming LGBT (*M* = 4.16). They also believe that LGBT individuals should go through counselling to change their orientation back to either male or female again (*M* = 4.10). Besides, in terms of relationship recognition, the idea of same-sex couples marrying is marginally acceptable (*M* = 4.10). The results point to a lack of tolerance for LGBTs, and beliefs that being heterosexual is normative.

**Table 2** *Respondents' Views on LGBT Sexual Orientation (N = 413)*

| Item (7-point Likert Scale) | Mean | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Heterosexuality (i.e. being either female or male) is the best. | 5.54 | 1.75 |
| 2. LGBT sexual orientation is against religion. | 4.85 | 2.25 |
| 3. People are (not) born with LGBT tendencies.[R] | 4.37 | 1.83 |
| 4. Sex-change operation is against morality. | 4.33 | 2.31 |
| 5. LGBT individuals should overcome their feelings of wanting to be LGBT. | 4.16 | 2.18 |
| 6. LGBT individuals should go through counselling so that they can be either male or female. | 4.10 | 2.25 |
| 7. Same-sex couples marrying is (not) acceptable.[R] | 4.10 | 2.42 |
| 8. LGBT sexual orientation is (not) a natural expression of sexuality.[R] | 3.89 | 2.04 |
| 9. Being LGBT is a temporary phase in the lives of LGBT individuals. | 3.55 | 1.93 |
| 10. LGBT sexual orientation is a kind of mental health condition. | 3.49 | 2.14 |
| 11. LGBT sexual orientation is not a problem but society makes it a problem.[R] (LGBT sexual orientation is a problem, but it is society that makes it not a problem) | 3.31 | 2.25 |
| 12. LGBT individuals should keep their sexuality or gender identity a secret. | 3.28 | 1.88 |
| 13. LGBT individuals cannot fit into society. | 2.67 | 1.80 |
| Average | **3.97** | 1.55 |

*Notes:* [R] signifies that the item was reverse coded, and the word (not) has been added to the item in brackets to show the meaning after reverse-coding.
On a Likert-scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), the mid-point is 4 (*neutral*).

Next, the results with mean scores below four are reported, reflecting the LGBT-supportive beliefs. Table 2 results show that there is slight disagreement that LGBT sexual orientation is not a natural expression of sexuality (*M* = 3.89), suggesting that some respondents believed that one is born with LGBT orientation. Therefore, they disagreed that being LGBT is a temporary phase (*M* = 3.55) since sexual orientation cannot be changed. The respondents also marginally disagreed that LGBT is a kind of mental illness (*M* = 3.49). LGBT orientation is not a problem since LGBT individuals are normal like anyone else. With such beliefs, the respondents agreed that it is society which has made it a problem (*M* = 3.31). Therefore, LGBT individuals are encouraged to come out without keeping their gender identity a secret (*M* = 3.28). These results are consistent with their beliefs that LGBT individuals are not misfits in society (*M* = 2.67). Being the only item with a mean score below three, it was suggested that the respondents did not believe in ostracising LGBT individuals. However, the mean scores of the other items are all between three and four, which showed that support for LGBTs is only marginal.

**Respondents' Views on Rights of LGBT Individuals**
Table 3 (please see following page) shows that the respondents were generally supportive of the rights of LGBT individuals (*M* = 4.69). This result is surprising considering that there was a portion of heteronormative respondents who believed that it is better to be heterosexual (as described earlier).
The results in Table 3 show that the respondents believed in LGBT rights, ranging from holding public events to same-sex marriage. Nine statements on LGBT rights were presented to respondents, and the most positive response was their right to organise events in the neighbourhood (*M* = 5.03). The respondents also agreed that LGBT individuals should be free to live the life they want to live (*M* = 4.98), including dating whoever they want (*M* = 4.86), expressing their views on media such as national television (*M* = 4.85) and standing up for their own rights (*M* = 4.67), suggesting that the Malaysian respondents are rather supportive towards LGBT rights.

**Table 3** *Respondents' Views on LGBT Rights (N = 413)*

| Item | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| 1. LGBT individuals should have the right to organise events in the neighbourhood. | 5.03 | 2.02 |
| 2. LGBT individuals should be free to live the life they want to live. | 4.98 | 1.97 |
| 3. LGBT individuals should be free to date whoever they want. | 4.86 | 2.07 |
| 4. LGBT individuals should have right to express their opinions on Malaysian TV. | 4.85 | 2.01 |
| 5. LGBT individuals should stand up for their rights. | 4.67 | 1.97 |
| 6. LGBT couples should have the right to adopt a child. | 4.66 | 2.22 |
| 7. LGBT couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples (i.e. male-female couples). | 4.62 | 2.20 |
| 8. LGBT individuals should be free to have sex with whoever they want. | 4.30 | 2.32 |
| 9. LGBT couples should be allowed to get married legally. | 4.21 | 2.42 |
| Average | **4.69** | 1.92 |

*Note:* On a Likert-scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), the mid-point is 4 (neutral)

While the respondents were open in supporting LGBT rights, they were more reserved in supporting their sexual relationships. The results showed that they agreed with LGBT couples adopting children (*M* = 4.66) LGBT couples deserve the same rights as other heterosexual couples (*M* = 4.62). In comparison, items that made direct mention of sexual relationships showed lower agreement levels, although the reported attitudes were positive. The respondents marginally agreed that LGBT individuals should be free to have sex with whoever they wanted (*M* = 4.30) and get married legally (*M* = 4.21). The earlier results also showed minimal approval of same-sex marriage (*M* = 4.10, Table 2). It can be surmised that most of the respondents felt uncomfortable with LGBTs having sexual relationships. People were rather supportive towards LGBT rights rather than towards LGBT behaviour itself (Lambert et al., 2006; Passani & Debicki, 2016; Woodford et al., 2013).

**Influence of Demographic Characteristics on Views towards LGBT**

Table 4 shows the ANOVA test results on the relationship between demographic characteristics and respondents' views on LGBT sexual orientation, whereas Table 5 focusses on respondents' views on LGBT rights.

For Hypotheses 1–6, the ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents from different age groups (*F*[5,407] = 3.616, *p* = 0.003), ethnic groups (*F*[5,407] = 13.375, *p* < .001), religious groups (*F*[5,407] = 34.046, *p* < .001), and sexual orientations (*F*[4,408] = 15.283, *p* < .001). Educational level did not have a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation (Table 4).

**Table 4** *ANOVA Test of Tolerance toward LGBT Sexual Orientation and Demographic Characteristics*

| Demographic Characteristics | Statistical Test | *p*-value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | One-way ANOVA | .003** | Significant |
| Ethnic Group | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Religion | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Educational Level | One-way ANOVA | .290 | Not significant |
| Sexual Orientation | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Gender Identity | One-way ANOVA | .018* | Significant |

*\*p*-value < .05; \*\**p*-value < .01; \*\*\**p*-value < .001

Next, the Tukey post hoc test suggested that tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation decreased with an increase in the age of Malaysian respondents. Younger respondents were more tolerant towards LGBT than older respondents. In addition, the Tukey post hoc test showed that Malay and Sabah indigenous groups, and Muslims and Christians, were less tolerant toward LGBT sexual orientation compared to other ethnic and religious groups. Since Malays are also Muslims, it is

understandable that these social groups were identified as being less receptive towards LGBTs. The Muslims were less tolerant, compared to Christians. Put simply, older Sabah indigenous and Malay Muslims and Christians were the least tolerant towards LGBTs.

Although sexual orientation and gender identity are not demographic characteristics, we conducted statistical tests to determine if these characteristics significantly influenced tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation. The results showed that respondents with heterosexual sexual orientation were less likely to express tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation than respondents with LGBT orientation, and this was expected. In addition, there was a significant difference between gender identity and tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation ($F[2,410] = 4.064$, p = .018). The Tukey post hoc test showed that both male and female respondents expressed moderate tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation compared to the other gender identities, who expressed greater tolerance. These results suggested that heterosexual individuals were less tolerant towards LGBTs than other gender identities, and these results were also expected.

Next, for Hypotheses 7–12, the ANOVA test results showed that there were significant differences in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different age groups ($F[5,407] = 4.133$, $p < .01$), ethnic groups ($F[5,407] = 15.837$, $p < .001$), religious backgrounds ($F[5,407] = 34.673$, $p < .001$), and sexual orientations ($F[4,408] = 9.853$, $p < .001$). Educational level and gender identity did not have a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT rights (Table 5).

**Table 5** *ANOVA Test of Tolerance toward LGBT Rights and Selected Demographic Characteristics*

| Demographic factors | Testing | *p*-value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | One-way ANOVA | .001** | Significant |
| Ethnic group | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Religious background | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Educational level | One-way ANOVA | .449 | Not significant |
| Sexual orientation | One-way ANOVA | .000*** | Significant |
| Gender identity | One-way ANOVA | .103 | Not significant |

*p*-value < .05; **p*-value < .01; ***p*-value < .001

The Tukey HSD post hoc test showed that age had a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT rights, where tolerance toward LGBT rights decreased with an increase in age. The 51–60 age group had the lowest mean score, indicating the least tolerance of LGBT rights. The Tukey HSD post hoc test also showed that Malay and Sabah indigenous groups, Muslims, and respondents with heterosexual sexual orientation were less likely to express tolerance toward LGBT rights. The results suggest that older Malay Muslims were the least tolerant of LGBT rights.

Furthermore, we were also interested in knowing whether sexual orientation and gender identity affected respondents' views on LGBT rights. The Tukey post hoc test showed that sexual orientation had a significant influence on tolerance of LGBT rights. Respondents with heterosexual orientation were less likely to show tolerance toward LGBT rights than respondents with LGBT orientation.

**Discussion**
This study showed that there was an overall moderate tolerance among Malaysians towards LGBT individuals. These views are reflective of those who are highly educated, young, and of Chinese descent because a majority of respondents in the study were from these groups. However, the findings on moderate tolerance do not mean that each respondent held mild views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights. The computation of group mean scores balanced out the different levels of tolerance of those who held favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards LGBT. There were heteronormative respondents comprising mostly Christians and Muslims who believed that God created only male and female. At the other end of the continuum, there were LGBT-supportive respondents who believed that LGBT sexual orientations are natural expressions.

The study also showed that religious background, age, and ethnic group influenced tolerance towards both LGBT sexual orientation and LGBT rights. The results indicated that older Sabahan indigenous and Malay Muslims and Christians were the least tolerant towards LGBTs, whether in terms of their sexual orientation or rights. In addition, respondents with heterosexual orientation and female/male gender identity were less tolerant of LGBT sexual orientation and rights. These findings on the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBTs will now be discussed with reference to related findings. The finding that Muslims and Christians are less tolerant of LGBTs concurs with findings previously obtained in Malaysia (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Foong et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2015; Yeo et al., 2021) and other countries (Arli et al., 2019; Woodford, 2013). Religious beliefs often form the basis of moral and biological reasoning against the acceptability of LGBTs in Malaysia (Yeo et al., 2021).

Other Malaysian studies have not explored age, but our study showed that older Malaysians are more negative towards LGBTs. On the contrary, Horn's (2006) study in the United States found that younger adolescents were less likely to accept homosexuals. Young people like college students are not necessarily receptive towards same-sex marriage, as indicated by Lambert et al.'s (2006) study, where only about 43% of the respondents agreed that homosexual couples should be allowed to get married. As the younger respondents in the study were more tolerant of LGBT, it is likely that openness towards LGBTs is growing among the younger generation. Alternative newspapers and some mainstream newspapers offering a balanced representation of LGBTs in the media, including issues of LGBT rights, may have contributed towards greater tolerance towards LGBTs. Moreover, Juaini et al. (2017) found that information on the LGBT movement disseminated in social media had increased acceptance towards LGBT in Malaysia. With the growth of liberalism and human rights, it is likely that views of LGBT as abnormal human sexuality may diminish (Owoyemi et al., 2013).

Our findings on certain ethnic groups being less tolerant of LGBT (Sabahan indigenous and Malay) confirm Foong et al.'s (2019) – seemingly the only other study investigating ethnic background and LGBT attitudes. Their findings showed that Malaysian trainee doctors were positive towards LGBT individuals. The most positive were Indians, followed by Chinese, and Malays were the least positive.

As for sexual orientation, these findings on heterosexuals being less tolerant of LGBT concur with findings in Western contexts (Copp & Koehler, 2017) and Korea (Jung, 2020). Among heterosexuals, Herek (2002) found that heterosexual women had more positive attitudes than heterosexual men on employment and adoption rights for gay people. In the present study, there were no obvious differences between heterosexual female and male respondents' tolerance towards LGBTs.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that there is moderate tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation and rights among Malaysians, particularly among the highly educated, young, and Chinese groups. The study also produced new findings on educational level being not a factor influencing tolerance towards LGBTs, but older, Sabahan indigenous and Malay, Muslims and Christians who were less tolerant of LGBTs; educational level was not an influencing factor. Nevertheless, the findings are only generalisable to young Chinese degree-holders because this group formed the majority of the respondents. The over-representation of Chinese and the under-representation of Malays in this study in the context of the Malaysian population constitutes a limitation. It is possible that this is due to the respondents solicited through the first researcher's social network because she is Chinese. Future studies should seek a more representative ethnicity ratio in the sampling. Future studies should also examine religiosity and LGBT attitudes. Such studies will offer more insights than those that pinpoint only Islam and Christianity as the main religions that disapprove of the LGBT community. Among adherents, some may barely practise their nominal beliefs, while others strictly adhere to their religious teachings. By studying levels of religiosity, it may be possible to explain the mixed findings on whether there is an association between Christianity or Islam and tolerance of LGBTs (e.g., Astuti & Kurniati, 2018; O'Pry, 2012). Another area for further investigation is the relationship between contact with LGBT individuals

and tolerance towards LGBTs, particularly how the intergroup contact may modify views on LGBT sexual relationships.

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# The Intangible Impacts of Mass Running Events on Communities–Evidence from Thailand

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## Abstract

The increase of mass running events and numbers of running participants confirms the arrival of a running boom in many countries around the world, including Thailand. Despite the increasing popularity in recreational running and running events, research related to running events as small-scale events and their impacts remain scarce. Thus, in this study the aim was to examine the impacts of mass running events on the community with special attention on intangible impacts. A qualitative research approach and qualitative content analysis were applied. Based on in-depth interviews, this study concluded that besides tangible economic and tourism related impacts, mass running events generate diverse intangible benefits including creating community pride and unity. This creates a trickle-down effect and forms a new sports culture, develops and enhances public spaces and infrastructure, affords opportunities for knowledge sharing and business start-ups. The limitation of this study was its generalizability and comparability of findings, as the findings are derived primarily from key informants closely associated with the organization of mass running events. Future research should explore other research approaches that might better account for the impacts of mass running events.

**Keywords:** *Intangible impacts, mass running events, running boom*

## Introduction

Mass running events, as a kind of mass participation sport, have become popular and frequent. The numbers of mass running events as well as the number of marathon finishers rise on a yearly basis since the emergence of a running boom. Participating in mass running events has become a trend for leisure activities and a healthy lifestyle, in which people combine travel and sports interests. This has also driven sports tourism as a fast-growing segment of the tourism industry. On top of the tangible impacts, mass running events may also create intangible impacts. Previous research has focused mainly on the economic impacts of mega sporting events, while the other aspects have received less attention. Thus, the objective of this study was to examine the impact of mass running events, with a special focus on the intangible impacts by using a qualitative research approach.

## Literature Review
### Mass Running Event

Mass participation sporting events are commonly associated with large participation numbers (Murphy & Bauman, 2007). The traditional mass participation sporting events include marathon running, triathlons, duathlons, or just cycling and swimming events. The newer formats that are becoming more well-known are the obstacle races, themed events, and trail running. Driven by many reasons, such as rising incomes and the emergence of a bigger middle class, the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle, the use of social media, and also intrinsic motives, mass participation sporting participation events have experienced substantial growth worldwide.

Among mass participation sporting events, mass running events have become outstanding in terms of popularity and number since the first wave of the running boom emerged in the 1970s in the United States of America, which then spread to other countries in Europe and around the world (Van Bottenberg et al., 2010). For example, in India, the growth in popularity in marathon running during 2008–2018 was reported as 229.86%, Portugal 177.76%, and Ireland 130.05%. And the worldwide growth was 49.43% (Runrepeat, 2021). In Thailand, there were 700 mass running events held over varying distances from a mini to a full marathon in 2017 and this expanded to 1,305 in 2018. Up to

over 2,000 mass running events are expected in the following years. And from 16 million leisure runners in Thailand, which account for one-fourth of the population in the country, roughly 10 % participate regularly in mass running events. The growth of mass running events also can be seen in its monetary value, which stands at approximately 1,700 million Baht. It is no surprise that the number of mass running events owners and organizers has increased to more than 100 to serve this increasing demand (Thaihealthreport, 2020).

### *Tangible and Intangible Event Impacts*

The growth of mass running events clearly indicates its impact in various facets of society, especially in the economic sector. Impact is conceptualized as the longer-term effect of an outcome (Harding, 2014). With regards to events, impacts may differ based on duration. Short-term impacts are those that take place during the event, prior and immediately after the event, while long-term impacts may be referred to as after-use. For long-term effects, Spilling (2000) recommended four categories, namely, enhancing international awareness, increasing economic activity, enhancing facilities and infrastructure, and increasing social and cultural opportunities. A different approach was proposed by Allen et al. (2002) where four different aspects of impact were considered, namely, social and cultural, physical and environmental, tourism, and economic and political. Furthermore, some such as Carlsen et al. (2000) and Dwyer et al. (2000) distinguished impacts as being tangible and intangible.

Tangible gains of sporting events have been widely studied in previous research. ,Specifically monetary gain and loss from hosting sporting events have been quantified through various methods. Some studies used more simplified methods to assess the economic impact of sporting events, such as by calculating additional expenditures made by sports tourists and organizers in the host economies, as these represented the first-round of direct economic impacts.

Nevertheless, there is a rising interest among academic scholars to examine the intangible impacts of these mass events (Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Olberding & Olberding, 2004; Dwyer et al., 2000; Carlsen, et al., 2000). Intangible impacts can be defined as effects that accrue to the well-being of households but do not have a market price. As intangible impacts are not represented by monetary ,gainsthey can be difficult to quantify (Dwyer et al., 2000). Examples of intangible impacts reported in previous studies include civic pride, enhanced community engagement, community revival, improved image and reputation, sport inspiration, and social capital (Misener & Mason 2006; Gratton & Preuss 2008; Skinner et al., 2008; Minnaert 2012; Misener et al., 2015).

### *Previous Research on the Impacts of Mass Running Events*

Previous researchers focused primarily on marathon running events in terms of motivation, satisfaction and experiences of the participants, the expenditure and profile of sports tourists, as well as the tangible impacts of mass running events, especially the economic impacts. For instance, Coleman (2004) studied the economic impact of the London Marathon  2000through survey questionnaires that sought to identify the spending pattern of various groups linked to the event, including the event account and budget representing amount spent by organizers. Key findings indicated that the London Marathon contributed a net increase of 25 million UK pounds to the London economy. Similarly, in a study on the Chicago Marathon by the Regional Economics Applications Laboratory, it was found that the marathon made a significant contribution to the greater Chicago economy with an impact estimated at 143 million US dollars. The image of the city as a tourist destination was also improved by hosting the event. Also, the study of Agrusa et al. (2006) on runners participating in the Honolulu Marathon found that most of the event participants came from outside and around 20,000 participants came from Japan. These runners contributed 53 million US dollars of direct expenditure and nearly 87 million US dollars of overall impact, including induced expenditure during the event. Positive economic impacts also have been found in smaller-scale mass running events; for example, the Bristol Half Marathon, Dublin Marathon, Edinburgh Marathon, and Copenhagen Marathon (Coleman, 2004; Coleman, 2010).

Social impacts also have been studied by some academic scholars. For example, Olberding and Olberding (2004) investigated the soft social impacts of the Cincinnati Flying Pig Marathon through a participants 'perceptions and opinions survey. Results showed that the marathon has created a better image of the city among local and non-local participants. It also increased a sense of local pride and created opportunities for social interactions among more than 30,000 runners and walkers, 4,000 volunteers, and 150,000 spectators. Furthermore, it was revealed in the study that the cost or investment in marathon running event can be relatively low, but the impacts on both social and economic assets can be huge.The benefits may also outweigh the possible losses . ,For example Maenning (2003), whose study examined the displacement effects caused by the Berlin Marathon, found that the displacement effects, such as tourist avoidance of the city because of the marathon, were minimal compared to benefits gained from the event. Specifially, Maenning (2003) reported that whilehotel business and associate activity was displaced by 2and s ,%ightseeing bus companies experienced a 13 %loss in sales because of road closures these only accounted for ,0.07 %of the estimated additional expenditure generated by the marathon.

**Methodology**

The objective of the study was to examine the impacts of mass participation of sporting events on the community, with a strong focus on intangible impacts. A qualitative research approach was applied. Specifically, a post-event in-depth interview was used as a tool to collect qualitative data. Key informants were selected purposefully. The criteria for selection were based on the role and responsibility related to mass running events, as well as the ability and willingness to provide information. Key informants were primarily stakeholders of mass running events, which included event owners/organizers, local government and authority, local businesses, and residents residing in Sansuk Municipality (Chonburi Province), Buriram Province and Chom Beung Districht (Ratchaburi Province), and running participants of the Bangsean 42 Chonburi Marathon, Buriram Marathon, and Chom Beung Marathon. The saturation concept, which refers to the point when no new information is discovered, was applied when analysing the data (Glaser & Struss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). For this study, 15 key informants were interviewed (Table 1) with ,interview questions consisting of general questions about mass running events, the interviewees' role and involvement and their perception towards the impacts of mass running events.

**Table 1** *Profiles of Key Informants*

| No. | Key Informant | Role |
|-----|---------------|------|
| 1 | A | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 2 | B | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 3 | C | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 4 | D | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 5 | E | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 6 | F | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 7 | G | Mass Running Event Organizer |
| 8 | H | Pioneer runners & Active Committee of Thai Health Foundation |
| 9 | I | Pioneer Runners & Founder of Online Running Community |
| 10 | J | Local Governor & Resident |
| 11 | K | Running Participant & Resident |
| 12 | L | Local Resident |
| 13 | M | Paid Staff |
| 14 | N | Local Resident |
| 15 | O | Local Business |

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Thai language. This allowed respondents to express their viewpoints easily (Flick et al., 2004). Extensive notes and audio-recordings were taken during the interviews and were later transcribed. Qualitative content analysis

was applied as the analytical method, as it is a common method used for analysing verbal data collected through interviews or focus groups (Schreier, 2012). Interview excerpts with similar interpretations and meanings were summarized and categorized. This study was conducted based on the ethical guidelines and standard sand approved by the ethic committee of the researchers' university.

**Findings**

The results indicated that mass running events create diverse impacts to the community, ranging from short to long term, varying from positive to negative, and tangible to intangible impacts. Tangible impacts, especially the economic and tourism related impacts of the mass running events are obvious. Key informants admitted that mass running events boost local businesses and tourism, since the events attract large numbers of active and passive sports tourists to visit. These could be hotels and accommodation that are fully booked in advance and an uptick in restaurants and transportation operations. In short, the local economy is stimulated by the participants 'consumption and spending. In the long run, mass running events can build a positive destination image. This may result in participants returning as repeat-tourists, especially if the community and town, as well as the locals, leave a good impression. Aside from the aforementioned tangible impacts, key informants also revealed many intangible impacts, which were thematized under a number of headings.

### *Community Pride and Unity*

Pride is an intangible social impact experienced by the community hosting the event. Respondents from three areas, namely Sansuk Municipality in Chonburi Province, Buriram Province and Chom Beung District in Ratchaburi Province, expressed community pride in the interviews in many ways.

Key Informant J said:

> Chonburi and Sansuk people are proud that we are leading sports city and sports tourism city in Thailand. We are proud that our city can motivate and encourage other city to develop in the same direction. We are proud that as small city, we are the pioneer of the world-class standard mass running event. Our city stands along with a few cities in the world that have three Label Road Races from World Athletics. And it is the one and only in Thailand.

Also, in Chom Bueng, Key Informant H revealed that the community is very proud and looking forward to the mass running events. Chom Bueng Mararthon is a reunion event, in which Chom Beung people who live in Bangkok or elsewhere return to welcome or provide lodging for their friends and colleagues. Even though Chom Beung is a very small district in a small province, the reputation of Chom Bueng Marathon is great. This creates community pride.

Key Informant G, the organizer of the Buriram Marathon said that people were against the Buriram Marathon at first, when they knew that the event was going to be held and the roads were going to be closed. However, after the event, the city gained a reputation for being a nice host and a perfect sports city. This changed the attitudes of the locals so it became more positive. Buriram people are proud and they are now more willing to participate as runners or as supporters in their marathon.

### *Creating Trickle-Down Effects and Forming a New Sports Culture*

Trickle-down effects refer to the case where the success in elite sports or sporting events affects amateur participation (Weed et al., 2009). The interview results show that mass running events had some effects on increasing physical activity and sports participation, as reflected by Key Informant J, who stated:

> Mass running event encourages people to do more sports. Since people are proud of the event as it is world-marathon destination, they want to participate and they practice. I see more and more people running in Bangsean running T-shirts or Finisher T-shirt. And the city tries to facilitate them by creating more running tracks and increase security along the routes. And all these get back to serve the purpose of healthy city.

The same phenomenon emerged in Buriram and Chom Bueng as Key Informant G revealed that,

> although the city is well-established as sports city, but we talk about football or motor sport, which are suitable for specific group and gender. Football is rather for young men. But since we host Buriram Marathon, the event helps establish new sports culture. Sports is for everyone and everywhere. Nowadays we see more people running or jogging. Some started running for fun run and now become a marathon finisher.

Similarly, Key Informant O also reported that:

> The boom of running and marathon running events are the turning point for many people to start doing sports and take care of themselves. And to run a marathon, it is not a one-day event that people can just join and run. It requires regularly training. This turns into self-discipline and habit change. And at the same time, this inspires other people too.

Key Informant H talked about the increasing sports inspiration in Chom Bueng area in the following terms:

> People become more aware about sports and health issues. We have the legend of Pu Peng (Grandfather Peng *(*who was inspired by Chom Bueng Marathon and started running 10 km at the age of 79 years-old. He finished the first marathon when he was 85 years old. Pu Peng becomes the sports inspiration for many people, not only in Chom Bueng, but country wide.

### *Developing and Enhancing Public Spaces and Infrastructures*

Mass running events can bring benefits to the community in terms of public spaces and infrastructures development. These benefits are visible, especially in the case of the Buriram Marathon and the Bangsean42 Chonburi Marathon. These two running events are highly successful and are recognized as Road Races by World Athletics, which acknowledges races operating at a high standard.

Key Informant J shared interesting information in the interview as follows:

> To host a high-level standard running events, the city must upheave its own standard too. Thus, the city must improve road lighting, road smoothness, race course or the security along the route etc. and make them comply with the standard defined by World Athletic.

He also added that it is the task of the city and not the event organizer to develop appropriate infrastructure for hosting mass running events or other mass participation sporting events. Event organizers may provide guidance on what to do, but the execution is the sole responsibility of the city or the local authority. Moreover, to make the race a memorable showcase of the city, the city must develop its public spaces and tourist attractions. New lodging and transportation networks must be developed to accommodate the growing numbers of events and tourists. Existing lodging and facilities must also be enhanced and improved to serve the sport tourists.

Additionally, the Bangsean or Sansuk Municipality and Buriram Province are gearing themselves towards becoming leading sports city. Sport facilities, such as indoor and outdoor gym and swimming pools, public bike lanes, and more running tracks, are being built and existing public facilities are also being improved and extended. More road lighting and CCTV are being installed to enhance security. Public spaces that are improved can be utilized not only for the sport tourists but also by the local residents.

### *Opportunities for Knowledge Sharing*

Although event owners or organizers are taking full responsibility for the management of mass running events with little community involvement, the interview results showed that mass running events can create opportunities for knowledge sharing in many ways.

Key Informant E talked about knowledge sharing in the Chom Bueng Marathon, where the organization of the marathon is embedded within the mission of Muban Chom Bueng Rajabhat University. Indeed, in 2019 the university has established the Marathon Center. The primary purpose

of the Center is to share and develop academic knowledge in the area of sports management, sports tourism, and physical education related to marathon running. Marathon study courses are developed for students as compulsory or elective courses. The Marathon Center also cooperates with universities overseas. Another purpose of the Marathon Center is to disseminate knowledge about marathon running to a wider range of people in order to improve their condition of health and fitness. The Center works together with local hospitals and health organizations such as the Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

Knowledge sharing also occurred among organizers. Key Informant A, a prominent mass running event organizer, revealed in the interview that there was an attempt to develop an association of mass sporting event organizers in Thailand, or TMPSA. The members of TMPSA are mass participation sporting event/mass running event organizers. The purpose of TMPSA is to share knowledge and resources relating to the organization of mass participation sporting events and running events with the ultimate goal to promote the event business and set new standards for mass participation sporting events in Thailand.

Key Informant F, a small-size event organizer, also reported the case of knowledge sharing from organizer to community. She said:

> We were contacted by local authority who wanted to stage a small-size mass running event. Along the planning and working process, we have a chance to train local authority and local staffs on how to manage the event from the planning process on. We also provided the manual and event checklists that they can use for the future events. In the following years, they organize the mass running event on their own.

Additionally, some key informants revealed that their companies had signed an MOU with the local universities to share knowledge in the form of seminars, courses, or by providing internships or volunteer opportunities for students. Knowledge about event management and physical activities are also indirectly shared to communities or people who are involved in the management of mass running event. As Key Informant M, a paid-staff for Bangsean42 who also works as freelance event organizer, said in the interview:

> Being part of this mass running event, I have learnt many things. I saw the process from upstream to downstream. I have learnt how the professional organizer works. And on the event day, I can observe the behaviours of running participants. All the knowledge gained can be used in my working life as freelance organizers in order to improve the quality of the event and working process.

### New Business Opportunities and Start-ups

As the demand for running events increases, the number of new event organizers is increasing. Some have shifted their business domain or extend the scope of their businesses to leverage on this opportunity.

Key Informant A said that their company was active in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions industry. However, the organization of a mass running event was based on his own passion for running, as he wants to deliver good running events. Nowadays, the business portfolio of the company has shifted from a tech-event or participating in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions industry to organizing mass running events. Furthermore, organizing mass running events has helped the company become even more well-known internationally and nationally.

Key Informants B and G also extended their business scope and utilized their existing capabilities and experiences in mass gathering events or other kinds of sports events. They organized successful mass running events that are internationally recognized. ,Moreover Key Informant F used the experience gained as a runner to start an event organizer business during the peak of the running boom.

Many platforms are also created to promote mass running eventswith s ,ome serving as registration platforms. Thai.Run is a good example of a tech-startup that emerged during the running boom. Thai.Run has developed a number of event technologies, such as a registration platform, Face X, AI, and big data technology for running events that enhancethe  runners 'experiences and at the

same time elevate the standard and security of mass running events. Thai.Run plans to export these technologies to other countries and to other mass gathering event categories such as concerts.

Mass running events have also created new opportunities for related businesses such as sports shoes and apparel, energy foods and drinks, running gadgets, and sports and fitness. It is also reported that local residents have started peer-to-peer based activities providing accommodation or transportation to serve higher-end sport tourists during the event.

Other intangible benefits of the mass running events also include opportunities for volunteers and community empowerment. The events also have created a festive atmosphere in the city and, in some areas, they have become a tradition embedded into the city's event calendar. The community's quality of life also has been improved through economic diversification, increased awareness of healthy lifestyle, and the improvement of infrastructure and facilities. Nevertheless, mass running events have also created some negative impacts. Key informants mentioned inconvenience from road closures, traffic jams, crowds, and litter and waste accumulation as major drawbacks associated with the events. Nonetheless, the residents at the hosting venues or areas tolerate these problems, since the events are short-term.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This study provided insights regarding intangible impacts as a result of mass running events, such as community unity and pride, sports inspirational effects, development of public spaces and infrastructure, knowledge sharing, and new business opportunities. Contrasting to the characteristics of mass running events that are often held in a short period of time and require less investments for the organization compared to mega or large-scale events, the impacts of mass running events may be felt over short to longer periods of time. In many cases, these mass events provide benefits that outweigh the costs. They can bring about changes in behaviour and ways of living and may have long-lasting impacts such as promoting a healthy lifestyle, providing better knowledge, improved the quality of living, creating a novel community tradition, or generating new careers and business opportunities. It is important to note that unlike tangible impacts, especially the economic and tourism related returns, intangible impacts which cannot be quantified, should not be neglected. As seen in the interview responses, mass running events have the potential to introduce new concepts that will affect the culture and lifestyle of the host community. Thus, organization of mass running events should be supported not just by the community, but by local government agencies and authorities, in order to increase the numbers and improve the standards of these events. Mass running events require less resources to stage than many other public events, since they utilize existing roads for road races or the natural terrain for trail running. However, the generated benefits can be multifaceted and enormous. Nevertheless, some balances are essential, since the staging of mass running events and other mass participation sporting events can lead to the disruption of residents 'routine lives, as revealed by the key informants.

The major limitation of this study is the generalizability and the comparability of the findings, due to its qualitative nature. Moreover, the information is derived mainly through key informants who had close ties with the organization of mass running events. Thus, it is recommended that future research should apply different research approaches, i.e., research with key informants from diverse backgrounds or even develop a quantitative research strategy with a greater number of participants.

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# Reflecting on Criticisms of Positive Psychology: A Rebalancing Act

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## Abstract

The field of positive psychology has grown and spread quickly. Unsurprisingly, such rapid growth has led to some confusion about what, exactly, positive psychology is. Positive psychology has also attracted a number of critics who have questioned its necessity, validity, and relevance to non-Western cultures. This article presents these criticisms and responds to each of them. Instead of being seen as a separate field, the authors argue that positive psychology is best viewed as a rebalancing of psychology's focus as a whole. The article examines the immediate and powerful impact that ideas and practices from positive psychology have had on individuals, schools, organizations, and nations. The authors suggest that such quick and ready acceptance of positive psychology's core ideas and practices reflects the presence of a pre-existing imbalance within the field of psychology and calls for a more correct understanding of what is meant by a positive psychology. The article concludes by arguing that the study of flourishing should not be viewed as a new field of psychology. Instead, it should be seen as a complement to existing psychological theory and practice, with the result being a more holistic understanding of what it means to be human.

**Keywords:** *Positive psychology, well-being, criticism, application, flourishing*

## Introduction

Positive psychology has been defined as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). The field of positive psychology continues to expand at unprecedented speed and, in a short period of time, has gone global. Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of cultivating mental health in addition to helping those with mental illness, the latter of which has been the primary focus of psychology to date (Seligman et al., 2006). Early signs of the development of positive psychology can first be seen in 1902 with William James' concept of "healthy mindedness," and later in ideas from humanistic psychologists, including Rogers' concept of the fully functioning person, Maslow's call to study healthy people to understand self-actualization, and others (for an historical overview see Froh, 2004). However, officially the field of positive psychology began in 1998, when Dr. Martin Seligman, as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), formally called for psychologists to emphasize research on human excellence and goodness, character strengths, and building the best in life. Seligman did not suggest replacing the study of mental illness, but claimed that illness or morbidity had been the almost exclusive focus of psychology for too long, and suggested that a focus on understanding and treating psychological problems did not contribute sufficiently to the development of thriving individuals or communities (Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Czikszentmihalyi, 2000). It has been over 20 years since Martin Seligman famously called for such change and the debate on the verisimilitude of positive psychology continues, with various academics leveling criticisms against the field as a whole. This article first explores the various powerful and pervasive impacts of positive psychology theories, researches, and practices on individuals, groups, and nations. Next, it highlights some of the most significant criticisms of positive psychology. The article concludes by arguing that, rather than viewing positive psychology as a specific branch or perspective, a more accurate understanding will allow positive psychology to be seen as a rebalancing of psychology as a whole.

## Positive Psychology

### Positive Psychology and the Individual

Seligman and Czikszentmihalyi's (2000) original call was for a psychology concerned with helping "healthy" individuals live more fulfilling lives, not only reducing the suffering of the mentally ill. The field of positive psychology has clearly had an impact on people's lives. However, evaluating that impact on the non-clinical population poses challenges because "normal" or healthy people typically do not seek help from psychologists or counselors. The widespread and sustained popularity of books on topics related to "happiness," however, indicates the existence of a great number of normal happiness seekers (Parks et al., 2012). In recent years, *Time Magazine*, *National Geographic Magazine*, and *The Economist*, have devoted covers, and even entire issues, to the topic. Likewise, the proliferation of websites dedicated to improving well-being through the application of science-based positive psychology methods, such as greater.good.edu, verywellmind.com, and positivepsychology.com, suggests a wide audience among the non-clinical population. Additionally, the burgeoning popularity of a variety of smartphone applications, including Headspace, Happify, Live Happy, and more, which use science-based positive psychology principles to improve individual well-being, indicates the presence of a high number of normal people who are seeking, and perhaps finding to varying degrees, higher levels of happiness.

One way researchers are gauging the actual impact of positive psychology on the well-being of the non-clinical population is via research into people enrolled in massive open online courses (MOOCs), which are open to the public. For example, researchers looked at the effects of The Science of Well-Being, a Yale University course offered on the Coursera.org platform, and found evidence for significant improvements in well-being when compared with a control group (Yaden et al., 2021). Importantly, with over 3.3 million registered learners to date for this one course, there is clearly significant interest by non-clinical populations. Likewise, there exists a tremendous potential impact on any adult who registers and practice positive psychology interventions or PPIs (Yaden et al., 2021). It is worth noting that these authors found over 20 additional courses related to happiness, positive psychology, and well-being on Coursera and edX, the two most popular MOOCs, from universities such as Harvard University, the University of California, the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina, the University of Pennsylvania, and more. It is apparent that learning about, and practicing, well-being skills developed by positive psychologists, whether by book, website, course, or smartphone app, is impacting the lives of a great many healthy people.

Within the field of clinical psychology, the influence of positive psychology is much more apparent. The publication of the first *Handbook of Positive Clinical Psychology* (Wood & Johnson, 2016) serves as a tangible example reflecting the need for a more balanced approach to treating mental illness than the existing models offer; one that emphasizes the importance of building up the best things in life as well as fixing the worst (Seligman, 2011). Positive psychology's focus has spurred alternative conceptions to the dominant clinical paradigm, the disease model of mental illness, and questioned many of its underlying assumptions (Wood et al., 2020). A number of therapeutic approaches using positive psychology have been developed, including well-being therapy, quality-of-life therapy, mindfulness-based therapies, and positive psychotherapy (Wood et al., 2020). Positive psychotherapy (hereafter PPT), for example, emphasizes the importance of identifying and using one's character strengths, as well as remediating symptoms of mental illness. The importance of cultivating positive emotions is recognized in PPT as well as assisting in remediating distress (Rashid, 2015). While these developments are quite new, and more research is needed, preliminary studies show promise for their application to a range of psychopathologies (Wood et al., 2020). These examples highlight the value of incorporating the theoretical and practical tools of positive psychology to complement and enrich the treatment of clinical populations.

### Positive Psychology and Education

Beyond the benefit to the individual, positive psychology's mission also includes the scientific examination of factors helping organizations and communities, such as schools, thrive by building on

their strengths and virtues (Gable & Haidt, 2005). In response to high rates of depression among youth worldwide, Seligman and colleagues concluded that schools were ideal providers of initiatives aimed at developing resilience, preventing depression, and increasing life satisfaction on a wide scale (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive education, which aims to "teach both the skills of wellbeing and the skills of achievement" (Waters, 2011, p. 77), is well-aligned with calls for a new educational paradigm focused on developing the "whole student." Accordingly, schools around the world have since been integrating elements of positive psychology into their classrooms, and mounting evidence suggests that the skills of well-being championed by proponents of psychology can, in fact, be taught and assessed in schools (Waters, 2011; Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Adler, 2018). Some of the classroom intervention programs that have been studied to date include:

- the Penn Resiliency Program, used globally
- the Positive Psychology Program, first developed in Strath Haven High School in Pennsylvania
- awesome Us, a New Zealand program for fifth and sixth graders
- the Geelong Grammar School Project, a school wide program in Australia
- the Happy Classrooms Program, developed in Spain
- the training programs from the Positive Psychology Research Center of Tsinghua University, China, and further disseminated to schools around China
- the Youth First and Girls First training programs, from the nonprofit organization CorStone, in India and Kenya
- the Strengths Gym in British schools.

The inclusion of positive psychology within curricula provides clear indications of improvements on a host of measures, including resilience, psychological and emotional well-being, improved social skills, higher academic performance, prevention of depressive symptoms, improved conduct, and better physical health (Seligman & Adler, 2019; Seligman, 2011; Harzer et al., 2020). At the university level, institutions of higher education are increasingly seen as places that should prepare students for not just their careers, but also to be well-rounded and responsible global citizens (Oades et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2018). The concept of a "positive university" has gained momentum, with universities in the United States, Mexico, Portugal, China, and others embracing the application of positive psychology principles to enhancing the wellbeing of their students, faculty, staff, and organization as a whole (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Harzer et al., 2020; Oades et al., 2014). Mounting evidence at all levels of education suggests that applying positive psychology principles in schools and universities fosters well-being in students (Lambert et al., 2019). In fact, the theories and practices of positive psychology are demonstrating powerful, measurable, beneficial effects that, while still in need of further study and refinement, clearly contribute to gaps in existing psychological knowledge.

### *Positive Psychology and Organizations*

The fields of organizational psychology and organizational behavior have long been interested in the factors that contribute to improved productivity and performance. Traditionally, however, organizations have focused on preventing harm and fixing problems. Management research has long indicated that simply removing the negative factors from the workplace does not necessarily lead to positive changes in productivity, job satisfaction, or motivation (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2020). Again, responding to calls by the founders of positive psychology for a more balanced approach, positive organizational psychology, an approach was created that focused on studying "life-giving, positive characteristics in organizations" and "positive subjective experiences, positive traits, and positive institutions" (Donaldson et al., 2019, p. 114). Concepts and evidence-based practices from positive psychology have since readily been adopted by organizations around the world seeking to actualize employee potential in pursuit of organizational success. Success in today's competitive workplaces requires organizations and their employees to show creativity, to continuously grow, and to consistently excel in what they do (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2020). With higher well-being being associated with a number of desirable outcomes, such as higher retention, higher levels of

engagement, better work attendance, better customer satisfaction, and improved work performance, organizations have a vested interest in their members' well-being (Donaldson et al., 2019; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2020). A review of research evaluating the effectiveness of PPIs at work found that they improved desired work outcomes, and decreased undesirable work outcomes overall (Donaldson et al., 2019). The recently founded forum, International Positive Psychology Association Positive Work and Organization Division (2019), reflects the integration of positive psychology's broader focus. Seligman's call for a focus on all that is good in life has stimulated various lines of research and practice in yet another area, that of management and organizational behavior, which is flourishing.

### *Positive Psychology and National and International Policy*

Beyond organizations, the importance of well-being has also increasingly been a matter of concern for policy makers and economists at all levels. Since Bhutan first began including "gross national happiness" in its development planning in 1972, countries around the world have increasingly begun considering the happiness of their citizens using measures that go beyond the traditional monetary metrics (Michaelson et al., 2009). Cities, states, and countries around the world have officially begun prioritizing the well-being of its citizens in a variety of capacities. Some have even included wellbeing in their countries' constitutions, including South Korea, Ecuador, and Japan (Snyder et al., 2020). At the global level, the United Nations has been reporting on the well-being of countries since its World Happiness Report began in 2011. By seeking more balance in an imbalanced field, the ideas and practices originating from positive psychology already have informed and influenced policy at local, national, and international levels (Snyder et al., 2020). In spite of the aforementioned impacts of positive psychology's theories, researches, and applications, it has attracted a number of detractors.

### Criticisms of Positive Psychology
### *The Happiness and Suffering Dialectic*

Perhaps the most fundamental criticism of positive psychology can be found in the argument that the exploration of human excellence is not some modern phenomena. Concepts embedded in the infrastructure of positive psychology have been explored long before Seligman. This is evidenced among psychologists such as, Victor Frankl's (1985) *Man's Search for Meaning* (originally published in 1946), May's (1958) discussion on the role of existential anxiety the development of terror management theory (Solomon et al., 1991), and the development of humanistic psychology. Ancient philosophers such as Plato engaged in existentialist debates on the role of happiness and suffering yet these debates continued in the 19th and 20th century and are commonly attributed to notable thinkers such as Heidegger, Sartre, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Camus. Similar concepts such as emotional regulation, finding meaning in life, discovering core strengths and development of personhood have all been explored in early philosophies in the East, as seen in Taoism, Buddhism and Zen practices. The elucidation of the happiness and suffering dialectic is not limited to intellectual giants or Asian philosophies, it is at the very core of the human motivation to attain knowledge of self and to achieve growth from that knowledge. The self-evident truth of humanity's desire to develop is inherent in many of the principles of positive psychology (kindness, flow, empathy, or optimism) should not be attributed to Martin Seligman or the APA, yet the intellectual merit of positive psychology is evidenced by the cascade of research that followed Seligman's 1998 call for intervention. Seligman and company deserve credit for this. Further to this discussion, there are additional concerns regarding the nature of wellbeing as a byproduct of internal (innate) or external (behavioral) mechanisms. Physical health is an important component of mental health (Koenig et al., 2012; Brief et al., 1993) and physical health has a clear genetic foundation (Røysamb et al., 2002). Thus, the state-trait debate on the nature of well-being is a contested aspect of the positive psychology movement. Psychology's role in self-help or the achievement of a better self are rooted in humanism yet positive psychology should not be labeled from a neo-humanistic perspective. An alternative interpretation is that positive psychology brings a scientifically rigorous exploration to the age-old questions of what it means to flourish, where before there was none to be found.

### Humanism and Positive Psychology

While there are many criticisms of positive psychology, such as its' apparent similarity to self-help literature (Cabanas, 2016), its' American roots (Ehrenreich, 2009), or the perceived inherent ethnocentrism (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008), one of the most common critiques is that this perspective is simply an offshoot of humanism (Robbins, 2008). Many see positive psychology as being implicitly grounded in humanistic ideologies, such as positive mental health as discussed by Jahoda (1958), developed well before the establishment of PPIs. Indeed, Abraham Maslow, an influential driver of the humanistic movement, used the term positive psychology in publications (Maslow, 1954). However, Waterman (2013) clearly articulated three key features that distinguish the humanistic and positive paradigms. The first involves ontological differences whereby the humanists embrace social constructivism, phenomenology, and existentialism. On the other hand, the positive practitioners embrace both the individual nature and the generic nature of humanity as evident in the abundance of articles based on the development of character strengths.

The second distinction of these two psychological perspectives is the epistemological divide as Waterman (2013) recognized through the reliance on qualitative (humanistic) or quantitative (positive) research paradigms (Friedman, 2008). It is important to remain mindful of the fact that positivist psychology researchers' reliance on quantitative methodologies (Park & Peterson, 2007) is an epistemological strategy that aims to result in more rigorous (i.e., positivist based statistical) data that supports or refutes the research aims and that will be accepted by the psychological and psychiatric community. Such an approach avoids the criticisms so often cast upon phenomenological findings that result from interpretivist qualitative methodologies. The abundance of evidence on the positive impact of PPIs has led some observers to claim that positive psychology has caused the rebirth of a Panglossian era in psychological research (Cabanas, 2018). This is further complicated by one of the most common criticisms levied at the positive psychology research community, the problematic nature of operationalizing concepts such as mindfulness (Quaglia et al., 2015), subjective well-being (Busseri & Sadava, 2011), and life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Based on these criticisms, some argue that research in the field lacks credibility (Frawley, 2015).

Additionally, critics argue that the reliance on quantitative questionnaires implementing Likert scales leads to confirmation bias and social desirability response bias (Schwarz et al., 2008). However, one need only to imagine the potentially lethargic development of this new psychological paradigm as well as the wave of criticism that would have washed over Seligman and company had the majority of research methodologies implemented at the onset been based on epistemological, ontological, hermeneutic, or axial notions of the subjective human experience. Indeed, the abundance of quantitative instruments that have been developed, as well as the empirical data that support the PPIs, have contributed greatly to advancing the goals as stated by Seligman at the onset.

The third distinguishing feature of positive psychology that clearly separates this ideology from humanism relates to the applicability of the philosophy to counselors, therapists, and the like (Waterman, 2013). While humanistic and other psychosocial paradigms often endeavor to gain greater understanding of the phenomenological experience of the client, positive psychology has developed a series of PPIs (see Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2011; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013) that are not as client-counselor focused and furthermore are pragmatic in the sense that they do not require years of self-exploration and existential quandary (Waterman, 2013). In sum, the ontological, epistemological, and therapeutic differences clearly distinguish humanism and positive psychology.

### Positive Psychology is WEIRD

Psychology as a whole has been rather Western centered since inception (Berry, 2013), as has psychology as a social science (Hendriks et al., 2019). It has been argued, based on evidence outlining the predominant role of American psychologists in both counseling and research output by Arnett (2008) and Allik (2013), that the majority of research is WEIRD—based on data collected from participants which are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (Henrich et al., 2010). Yet global demographic trends are not WEIRD. An analysis of positive psychology research concluded

that only 5.5% of research output was conducted in non-Western nations (Schui & Krampen, 2010). This argument, the Western and thus individualistic nature of psychology, has led to additional criticism (Cabanas, 2018) wherein positive psychology is characterized as a byproduct of ideologies emphasizing Western individualistic paths toward flourishing (Richardson & Guignon, 2008).

Implicit within many PPIs is the value of instrumentalism and individualism (Wong, 2019). Yet the claim is exacerbated given the American origins of most PPIs (Park & Peterson, 2007). This American individualistic argument lends to the claim that these PPIs cannot be reliably implemented abroad and further arguments that these "happiness therapies" (Cabanas, 2018. p. 4) are far too individualistic, have led some to misinterpret the calls for greater socialization and development of empathy and instead choose to focus on the politics of wellbeing within an individualistic lens. A further semantic undercurrent is prevalent in much of the academic literature on PPIs where critics commonly substitute terms such as wellbeing with "happiness" and individualistic for "narcissistic." While, from the global cultural perspective, individualism is on the rise (Santos et al., 2017); from the macrosocial perspective, given access to technology, the ability of the individual to seek knowledge related to mental health questions and potential solutions has never been greater. This is particularly relevant in cultures that stigmatize mental health, a global problem (Thornicroft et al., 2009), yet particularly relevant given the increasing global acceptance of psychological treatments in traditionally collectivist nations in Asia (Kudva et al., 2020), which accounts for 60% of the global population. In India, for example, Nandy (2013) argued the transition to individualism is a "cultural disease" (p. 176) manifest in the desperately narcissistic pursuit of happiness that originated in the West. In fact, cross-cultural research in positive psychology is still in its infancy, but the trend is clear: research from non-Western countries is increasing rapidly (Hendriks et al., 2019). However, simply having American origins is not a credible reason to discount attempts to rigorously examine the processes and elements making up well-being. On the contrary, the need for high-quality research that is relevant to non-Western cultures is a powerful justification for renewed efforts to develop methodology that explores the cultural variations in understanding the factors make life most worth living.

## Discussion

Positive psychology has spent over 20 years using the tools of science to investigate the various elements, causes, and consequences of well-being. If at first there was some question whether the science of positive psychology would contribute anything of value to science and society, that question has been answered. Interest has grown enormously and has had a significant impact on a wide range of disciplines, including mental health, education, organizations, economics, national, and international policy (Maddux, 2020). For example, a Google search for "positive psychology" by the authors in 2021 resulted in over 8,740,000 results, and the same search in Google Scholar resulted in over 3,450,000 results. Additionally, the phenomenon has gone global, with positive psychology journals, conferences, and associations across Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. However, as a relatively new area of focus, and one that receives a tremendous amount of popular media attention, many still question the value of the contributions made by positive psychology. Such skepticism, explored in the criticisms described above, may be warranted, as popularity and growth does not speak to the validity of the science. The authors of this article argue, then, that positive psychology represents a rebalancing of psychology as a whole; a holistic refocusing of what it means to be human. When seen in this light, the above criticisms, specifically that positive psychology is nothing new, that it is just an extension of humanism, and that it is only relevant to Western cultures, are not valid. Rather than being seen as a separate field within psychology, positive psychology should be acknowledged globally as an important complement to existing psychosocial theories, techniques, and interventions across various branches of psychology as a whole. An examination of positive psychology's many impacts makes a strong case for expanding psychology's current purview to include a greater focus on studying the positive (Gallagher & Lopez, 2021).

## Conclusion

In this article, the authors argue that the positive psychology can best be seen as a rebalancing, rather than an entirely new perspective, branch, or a sub-field of psychology. The initial call for a more positive psychology was a direct result of psychology's almost exclusive focus on the negative since its inception, and the subsequent rapid and ubiquitous growth of interest in studying the positive reflects the need to address the historical imbalance. The inclusion of a scientifically rigorous examination of the positives across all branches of psychology has been welcomed by psychologists, but not all agree on its value. Upon reflection, treating positive psychology as a new perspective or a separate field is a mistake. The study of flourishing, of thriving, cannot be separated and criticized, because the good, together with the bad, form the whole. When seen in this light, the most significant criticisms of positive psychology lose their relevance altogether. Perhaps eliminating the moniker "positive psychology" altogether is the next step in the rebalancing process.

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# Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty as Influenced by Service Quality, Trust, and Perceived Value in Chinese Language Training Centers in Bangkok, Thailand

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**Abstract**

Learning the Chinese language as a third language (after English as a second language) is trending among younger generations in Thailand, indicating the need for Chinese language training centers. In this study, five dimensions of service quality were investigated (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy), together with trust and perceived value, to observe their contribution to customer satisfaction at Chinese language training centers in Bangkok. Additionally, the influence of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty and five dimensions of loyalty outcomes were examined—identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and share of wallet. Survey data was collected (*N* = 482) and analyzed using the structural equation modeling technique. The findings showed that the assurance dimension of service quality had a positive influence on customer satisfaction, and reliability and empathy of service quality had a positive influence on trust. Management could enhance trust through arranging appropriate Chinese classes, giving strong service support, and providing flexible class schedules. Customer satisfaction could be increased through hiring more experienced teachers and offering scholarship possibilities.

**Keywords**: *Service quality, perceived value, trust, customer responses*

**Introduction and Literature Review**

There is worldwide enthusiasm for learning the Chinese language. This has been shown also in Thailand (Siripetch, 2020). The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty at selected Chinese language training centers. The following research questions were asked:

1. What are the influences of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction at Chinese language training centers in Bangkok, Thailand?
2. What are the influences of perceived value and trust on customer satisfaction?
3. What is the influence of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty?

Service quality is the customer's judgment of overall excellence of a service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The best-known model to study service quality is the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which provides a set of five dimensions for measuring customer service satisfaction. These dimensions are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The current study adapted the SERVQUAL model to measure the service quality of Chinese language training services.

Perceived value is one of the most important factors giving a competitive advantage in business (Parasuraman, 1997). According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is a customer's overall assessment of product utility based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Buyers choose products based on perceived value, which comes from the tangible needs of quality, price, and convenience.

In the study of Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust was defined as "confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity." They considered it a key mediating construct in relationship exchanges. Trust arises when a customer can see that employees respond, and they recognize that this trust is different from other service-quality dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Trust is essential for building and maintaining long-term relationships (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

According to Kotler (2000), customer satisfaction is related to a person's positive or negative feelings after comparing the perceived performance of products or services with their expectations. In previous research, it was found that satisfied customers buy more products or services, recommend products to others, and were less price sensitive as a result (Homburg et al., 2005). By contrast, Oliver

(1997) considered customer satisfaction a perception that some needs had been fulfilled. Satisfaction is an evaluation that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, gives an appropriate level of fulfillment.

Customer loyalty is a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a chosen product or service, regardless of situational influence or marketing activities that make consumers want to choose other products or service (Oliver, 1997). It is more cost effective to have loyal customers than to find new customers (Thomas & Tobe, 2013). In previous studies loyalty outcomes have been examined including repurchase intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996), lower switching intentions (Keaveney, 1995), increased strength of preference (Dick & Basu, 1994), positive word-of-mouth or recommendations (Zeithaml et al., 1996), exclusive purchasing (White & Schneider, 2000), identifying with the service provider through exclusive affiliation (Butcher et al., 2001), and a willingness to pay a price premium for a given service (Zeithaml et al. 1996).

In this study, the research model illustrated in Figure 1 was used. It was proposed that five dimensions of service quality were the main drivers used to assess perceived value in Chinese language training centers. These five dimensions of service quality are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Cornin & Taylor, 1992).

**Figure 1** *Theoretical Framework*
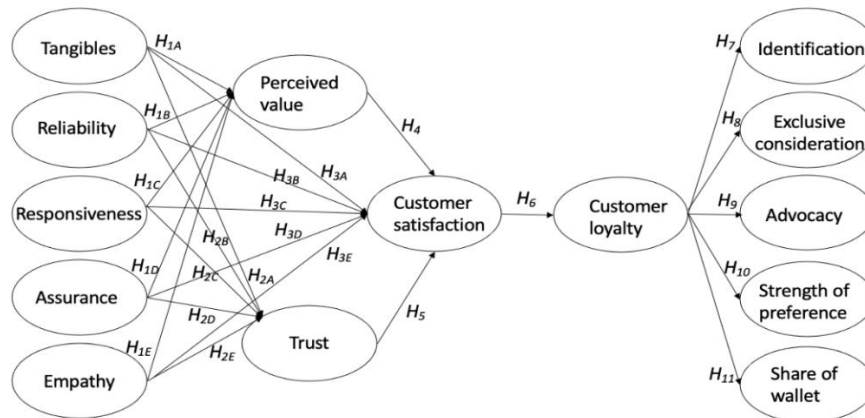


On the basis of the theoretical framework, the initial groups of hypotheses adopted for this study were as follows:

Group 1 Hypotheses—$H_{1a}$: The tangible dimension of service quality positively influences perceived value in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{1b}$: The reliability dimension of service quality positively influences perceived value in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{1c}$: The responsiveness dimension of service quality positively influences perceived value in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{1d}$: The assurance dimension of service quality positively influences perceived value in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{1e}$: The empathy dimension of service quality positively influences perceived value in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok.

The elements of quality in service were expected to affect trust directly. This is because the elements of service represent the best way to convey the trustworthiness of the system. Gefen et al. (2003) suggested that different determinants affected trust and showed that service quality had a positive influence on customer trust. Therefore, a further cluster of hypotheses was made:

Group 2 Hypotheses—$H_{2a}$: The tangible dimension of service quality positively influences trust in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{2b}$: The reliability dimension of service quality positively influences trust in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{2c}$: The responsiveness dimension of service quality positively influences trust in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{2d}$: The assurance dimension of service quality positively influences trust in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{2e}$: The empathy dimension of service quality positively influences trust in Chinese

language training centers in Bangkok.

A previous study indicated that customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, based on thinking or feeling, occurred when a customer had one or many service experiences (Rust & Oliver, 1994). Satisfaction is an emotional response after purchasing a product or service where the customer considers both perceived and expected quality. Iacobucci et al. (1995) conducted an empirical study of these two variables using qualitative techniques. They compared service quality and customer satisfaction, and found that the former was associated with managerial delivery of service, while the latter was related to customers' experiences with that service. They claimed that if the company made improvements contrary to what customers say their needed, the result would not be improved customer satisfaction. Thus, greater service quality leads to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Johns et al., 2004). Therefore, a third group of hypotheses was made as follows:

Group 3 Hypotheses—$H_{3a}$: The tangible dimension of service quality positively influences satisfaction in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{3b}$: The reliability dimension of service quality positively influences satisfaction in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{3c:}$: The responsiveness dimension of service quality positively influences satisfaction in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok; $H_{3d}$: The assurance dimension of service quality positively influences satisfaction in Chinese language centers in Bangkok; $H_{3e}$: The empathy dimension of service quality positively influences satisfaction in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok;.

According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value has a prior effect on buying intentions and actions, and a number of studies have empirically validated this proposition (Ennew & Binks 1999; Wakefield & Barnes 1996). According to a study by Glaveli et al. (2006), perceived value directly influences the level of customer satisfaction. Based on these previous studies, a fourth hypothesis was formulated.

$H_4$: Perceived value positively influences customer satisfaction in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok.

Researchers have established that trust is essential for building and maintaining long-term relationships (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). In some studies, it has been proposed that trust precedes satisfaction (Gul, 2014); at first, customers trust the service providers based on factors that exert effects on satisfaction. This led to the formulation of the fifth hypothesis for the model:

$H_5$: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and trust in Chinese language training centers in Bangkok.

Previous studies have shown that satisfied customers show loyalty by purchasing more products or services, recommending products to others, and being less price sensitive (Homburg et al., 2005). Throughout the literature, there are numerous studies that have indicated that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kuo et al., 2009). However, others (Seiders et al., 2005) noted that high customer satisfaction does not always indicate high loyalty. This led us to propose a sixth hypothesis adopted for the model:

$H_6$: Customer satisfaction positively influences customer loyalty.

Customers connect with a company as a result of involvement with it, their feeling of belonging, or their shared values with providers (Butcher et al. 2001). Iacobucci (1992) suggested that services, as opposed to goods, provided more incentive for customers to form a comparative identity because of their interpersonal nature. This led us to propose a seventh hypothesis adopted for the model.

$H_7$: Customer's level of loyalty positively influences identification.

One of the outcomes of customer loyalty is exclusive consideration. This refers to the range of a customer's consideration-set when purchasing a particular type of service (Hauser & Wernerfelt, 1990; Kardes et al. 1993). These authors also suggested that customers try to limit the buying choices to reduce the mental effort needed to decide which brands to purchase. According to Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995), customers build loyal relationships with service providers to limit choice-set in much the same way they do with brand goods. This led us to propose an eighth hypothesis for the model.

*H₈*: Customer's level of loyalty positively influences exclusive consideration.

Loyal customers also are more likely to use word-of-mouth to suggest that their friends, relatives, and other potential customers buy products and services (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). A number of studies have linked service quality and satisfaction to consumer advocacy (Butcher at al. 2001; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). These previous studies indicated that as customers become more committed to a service provider, the likelihood of them becoming an advocate increased. This led us to propose a ninth hypothesis adopted for the model.

*H₉*: Customer's level of loyalty positively influences advocacy.

Strength of preference is about attitude and perception. In order for people to show strength of preference, they must display an attitude that reflects that they value the relationship between themselves and the company. Furthermore, they must show their loyalty to their preferred company and have a positive feeling (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Therefore, these studies showed that loyalty had an influence on how constructs, such as service quality, related to a consumer's strength of preference. This led us to propose a tenth hypothesis adopted for the model.

*H₁₀*: Customer's level of loyalty positively influences strength of preference.

Share of wallet is defined as a customer's desire to purchase what a service provider offers (Day, 1976). Reynolds and Beatty (1999) measured the effects of both loyalty to a store and to a salesperson based on share of wallet, and found a significant relationship. Thus, the literature supports the idea that customer loyalty drives share of wallet, leading to an eleventh proposed hypothesis for the model.

*H₁₁*: Customer's level of loyalty positively influences share of wallet.

**Table 1** *Definitions Previously Used and Operational Definitions*

| Variables | Definitions (Previous Studies) | Operational Definitions (This Study) |
|---|---|---|
| Service Quality | Service quality is a customer's judgment of overall excellence of the service or the difference between customer's expectation and the actual service performed or perceived. (Parasuraman et al., 1985) | A customer's recognition of the standard of service, or how actual service performed by the Chinese language training center differs from the customer's expectation. |
| Satisfaction | Customer satisfaction is defined as an overall evaluation based on total purchase and consumption experience with the good or service over time. (Fornell et al., 1996) | An overall estimation of the complete purchase and consumption experience with the Chinese language training center over time. |
| Perceived Value | Perceived value is the customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. (Zeithaml, 1988) | A customers' overall measurement of the language training service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. |
| Trust | Trust is a customer's confidence that a service provider is dependable and can be relied upon to deliver on its promises. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) | Trust is a customer's confidence that the Chinese language training center is dependable and can be relied upon to deliver on its promises. |
| Loyalty | A deeply held commitment to re-buy a preferred product consistently in the future, thus causing repetitive same brand purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. (Oliver, 1999) | A strong intention to continue to purchase the Chinese language center's service in the future, in spite of any situational influence and marketing efforts that might cause switching behavior. |

**Methodology**

The target population of this study were the people who paid for Chinese language training for themselves or others at eight branches of one Chinese language training center. A pilot study was conducted using 30 samples to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. After the pretest, the main data collection was conducted from a convenience sample of 600 who completed a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 482 usable questionnaires from respondents were analyzed after screening out incomplete questionnaires.

The questionnaire contained 22 items covering five dimensions of service quality adapted from work done by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Parasuraman et al. (1988); six items about perceived value based on Zeithaml (1988); six items about satisfaction adapted from Fornell et al. (1996); nine items about trust adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994); eight items about loyalty adapted from Oliver (1999) and 18 items about loyalty outcomes adapted from Ganesh et al. (2000). This study used five-point Likert scales to measure the constructs, with 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

There were three steps in the data analysis process. First, Cronbach's alpha was used to analyze the reliability of the scale used to measure variables. All variables ranged from .819 to .929. Second, the discriminant validity of the questionnaire was measured by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Third, the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was used to test the proposed model and assumptions. In the original set of questionnaires for this study, there were 69 items. Through the CFA and SEM processes, 32 items were deleted. In the final SEM model (see Figure 2 in the Results section), there were 15 scale items for service quality (22 original scale items), two scale items for perceived value (six original scale items), two scale items for trust (six original scale items), six scale items for satisfaction (nine original scale items), two scale items for loyalty (eight original scale items), and 10 scale items for loyalty outcome (18 original scale items).

**Results and Discussion**

In this study, 600 questionnaires were distributed and 482 (80.3%) responses were deemed fit for further analysis. The respondents came from eight districts of Bangkok. The demographic profile showed that respondents were 77.6% female and 22.4% male, and the dominant age group was 20 to 40 years (72.2%), followed by 41 to 60 years (24.7%), above 60 years (2.1%), and a few were under 20 years (1.0%). A majority of respondents had master's degrees (72.6%), followed by bachelor's degrees (18.7%), middle or high school diplomas (7.1%), doctoral degrees (1.0%), and a few held primary school training or under (0.6%). The majority of respondents had a monthly income of 40,001~60,000 Baht (51.9%) and of 20,001~40,000 Baht (40.0%), while 4.1% had a monthly income of 60,000~80,000 Baht, 2.5% had a monthly income above 80,000 Baht, and 1.5% had a monthly income under 20,000 Baht.

In order to confirm the hypothesized relationships among variables and their underlying constructs, CFA and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) approaches were used. Four groups were included in the measurement model, namely, Group (1) tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; Group (2) perceived value and trust; Group (3) satisfaction and loyalty; and Group (4) identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and share of wallet. Each variable within a group related to one another, and thus it was faster to get acceptable model fit indices by looking at the modified indices.

Several fit indices were used to validate fitness of the proposed framework to the observed population, including standardized root mean square residual (SRMR < .09) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA < .06) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model fit options are presented in Table 2. The current research used RMSEA and SRMR to judge the quality of the model fit, as the data showed the most valid results with these indices.

**Table 2** *Model Fit Indices Obtained*

| Item | CMIN/*df* | CFI | RMR | SRMR | RMSEA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fit Criteria | <3.0 | > .90 | < .05 | < .09 | < .05 |
| CFA Group (1) | 1.234 | .982 | .024 | .041 | .022 |
| CFA Group (2) | 3.307 | .973 | .025 | .045 | .055 |
| CFA Group (3) | 1.250 | .996 | .013 | .027 | .023 |
| CFA Group (4) | 8.786 | .914 | .027 | .053 | .135 |
| SEM | 2.237 | .881 | .040 | .051 | .046 |

*Note:* CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMR = Root mean square residual; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

In addition, in the CFA test, composite reliability (CR > .70) and average variance extracted (AVE > .50) values were obtained to confirm the validity and convergent validity of the scales (Bagozzi, 1980; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The level of fit to the SEM model is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2** *Final SEM Model Adopted and Values Obtained*
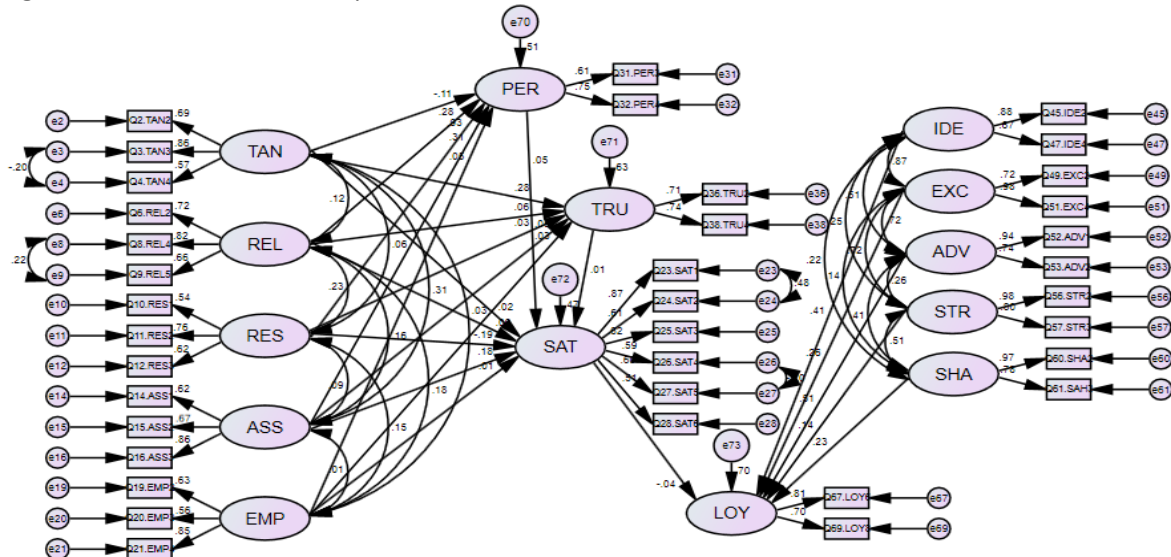


Eleven hypotheses were supported by the data analysis as shown in Table 3. These were $H_{1b}$, $H_{1d}$, $H_{1e}$, $H_{2b}$, $H_{2e}$, $H_{3d}$, $H_7$, $H_8$, $H_9$, $H_{10}$, and $H_{11}$. In the $H_1$ group, it was hypothesized that a relationship existed among the five dimensions of service quality and perceived value. Reliability, assurance, and empathy were the dimensions that supported perceived value. These result are consistent with past research data (Azman et al., 2009; Cigdem & Berkehan, 2016), which showed that service quality had a significant influence on perceived value. Customers recognize perceived value from the Chinese language training centers and believe they can accurately fulfill service commitments, and provide knowledge and courtesy with a personalized focus on customers.

**Table 3** *Summary of Testing Results*

| | Path Hypothesis | Path Estimates | Standard Error | Significance Level (*p*-value) | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $H_{1a}$ | Tangible→Perceived Value | -0.126 | 0.08 | .118 | Not supported |
| $H_{1b}$ | Reliability→Perceived Value | 0.281 | 0.099 | .005** | Supported |
| $H_{1c}$ | Responsiveness→Perceived Value | -0.068 | 0.101 | .503 | Not supported |
| $H_{1d}$ | Assurance→Perceived Value | 0.233 | 0.114 | .042* | Supported |
| $H_{1e}$ | Empathy→Perceived Value | 0.914 | 0.091 | .033** | Supported |
| $H_{2a}$ | Tangible→Trust | 0.025 | 0.075 | .734 | Not supported |
| $H_{2b}$ | Reliability→Trust | 0.305 | 0.105 | .004** | Supported |
| $H_{2c}$ | Responsiveness→Trust | -0.123 | 0.1 | .221 | Not supported |
| $H_{2d}$ | Assurance→Trust | 0.16 | 0.113 | .156 | Not supported |
| $H_{2e}$ | Empathy→Trust | 0.185 | 0.092 | .044* | Supported |
| $H_{3a}$ | Tangible→Satisfaction | 0.047 | 0.056 | .403 | Not supported |
| $H_{3b}$ | Reliability→Satisfaction | 0.027 | 0.071 | .071 | Not supported |
| $H_{3c}$ | Responsiveness→Satisfaction | 0.085 | 0.084 | .311 | Not supported |
| $H_{3d}$ | Assurance→Satisfaction | 0.151 | 0.075 | .043* | Supported |
| $H_{3e}$ | Empathy→Satisfaction | -0.012 | 0.066 | .852 | Not supported |
| $H_4$ | Perceived value→Satisfaction | 0.048 | 0.042 | .257 | Not supported |
| $H_5$ | Satisfaction→Trust | 0.002 | 0.01 | .861 | Not supported |
| $H_6$ | Satisfaction→Loyalty | -0.053 | 0.056 | .345 | Not supported |
| $H_7$ | Loyalty→Identification | 0.26 | 0.076 | *** | Supported |
| $H_8$ | Loyalty→Exclusive Consideration | 0.956 | 0.12 | *** | Supported |
| $H_9$ | Loyalty→Advocacy | 0.597 | 0.096 | *** | Supported |
| $H_{10}$ | Loyalty→Strength of Preference | 0.138 | 0.056 | .013* | Supported |
| $H_{11}$ | Loyalty→Share of Wallet | 0.226 | 0.082 | .006** | Supported |

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In the $H_2$ group, the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality and trust was investigated. The two dimensions that supported trust in this data were reliability and empathy. This implied that customers thought that the value of the Chinese language institution was the ability to fulfill its promised service and personal care.

In the $H_3$ group, the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality and satisfaction was tested. Assurance was found to support satisfaction, but the other four dimensions did not support customer satisfaction. Assurance was identified as courtesy and knowledge displayed by the Chinese language training center employees and their ability to convey trust. This implies that customers may think the most important criterion of satisfaction in Chinese language training industry is the knowledge of Chinese language teachers. Such a finding also was highlighted in research conducted by Hossain (2012). Tangibles did not support satisfaction, which represents a similar conclusion reached in an investigation completed in the United Kingdom holiday market by Ekinci et al. (2003). There they found that customers evaluated the importance of intangible elements of service quality higher than the tangible elements. The results also showed that responsiveness made an insufficient contribution to explain customers' satisfaction, which was confirmed in Azam's (2018) study. Reliability and responsiveness did not support customer satisfaction, which was similar to the finding of Tung (2004). This could be because consumers in Thailand considered a high level of reliability and responsiveness to be common to language training centers. Empathy was not significant in contributing to customer satisfaction, a finding similar to that found by Wang (2004).

In the $H_4$ group, perceived value did not have a signification influence on customer satisfaction, a finding consistent with Edward's (2015) findings. The investigation of $H_5$ indicated that customer satisfaction did not have a positive influence on trust, which is similar to the findings of Tooba et al. (2016). The result found in testing $H_6$ was compatible with the results of Jones and Sasser (1995), who reported that customer satisfaction does not always have a significant influence on loyalty. One

possible explanation may be that there is a low level of customer satisfaction in the centers. Therefore, no particular dimension could be assigned to satisfaction. Another reason could be that customers have many choices for language training in Bangkok, so they do not feel loyal to any language training center. The final five hypotheses were supported. They all showed a positive relationship between loyalty and loyalty outcomes, which agreed with the findings of Bourdeau (2005). This was an expected outcome since loyal customers naturally show these behaviors, namely, identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and share of wallet.

**Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications**

First, this study revealed the dimensions of service quality (reliability, assurance, and empathy) that positively influence perceived value. According to this finding, managers may need to train employees to become more thoughtful, to always have the customer's best interests at heart, and to patiently listen to the needs of customers. A specialist Chinese curriculum consultation should be conducted so that an appropriate Chinese language course can be designed for the different levels of need displayed by customers. In addition, managers need to consider the most convenient business hours for clients and then offer a flexible class schedule. Second, the study confirmed that some service quality components (reliability and empathy) positively influenced trust. This means that staff in the Chinese training center should always be ready to respond to customer calls for assistance. Third, the findings of this study added to the existing literature regarding the link between customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, customer satisfaction does not always have a significant influence on loyalty (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Hick et al. (2005) also indicated that an approach focused solely on customer satisfaction may be not sufficient to induce customer loyalty.

Furthermore, the findings of this research also indicated that customer satisfaction in Chinese language training centers largely depended on assurance in service quality. This may inspire managers to hire more experienced and courteous Chinese teachers to deliver classes and to sign contracts with customers at the beginning to make them feel safe in their transactions. The managers also are urged to focus on reducing the cost of training and to improve the availability of learning materials.

The final theoretical implication of this study is that it supported the links between loyalty and loyalty outcomes: identification, strength of preference, and share of wallet (Bourdeau, 2005). This should encourage managers to identify customers who show loyalty to a particular Chinese learning center. When a customer is loyal to the Chinese language center, they are likely to repeatedly purchase courses and recommend others to attend the center, regardless of the price of Chinese courses on the market. This may inspire the managers to advertise among loyal customers so that more customers are attracted. Managers also could introduce some incentive polices to maintain customers. This might be in the form of offering a discount or in giving them the right to adjust courses or choose particular Chinese teachers.

**Limitations and Conclusions**

There were certain limitations associated with this study that should be considered in further research efforts. One limitation in the methodology was that some variables in the questionnaire were measured by just two questions. In order to find a good model fit, this study deleted some scales from the original items. Therefore in future studies, attention might be given to the original methodology as derived from previous studies. Another limitation in this study was that a quantitative design was used to study the influence of factors affecting service quality and customer loyalty. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches would deliver more comprehensive results. Also, because most literature is based on research conducted in Western countries, clients' feelings and opinions may be different when compared with those in Thailand. An alternative design, using in-depth interviews or focus groups, may have resulted in the identification of more significant factors contributing to customer loyalty.

The purpose of this study was to test the proposed framework of service quality, perceived value, trust, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of Chinese language training centers in Bangkok, Thailand. It was hoped to better understand the five phases of loyalty outcomes. Future

research, based on this study, should extend the model used by incorporating other factors that may influence customers' satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

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# Expansion and Speculation of the Creation Theme in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

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**Abstract**

In this study the theme of creation in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is explored. From the Apocrypha, the study focuses on selected creation references from the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Baruch, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Prayer of Manasseh. From the Pseudepigrapha, creation references are selected from the Book of Jubilees, the Book of the Secrets of Enoch (2 Enoch), and the Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra). Even though in most cases both the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha generally follow many of the Old Testament creation traditions, they also interpret the creation account of Genesis 1–2 through the lens of other creation passages in the Old Testament. As a result, they modify and expand certain creation images and ideas. Moreover, they also have the tendency to speculate. The speculation involves, in most cases, adding details to the creation narrative of Genesis 1–2 so as to clarify what is not mentioned in the narrative.

**Keywords**: *Second temple, Jewish writings, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, creation*

## Introduction

The Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha are two bodies of literature that were written during the Second Temple period. During this period, considerable "development and elaboration" (Helyer, 2004) and "Jewish speculation" (Young, 1955) of the Old Testament (OT) occurred. As one reads the New Testament (NT), especially the Gospels, it is helpful to remember that Jesus and His apostles were reading Israel's sacred Scriptures "through the lens of Second Temple Judaism" (Helyer, 2004; Hauser & Watson, 2003).

In this study the focus is on these two bodies of writings despite the fact that there are other writings during the Second Temple period such as those of the Qumran literature. This delimitation is due to the fact that unlike most of the writings in the Second Temple period, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha were written following the styles and forms of biblical literature (Dimant, 1988; Nickelsburg, 2005). Furthermore, these writings were influential and considered inspired by many Jewish and Christian communities (Biblical literature: Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, 2021).

Several scholars have explored how the Second Temple Jewish literature has expanded some biblical themes including creation. Nickelsburg (1984), for instance, discussed how some portions of the OT have been rewritten and expanded. He provided several examples of expansion. For example, 1 Enoch speculated on the giants and angels in Noah's narrative. Jubilee expanded on Moses and Israel. However, he did not elaborate on other elements of creation in the Genesis 1–2 creation story. Similarly, Young (1955) argued that the Second Temple period had been a time for "considerable speculation" of biblical themes. However, he focused only on Isaiah. Additionally, Kulik and Minov (2016) presented, among others, how the Slavonic texts *About All Creation* and *the Creation of Adam* expanded the six days of creation in Genesis 1 and gave non-biblical details of the creation of Adam (cf. Gen 2–3). Kulik and Minov's study perhaps closely reflects the focus of this study. However, it explored only the Slavonic texts whereas this study looks at the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. A survey of other similar scholarly literature revealed a gap in the study of how the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha have expanded and speculated on the theme of creation in the OT that included the narrative of Genesis 1–2. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap.

The objective of this study was to explore the theme of creation in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha with the focus on Jewish elaboration and speculation. However, it is not meant to be exhaustive. Due to the limitation of space, it analyzes selected creation references from both the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha in order to demonstrate Jewish elaboration and speculation

concerning the theme of creation in the OT with a particular interest in the Genesis 1–2 creation narrative.

**Research Methodology**

The methodology involved selecting creation references from the two bodies of writings and categorizing them into (a) narrative accounts of creation, (b) descriptive accounts of creation, and (c) brief references to creation. Endo (2002) explained that the narrative accounts of creation are a retelling of the Genesis creation narrative and generally follow the pattern of Genesis 1–2. The descriptive accounts of creation are selective references of creation with interpretative nature. The brief references to creation are shorter, and briefly mention creation in support of the main theme of a passage. Subsequently, these selected references were examined with the focus on how the creation theme had been expanded and speculated in the references. A special interest was given to Genesis 1–2 creation narrative. Throughout the process of examination, the study utilized the primary sources in their English translations. Concerning Bible references, it used the Hebrew text of the OT while consulting various English translations.

**Apocrypha**

From the Apocrypha, this study analyzed selected references from the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Baruch, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Prayer of Manasseh. These books were selected on account of the clear connection of the creation references to the theme of creation. The English translation of all the references were taken from *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* edited by Charles (1913).

***The Wisdom of Ben Sira***

The Wisdom of Ben Sira is also known as Sirach. Sirach is the Greek form of Sira. Sometimes it is called Ecclesiasticus. In this discussion, the form Sirach is used.

*Sirach 16:24–17:14*

Sirach 16:24–17:14 is a descriptive account of creation (Endo, 2002). The creation passage appeared in the central argument (16:17–17:14) of a larger unit (Sir 14:20–23:27). The reference emphasized "God's mercy which prevails over human sinful nature" and presented creation as "an accurate knowledge" (Sir 16:25), focusing on "the creation order (16:26–30), and on the creation of human beings (17:1–8)" (Endo, 2002, p. 102).

Endo (2002) suggested two themes to consider: (a) creation order, and (b) wisdom and the law in the context of humanity. The first theme portrays God as "the Creator who established the eternal order in the universe" (p. 102), alluding to Psalm 104:5–23. The section focuses on the creation order (16:26–30) depicting God as assigning boundaries to His creation (Sir 16:26), arranging their (creation) eternal order and their dominion or realm in their generation (Sir 16:27), and graciously providing for them so that they could obey the divine word (Sir 16:28). Two things characterized God's creation: (a) "harmony among all its constituent parts," and (b) "obedience of all things to the divine plan" (Berg, 2013, p. 146). All of these depictions highlighted "the sovereignty of God who rules the world by His divine order" (p. 102).

The second theme—the theme of wisdom and the law—was emphasized in a sapiential context (Sir 17:1–8), focusing on the creation of human beings. Human beings were said to be weak and their life transient. However, God endowed them with strength and wisdom by placing the fear of God in their hearts and giving them human attributes (17:3–6), by filling them with knowledge and understanding in order to discern good and evil (17:7), and by allotting them the law of life (17:8).

Berg (2013) argued that Sirach's primary concern in the creation account (16:24–17:14) was "about the human capacity to *know* God's law" (pp. 157). Sirach interpreted the Genesis creation accounts through creative juxtaposition of Genesis 1–3 and allusions to Exodus 19–20 and Deuteronomy 5, 30. Even though the discussion was about humankind, the implication was applied in

particular to the people of Israel, whom God endowed with wisdom (cf. Sir 17:17). In Sirach it is argued that since "humans are capable of knowledge in their created state," it followed then that "the Jews are capable of knowing the law given specifically to Israel." This argument seemed to reflect an attempt by Sirach's author "to reconcile the universal and the particular" (Berg, 2013, p. 151; cf. Goering, 2009). Consequently, human beings, in general, and Israel, in particular, should pursue the way of life if they "desire to live in accordance with the law and wisdom" (Endo, 2002, p. 103).

*Sirach 33:7–15*

Sirach 33:7–15 gives a brief reference to creation (cf. Endo, 2002). It is a section in a larger unit of Sirach 24:1–33:18. The section affirmed God's providence through the creation account. Creation was connected with the idea of theodicy in this passage. After comparing and contrasting those who feared God and sinners, Sirach 33:7–15 explained why there were two kinds of people—good and evil—in this world.

The universal divisions or pairs of opposites in time and space, in the highlighted passages in Sirach, were illustrative of the division between good and evil people. On the one hand, "in His infinite wisdom, God has established in creation a series of opposites or contrasts or contraries" as part of the divine ordering of the cosmos, which included human beings. On the other hand, "God has also made 'people unlike' (33:11a), blessing some and cursing others (33:12)" (Skehan & Di Lella, 1987, p. 400). "Referring to the created universal order, Sirach thereby emphasized how the destinies of human beings (or Israelite) are in the hands of the Creator" (Endo, 2002, p. 153).

*Sirach 39:12–35*

Sirach 39:12–35 is a descriptive account of creation (Endo, 2002). The unit where the reference is located (Sir 38:24–43:33) contains another creation reference: Sirach 42:15–43:33. This other reference is discussed next. Within the broader context, Sirach 39:12–35 highlighted "the sovereignty of God who provides for every need of His creation (Sir 39:33)" (p. 103).

In general, Sirach 39:12–20 was based on Psalm 33 (Endo, 2002). Several motifs alluding to Psalm 33 appeared in Sirach. These motifs included the praise of God with lyres (Sir 39:15; Ps 33:2), the works of the Lord undertaken were right/good (Sir 39:16; Ps 33:4), the word (from the mouth) of the Lord made water reservoirs (Sir 39:17b; Ps 33:6–7), God spoke/commanded and things were done (Sir 39:18a; Ps 33:9), and God saw all humans (Sir 39:19; Ps 33:13). These motifs, however, were just examples of how Psalm 33 has influenced Sirach 39:12–35. Consequently, they demonstrated how the author of Sirach has speculated on Psalm 33 (Bernard, 2020).

The central theme of the passage concerned the relationship between creation and eschatology. On the one hand, God created everything good and for its own purpose (Sir 39:17) and need (39:21, 33); things existed in balance (Skehan & Di Lella, 1987). On the other hand, this balance carried the idea that good things were for the good ones and bad things were for the bad ones (Sir 39:22–27). Thus, a dualistic idea was developed. Under the Creator's sovereignty, the whole creation became instrument of judgment and punishment for the wicked at the appointed time, namely, at the eschaton (Sir. 39:28–31; cf. Skehan & Di Lella, 1987; Endo, 2002). Furthermore, by alluding to Psalm 33:6–12, Sirach's author was also presenting an eschatological interpretation of the creation passage in the Psalm. In other words, "Sirach understands that God who accomplished His work of creation by His word (Sir 39:17b) can realize and accomplish His eschatological judgment through His word" (Endo, 2002, p. 107).

*Sirach 42:15–43:33*

Sirach 42:15–43:33 is a descriptive account of creation (Endo, 2002). As mentioned, this passage is the second creation reference in its broader context or unit (i.e., 38:24–43:33) and it follows the section on ethical instructions (Sir 40:1–42:14). In the passage, the works of God are recalled and declared (Sir 42:15). These works of God highlighted His sovereignty.

There was a clear Old Testament influence in Sirach 42:15–43:33. It contained several verbal correspondences to Job 37–38 (Endo, 2002). The correspondences included phrases or words such as "the ordinances of the heavens" (Sir 43:1–10; Job 38:31–33), "thunders" (Sir 43:13, 17; Job 37:5), "snow" (Sir 43:13; Job 37:6), "north wind" (Sir 43:17b, 20–21; Job 37:9–10), "south wind" (Sir 43:16b; Job 37:17a), "hail" (Sir 43:15; Job 38:22), "frost" (Sir 43:19; Job 38:29), and "ice" (Sir 43:20; Job 38:30). They were used in connection with God's mighty power of judgment as well as salvation.

The theme of the sovereignty of God is highlighted in the passage. First, it underscores "God's sovereignty over all creation by referring to His knowledge (Sir 42:18–20) and His power which rules over all creation through the universal order (Sir 43:21, 23)" (Endo, 2002, p. 109). As Calduch-Benages (2008) pointed out concerning Sirach 42:15–43:33, "the manifestations of beauty and splendor in creation are seen as reflections of the glory of God" (p. 135). Second, the theme emphasized God's sovereignty through the motifs of God's creative word and wisdom (Endo, 2002). By His word, His work was accomplished and by the wisdom of His command, everything in creation found its order and design. Moreover, wisdom was mentioned in the creation context that strongly exhibited monotheism (Sir 42:21). The monotheistic emphasis was a clear allusion to Isaiah 40:13b–14a, 28 (LXX). Thus, God's identity "is depicted as the Creator and Ruler over the whole universe" following "the exegetical tradition of the Genesis creation account" (Endo, 2002, p. 111).

### Baruch

The book of Baruch was "the first of several works attributed to Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah" (Nickelsburg, 2005, p. 94). Thus, it was sometimes called 1 Baruch. It was divided into four sections: (a) narrative introduction (1:1–14), (b) prayer or the confession of sin (1:15–3:8), (c) Wisdom poem, which highlighted the praise of God's wisdom (3:9–4:4), and (d) Zion poem, which concerned the author's lamentation and comfort (4:5–5:9) (Endo, 2002; Nickelsburg, 2005; cf. Whitehouse, 1913). They were bound together by the common theme of exile and return.

The brief creation reference in Baruch 3:32–38 (Endo, 2002) falls within the larger unit of a wisdom poem (3:9–4:4). Endo (2002) suggested a structural understanding of the unit and noted that Baruch used the creation account to describe God's sovereignty.

Sheppard (1980) noted several verbal correspondences between Baruch 3:32–35 and Job 28, 38. It was a case of motif expansion. Summarizing Sheppard's comments on the correspondences, Endo (2002) succinctly wrote that Baruch "expands the imagery of light, from lightnings in Job chapters 28 and 38 to the primordial light (1 Bar 3:33) and luminaries (1 Bar 3:34–35) which appear in the Genesis creation account" (p. 151–152; cf. Sheppard, 1980).

The focus of the brief creation reference in Baruch seemed to be the creation of light. The creation of light portrayed God's sovereign power over creation in the sense that God was authoritative and creative in His command. God was depicted as commanding the obedience of lights and luminaries in Baruch 3:33–35. This was clearly an allusion to the creation of lights and luminaries in the Genesis creation account. This particular motif of obedience of lights, in Baruch's portrayal, seemed to be a result of juxtaposing the references to "lightning" in Job 38:35 and "light" in Genesis 1:3–4, 14–19. In other words, the obedience of "lightning" (Job 38:35) was adapted to the creation of light and luminaries (Gen. 1:3–4, 14–19) in order to depict God's commanding of obedience of lights and luminaries (1 Bar 3:33–35) (Bernard, 2020; cf. Endo, 2002). Thus, Baruch 3:32–38 portrayed God's sovereign power in commanding obedience of creation.

### The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon (or Wisdom) was "an exhortation to pursue Wisdom and thereby to live the righteous life that issues in immortality" (Nickelsburg, 2005, p. 205). Nickelsburg suggested that the book has "three closely related and interlocking parts": (a) the "book of eschatology" (1:1–6:11), (b the "book of wisdom" (6:12–9:18), and (c) the "book of history" (chapters 10–19). The four brief references to creation in the book—Wisdom 7:22; 8:5; and 9:1–2, 9 (Endo, 2002)—are located in the second section. All of them portrayed a personification of wisdom (cf. Winston, 1979).

All four references in Wisdom referred to the role of wisdom as a "fashioner" in God's work of creation. Wisdom 7:22 (in context) personified wisdom in a mystical way as one who told about "the cosmic order, the astronomical phenomena, and the nature of all living things (Wisd 7:17–22)" (Endo, 2002, p. 148). Wisdom 8:5 (in context) depicted wisdom as one who was more desirable than riches since it could "make known the will of God" to the people because of its position that was "in close relationship to God from the beginning (Wisd 8:3–4; 9:4, 9–10; cf. Prov. 8:27–30)" (pp. 148–149). Wisdom 9:1–2 (in context) presented God's identity as Creator who created all things by His word and made human beings by His wisdom "in order that they could rule over the world according to the knowledge of God (Wisd 9:2b–3)" (p. 149). Wisdom 9:9 (in context) portrayed wisdom as in close relationship to God, knowing His works, and being present at creation.

Consequently, the central theme of the creation references in Wisdom is wisdom personified (Endo, 2002; cf. Winston, 1979). The references speculated "about the divine role of wisdom (i.e., to reveal the will of God, and to guide the people to perfect knowledge)" in relation to the motif of wisdom as a "fashioner" (cf. Prov 8:30) and the "breath of life" (cf. Gen 2:7) (Endo, 2002, p. 149). Through wisdom, the sovereignty of God was highlighted.

Cox (2007) suggested that the "book of wisdom" (6:12–9:18) elevated wisdom or "Sophia" to prominence. He concluded that "Sophia is not one of God's creations but an entity closely related to him; she is His breath, His emanation, His image" (p. 64). Furthermore, Sophia "does not just witness creation but has a preeminent role in the event; she fashioned all things and, while essentially distinct from them, she continues to pervade and order all things" (p. 87). Thus, the Wisdom of Solomon portrayed wisdom in relation to creation.

Endo (2002) pointed out some influences of the OT in the Wisdom. First, the description of wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon seemed to be grounded in the book of Proverbs (e.g., 8:1–9:6). Second, Wisdom 7:7 seemed to recognize the phrase "an understanding and wise heart" (1 Kgs 3:12 [LXX]) as a bestowment of "a spirit of wisdom." This recognition was a unique exposition of Solomon's narrative in 1 Kings 3:5–15. Third, there was a connection between the divine wisdom and God's spiritual activity such as depicted in Exodus 31:3; 35:31 where the spirit of God brought wisdom and all kinds of craftsmanship in the building of the tabernacle. Isaiah 11:2 also portrayed God's spirit bringing "wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (p. 148).

### The Prayer of Manasseh

The Prayer of Manasseh (PrMan) was a short penitential prayer claimed to have been uttered by Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah, to God (cf. 2 Chr 33:12–13) (Nickelsburg, 2005). Structurally, the prayer contained three main parts (Endo, 2002; Charlesworth, 1985): (a) an invocation (vv. 1–7) which contained praise to the Lord for His work of creation (vv. 1–4) and an acknowledgement of the Lord's anger against sinners and His immeasurable mercies (vv. 5–7), (b) a confession of sins (vv. 8–10), and (c) a petition for forgiveness (vv. 11–13). The prayer ended with a doxology (vv. 14–15).

The brief reference to creation (PrMan 1:2–3) (cf. Endo, 2002) was part of the invocation. The reference comprised praise to God and proclamation of His mighty work of creation (vv. 2–3) in order to affirm His power (v. 4). This work of creation was associated with God's name. It was His identity. "Reference to the work of creation is made to affirm the unique identity of God which is the ground for the implied author's plea" (Endo, 2002, p. 144).

The OT influence was observed in several ways. First, the narrative of King Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:11–19, which contained his prayer (vv. 11–13), provided the background of the prayer. Charlesworth (1985) listed several correspondences between the narrative in 2 Chronicles 33 and the Prayer of Manasseh. The correspondences included information such as the provocation of the Lord's anger (2 Chr 33:6; PrMan 1:10, 13), the placing of the idol in the temple (2 Chr 33:7; PrMan 1:10) and the humbling of Manasseh before the Lord (2 Chr 33:12; PrMan 1:11) (cf. Endo, 2002). Bateman IV (2010) suggested that the author of the Prayer of Manasseh used "supplemental exegesis" method since he seemed to attempt a finalization of an "incomplete content of a biblical text" (p. 46).

Second, Charlesworth (1985) pointed out the resemblance of the penitential nature of the prayer to Psalm 51, which contained references to God's right judgment against transgression (Ps 51:3–4; PrMan 1:9–10), His abundant mercy (Ps 51:1; PrMan 1:7), and His forgiveness and salvation (Ps 51:14–15; PrMan 1:15) (cf. Endo, 2002). The reference to God's mighty work of creation at the beginning of the prayer might have been added in light of other OT passages that highlighted God's sovereignty (Charlesworth, 1985; Endo, 2002).

One could discern the theme related to God's word and name in the work of creation. The parallelism "He bound the sea and established it by the command of His word, He closed the deep and sealed it by His powerful and glorious name" (PrMan 1:3) suggest a direct association between the command of God's word and the creative, sustaining, and glorious name of God. The connection between God's name and creation also was found in other Second Temple Jewish literature (e.g., Jub 36:7; 3 En 42:1–7; 1 En 69:16–21). The connection "indicates the power of the divine authority of Yahweh, through which the heavens and the earth were made and sustained" (Endo, 2002, p. 147).

**Pseudepigrapha**

There are several creation passages in Pseudepigrapha. This investigation focuses on three books only: the Book of Jubilees, the Book of the Secrets of Enoch (2 Enoch), and the Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra). These books were selected because of their direct connection to the theme of creation, particularly the narrative of Genesis 1–2. The English translation of all the references was taken from *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* edited by Charles (1913)

***The Book of Jubilees***

The Book of Jubilees (Jubilees) retold the story and history of the people of Israel. It was "an extensive elaboration of Genesis 1 to Exodus 12, presented as a secret revelation that the angels of God's presence transmitted to Moses on Mount Sinai" (Nickelsburg, 2005, p. 69). The author of Jubilees did this by "putting the date in each episode in accordance with the Solar calendar (7 day periods) and Jubilee years (49 year periods), in order to demonstrate how history is governed by the times of the laws" (Endo, 2002, p. 12). The author "constantly and seamlessly integrated Levitical Law with Genesis 1–Exodus 24:18" (Bateman IV, 2010, p. 37). Bateman IV suggested that this was an example of complementary exegesis in the Second Temple period. From this book, the examination focused on one narrative account of creation (Jub 2:1–16) and two brief references to creation (Jub 12:4, 26) (cf. Endo, 2002).

*Jubilees 2:1–16*

Jubilees 2:1–16 retold the Genesis creation account, followed by a passage on the significance of the Sabbath in relation to the story of creation (Jub 2:17–33). The angel of the presence told Moses to write the whole account of creation that covered the six days of creation work and the Sabbath (v. 1). The angel's utterance "alludes to the biblical creation account of Exod 20:11 and Gen 2:2–3" (Endo, 2002, p. 13). Endo (2002) noted that God kept the first Sabbath after all His work of creation; He sanctified it and made it "a sign" for all His works.

Since Jubilees 2:1–16 was a retelling of the Genesis creation story, it followed the order of creation in the creation week. However, the author of Jubilees did several things. First, he picked up "twenty-two objects which were made in the six days" of creation to match "the number of chief men from Adam until Jacob (Jub 2:23)." Second, he supplemented the story of the creation of the Spirit and understood it to be the creation of angels. This description of angelic creation seemed to be an interpretation of the term *ruach* in Genesis 1:2 (Endo, 2002). Furthermore, the author provided a detailed list of objects created on the third day that were not in the Genesis creation account. On the fourth day, he employed the words "sun" and "moon" instead of "the greater light" and "the lesser light" (Gen 1:16). Ruiten (2000) suggested that those words were used in order to give special attention to the sun (i.e., solar calendar).

The creation account of Jubilees 2:1–16 used several motifs in the form of images. These motifs exhibited aspects of God's identity (utterance [vv. 5–6], wisdom/knowledge [v. 2], and hands [v. 11]) and represented eschatological reality (light [vv. 8–10]). The image of God's utterance depicted God's sovereign power in creation; the image of wisdom or knowledge expressed His perfect and wonderful plan; His utterance portrayed His sovereign power (Endo, 2002). The image of lights was a symbol of the eschatological event of a new creation. The description of the role of light especially in connection with the eschatology in Jubilees 2:8–10 seemed to be an interpretation of Isaiah 30:26 in connection with Genesis 1:15–16. Thus, these motifs of creation were used to depict God's identity and an eschatological reality (Bernard, 2020).

*Jubilees 12:4*

Jubilees 12:4 was part of a conversation between Abraham and Terah. The Jubilees' account of the story narrated how Abraham told Terah not to worship idols (12:2–5). In their conversation, "Abraham refers to God's work of creation to demonstrate the sovereignty of God, which is contrasted with the uselessness of other gods" (Endo, 2002, p. 137).

The theme of the sovereignty of God was central to Jubilees 12:4. "The God of heaven" was depicted as the Creator who sent down rain and dew upon the earth. By His word, He created everything. In order to emphasize God's sovereignty, the author of Jubilees made a couple of contrasts (vv. 4–5). First, the idols were made by hands while God created hands. Second, whereas the idols had no life, God provided life. By implying that God was the origin of all life, the author emphasized God's sovereignty (Endo, 2002).

The theme of creation in Jubilees 12:2–5 corresponded with Isaiah 44 and 46 as well as Psalm 135. These Old Testament passages demonstrated "a clear contrast between God and idols by referring to God's mighty work of creation" (Endo, 2002, p. 137). The verbal correspondences reflected the attributes of the idols and included ideas such as to "bow down" and "worship" the idols (Jub 12:2; Isa 46:6), which had "no spirit/breath" (*ruach*) in them and could "not speak" (Jub 12:3; Ps 135:17). The idols were "made by hands" (Jub 12:3, 5; Ps 135:15) and being "carried on your shoulders," giving "no help/salvation" but bringing "shame" to those who made them (Jub 12:5; Isa 46:7; 44:11, 9) (Bernard, 2020).

*Jubilees 12:26*

The context of Jubilees 12:26 was the account of the restoration of the Hebrew language, which was said to be the language (tongue) of creation (Jub 12:25–27). God wanted to restore the language in Abraham's mouth. This account was speculative in nature. The story of Abraham receiving the word of the covenant, which appeared before this, however, had a basis in Genesis 12:1–3 (Bernard, 2020).

The motif of the language of creation was the central theme of Jubilees 12:25–27. Interestingly, it was mentioned in the context of the covenant. Rubin (1998) proposed that during the second century BCE a tradition was conceived that believed in the restoration of the Hebrew language. It was called "*Leshon Haqodesh.*" The tradition maintained that "the world which was created will prevail once more in the end of the days, when all nations will once again speak this primordial language in which the world was created" (p. 317). Endo (2002) pointed out that this tradition was an eschatological speculation grounded on the Genesis creation account.

**The Book of the Secrets of Enoch (2 Enoch)**

The book of the Secrets of Enoch (2 Enoch) is also called *Slavonich Enoch* because it survived "only in old Church Slavonic and some other Slavic languages" (Stone, 1984, p. 406). It is "an amplification of Genesis 5:21–32," covering "events from the life of Enoch to the onset of the Flood" (Andersen, 1983, p. 91). It consists of three major sections. First, chapters 1–34 cover the account of Enoch's ascent to the heavens, the vision of God, the transfiguration into an angel, and the receiving of the secrets of the creation process from God. Second, chapters 35–68 deal with Enoch's return to earth, the revealing of the heavenly mysteries, and the giving of moral instruction to his children. Third,

chapters 69–73 narrate the story of the antediluvian priesthood beginning with Adam and climaxing in the story of Melchizedek's miraculous birth and life through the flood (Stone, 1984). In the third section, however, chapter 73 appears only in the longer recension (called J) of the work (cf. Andersen, 1983). Each section has its correspondence in 1 Enoch (cf. Nickelsburg, 2005). The analysis of 2 Enoch in this study is based on the longer text (recension) and the translation by Andersen (1983). From this book, the examination focuses on the creation references in chapters 24–33, 47–48, and 65–66.

*2 Enoch 24–33*

2 Enoch 24–33 is a narrative account of creation (cf. Endo, 2002). In the chapters 24–33, the author of 2 Enoch called the accounts of creation as "the great secrets of God" (2 En 24:1 [J recension]). Furthermore, "the account of the cosmos has been elaborated in a quasi-scientific manner" (Andersen, 1983, p. 91). God was highlighted as "the sole ruler (33:7) in the universe, and that there is no other God except Himself (33:8; cf. 2:1; 10:6)" (Endo, 2002, p. 20).

While 2 Enoch 24–33 was based on the Genesis creation narrative in its content and order, it added three things that were not in Genesis 1. First, it added on the creation of the throne of God on the first day (2 En 25:4). Second, it speculated on the creation of the angels on the second day (2 En 29:3). This speculation is different from the creation account of Jubilees 2, where angels were created on the first day. Third, the creation of a paradise garden (possibly referring to Eden) came on the third day (2 En 30:1). These additions appeared to be speculative of the biblical account of creation (Bernard, 2020).

Endo (2002) suggested five thematic considerations in 2 Enoch 24–33. First, the way God created the heavens and the earth described the motif of God's creative command. The description follow the formula of creation in Genesis 1. The creation account emphasized God's exclusiveness as Creator, without adviser or successor to His creation. Second, 2 Enoch 24–33 depicted the motif of light and darkness as two contrasting elements. Both were portrayed as pre-existent and the primary elements for His subsequent creative work (2 En 27:1). Light was placed highest in creation (25:5) and was depicted as a symbol of paradise (cf. 65:10). It was separated from the darkness, which was the foundation of the lowest things (26:3; 27:4). Third, 2 Enoch 24–33 depicted the motif of life as a symbol of the eschatological blessing of Paradise. The blessing of joy and happiness with eternal light and life would be given to the righteous (42:3) in future paradise. Fourth, the account of creation emphasized the motif of new revelation. Enoch told "the great secrets of God" to his children and admonished them truthfully. Fifth, 2 Enoch 24–33 portrayed wisdom as God's perfect thought-up plan. In wisdom, God had thought-out the plan of creation before realizing the plan by His word (33:3–4).

*2 Enoch 47–48 and 65–66*

2 Enoch chapters 47–48 and 65–66 contain descriptive accounts of creation (cf. Endo, 2002). They are located within a section where sapiential disciplines are discussed. The two accounts appear in the context where the principle of the fear of God in teaching recurred (2 En 43–66).

The account of creation in chapters 47–48 emphasized God's exclusive sovereignty over His creation. It depicted a monotheistic understanding of God. The Lord was unique and the sole Creator of all things (cf. 47:3–6). Several images that correspond to OT passages in Job, Isaiah and the Psalms were used to emphasize this monotheistic understanding of the Creator and His sovereignty. The images include: there is no one but the Lord ... in the deepest places (2 En 47:3; Ps 139:8–12); God laid the foundation and spread out the heavens (2 En 47:4; Isa 42:5; cf. 40:22; 44:24); God solidified the earth above the waters, alone created innumerable creatures and counted the dust or drops of rain (2 En 47:5; Ps 136:6; 104:25; Job 28:25; 38:37; Isa 40:12) (Bernard, 2020; cf. Endo, 2002).

2 Enoch concluded the account of creation in chapters 47–48 by encouraging "the readers to accept these books and to fear the Lord (2 En 48:6–9) in order to gain the way to Life (2 En 48:9)" (Endo, 2002, p. 62). Thus, this creation account "functions as a theological basis for sapiential instructions" (p. 63).

2 Enoch chapters 65–66 contain Enoch's last instructions to the people before he was taken up to heaven. Similar to chapters 47–48, here Enoch urged them to appreciate the laws (65:5), not to commit idolatry, and to worship the sole Creator (Endo, 2002; cf. Bernard, 2020).

The principal theme in chapters 65–66 is the worship of the one and only God, who was depicted as the Creator and Lord of all creation (cf. 2 En 66:2–7 [J]). Idols were not to be worshipped because they were not the true God; they were merely things created by man. The true God was "the Lord of all creation" (2 En 66:5 [J]). Thus, as Endo (2002) noted, 2 Enoch 65–66 exhibited a monotheistic understanding of God in the context of sapiential instructions. This understanding was "extended into monolatry, based on the understanding of God's mighty work of creation" (p. 64).

### The Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra)

The book of 4 Ezra comprises chapters 3–14 of 2 Esdras (Metzger, 1983). It is also known as the *Apocalypse of Ezra* (Stone, 1984). Generally, it can be divided into seven sections which comprise seven visions: (a) 3:1–5:20; (b) 5:21–6:34; (c) 6:35–9:25; (d) 9:26–10:59; (e) 11:1–12:51; (f) 13:1–58; (j) 14:1–48 (Metzger, 1983). The first three sections are dialogues between Ezra and the angel concern divine justice; the next three are symbolic visions that deal with the questions raised in the dialogues; while the last section is a narrative of the revelation of the books of Ezra (Stone, 1984). "The main concern of 4 Ezra is the question of why Israel should be handed over to the unrighteous, and why salvation should be delayed (4 Ezra 3:28–36; 5:28–30; 6:55–59)" (Endo, 2002, pp. 24–25). References to creation are located in 4 Ezra 3:4–5; 6:1–6, 38–54. These three references are descriptive (3:4–5; 6:1–6) and narrative (6:38–54) in nature.

*4 Ezra 3:4–5*

The creation reference in 4 Ezra 3:4–5 is part of a larger section that recounted the biblical creation story up to the event of the giving of the Torah (3:4–19). It depicted God as the "sovereign Lord" who alone created the earth by His word and formed Adam by His word, His spirit of life and His hands. However, the context involved the relationship between God and Israel. The sovereign God would not abandon His people in destitute. He would show them grace and mercy. Thus, 4 Ezra 3:4–5 focused "on the identity of the people of Israel and their destiny in relation to the understanding of the identity of God as the Creator" (Endo, 2002, p. 66).

The theme of God's creation of Adam in 4 Ezra 3:4–5 was based on Genesis 2:7 and Isaiah 42:5 (Endo, 2002). God's act in the creation of Adam was depicted by the imagery of His word, His hands and the giving of the breath of life. God spoke at creation; He "commanded the dust and it gave you Adam, a lifeless body" (4 Ez 3:4). Endo (2002) pointed out that the employment of the motif of God's creation of Adam emphasized the special status of Israel as the chosen people and the fact that God has never abandoned them even in their present tribulation.

The idea of theodicy was also connected to the status of Israel. The imagery of God's hands in forming Adam highlighted God's mighty power and loving care for His people (cf. Isa 45:12; Ps 95:5; 119:73; Job 10:8). Endo (2002) concluded that "since human beings were created by God's word or by His hands, they will not be abandoned easily by their God the Creator" (p. 68). The giving of the breath of life to Adam after God made Adam's lifeless body by His word/hands portrayed God as a powerful Creator who gave life to lifeless beings (4 Ez 3:5).

*4 Ezra 6:1–6*

The creation reference in 4 Ezra 6:1–6 contains more than a dozen temporal subordinate clauses that begin with the word "before" followed by descriptions of creation (vv. 1–5). These clauses were employed to emphasize God's "pre-existent plan for the past (creation) and the future event (the eschaton) (4 Ez 6:6a)" (Endo, 2002, p. 70). In other words, "God has already made a plan for the eschatological salvation with His deep thought (cf. 4 Ez 5:49; 6:6, 7–10)" (p. 69). The framework of the passage with descriptions that begin with "before" might be influenced by Proverbs 8:22–29 (cf. Kee, 1981) which described wisdom's pre-existence.

The main concern of the passage was the idea that the eschatological salvation "will be brought by God alone, not through another Messianic figure" (Endo, 2002, p. 69). God, who has thought out the plan for the creation of the world in His wisdom, will alone bring about salvation in the end time (Bernard, 2020).

*4 Ezra 6:38–54*

The creation reference in 4 Ezra 6:38–54 narrated the six days of creation. It opened the third section of 4 Ezra (i.e., 6:35–9:25) where "the question of theodicy is pressed to its unanswerable limits" and Ezra's prayer dealt, once again, with Israel's plight (Nickelsburg, 2005, p. 272). The creation account in 4 Ezra 6:38–54 corresponded with the content and the order of creation in Genesis 1. The expression, "in the beginning" appeared in both accounts (4 Ez 6:38; Gen 1:1). The rest of the creation account in 4 Ezra narrated the work of creation from the first day to the sixth day (vv. 38–54).

An intriguing piece of information about the creation of light appeared in 4 Ezra 6:40. It is stated that a ray of light was brought forth from God's treasuries. Box (1913), in his comment on 4 Ezra 6:40, noted that the Rabbinic tradition (cf. Hagigah 12a) mentioned about light being created on the first day and that it was "afterwards withdrawn and reserved by God for the righteous in the world to come" (p. 578). In other words, "light itself existed before the work of creation" and was described as a divine thing (Endo, 2002), or as Box (1913) put it, "the heavenly light ... was older than Creation, and belonged to God's essence" (p. 578).

The motif of God's word in creation was prominent in 4 Ezra 6:38–54. The idea that God's word (divine command) proceeded from His mouth and accomplished His plan immediately (cf. 4 Ez 6:38, 43) alluded to Isaiah 48:3 and 55:11. "In both 4 Ezra 6:38–43 and Isa 55:11 (and Isa 48:3), the word of God is personified and functions as an agent to accomplish the will or the plan of God" (Endo, 2002, p. 26). This personification was depicted in the account by phrases such as "your [God] word accomplished the work" (6:38); "your [God] word went forth, and at once the work was done" (6:43). The personification of the divine word implied God's mighty work in creation, even to the extent of producing living things out of lifeless objects (cf. 6:47 [the dry land]; 6:48 [the dumb and lifeless water]). The word of God was a powerful agent to produce life from lifeless things (Endo, 2002; cf. Cook, 1992).

Directly related to the account of creation in 4 Ezra 6:38–54 was Ezra's question of why Israel could not possess the world even though God created it for them as an inheritance (4 Ez 6:55–59). Here, creation was used to demonstrate the unique relationship between God and His people, Israel. While other nations were nothing (cf. Isa 40:17) and like spittle or a drop from a bucket (cf. Isa 40:15; 4 Ez 6:56), Israel was special. They were people who would inherit the world God created (Bernard, 2020).

**Summary**

References to creation in the Apocrypha generally follow the OT understanding of creation. There are allusions to the OT creation references such as those in Genesis, Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. God is portrayed as the Creator who is wise, powerful, sovereign, and unique. He alone created the world by His word. By His wisdom, He endowed His creation with purpose, order and design. As sovereign God, He rules over human history. His sovereignty answers the issue of theodicy; He rules over times so that the eschatological promises for His people are fulfilled.

There are expansions of ideas, however, concerning the creation of lights and the personification of wisdom in creation. First, God created light and ruled sovereign over them (1 Bar 3:32–38). He commanded its obedience. The imagery of light in Baruch 3:32–38 resembles that of Job 28 and 38. This expansion seems to be the result of combining the idea of the creation of light and luminaries in Genesis 1:3–4, 14–19 and the reference to the obedience of lightning in Job 38:35 (cf. Job 28; 38). Second, wisdom is personified and portrayed as an artificer in the work of creation. Wisdom is personified in some mystical way and it sets the order in creation (Wisd 7:22). Wisdom is an agent by

which God ruled the world that He created by His word (9:1–2). It is also depicted as a close pre-existent companion of the Creator (9:9).

Similar to the Apocrypha, references to creation in the Pseudepigrapha generally follow the OT creation tradition. The expansion and speculation of the creation theme can be seen particularly in the Genesis creation story in relation to other biblical references. First, concerning the objects of creation, the Pseudepigrapha depicted (a) twenty-two objects that were created in the six days of creation (Jub 2:1–16); (b) the creation of angels either on the first day (Jub 2:2) or the second day (2 En 29:3); (c) the creation of God's throne on the first day (2 En 25:4); and (d) the creation of a paradise (possibly Eden) on the third day (2 En 30:1). Second, the motif of light was portrayed as a contrasting element to darkness. Both light and darkness pre-existed creation. They were the primary elements for subsequent works of creation (2 En 27:1). Light was said to have been brought from God's treasuries (4 Ez 6:40). Third, the motif of creation by the word was expanded by employing the idea that God devised His creation plan by His wisdom and executed it by His word with immediate effect (2 En 33:3–4). The idea seemed to be a juxtaposition of Psalm 33:6, 9; Proverbs 8:30, Isaiah 48:3, 13 and 55:11. God's wisdom and His word were personified and functioned as agent to accomplish creation. Fourth, the motif of Hebrew as the language of creation was an intriguing piece of information. The motif was central to Jubilees 12:25–27. Through Abraham, God wanted to restore this language. Thus there was an expansion and speculation of the creation theme in the Pseudepigrapha.

## Conclusion

The investigation of the selected creation references from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha establishes three salient points. First, the creation theme in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha generally follows many of the OT creation tradition. The idea of the sovereignty of God is particularly prominent and it follows the theology of creation from the Old Testament. Second, the two bodies of writings interpret the Genesis creation account through the lens of other OT creation passages, resulting in modification of images and expansion of original OT creation ideas. Third, there was a tendency to speculate concerning creation ideas as the OT creation texts were appropriated. The speculation involves adding details to the creation theme, particularly the creation narrative of Genesis 1–2. These points may provide useful bases for future investigations concerning the theme of creation in the Second Temple Jewish writings.

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# Reducing and Resolving Conflicts in Family Businesses in Myanmar

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## Abstract

In a number of countries, family businesses predominate and represent their economic backbone, as they generate wealth and employment. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the characteristics of conflicts in family businesses and to make focused recommendations for the management and resolution of such conflicts. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 participants from seven distinct family-owned businesses in Kalay Town, Myanmar. The findings indicated that task, process, and relationship conflicts are prevalent in family businesses. Seven conflict management strategies were frequently used to deal with these conflicts—open communication, confrontation, debate or discussion, rotating responsibility, involving a third party, accommodation, and avoidance. Effective governance can improve family business dynamics, along with reducing and preventing conflicts.

## Introduction

### Overview of the Topic

Family-owned businesses are critical to economic success in every country and have social significance (Brigham, 2013). In many countries, they represent most businesses and are the primary source of job creation. Myanmar is no exception; it has been estimated that approximately 83% of Myanmar companies are family-owned (International Finance Corporation, 2017).

Family businesses are characterized by their own complexities. The role of conflict is mainly because the members managing the business are linked not only by co-ownership, but also by parental relations, resulting in a nexus of economic and family-centered goals to be met at the same time (Kotlar & Massis, 2013). Family members confront each other in both their professional and personal lives, thus contributing to the complexity and blurring of work and family duties in their professional and personal lives. As a result, the relational equilibria inside family companies are more delicate, and as a matter of fact, conflicts are more frequent, intense, and less understood (Caputo et al., 2018). Such conflicts are named "family-related conflicts" because they occur at three interfaces—family-business, family-ownership, and family-business-ownership (Qiu & Freel, 2020).

One of the needs of a family business is to learn how to manage conflict within the family. What is feared, and frequently occurs, is that conflict divides people, destroys their relationships, and makes reaching agreements and finding solutions to problems even more difficult. The findings of this study will help provide a better understanding of the drivers, characteristics, and consequences of conflict in family businesses. Likewise, the investigation will assist in determining how best to manage conflicts, make the process less harmful, and the outcomes more favorable (Davis & Collette, 2014).

### Motivation or Justification for the Research

Family businesses are personal and they can represent the key fabric of the country's economy. Myanmar's economy is poorly developed, although there has been a significant improvement in recent years. Most businesses are family businesses, and they are the backbone of the community. Family businesses also engage in corporate activities that have social responsibilities and philanthropic dimensions. Since it is difficult to open a business individually, it is common to get support from one's family, or for the extended family to be involved in the business management. The prosperity and survival of these businesses was a central concern behind this investigation.

A business's long-term sustainability and profitability depends on adopting sound fundamentals, and on the characteristics of the family that runs it. According to the Family Business Network (2017), only 33% of family businesses survive the founder, and 95% fail by the third generation. Family conflict is one of the most challenging aspects of running a family business. To learn effective conflict management, one must understand the causes, characteristics, and consequences of conflict in family businesses. The family conflict resolution culture is also a critical component for the success and longevity of a family business.

### Anticipated Usefulness of Results

The study findings outlined here may help to suggest an effective system of managing and resolving conflict for family business practitioners. They may also be significant to those who want to start their own family business or just a small business. Moreover, they can also be applicable for people who wish to reduce conflict and increase a family's viability. The study also aims to provide readers with a better grasp of family businesses and their conflicts. It helps to identify some root causes of conflicts by understanding their nature and content. The findings show how to manage conflicts so that the process is less harmful, and hopefully more beneficial. This report might serve as a starting point for academics interested in learning more about how family businesses are affected by conflict.

## Literature Review
### Family Business

In a family business, a few key members are usually involved in making strategic management and overall business goal decisions as they supply a significant amount of financial capital or have a controlling ownership (Trevinyo-Rodríguez, 2009). In many respects, family businesses differ from non-family companies. Family owners, even as prominent shareholders in a public corporation, behave differently than unrelated shareholders. As shareholders, family members have family ties, as well as values and concerns, that are often more important to them than making a profit. Moreover, members are acknowledged as a family in society, and their position and identity as a family are crucial to them. As opposed to non-family businesses, leadership or control of the company will be passed on to the family's next generation. As such, the relationship of the current generation of owners to past and future generations is also different. "You don't inherit a family business; you borrow it from your grandchildren", as one Hermes family member put it (Jaffe, 2018).

Table 1 lists some criteria that are frequently used to characterize family businesses.

**Table 1** *Frequently Used Criteria to Characterize Family Business*

| Definitional Criterion | No. of Occurrences | Frequency (%) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ownership | 98 | 79 |
| Management | 66 | 53 |
| Directorship | 35 | 28 |
| Self-identification | 19 | 15 |
| Multiple Generations | 11 | 9 |
| Intra-family Succession Intention | 9 | 7 |
| Total | 238 | |

*Note*: Percentages are more than 100 % because most studies use multiple criteria. Source: (Davis & Collette, 2014)

Family businesses range from small businesses that serve a local community to big conglomerates that operate across numerous industries and countries. The definition of a family business is a complex issue, with no agreed-upon term in the literature. Defining the exact composition of a family business is complicated, so a variety of definitions are used for the reader to compare among studies.

According to the European Commission (2010), a family business of any size is defined as follows:

1. Most decision-making rights are in the hands of the natural person(s) who founded the firm, or the natural person(s) who has/have acquired the share capital, or their spouses, parents, children, or immediate heirs.
2. Most decision-making powers are either indirect or direct.
3. At least one member of the family or kin is formally involved in the firm's governance.
4. Listed companies are family enterprises if the person who founded or purchased the firm (share capital) or their families or descendants own 25% of the decision-making rights required by their share capital.

### Conflicts Characteristic and Consequences

There are different elements and various types of family conflicts. Combining family members' assets, wealth, and employment in the family business system often makes for petty–yet deep-seated–bitterness and interpersonal conflicts (Karam et al., 2019). A study on conflict management identified three types of conflicts—task, process, and relationship (Jehn & Mannix, 1997).

*Task Conflict* refers to issues that may occur during the discussion of objectives and company strategies. It also includes conflicts about the content of a task. In this way, families that are prone to engage in debates and open discussions (communication orientation), creating a positive environment in which a functional task conflict can increase the level of innovation (Caputo et al., 2018). *Conflicts over processes* in family businesses arise from questions on how best to execute the work. In other words, this involves disagreements about how goals and tasks should be accomplished, as well as conflicts caused by strained interpersonal relationships. Task and process conflicts can occur at multiple decision points, and the strategy finally adopted can interfere with the smooth running of the enterprise. The difficulties tend to increase as more families and generations get involved in the family business (Qiu & Freel, 2020).

*Relationship Conflict* is defined as a sense of personal enmity, and incompatibilities that spill over and generate negative emotions like displeasure and frustration (Qiu & Freel, 2020). When individuals in a business have a personal disagreement, relationship conflicts develop. While relationship conflict can occur at any point, it is more likely to occur among family members due to the emotional bonds that exist (Alderson, 2015). When there is a relationship conflict within the family, it is complex and emotionally charged. This type of conflict is deeply rooted and can cycle through the business on many occasions. Unresolved conflict can lead to internal family competition and destroy a successful family business (Qiu & Freel, 2020).

While relationship conflict will continually hurt performance, task conflicts may have a range of functional impacts under certain circumstances. Task conflicts with a high level of intensity may have dysfunctional consequences (McKee et al., 2014). However, contrary to popular belief, disagreements can have positive functional effects when they are directed toward problem-solving. Researchers claim that when disagreements are directed toward problem-solving, they can stimulate the generation of alternatives, strengthen decision-making criteria, and create an atmosphere of commitment among team members (Qiu & Freel, 2020).

### Conflict Management

As families have a highly informal communication style, a lack of communication is another major issue for family businesses. The survival and profitability of the family business require effective and open communication from all family members across generations. Effective communication skills is a core competency (Alderson, 2015).

It is suggested that relationship tension in decision-making could be decreased in boards where members share a high level of competence-based trust, as evidenced by the participation of family members from emotionally collective families (Brigham, 2013). Furthermore, the presence of independent board members may encourage the emergence of contradictory ideas, thus providing the key to formulation of sound strategic decisions. The presence of a number of board members may also encourage uncovering the main issue underpinning a conflict, thereby uncovering crucial issues

fundamental to sound decision making (Karam et al., 2019). Conflicts, on the other hand, can be used as motivators for positive change in the business (Caputo et al., 2018). Understanding the cause of conflict, the consequences of conflict, and the many ways for managing conflict is crucial to developing an effective strategy to resolve conflicts before they negatively influence productivity and creativity. As a result, knowing how to deal with conflicts involves cultivating an environment where the disputing parties can communicate openly.

**Statement of the Research Purpose**

The purpose of this paper was to identify the characteristics and causes of conflict in selected family businesses in Kalay Town, Myanmar, with the objective of making focused recommendations for their management and conflict resolution.

**Research Questions**

1.  How often does conflict arise in a family business?

2.  What are the factors leading to the emergence of conflict situations?

3.  How are conflicts resolved in family businesses?

**Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. The main reason was not to limit the scope of the research or the nature of participants' responses. Data were collected through face-to-face interview sessions in small family group sessions.

*Characteristics of the Businesses*

Seven distinct family businesses were interviewed in Kalay Town, Myanmar. These businesses included a private elementary school, a private high school, a gas station, a pharmacy, a rice supplier, a fish farm, and a bottled water company. Kalay Town is a strategic business site since it is close to the Indian border and well connected to Myanmar's various states and regions. All these family enterprises were currently managed either by the second generation, or involved the participation of the first and second generations.

*Participants*

A total of 12 participants were interviewed (please see Table 2). These consisted of four owners, two managers who were also family members, three employees who were family members, one family member, and one principal. Individuals holding different positions of responsibility were interviewed to provide a more comprehensive view of the problems encountered and conflict resolution strategies adopted. Initially, 14 prospective people were contacted and agreed to participate. However, due to work obligations, two had to withdraw.

*Data Collection Method and Tool*

Each participant was interviewed with no other family member present. This method allowed for the collection of detailed information on interviewee perspectives and motivations. Questions were asked that enabled a deeper understanding of the conflict, elements of the problem, effects of the conflict, and how conflicts were handled in their family businesses. Although interview guidelines were created and used by the researcher, the interviews were primarily unstructured to allow for flexibility in their flow. Participants were not compensated in any way for their contributions. When more information was needed, the researcher asked more precise follow-up questions. Most people were a little uneasy when hearing the term *conflict* at the start of the interview. When the word *disagreement* was used, they were more ready to respond and elaborate.

**Table 2** *Profile of the Participants*

| Business Type | Participants | Position | Frequent Type of Conflicts reported | Main Decision Maker |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Private School (High School and Middle School) | 1<br>2 | Owner<br>Family Member | Process, Relationship | The Parent |
| Private School (Elementary School) | 3<br><br>4 | Family Member/ Employee,<br>Principal | Task, Process, Relationship | The Children |
| Gas Station | 5 | Family Member/ Employee | Task & Relationship | The Owner (Respondent Sibling) |
| Pharmacy | 6<br>7 | Owner<br>Manager | Task | The Parent |
| Rice Supplier | 8<br><br>9 | Owner<br>Family Member/ Employee | Task, Process | The Parent |
| Fish Farm | 10<br><br>11 | Owner<br>Family Member/ Manager | Task, Process, Relationship | The Parent and the Children |
| Bottled Water Company | 12 | Owner | Task, Process, Relationship | The Owner (Respondent Sibling) |

The interviews lasted between 20 and 26 minutes. Participants were first asked whether they were able to take part, after which an appointment was scheduled. They chose the time and location most convenient and comfortable for them. This was during business hours due to the circumstances in Myanmar. Interviews caused minimal disruption in participants' activities because some were interviewed while working.

Before an interview, permission to audiotape was requested from all the respondents. Two interviewees were uneasy about such a procedure. Notes were taken at every interview enabling confidential review and data management at a later time. After the conclusion of recordings, conversations were continued with respondents. During these conversations, they provided numerous tips for reducing future conflicts.

### *Data Analysis*

The interview analysis was a multi-step procedure; no computer software was used. Comments were listened to in conjunction with the note records. Sometimes the procedure was repeated so as to acquire a better sense of the data collected, as well as to figure out the main points and the most critical issues. Following each interview, text fragments were examined and assigned a code. The initial step involved open coding after the interview was transcribed. Codes were placed in the margins of transcripts, while the next step involved applying these codes to the entire data set. Then the codes were evaluated and categorized. Concepts were linked to codes that matched or were related to the same subject. Hence, a category was connected to its subcategories. Finally, in an operational conceptual model (Figure 1), selective coding was employed to fit and link the concepts together.

**Figure 1** *Data Analysis Process*



Read and Annotate → Identify Themes → Coding → Categories → Concepts
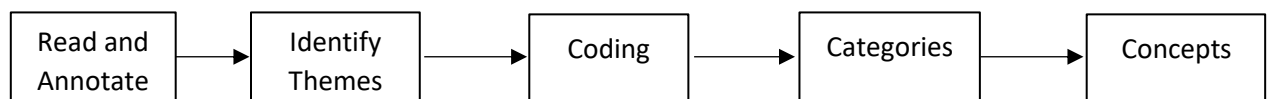
The definitions of concepts and categories were taken from and found in the interviews. Their application remained constant. Citations were used to illustrate the findings. After a citation, each respondent was identified by a number in brackets, e.g., Participant 1 or (Participant 2).

**Research Findings**

*Conflict: Concept Definition*

A visible conflict between two or more family members was referred to simply as a conflict. Occasionally, situations were encountered where friction and teamwork were less than ideal. Because conflicts were viewed as major negative events, respondents preferred the term *disagreement*. Minor disagreements occurred almost daily. For example, Participant 3 stated: "Almost every day, there is at least some disagreement in the work".

*Types of Conflict and the Conditions Leading to Conflict*

In the analysis of an interview, conflicts were classified into three types, namely, task conflict, process conflict, and relationship conflict. A generalized summary of the results is shown in Table 3 where the different conflict resolution methods used are structured by the type of conflict.

*Task Conflict* occurs when people disagree on which tasks should be completed. This involves opposing viewpoints on how to complete a work-related task or make a work-related decision. The most common and frequent type of conflict was task conflict. It ranged from a simple disagreement to a more major issue, such as the strategic goals of the business. Differences of opinion and a lack of cooperation were the most common causes. When specific expectations were not reached, a conflict resulted, as expressed by Participant 7—"When they don't do [or] think as I said, they perform badly, and I will get mad at them." Discussions on the best way to handle a project or differing perspectives on how to allocate limited resources constitute two examples leading to conflicts, i.e., "Assigning our family's own resources to the business creates a lot of disagreement" (Participant 12). When two jobs had tasks that overlapped, this could lead to conflict between the coworkers as observed by Participant 9: "We have different jobs, but we both have to make a financial statement." Discussing alternatives can also lead to conflict. Task conflicts can hinder a smooth work process because no decisions can be made until the conflicts are resolved.

*Process Conflict* occurs when individuals disagree on how to divide and assign responsibilities or on how to get things done. It normally occurs when opposing viewpoints and strategies clash. Participant 4 illustrated this issue as follows: "After we discuss what to do, none of us wants to be the one who is responsible." Different opinions on techniques for the process and resource allocation for a task may be involved: "We discuss over and over about the distribution of resources available to different applications" (Participant 11). Process conflict can involve dissimilar ideas on problem-solving or decision-making processes. For example, Participant 1 stated that the "government makes new rules related to the school. We had a lot of disagreement on the manner of how to approach that." While discussing or debating how the task should be executed, older members can also use their authority position to accomplish their objectives. This simply complicates matters and frustrates other persons, ending in relationship conflict. Multiple interfaces can potentially cause task and process problems. This can occur when it comes to time management, work distribution, or responsibility. Passive-aggressive tactics like power plays, blaming, and concealing information are examples of process-based conflicts. Respondents with more families and generations involved in a family business reported a higher frequency of task and process conflict.

Relationship Conflict develops when personal dislike and incompatibility lead to unpleasant emotions like annoyance and disagreement. Relationship conflict arises when personal feelings and emotions are involved. Interpersonal differences and emotional bonds with the company are at the center of this form of conflict. Things might easily become emotional due to the family's closeness and direct communication style. This was illustrated by Participant 5 who said: "I usually don't like how my brother talks to me about the work; sometimes I feel disrespected." Relationship conflicts are a natural

aspect of family businesses since families are not reluctant to express their thoughts. For example, "My father will loudly oppose my idea" (Participant 9). This could include things like snapping at others or raising one's voice. This can lead to feelings of disrespect, as illustrated by Participant 11: "My mother sometime will raise her voice […] It is completely unpleasant for me."

**Table 3** *Summary of Conflict Resolution Strategies Structured by the Type of Conflict*

| Conflict Type | Conflict Management | Consequence |
|---|---|---|
| Task | Discussion/Debate | A fair solution that both accepted |
| | Compromise | Lessens relationship conflicts in the family |
| Process | Compromise | Prevents new conflicts from happening<br>Might not address the full interests of the other party |
| | Rotating responsibilities | Shares responsibility for solving problems<br>Feels empowered |
| | Involve a third party | Helps to diffuse tension<br>Dissolves negative emotions |
| | Collaboration | A win-win outcome<br>Generates constructive conflicts and reduces relationship conflict<br>Open communication |
| | Accommodating | Reduces the occurrence of relationship conflict<br>One party may feel overpowered |
| Relationship | Open communication | Resolves the conflict faster<br>Avoids complex conflicts<br>Healthy discussion promoted |
| | Avoidance/separation | Helps to cool down emotions<br>Reduces the complexity of conflicts |
| | Confrontation | Reduces the complexity of conflicts by setting clear boundaries between conflicting parties |

Complaining about others while expressing negative feelings also leads to personal conflicts. They are typically petty, however, and easily resolved within the family—"If we fight about a silly thing, we get over it quickly" (Participant 4). Respondents stated that they maintained a professional attitude at work and among other coworkers. Task and relationship conflicts can exist simultaneously between a parent and their children. Family members rarely fight about what they think they are fighting about. Therefore, arguments about a task, for example, could lead to or indicate a relationship conflict. Participant 9 illustrated this dynamic in this way: "My mother will get upset or emotional after we had an argument about 'whose job it is'" (Participant 9). Relationship conflict can cause frustration and irritation, as well as development of an unpleasant atmosphere.

### Conflict Management and the Consequences

In open communication, recognizing the disagreement is the first step. That way the conflict is communicated with respect to personal differences and contradicting viewpoints. This creates a healthier discussion about the conflict. The key point is to listen to the viewpoint expressed and show understanding. Communicating openly can calm others down, hence preventing an emotional outburst. This approach can lead to a sensible solution to the actual problem. For example, one respondent said, "After openly communicating, I found out the underlying interest" (Participant 3). Such an approach adopted to relationship conflict can lead to a quick resolution, thus avoiding complex conflicts.

In the confrontation method of solving conflicts, a disagreement can be raised directly with the person involved. For example, a person who is complaining can be confronted, and they can be asked about it objectively. This was illustrated by Participant 1: "When I heard the complaint, I asked [the individual] to give me a sensible reason and suggestion." Also, direct confrontation can be appropriate

for a person who does not cooperate, makes mistakes, or is tardy. On the other hand, the issue can be approached indirectly at a team discussion. Participant 4 adopted this approach as explained below: "I know there is a disagreement between them. I don't want to confront them face-to-face; I will look nosy. Instead, I bring it up at the team meeting." Confrontation can reduce the complexity of the conflict while setting clear boundaries.

The debate or discussion method of resolution is fact-based and non-emotional. Everyone takes part in the brainstorming process to find the best answer to the problem. It is most commonly used in task-based conflicts, and can bring about a compromise or a solution. Everyone is given the opportunity to express their point of view, and then the most convincing argument is chosen through a rational debating process. Participant 10 stated: "We dealt with task-related conflict by ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to thoroughly explain their points of view, and then going through a reasonable discussion process for determining whose argument was the most compelling."

Rotating responsibility can be used when there is disagreement on workload issues or when there is a process conflict (how to allocate responsibility). To assure the quality of the work, the family members may make compromises in their schedules and tasks. Everyone becomes involved in taking responsibility and solving the problem in this way, as explained by Participant 12: "We provided everyone the opportunity to volunteer for the work that [they] desired."

Finding middle ground between two parties is the goal of compromise. It is a popular technique for resolving task and process conflicts. After a discussion, debate, or open communication, a compromise is reached. Compromise is considered fair since it requires each party to make concessions to maintain the equilibrium. This thought was expressed by two participants thus: "We came to an agreement over who did which" (Participant 6), and "We acknowledged that our interests and techniques differed, and attempted to reconcile our matters" (Participant 11).

A third party can be called to assist them in finding a long-term desirable solution. This may be another family member or someone in a position of higher authority. This approach was adopted by Participant 4: "When my sister and I had a conflict about our schedule, we asked the principal to decide for us." Most process-related conflicts can be resolved by talking to the next-level supervisor. To allow for a timely resolution, this discussion should be held as early as possible.

Accommodating is where individuals are willing to adapt to the wishes of the other party. Respondents described this strategy as "avoidance," as they evaded uncomfortable conversations to avoid a relationship conflict. Giving in to the desires of others is simpler than having a confrontation, and it is a good way to avoid further conflict. When one party has greater power than the other, it is quicker and easier to compromise: "I don't agree with everything he says, but he's the owner, so I simply do what he wants" (Participant 12).

Avoidance or separation refers to a lack of responsiveness to conflict and a desire to avoid it. Avoidance is an effective strategy to de-stress. Avoidance, according to Respondent 2, was not about refusing to deal with the problem; rather, it was about allowing the other party to cool down after an outburst of anger to keep from further exacerbating the situation. This can be as simple as removing oneself from the other for a brief period: "He was emotional and angry, so I avoided talking about anything else, and took a break from him to chill off" (Participant 2).

**Discussion**

Conflict management styles were identified in this study based on information provided by the respondents. It reviewed how families dealt with task, relationship, and process problems, as well as how conflict and satisfaction levels were affected by different conflict resolution tactics. Personality differences, differences of opinion, authority, lack of cooperation, expectations, and communication were all leading causes of family-related conflicts in their businesses. The weight attached to each of these differed from person to person. The importance of task conflict was determined by how much the solution would affect the business. Conflict in day-to-day business operations, for example, is less significant than locating scarce resources. When there are more family members involved in the business, there are more task and process-related conflicts. Task and process conflicts can shift to

relationship conflicts, particularly when distrust develops and individuals take significant differences personally. This can happen frequently. Aside from that, disagreements between siblings were minor and resolved by informal communication.

Task conflict in the family business can be beneficial (Qiu & Freel, 2020). When families debate and even argue as a matter of habit concerning plans and objectives, they can see things differently, and see ways to boost productivity without escalating a conflict. Debates over understandings and perspectives concerning a problem can lead to higher-quality decisions being made. Discussion and debate help the family to effectively and creatively combine information, judgments, and viewpoints of individual members to produce significantly better results.

Some elements, such as the nature of the conflict, affect the resolution techniques used (open communication, confrontation, debate, or discussion, rotating responsibility, involving a third party, accommodation, and avoidance). The complexity and seriousness of a conflict are factors that need to be considered. Among health care professionals, differentiation is made between structural and non-structural conflicts. These professionals do not usually get involved in quarrels unless they are quite serious. They will not hesitate to seek a confrontation if the problem is serious. The emotional state of team members has an impact on the tactics they use to resolve conflicts. In addition, the context of conflict has relevance. This refers to the time and atmosphere in which a conflict occurred (Leever et al., 2010). My respondents believed that when something needed to be communicated, choosing the right time was critical. Furthermore, distinct family characteristics, such as emotional connection or power distribution among family members, influence family-related conflicts and how they are resolved.

This study validated the idea that if more family members are involved in the business, more task and process-related conflicts occur (Pieper et al., 2015). The respondents who worked with more family members reported a higher frequency and variety of conflicts. Especially when many of them held management positions, they could voice their ideas and disagreements. Marquis and Huston (2006) stated that discontentment arises from differences in ideas, values, or feelings between two or more persons leading to conflict. In this study, it was found that when diverse points of view clashed and expectations were not satisfied, the family business suffered from the conflict. In most cases, disagreements over ideas lead to task and process conflicts. When the quality of performance falls short of expectations, it causes agitation and anger, and may lead to conflict as well. Respondents may vary in what they perceive as a good conflict resolution strategy. For example, in accommodation conflict resolution, one's needs and interests will not be fulfilled when giving in to the wishes of others.

According to one study, there may be little conflict between second-generation family members and their parents, but there can be a lot of conflict amongst siblings (Alderson, 2009). In the interviews reported in this study, only two respondents said they often disagreed with their parents. Both respondents worked in the business as executives. Tasks and processes were the main sources of this type of conflict. The family dynamic, power structure, and the decision-making power of the children can help explain why there is little conflict between parents and their children. Arguing with a parent is seen as disrespectful and displaying bad manners. The children frequently listened to or gave in to the parent's wishes, because they understood that they lacked experience and understanding in the business compared to their parents.

Many family conflicts can be prevented from happening or minimized by having reasonable governance procedures to deal with business dimensions. One of the most important methods is having open communication. Open communication focuses on the emotive tone of discussions (e.g., ego-invested versus amicable task-centric debate). Families should separate family and business-related issues. Families with a more viable business decouple or separate ownership matters from management difficulties, and maintain a balance between their relationships as family members and business owners (Nasser, 2014). Most respondents stressed the importance of all members of the family being treated consistently and fairly. To manage this, the benefits that one gets from the family business should depend on the contribution made. Also, a family member needs to develop some skills before and after joining the business.

One significant family business concern relates to the business succession process. If this is not adequately planned and managed, even in a profitable and stable business, failure of the business may result because of the conflict (Davis & Collette, 2014). For the transition to the next generation to be successful, the older generation's vision must align with that of the new generation. It is crucial that the next generation is involved and encouraged to learn about the business entity as early as possible, in order to provide the necessary experience and build a sense of ownership and loyalty to the family business. Family relationship conflicts can be prevented or minimized by having regular family gatherings or meetings. It is essential that everyone in the family participate, regardless of whether they are actively involved in business management or not. As a result, the chance of family conflict is reduced, and the likelihood of the next generation embracing and supporting the family business is increased.

## Conclusion

Conflict is a common issue within family businesses. In this paper, the vital role that family businesses play in the economy has been emphasized. The existing literature on conflicts in family businesses was investigated, and a connection established between different types of conflict and conflict management strategies employed in family businesses. This enabled some important conflict management techniques used in family businesses (e.g., discussion/debate and third-party intervention) to be described. Depending on the context of a conflict, its complexity, and the emotional state of family members, family businesses favor certain strategies over others (e.g., compromise and rotating responsibilities). Family meetings, a written constitution, and family retreats are examples of governance tools that can be used to improve family communication, improve decision-making effectiveness, and prevent and resolve conflicts within the family business.

## Limitation and Recommendations for Future Research

The main limitation of the study was its inability to cover more businesses, and the focus was entirely on just one location. This means that generalization to other areas is limited. Recommendations for further research would be to replicate this study using a larger sample size. Second, it would be helpful to study the similarities and differences in patterns of family-related conflicts, and the related conflict management strategies used across different types of family businesses.

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**Characteristics of Major Negative Interpersonal Events (MNIE) among Palestinian Adolescents**

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**Abstract**

The characteristics of Major Negative Interpersonal Events among Palestinian adolescents were investigated in terms of gender, age, family composition, and the education of parents. Descriptive-analytical and analytical approaches were adopted. Four hundred and ten adolescents were selected and surveyed using a Major Negative Interpersonal Events Measurement questionnaire. The study found the following: Adolescents mainly faced MNIE that relate to their own experiences, while classmates-related MNIE was found to be the fifth and the last factor experienced by adolescents. There were no gender differences that were related to family, classmates, the adolescents themselves, or teacher MNIEs. There were differences in friends-related MNIE attributed to females but no differences were found among the factors investigated. Adolescents who lived with their father and his children suffered from teachers-related MNIEs. There were differences attributed to their father's education across all factors, but not to their mother's education in factors such as classmates, self, and teachers. Adolescents whose mothers had a university degree had family-related MNIEs and friends-related MNIEs. These results revealed the context/domains affecting adolescents' lives in Palestine and, consequently, they give a more comprehensive understanding of the social ties experienced by Palestinian adolescents.

**Keywords:** *Palestinian, adolescents, major negative interpersonal events*

**Introduction**

Adolescents are members of the community, and as such, they encounter a number of concerns, including social problems (SP) that develop during daily interactions and for which efficient interventions are required (D'Zurilla et al., 2002; Heppner et al., 2004; Nezu, 2004; Aburezeq & Kasik, in press). These troubles could be caused by having a difference with colleagues, or having daily skirmishes with a family member, teacher, or friend. Therefore, social problem-solving (SPS) is a cognitive-affective-behavioral process in which people try to address social (interpersonal) problems in a social setting (e.g., D'Zurilla et al., 2004). One of the chief SP that upsets people's lives is the experience of Major Negative Interpersonal Events (MNIE). These occurrences have a negative impact on people's lives, particularly those of adolescents. Aburezeq and Kasik (2021c) stated that SPS has been linked to MNIEs and stressful life events. MNIEs are potentially harmful events that occur in an individual's life and impact psychosocial adaption, due to emotional effects, and may reduce a person's coping strategies (Gonçalvesa et al., 2017). When humans are exposed to sudden and unexpected occurrences, major negative events (MNE) occur. The resultant shock could trigger a series of psychological, physical, emotional, and social problems (Altawil et al., 2008).

It is worth noting that not everyone reacts the same way to an MNIE, as it typically depends on the individual's expectations and adaptive techniques adopted. Life events are occurrences that cause people to modify their habits and force them to readjust their behavior and such events affect their overall stability (Bras & Cruz, 2008, as cited in Gonçalves et al., 2017). Aburezeq and Kasik (2021b) mentioned that MNIEs can range from those that affect one of the family members (e.g., a father's job loss) to those that affect the adolescent's peers (e.g., death of a friend). Canavarro and Lima (2006) mentioned that the most prevalent negative life events of senior students were unwanted pregnancies, parental divorce, and relations break-ups. Furthermore, MNIEs have piqued researchers' curiosity as etiologic factors in disease, since they can cause psychopathological issues (Coddington, 1972). The majority of psychological research on the link between life experiences and depressive

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disorders has focused on the link between events and subsequent depressive symptoms (Hammen, 2006). Peers and relatives may also be a cause of stress for teenagers (DuBois et al., 2002; Smetana et al., 2006). One of the major consequences for MNIEs is that they may be fatal, such as ending in suicide (Sinha, 2008). Adolescents may also become more associated with delinquent peers as a result of their exposure to MNIEs (Wills et al., 2011). This is why some investigators have focused on exploring the negative orientation of the problem by inventing a proper instrument (i.e., Kasik et al., 2018), which was later validated by Aburezeq and Kasik (2021a).

### MNIEs among Adolescents in the Context of Palestine

Shalayel (2015) conducted a study on Palestinian adolescents (15-year-old) in Gaza ($N$ = 375, males 199, female 176) to determine which MNE they were exposed to. In the study, the following data were obtained: 79% of the adolescents reported that they had lost family members or relatives, 82% of those lost witnessed the killing of their friends, while 46% suffered from corporal injuries. The overall percentage of the exposure to MNEs was 66.7%, which is at a high level.

Mousa (2015) conducted a comprehensive MNE study in the Gaza Strip in Palestine. In her study, she explored the level of MNEs that had been suffered by the Palestinians after they were expelled from their homes in 1948. She met with 41 Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip and asked them to respond to an MNE questionnaire. She classified the respondents into four groups as follows:

Group 1: Those who experienced expulsion from their lands in the 1948 War.
Group 2: Those who experienced the 1967 War.
Group 3: Those who experienced the Second Intifada of 2000.
Group 4: Those who experienced the War of 2008, and their ages ranged from 9 to 18 years old.

The following findings were obtained: (a) The first group suffered MNEs up to 58%, (b) the second group suffered 48% of MNEs, (c) the third group 49% of MNEs, and (d) the fourth group experienced 47% of MNEs. Additionally, in relation to MNIEs, adolescents suffered frequently when a family member or friend was injured or the latter killed, and when they left their family or were injured.

In a closely related study Thabet (2007) selected a sample of adolescents ($N$ = 405) living in the southern cities of the Gaza strip. Each adolescent suffered from four MNEs during the Second Uprising (Intifada), which lasted four years. Odah (2010) surveyed 600 Palestinian (253 males, 347 females) to define which MNE was mostly experienced by adolescents living in the Gaza Strip, especially those who lived in areas next to the borders. He found that 96% of the respondents suffered from the loss of a person they knew and 95% witnessed incidents of shootings.

Altawil et al. (2008) researched MNEs experienced by 498 boys and 639 girls in the Gaza Strip. They found that each adolescent suffered from MNEs and MNIEs. Furthermore, 99% of the Palestinian adolescent felt very sorry for the MNEs experienced by their family members; 79% of them had witnessed a martyr's funeral (family member, friend, classmates, or relatives). Furthermore, 46% of the adolescents reported that a friend, neighbor, or relative was injured. The MNIEs affected adolescent-teacher and adolescent-parent relationships and 22% of the adolescents had problems either with their teacher or parents. Thabet et al. (2007) stated that 95% of his respondent adolescents had reported the experience of MNEs as they watched horrific scenes of killing of Palestinians on TV channels. Twenty-eight percent of the adolescents reported that they lost a family member or a relative. Eleven percent suffered from beatings and were insulted on account of the Occupation. Two percent of the respondents reported that they were injured.

The study conducted by Abu-Hain (2007) was focused on determining the MNE most experienced by Palestinian adolescents living in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. In the study, 451 adolescents were involved. The majority of adolescents lost a family member during the wars and that was the primary source of MNEs for them. No difference was found between boys and girls that could be attributed to the loss to a family member.

Assaf and Abu-El-Hassan's (2007) study targeted 135 adolescents in Jenin City, Palestine, to assess their MNEs in relation to Israeli incursions into the city. The study indicated that 25% of the

respondents suffered from severe MNEs, 35% of them suffered from moderate MNEs, and 39% suffered from minor MNEs. There were no differences attributed to gender. The 15-year-old adolescents suffered the most MNEs. Concerning MNIEs, the study reported that 46% of the respondents reported that they had unstable relationships with others.

These studies have shown that Palestinian adolescents experienced MNEs that were mainly related to a war context. The MNEs investigated in the previous studies were not categorized under factors; which is new in the present study. The previous studies did not ask the respondents if they faced an MNE in the past six months, an aspect considered here.

**Statement of the Problem**

The quality of relevant and available research remains limited (Assaf & Aburezeq, 2018). While there are MNE studies in the Palestinian educational literature, a majority of these studies investigated MNEs related to wars, conflicts, killing, and violence as mentioned in Khamis (2013). The present study could be the first in Palestine in terms of major personal negative events. In addition, the new measurement introduced in this study was not used in previous investigations. We published a newly developed method of assessing MNIEs in Aburezeq and Kasik (2021b), after investigating the previously constructed measurements. A more comprehensive set of questions were addressed making the present study of greater relevance. This current study includes more variables than previously, such as gender, age, family composition, and the education level attained by parents. The previous mentioned variables have not been studied together in a single study in the Palestinian context. In addition, in the current study three ages were included, namely, 12, 15, and 18 years, which has not been done previously in a single study.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were addressed in the study:
1. What are the characteristics of MNEs among Palestinian adolescents?
2. Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their gender?
3. Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their age?
4. Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their family composition?
5. Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their father's education?
6. Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their mother's education?

**Methodology**

The area of the study covered in this research is social psychology. In the study a descriptive approach was adopted.

*Instrument*

A Major Negative Interpersonal Events–Measurement instrument (MNIE-M by Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021b) was used in the present study. By categorizing the MNIE into types of items and then calculating the frequencies of each event in the adolescents' lives over the previous six months, the major negative interpersonal events among adolescents were analyzed and categorized under a number of headings (i.e., family-related events, classmates-related events, student direct-related events, teachers-related events, and friends-related events). The 29 items were categorized into five categories (refer to Appendix 1); family-related events were assigned to items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Items 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 were categorized as events involving classmates. Student direct-related events were assigned to items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Teachers-related events were assigned to items 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24. Friends-related events were assigned to items 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29.

Respondents were asked to select yes or no in order to indicate their exposure to MNIEs over the last six months (Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021b). However, what makes this questionnaire distinguished is that in some earlier studies (e.g., Archea et al., 2007; Buri et al., 2018), a list of general, not specific, MNEs were used to measure individuals' exposure to MNEs over the past six months.

### The Instrument's Psychometric Properties

The instrument used was first tested on 49 Palestinian adolescents to ensure its reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha for the entire items was .898, which is a very high score. The Split Half Method yielded a value of .861 for the first half and .847 for the second, both of which were high. The Guttman Split-Half Coefficient was .693. Furthermore, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was found to be high on all items. The KMO and Bartlett's Test was .599 (Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021b).

### Translation and Back Translation of the Measurement

The measurement items were originally gathered and written in English. An expert translator provided the final version of the measurement in Arabic so that it could be distributed to Arab adolescents in Palestine. Then, to ensure that the Arabic and English versions of the translation were identical, we conducted a back translation.

### Referee Validity

First and foremost, we gathered the measuring items based on prior studies and associated literature. Following that, we took our preliminary measurements, which were then sent to a panel of experts who decided on the correctness of the items and their relationship to the factors. Finally, we made the measurements. There was no need to calculate the Cohen Kappa Coefficient because the referees agreed on all 29 items of the measurement.

### Results
### Participants and Demographic Varoiables

The study involved 410 Palestinian teenagers. In Table 1, the responses of this group is shown in relation to gender, age, family composition, and father's and mother's education.

**Table 1** *Distribution of the Study Sample According to Demographic Variables*

| Demographic Variables | Classification | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 201 | 49.0 |
| | Female | 209 | 51.0 |
| Age | 12 years old | 124 | 30.2 |
| | 15 years old | 127 | 31.0 |
| | 18 years old | 159 | 38.8 |
| Family Composition | Mother, father and one child | 17 | 4.1 |
| | Mother, father, more than one child | 364 | 88.8 |
| | Mother and her children | 16 | 3.9 |
| | Father and his children | 10 | 2.4 |
| | Grandparents and grandsons | 3 | 0.7 |
| Father's Education | Non-educated | 12 | 2.9 |
| | Elementary | 33 | 8.0 |
| | Preparatory | 61 | 14.9 |
| | Secondary | 141 | 34.4 |
| | University | 123 | 30.0 |
| | Postgraduate | 40 | 9.8 |
| Mother's Education | Non-educated | 8 | 2.0 |
| | Elementary | 8 | 2.0 |
| | Preparatory | 47 | 11.5 |
| | Secondary | 188 | 45.9 |
| | University | 146 | 35.6 |
| | Postgraduate | 13 | 2.3 |

The data indicate that there was a balance between males (201) and females (209). Furthermore, there was a good distribution in relation to age (12 years old = 124), (15 years old = 127), (18 years old = 159), giving the study results greater applicability. The family composition showed that the vast majority of respondents lived in complete families consisting of their mother, father, and more than one child ($N$ = 364). Just three participants lived with their grandparents. Prominently, the figures displayed that the majority of the participants' parents had received a secondary school education followed by many who had received a university degree.

### Answers to Research Questions

The results of the six study questions are reviewed below. The answers were quantitative and were interpreted based on the use of a statistical software package. The answers to the first question "What are the characteristics of MNEs among the Palestinian adolescents?" are given in Table 2.

**Table 2** *Responses to the MNIE-Ms Found in Adolescent Palestinians*

| Factor | No. of Items | Mean | Std. Deviation | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | 7 | 12.50 | 1.62 | 23.7 | 2 |
| Classmates-related MNIE | 5 | 8.90 | 1.38 | 16.9 | 5 |
| Self-related MNIE | 7 | 12.70 | 1.76 | 24.1 | 1 |
| Teachers-related MNIE | 5 | 9.30 | 1.09 | 17.6 | 3 |
| Friends-related MNIE | 5 | 9.20 | 1.35 | 17.4 | 4 |

The first-ranked factor of MNIEs among Palestinian adolescents deals with those affecting the adolescents themselves. The second-ranked factor was represented by family-related MNIEs and this was followed by teachers-related MNIEs. Friends-related MNIEs closely followed and classmates-related MNIEs fell in the last place.

Answers to the second question "Are there any statistical differences in MNIE among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their gender?" are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** *Gender Responses to the MNIEs-M*

| Factor | Gender | Mean | Std. Deviation | $t$ Value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | Male | 12.60 | 1.61 | | Not Sig |
| | Female | 12.50 | 1.63 | .730 | |
| Classmates-related MNIE | Male | 8.80 | 1.42 | | Not Sig |
| | Female | 9.00 | 1.32 | .056 | |
| Self-related MNIE | Male | 12.80 | 1.80 | | Not Sig |
| | Female | 12.70 | 1.73 | .870 | |
| Teachers-related MNIE | Male | 9.27 | 1.18 | | Not Sig |
| | Female | 9.30 | 0.99 | .110 | |
| Friends-related MNIE | Male | 9.00 | 1.44 | | |
| | Female | 9.40 | 1.23 | .006 | Sig |

In Palestinian adolescents, no differences could be attributed to gender in factors involving family, classmates, self, and teachers. However, differences in friends-related MNIEs were found for females. Thus, Palestinian female adolescents experienced more MNIEs related to friends than boys.

Answers to the third question "Are there any statistical differences in MNIE among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their gender?" are given in Table 4. No differences were found among Palestinian adolescents attributed to their age. This applied to all factors investigated.

**Table 4** *One Way ANOVA Analysis of Age Responses to MNIEs-M*

| Domains | Source of Variance | Sum of Squares | df | Mean square | F Value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | Between Groups | 4.30 | 2 | 2.15 | .82 | .440 |
| | Within Groups | 1064.04 | 407 | 2.61 | | |
| | Total | 1068.34 | 409 | | | |
| Classmates-related MNIE | Between Groups | 4.17 | 2 | 2.08 | 1.09 | .335 |
| | Within Groups | 774.77 | 407 | 1.90 | | |
| | Total | 778.94 | 409 | | | |
| Self-related MNIE | Between Groups | 13.77 | 2 | 6.88 | 2.23 | .108 |
| | Within Groups | 1254.71 | 407 | 3.08 | | |
| | Total | 1268.48 | 409 | | | |
| Teachers-related MNIE | Between Groups | 8.68 | 2 | 4.34 | 3.67 | .026 |
| | Within Groups | 480.60 | 407 | 1.18 | | |
| | Total | 489.29 | 409 | | | |
| Friends-related MNIE | Between Groups | 4.12 | 2 | 2.06 | 1.12 | .325 |
| | Within Groups | 744.26 | 407 | 1.82 | | |
| | Total | 748.39 | 409 | | | |

Answers to the fourth question "Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their family composition?" are shown in Table 5. There were no differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their family composition, classmates, or friends. Adolescents who lived with their father and his children experienced teachers-related MNIEs according to Tukey test results.

**Table 5** *One Way ANOVA Analysis of Responses to MNIEs-M Relating to Differences in Family Composition*

| Domains | Source of Variance | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F Value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | Between Groups | 16.89 | 4 | 4.22 | 1.62 | .160 |
| | Within Groups | 1051.45 | 405 | 2.59 | | |
| | Total | 1068.34 | 409 | | | |
| Classmates-related MNIE | Between Groups | 7.46 | 4 | 1.86 | .98 | .410 |
| | Within Groups | 771.48 | 405 | 1.90 | | |
| | Total | 778.94 | 409 | | | |
| Self-related MNIE | Between Groups | 16.82 | 4 | 4.20 | 1.36 | .240 |
| | Within Groups | 1251.66 | 405 | 3.09 | | |
| | Total | 1268.48 | 409 | | | |
| Teachers-related MNIE | Between Groups | 17.76 | 4 | 4.44 | 3.81 | .005 |
| | Within Groups | 471.52 | 405 | 1.16 | | |
| | Total | 489.29 | 409 | | | |
| Friends-related MNIE | Between Groups | 14.95 | 4 | 3.73 | 2.06 | .085 |
| | Within Groups | 733.43 | 405 | 1.81 | | |
| | Total | 748.39 | 409 | | | |

Answers to the fifth question "Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their father's education?" are shown in Table 6. There were differences in Palestinian adolescents' responses attributed to their father's education involving all factors. Tukey test data showed the direction of differences. Under the heading of family-related MNIEs, students whose father possessed postgraduate level training showed family-related MNIEs (*M* = 13.10). Adolescents whose father finished elementary education showed classmates-related MNIEs (*M* = 9.24). Adolescents whose father finished a university education experienced MNIEs-related to self (*M* = 9.47). Those adolescents whose fathers finished postgraduate education experienced teacher-

related MNIEs (*M* = 9.47). Finally, adolescents whose father finished a university education reported friends-related MNIEs (*M* = 9.52).

**Table 6** *One Way ANOVA Analysis of Responses to MNIEs-M Attributed to a Father's Education*

| Domains | Source of Variance | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F Value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | Between Groups | 48.24 | 5 | 9.64 | 3.82 | .002 |
| | Within Groups | 1020.10 | 404 | 2.52 | | |
| | Total | 1068.34 | 409 | | | |
| Classmates-related MNIE | Between Groups | 41.54 | 5 | 8.31 | 4.55 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 737.39 | 404 | 1.82 | | |
| | Total | 778.94 | 409 | | | |
| Self-related MNIE | Between Groups | 51.41 | 5 | 10.28 | 3.41 | .005 |
| | Within Groups | 1217.07 | 404 | 3.01 | | |
| | Total | 1268.48 | 409 | | | |
| Teachers-related MNIE | Between Groups | 26.77 | 5 | 5.35 | 4.67 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 462.51 | 404 | 1.14 | | |
| | Total | 489.29 | 409 | | | |
| Friends-related MNIE | Between Groups | 45.10 | 5 | 9.02 | 5.18 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 703.28 | 404 | 1.74 | | |
| | Total | 748.39 | 409 | | | |

Answers to the sixth Question "Are there any statistical differences in MNIEs among the Palestinian adolescents attributed to their mother's education?" are recorded in Table 7.

**Table 7** *One Way ANOVA Analysis of Responses to MNIEs-M Attributed a Mother's Education*

| Domains | Source of Variance | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F Value | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family-related MNIE | Between Groups | 38.27 | 5 | 7.65 | 3.00 | .011 |
| | Within Groups | 1030.06 | 404 | 2.55 | | |
| | Total | 1068.34 | 409 | | | |
| Classmates-related MNIE | Between Groups | 13.021 | 5 | 2.60 | 1.37 | .233 |
| | Within Groups | 765.92 | 404 | 1.89 | | |
| | Total | 778.94 | 409 | | | |
| Self-related MNIE | Between Groups | 31.19 | 5 | 6.23 | 2.03 | .073 |
| | Within Groups | 1237.29 | 404 | 3.06 | | |
| | Total | 1268.48 | 409 | | | |
| Teachers-related MNIE | Between Groups | 11.07 | 5 | 2.21 | 1.87 | .098 |
| | Within Groups | 478.21 | 404 | 1.18 | | |
| | Total | 489.29 | 409 | | | |
| Friends-related MNIE | Between Groups | 29.24 | 5 | 5.84 | 3.28 | .006 |
| | Within Groups | 719.14 | 404 | 1.78 | | |
| | Total | 748.39 | 409 | | | |

There were no differences in Palestinian adolescents responses attributed to their mother's education relating to self, classmates, or teachers. However, differences were found in relation to family and friends. Tukey test data indicated that the adolescents whose mother had a university degree had family-related MNIEs (*M* = 21.73). Also, it was revealed that the adolescents whose mother had a university degree had friends-related MNIEs (*M* = 9.43).

**Discussion**

The results obtained relevant to the first question showed that the first-ranked factor of MNIEs among Palestinian adolescents involved adolescents themselves. This was followed by family-related MNIEs, teachers-related MNIEs, friends-related MNIEs, and finally classmates-related MNIEs. These results showed that adolescents in the Palestinian society suffer from MNIEs affecting themselves directly, which is not a good indicator. This surely affects their psychological wellbeing (Abu Taha & Aburezeq, 2018; Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021d; Aburezeq & Abu Taha, 2018b; Aburezeq, 2020). This corresponds to Khamis' (2013) data where that the majority of Palestinian adolescents suffered from MNEs. This is also comparable to the results of Thabet (2007) who reported that each adolescent suffered from four MNEs during the Second Uprising (Intifada), and Odah (2010) found that 95% of adolescents witnessed incidents of people being shot. The results agree with the following studies that found family MNIEs among Palestinian adolescents (Mousa, 2015; Altawil et al., 2008; Thabet et al., 2007; Abu-Hain, 2007). Teacher-related MNIEs were also found among Palestinian adolescents. Altawil et al. (2008) report that 22% of the adolescents had problems either with their teachers or parents. Furthermore, friends-related MNIEs were found in the Palestinian adolescents in the study of Altawil et al. (2008). These investigators found that 46% of the adolescents experienced injury to a friend. Finally, classmates-related MNIEs were found in the same study.

The results gathered relating to the second question revealed that there were no differences among Palestinian adolescents attributed to gender in the factors involving family, classmates, self, and teachers. This means that both genders had the same experiences after their exposure to trauma. However, there were differences in friends-related MNIEs attributed to females. This result contradicts the findings of Assaf and Abu-El-Hassan (2007), which indicated that there were no differences attributed to gender. It is important to include gender as a variable since we need to know who is experiencing more MNIEs in Palestine. This matches with previous studies as most of them used gender in their questions.

The results relating to question three indicated that there were no differences in Palestinian adolescent experiences attributed to age. This result contradicts the assertions of Assaf and Abu-El-Hassan (2007) where they reported that 15-year-old adolescents suffered the most MNEs. It is important to include age as a variable since we need to know who is experiencing more MNIEs among the three ages (12, 15 and 18). This matches previous studies as most of them used age in their questions.

The responses to question four indicated that adolescents who lived with their father and his children only suffered from teachers-related MNIEs. In the Palestinian literature, no study investigated the family composition in relation to MNIEs. The family composition variable is a newly added variable connected to MNIEs. Family composition shows if there is any connection between the adolescent's social status (with whom they live) and the degree of exposure to MNIEs. Surprisingly, this variable was not included in previous studies. However, the literature explains that family ties help adolescents face their MNIEs, and help them take the appropriate decision to face these events (Al-Damen, 2005).

The results of the fifth question indicated that there are differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their father's educational status. This means that there is a strong link between father's education and MNIEs. However, no studies in the Palestinian literature were found about a father's education in relation to MNIEs. It is conceivable that some MNIEs may be contributed to by a parents' education. For example, when parents have separated and family members move out of the family home. Also, some of the adolescent relationships could be affected by their parents' education. A father's education could influence adolescent coping strategies. However, the literature is very poor about the relationship between MNIEs and the father's education.

The results obtained to the sixth question showed that there were no differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their mother's education in the factors involving classmates, self, and teachers. However, it was shown that adolescents whose mother had a university degree had family-related MNIEs. Also, it was revealed that the adolescents whose mother had a university degree had friend-related MNIEs. We found one study that investigated a mother's education and its relationship

to MNIEs (Odah, 2010). A mother's education is also important to face the MNIEs experienced by adolescents; it could help in facing these MNIEs as a father's education does.

As mentioned by the answers, they give a pretty comprehensive explanation about the characteristics of MNIEs among the Palestinians adolescents, and explain some relations.

## Conclusion

After searching the Palestinian literature, the majority of studies investigated MNEs related to wars, conflicts, killing, and violence. However, no specific study investigated MNIEs in Palestine; MNIE studies were not even found in the world literature. Therefore, the current study investigated MNIEs among Palestinian adolescents in terms of adolescent gender, age, family composition, father's education, and mother's education. The study indicated that self-related MNIEs were the most significant. There were no differences between Palestinian adolescents attributed to gender in the factors involving family, classmates, self, and teachers. There were differences in friends-related MNIEs attributed to females. There were no differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their ages spanning all factors. Adolescents who lived with their father and his children only suffered from teachers-related MNIEs. There were differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their father's education spanning all factors. There were no differences in Palestinian adolescents attributed to their mother's education in factors involving classmates, self, and teachers. However, the adolescents whose mother had a university degree displayed family and friends-related MNIEs.

At the international level, the study is considered a new addition to the field of major negative events, interpersonal relationships, social ties, and social problem-solving. In Palestine, the scope of the study breaks new ground in terms of the variables and their measurement. It is recommended that more studies using the study factors used be conducted. The results indicate which MNIEs the Palestinians suffer from, which is important for social workers, teachers, counselors, and parents. Some programs could be conducted involving teachers and parents to better help in alleviating the impact of these MNIEs on the life of adolescents. Consequently, identifying the MNIEs experienced by adolescents helps teachers to better evaluate their students in the various subjects and know why there are some weak points in their learning.

## Limitations of the Study

The research was carried out in Palestine's Gaza Strip during the first term of the school year 2021/2022. We were able to achieve a good geographical spread among the respondents because they did not all live in the same location. The sample might be regarded as representive of the entire Gaza Strip's adolescent population.

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**Appendix (1) The MNIE Questionnaire**

| No. | Item | During the Last 6 Months | |
|-----|------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. | My family member passed away. | Yes | No |
| 2. | My family member experienced a physical assault or attack. | Yes | No |
| 3. | My family member moved out of my home. | Yes | No |
| 4. | My parents separated. | Yes | No |
| 5. | My family member had an accident. | Yes | No |
| 6. | My family member had a serious illness. | Yes | No |
| 7. | One of my parents was fired from his/her job. | Yes | No |
| 8. | One of my classmates passed away. | Yes | No |
| 9. | One of my classmates had a serious accident. | Yes | No |
| 10. | One of my classmates had a serious illness. | Yes | No |
| 11. | One of my classmates experienced a physical assault or attack. | Yes | No |
| 12. | One of my classmates was fired from our class. | Yes | No |
| 13. | I had a serious incident. | Yes | No |
| 14. | I had a serious illness. | Yes | No |
| 15. | I made a big problem with my friend (boy/girl). | Yes | No |
| 16. | I had a bad problem with one of my parents. | Yes | No |
| 17. | I had a bad argument with my teacher. | Yes | No |
| 18. | Some of the people attacked me physically. | Yes | No |
| 19. | I made a big problem with my classmate. | Yes | No |
| 20. | One of my teachers passed away. | Yes | No |
| 21. | One of my teachers had an accident. | Yes | No |
| 22. | One of my teachers had a serious illness. | Yes | No |
| 23. | My best teacher left the school. | Yes | No |
| 24. | One of my teachers experienced a physical assault or attack. | Yes | No |
| 25. | My friend (boy/girl) passed away. | Yes | No |
| 26. | My friend (boy/girl) had a serious accident. | Yes | No |
| 27. | My friend (boy/girl) had a serious illness. | Yes | No |
| 28. | My friend (boy/girl) experienced a physical assault or attack. | Yes | No |
| 29. | My friend (boy/girl) was fired from our class. | Yes | No |

# A Study on the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Hospitality Graduates' Employability

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## Abstract

The hospitality industry was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with lockdowns and travel restrictions resulting in huge layoffs and greatly reduced employment opportunities. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative investigation was to study the experiences of International Hospitality Management graduates as they searched for employment during the COVID-19 pandemic when hospitality jobs were scarce. Ten graduates from a university in Bangkok, Thailand, representing five different nationalities participated in in-depth interviews via Line and Zoom applications. It was found that pandemic-related obstacles in job hunting did not deter the participants from seeking employment. When hospitality work opportunities were unavailable (except in China), participants sought employment in other industries and were successful. Instead of viewing the pandemic as a threat or a defeat, most respondents saw it as an opportunity to explore other professions. Exposure to non-hospitality jobs was beneficial, adding value to their resumes and reflecting their resilience. The usefulness of knowledge gained from their degree work varied according to the jobs obtained. While a few expressed interests in the hospitality industry when it recovers, others did not want to be employed in the hospitality industry anymore after experiencing alternative options.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19 pandemic, employment, hospitality, Thailand*

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was totally unexpected and has led to challenging times around the globe, affecting the lives and livelihoods of every person regardless of religion or wealth status (Korstrom, 2020; Krishnan et al., 2020). The disease and efforts to contain it led to worldwide lockdowns, business closures, and rising unemployment, dragging countries into recession, with worsened business performance as a result of reduced consumer spending and decreased savings (Hayri et al., 2020). Every sector experienced the impact of COVID-19, with the hotel industry being hit the hardest (Krishnan et al., 2020).

Thailand was no exception, and even by the first quarter of 2020, early signs of unemployment were evident (International Labor Organization, 2020); numbers continued to increase in both the second and third quarters of 2020 (Open Development Thailand, 2020). New graduates coming into the market during the prolonged pandemic in Thailand had a challenging time as they competed with fellow graduates and more experienced laid-off employees for scarce jobs, particularly hospitality ones (Boonlert, 2020). Highly reputed as one of the world's most popular tourist destinations (Lunkam, 2021), the International Hospitality Management (IHM) major in Thailand was a hit with both local and foreign students alike, with many foreign students hoping to work in Thailand after graduation.

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges faced by hospitality graduates who had completed their studies during the pandemic and were looking for a job during its prolonged existence. This study will contribute to the scant literature on employment opportunities for hospitality graduates in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who stand to benefit particularly from this study are those in the academic sphere and students in the higher education sector.

## Literature Review

The world will always remember the unexpected crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic as it witnessed the closure of many hotels during the first quarter of 2020 (Hayri et al., 2020). Travel and hospitality businesses were negatively affected due to mobility restrictions and social distancing

measures (Gössling et al., 2020). Revenues plummeted in "room, food and beverage, banquet, wedding, and retail shop" (Hayri et al., 2020, para. 1).

### Employment during the Pandemic

Aside from a worldwide health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic also created a tremendous negative impact on the entire global economy resulting in massive layoffs, recessions, and lockdowns (Hayri et al., 2020; Nga et al., 2021). The U.S. reported massive job layoffs, and its unemployment rate was the highest since the Great Depression, with an uncertain date for recovery (Petrosky-Nadeau & Valletta, 2020). Thailand's first lockdown, from the middle of March until June 2020, had a massive negative impact on the economy despite its success in keeping the pandemic under control (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021; "Signs Point to Higher Job Losses," 2021). On account of the closure of shopping malls and the majority of businesses during the lockdown (Boonlert, 2020), Thailand faced a loss of 758,000 jobs during the first quarter of 2021, and the numbers continued to increase with gradual business closures. Although job opportunities had increased during the second quarter of 2021, they were not in the hospitality sector, but in other industries such as e-commerce, e-learning, and technology. Thailand found itself in a recession during the second quarter of 2020 (Boonlert, 2020). Things worsened in April 2021 with the third wave of the disease, which was characterized by a higher infection rate and deaths due to the emergence of the Delta variant ("Signs Point to Higher Job Losses," 2021). University graduates during the pandemic were highly challenged as they stepped into the job arena with very few job prospects, and many who had previous job offers were informed of job cancellations or indefinite postponements (Mongkol, 2020). Not all graduates were without hope; organizations still needed skilled employees who could play a significant role in driving their organizations ("Signs Point to Higher Job Losses," 2021).

### Impacts of the Crisis on Tourism and Hospitality

Originating in Wuhan, China, the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak that began in December 2019 spread throughout the world, resulting in travel restrictions that heavily impacted the hospitality industry (Aharon et al., 2021; Fox, 2020); Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Wright, 2020) adversely affecting its stability and performance (Aharon et al., 2021). Chinese hotels were the first to experience a decline in occupancy to 75% in January, and as the virus spread, rates fell further, not only in China, but also across the Asia-Pacific region and in other COVID-19 affected areas (Fox, 2020). Around the globe even the most iconic hotels were affected, resulting in a "decline in occupancy rates, liquidity crises, struggling to pay the employees, difficult to afford their commercial mortgages, and low consumers because of the restrictions on the travel" (Annapoorna & Cherian, 2021, p. 2025). Canceled events also led to cancellation of hotel reservations (Fox, 2020).

As a foreign tourism-dependent country, Thailand's hotel occupancy dropped by 44% nationwide in 2020 (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021), costing it at least six million jobs ("Signs Point to Higher Job Losses," 2021). Hotel operations were weak in 2020 and depressed through 2021, with recovery predicted to start at the end of 2021 and last through 2023. It was also predicted that it would take four years for Thailand to recover and reach pre-COVID levels (Lunkam, 2021). Its domestic travel had somewhat recovered, largely attributed to the Thai government's domestic travel stimulus packages ("Rao Tiew Duay Gan" in Thai), relaxed lockdown restrictions, increased vaccinations, and removal of inter-provincial travels restrictions (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021; Kasikorn Research Center, 2021).

### Recovery from the Pandemic for the Hospitality Business

With patients recovering from COVID-19, the global economy will, in due time, recover as well. However, the greatest economic scars have been felt particularly in the poorest nations. In some such places, marked debt increases were seen, inequalities widened, and the destruction of jobs was the heaviest. Getting back to the pre-pandemic period will no doubt take time. However, advanced countries have suffered fewer impacts compared to low-income countries and emerging markets (Curran & Kennedy, 2021). A variety of factors that are conducive to the gradual and lengthy recovery

of the travel and tourism industry include improved vaccination uptakes, relaxed border restrictions, and simplified procedures enabling travel. The early stages of global hospitality recoveries and reopening have been attributed to domestic and short-haul regional travel. "The U.S. and China were able to curb the virus spread and stabilize domestic activities for the most part of 2021, resulting in a quick RevPAR turnaround" (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021, p. 12). The Maldives was a successful pioneer in reopening to foreign tourists, although they had not achieved herd immunity (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021). Recovery to pre-COVID-19 levels is predicted to be in 2023 or later, and the hospitality industry will experience shifts in the post-pandemic era (Krishnan et al., 2020). The road to recovery is going to be a long one, as hotel operators struggle to survive with low occupancy rates (Aharon et al., 2021). Personal leisure is expected to return first via the use of cars to visit friends and relatives, followed by domestic and close-to-home travel. It will take a longer time for international leisure trips to rebound because of some ongoing travel restrictions (Krishnan et al., 2020).

Asia's growth was reported to rebound faster in 2021 than in 2020, but various economies within the region were on divergent paths as determined by the extent of vaccine rollouts, domestic outbreaks, and benefits reaped from the global recovery (Alegado, 2021). The Chinese economy showed signs of recovery, as it was successful in keeping the pandemic under control for approximately one year (Curran & Kennedy, 2021). Its strategy was revised to cater to the large domestic Chinese market and short-distance travelers, as international travel was restricted (Krishnan et al., 2020). Thailand, in its attempts to gradually increase foreign tourists, ``reopened its doors to fully vaccinated travelers from 63 countries without a quarantine requirement since November 1, 2021." This was on top of its original Phuket Sandbox program that in 2021 had successfully "attracted 60,000 visitors from July to October, with the top five markets" (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021, p. 3).

The Delta variant caused a re-emergence of the pandemic just as things were starting to get better (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021). As a further complication, while the world was starting to gradually recover from the pandemic with increased vaccinations, "the latest new variant of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), B.1.1.529 (Omicron) first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by South Africa on November 24, 2021" (CDC COVID-19 Response Team, 2021, p. 1731). This newest threat has been a tremendous hindrance to the global recovery, with Europe witnessing a large surge in COVID-19 cases, and other countries set to follow in due time (Ray, 2021). Things were optimistic with Thailand's reopening on November 1, 2021, but then, "a fresh whiplash in travel sentiment from the Omicron variant has put the brakes on recovery prospects in 2022" (Worrachaddejchai, 2021, par. 1). The "most likely scenario for Thai hospitality business is U-shaped gradual recovery until 2024, starting with domestic leisure travel, which has already resumed (Worrachaddejchai, 2021, par. 3).

*Objectives and Research Questions*

Graduating from university during the prolonged two-year COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a very difficult time for former university students as they looked for employment in a very competitive job market with limited and scarce job opportunities. This was especially so for hospitality graduates, as the hotel industry was highly affected by a tremendous drop in occupancy rates, resulting in many employees being laid-off and some hotel closures. The objective of this study was to find out IHM graduates' experiences in their search for employment during the COVID-19 pandemic when hospitality jobs were almost impossible to find. The research objectives were as follows:

1. To find out how hospitality students went about hunting for a job during the pandemic.
2. To find out the types of jobs hospitality graduates secured during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To find out participants' interest in returning to the hospitality industry after the pandemic.
4. To discover the extent to which hospitality degrees were useful in their current lines of work.

**Methodology**

The qualitative research methodology chosen for this study was phenomenology, an approach that investigates "various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2019, p. 338) by focusing on commonalities in the lived experiences of a particular group. In this study, the difficulties of seeking employment in the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic were explored, and data were collected through in-depth interviews. The COVID-19 pandemic did not permit normal face-to-face interviewing; hence, in-depth interviews averaging about 45 minutes each were conducted through three platform channels during the month of July 2021. The channels were: (a) Line Video Calls (Thailand and Singapore); (b) WeChat Video Calls (China); and (c) Zoom (Myanmar). Purposive sampling was used to align with the intent of the phenomenon being investigated. Participants had to meet two main criteria: namely, be a hospitality graduate who had graduated from Thailand, and was looking for employment during the pandemic period (end of 2019–2021). Ten participants participated in the study, completing a simple e-survey that provided basic demographic information prior to their interview sessions.

The interview protocol consisted of three parts: Part 1—Job searches during the pandemic (three questions); Part 2—Basic employment profile (four questions); and Part 3—Current employment (four questions). There was a total of eleven open-ended structured questions. The demographic and current employment profiles of the ten hospitality graduates are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1** *Demographic and Employment Information*

| Participant | Gender | Age Range | Nationality | Country of Employment | Position |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | Female | 21–25 | Thai | Thailand | Customer Service |
| Participant 2 | Female | 21–25 | Thai | Thailand | Sale and Marketing Executive |
| Participant 3 | Male | 26–30 | Nepalese - Japanese | Thailand | Board of Directors Assistant |
| Participant 4 | Female | 21–25 | Thai | Thailand | Sales Engineer |
| Participant 5 | Female | 21–25 | Singaporean | Singapore | Assistant Chef |
| Participant 6 | Female | 21–25 | Vietnamese | Thailand | Support and Administration |
| Participant 7 | Male | 26–30 | Myanmar | Myanmar | Unemployed |
| Participant 8 | Male | 21–25 | Chinese | China | Management Trainee |
| Participant 9 | Male | 21–25 | Chinese | China | Customer Relations & Business Development |
| Participant 10 | Female | 21–25 | Chinese | China | Management Trainee |

**Results**

The results of the study are reported under four themes (Table 2) and correspond to the four research questions: (a) Theme 1: Job search platforms used; (b) Theme 2: Employment during the pandemic; (c) Theme 3: Expressed interest in returning to the hospitality industry after the pandemic, and (d) Theme 4: Alignment of current employment with their hospitality major.

***Theme 1: Job Search Platforms***

Although using social media is a current trend in job hunting, participants also relied on other methods such as walk-ins, referrals, and using the services of a Japanese Recruitment Agency. Participants from different countries relied on different social media platforms. Those looking for a job in Thailand relied on Jobsdb.com, JobThai, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Participants who were applying for jobs in their homelands went through different channels. In Myanmar, the respondent applied through Facebook job listings, while Chinese hospitality graduates relied on a Chinese Hospitality Application platform. A Singaporean who decided to apply for a job in her home country received her

employment offer through mycareerssg, which is the job website used by most Singaporeans. The Nepalese-Japanese participant had received a job offer through a referral, and was looking forward to being vaccinated, as he had just received a conditional job offer in a hotel on an island in Thailand. Of all the ten hospitality students, three of them were employed in the hospitality industry in China. Three others worked in the Food and Service establishment, while the rest (three) were working in industries completely unrelated to hospitality (IT, Entertainment, and an electronics manufacturer). The number of jobs each participant had held varied. Four of the participants were in their first job, three were in their second place of employment, and two were working in their third job. Participant 7, who started out working in the hotel but had lost his job because of the pandemic, was studying to pass a Japanese proficiency test and hoping to get an engineering job in Japan.

**Table 2** *Themes in Summary*

| Theme | Description |
| --- | --- |
| **Theme 1**: Job Search Platforms | 1. Social media was used widely, with each country using different platforms.<br>   a. China: Hospitality application<br>   b. Myanmar: Facebook<br>   c. Singapore: mycareerssg<br>   d. Thailand: Jobsdb.com, JobThai, Facebook, and LinkedIn<br>2. Other approaches included: referrals, recruitment agency, walk-in. |
| **Theme 2**: Employment during Pandemic | 1. Plentiful hotel positions in recovered Chinese economy.<br>2. Zero Thai hotel jobs for hospitality graduates.<br>3. Travel restrictions prevented outbound job opportunities.<br>4. Foreign language abilities opened up job opportunities in Thailand.<br>5. Graduates turned to alternative industries/professions. |
| **Theme 3**: Expressed Interest After Pandemic | 1. Chinese want to work in better paid and reputable hospitality jobs abroad, return to hospitality industry.<br>2. Two participants were waiting to move back to hotels.<br>3. Half of participants decided that hospitality was no longer for them. |
| **Theme 4**: Alignment of Current Employment | 1. Full usage of hospitality knowledge in hotel positions.<br>2. Only customer service aligned with work in alternative industries. |

### *Theme 2: Employment during the Pandemic*

Graduating and seeking a job during the pandemic, particularly in the highly impacted hospitality industry, was extremely challenging. Table 3 provides the time periods taken to obtain a job.

Plans to work in hospitality upon graduation were dashed for participants with the exception of three Chinese graduates, who were capable of landing hotel jobs back in China, as the Chinese economy was recovering well from the pandemic and was almost back to normal. Relying solely on a Chinese hospitality application, Participant 8, who had originally planned to work in Thailand, returned home to China and successfully received a job offer there as a management trainee in the field of food and beverage. Participant 9 had a bad experience working in a front office in China; he discovered that hotel jobs were no longer for him, and moved on to a customer relations and business development position in a Chinese IT company. As a foreign graduate with two hospitality internships outside China, Participant 10 shared that, "it was much easier for me to get a job, but it was still challenging and difficult to get a much-coveted Management Trainee position in a 5-star hotel". She also mentioned that "although there were many hospitalities positions out there in China, the salaries were not very good."

**Table 3** *Graduation and Job Search Details*

| Participant | Graduation | Started Job Search | Time in Getting a Job | | | | |
| | | | Before Graduating | 1–3 Months | 4–6 Months | 7–12 Months | > 1 Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | March 2020 | December 2020 | | 1 | | | |
| Participant 2 | October 2020 | September 2020 | | 1 | | | |
| Participant 3 | March 2020 | June 2020 | | 1 | | | |
| Participant 4 | June 2021 | March 2021 | 1 | | | | |
| Participant 5 | June 2020 | December 2019 | 1 | | | | |
| Participant 6 | October 2020 | January 2021 | | | 1 | | |
| Participant 7 | December 2020 | October 2019 | 1 | | | | |
| Participant 8 | February 2020 | January 2020 | 1 | | | | |
| Participant 9 | February 2020 | July 2020 | | | | | 1 |
| Participant 10 | July 2021 | May 2021 | 1 | | | | |
| | | Total | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | Percent (%) | 50 | 30 | 10 | 0 | 10 |

A participant (1) who had formerly interned in the Maldives and received a job offer there was unable to travel after graduation "because of the lockdown and working restrictions in the Maldives. I was unsuccessful in applying for hospitality jobs, and am currently working in a hospital's food company as a Customer Service staff." Participant 6 was another victim of travel restrictions. Although she had a management trainee job waiting for her in Vietnam, she was unable to fly and had to resort to job hunting in Thailand. Interestingly, two foreign graduates, a Vietnamese (Participant 6) and a Nepalese-Japanese (Participant 3), were able to get employment in non-hospitality companies in Thailand through referrals because of their native language skills. Participant 3 also mentioned that "I had applied for a hotel position in Thailand, and am waiting to be vaccinated to be eligible to start work." A native of Myanmar (Participant 7) had worked in a hotel back in Myanmar for five months, but had to leave because "my hotel, together with many other hotels, had to close down because of COVID-19."

Many participants expressed that they had graduated at a difficult time when Bangkok faced the first most stringent lockdown. Applications that had been sent to hotels were usually unsuccessful because hotels were closed, staff were laid off rather than hired, and vacant hotel positions were usually management-level positions for which the participants, being new graduates, were not qualified. Participant 2 shared that "as hotels were mostly closed, I couldn't apply for a hospitality job. Therefore, I worked as an Assistant Manager at my mother's restaurant, and then started to look for a job in December 2020, and got a sales position after one month." Facing the same problem, Participant 4 helped out in her family business for the first six months before deciding to branch out into different industries. It took her one year and four months before receiving a job offer through a Japanese recruitment company. Participant 5's experience was different, as she started off in a sugar factory in an administrative position and, like other hospitality graduates, failed to hear from hotels regarding her job applications. With the worsening of the pandemic and no job opportunities, she decided to open a noodle shop because of her love for cooking. As a Singaporean, she eventually decided to try applying for a job in Singapore, and received a job offer as a waitress in a Thai restaurant in Singapore; later on, she moved on to being an assistant chef.

### Theme 3: Expressed Interest in Returning to the Hospitality Industry after the Pandemic

Two of the three Chinese participants who are currently management trainees in hotels said that they would definitely remain in hospitality, and all planned to pursue hospitality roles outside of China, as jobs abroad were far better in terms of compensation and prestige. Waiting to be fully vaccinated,

Participant 3 said that he was on the waiting list to work in a hotel in Thailand, and is definitely willing to work in the hospitality industry as it recovers. Participant 1, who had previously interned in the Maldives and had later received a job offer, was unable to fly into the Maldives due to COVID-19. She said that "I'm looking forward to transiting back to hospitality in the Maldives in the future when things open up." As for Participant 6, who is currently employed in a support and administrative position, she said that "I don't think I would go back to hospitality. I will find it hard to adapt to working in the hotel as it means a ten-hour shift on a rotation basis, and I don't think it's OK for me now." The remaining participants had other plans outside of hospitality. With a former degree in engineering, a graduate from Myanmar, Participant 7, said: "I am not going to work in hotels anymore, and living in Myanmar is very hard right now because of the military regime that started on February 1, 2021." He is currently studying Japanese and awaiting employment in Japan in the field of engineering. Participant 2, on the other hand, plans to go abroad to study Japanese and help her mother's friend in Japan run a Thai restaurant there. With an uncertain future ahead, Participant 4 said that "If the economy improves and things go back to normal, I may think of something that I can deal with by myself and will start my own company."

### Theme 4: Alignment of Current Employment with the Hospitality Major

Participants employed in the hotel/accommodation industry unanimously agreed that their current jobs were definitely related to their hospitality major, while those in food services establishments stated that they were partially related to their major. Others who held positions in non-hospitality fields, such as sales, administrative support, and a factory felt that their jobs were almost completely different from hospitality, but their jobs contained a minor customer service component. Participant 2, who was in sales and marketing, said that "it's completely different," while a support and administrative employee (Participant 6) said that "90% of my job is completely unrelated to hospitality, but 10% of it is related to customer service."

Participant 1, working in customer service, compared her job in a very interesting way. She shared that "my job is similar but just in a different industry setting. If I were to work in a hotel, I would be at the front desk, meeting customers. However, in my current position of customer service for a food catering business in a hospital, I meet with guests in their rooms." Participant 8, who worked in hospitality, mentioned that "since I'm in hospitality, the knowledge gained could be used. However, there are other knowledge and skills that can only be received while working." While in his previous hotel job, Participant 9 said that "All of the hospitality knowledge gained had been useful—in Food and Beverage and Front Office." Participant 5 mentioned that "I lost quite a lot of knowledge as I wasn't in the hospitality business. It's been nine months, and working six days a week with Sunday as a laundry day, I haven't had the time to practice my cooking either." Starting off in a position as an Assistant to the Board of Directors, Participant 3 said that hospitality knowledge was "fantastic and very useful", but when he was transferred to the current entertainment industry, he said that "IHM courses were not useful, but business-related courses were in Virtual Reality." Although in sales, Participant 4 said: "I found hospitality knowledge useful from my internship and university in working with customers. There's a change from servicing guests to customers. Reservation training during the internship also has helped me with emails." Another participant (2), who was also in sales, had a different opinion, as she said that only 20% of specialized knowledge gained was used. Participant 6, who was in a support and administrative position, replied that "I think, not on a large scale. But there were some things I could use such as budgeting, risk management in projects."

### Discussion
### Theme 1: Job Search Platforms

The platforms employed by the participants in job applications were similar to the ones used prior to the pandemic, such as job applications through social media, referrals, and walk-ins. Referrals were still a very effective method of getting a job (Ngotngamwong, 2021). The new knowledge acquired from this study was the usefulness of various platforms that were used in Singapore (mycareerssg),

Myanmar (Facebook), and China (Hospitality app only used in China). The duration in obtaining jobs varied from one participant to another, but all obtained jobs with the exception of Participant 7, who had in fact started working in a hotel, but later became unemployed when the hotel closed down.

### *Theme 2: Employment during the Pandemic*

There is no debate regarding the difficulties of finding work at a time when unemployment was prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nga et al., 2021). The experiences shared by the participants were extremely interesting, with each story being different. The majority of the participants (80%) were capable of getting a job by at least the third month after graduation; 30% already had a job offer prior to graduation. Only 20% had a more difficult time, which is basically the norm for new graduates. This was a good indication of participants' employability despite the pandemic, the unavailability of hospitality jobs, and the difficulties of finding work in a scarce job market. However, three Chinese participants were able to work in hotels in their home country, as the Chinese economy was recovering well from the pandemic (Jensiriratanakorn & Jian, 2021).

The non-Chinese were not as fortunate, as their economies were not recovering, and they were still experiencing the effects of the pandemic with lockdowns, hotel closures, layoffs, and limited positions in the hospitality industry (CDC COVID-19 Response Team, 2021). The majority of those incapable of getting hotel jobs turned to other industries instead of just waiting for hospitality jobs to open up for them. That was a good decision, because the pandemic that started in Thailand in March 2020, as well as the world, is ongoing and punctuated with multiple lockdowns as a consequence of the emergence of troubling variant strains (CDC COVID-19 response team, 2021).

Half of the participants were foreigners who had intentionally undertaken their undergraduate hospitality studies in Thailand with plans of working in hotels in Thailand. All of them had to eventually leave for home because of the situation. Aside from the difficulties of job hunting, international travel restrictions also prevented job opportunities from being realized by two participants (Mongkol, 2020; Sobieralski, 2020). They were examples of the many lost job opportunities due to international travel restrictions.

### *Theme 3: Expressed Interest in Returning to the Hospitality Industry after the Pandemic*

Half of the participants were interested in continuing to work in the hospitality industry after the pandemic abates and things start opening up again. The other five participants thought otherwise, with each participant moving along a different path away from hospitality. Their decisions to either stay or leave the hospitality industry demonstrated the amount of passion and interest that International Hospitality Management graduates truly had in the hospitality industry. It was not surprising that some participants who had experienced a different working environment decided to continue on in a non-hospitality path after the pandemic is over. Going abroad had an appeal for five participants. All three Chinese participants wanted to move abroad when things open up, while a Thai participant was waiting to take up her position in the Maldives, and another Thai participant planned on moving to Japan to work in a restaurant there.

### *Theme 4: Alignment of Current Employment with the Hospitality Major*

The degree of usefulness of knowledge acquired from their undergraduate International Hospitality Management studies varied from one participant to another. Those working in hotels were able to fully utilize the knowledge in their positions. Non-hospitality employees, on the other hand, stated that they were capable of using some knowledge in their current roles, some more than others. This is typical, depending on how much knowledge could be used and incorporated. It is usual for graduates to use the knowledge they acquired in their positions related to their studies, and some of this knowledge would still be valuable if they were to work in a different field. The amount of knowledge usage would vary according to the industry concerned. One point made by a participant is also worth mentioning here: when one does not work in the hospitality industry for some time, the relevant knowledge tends to be lost.

## Conclusion

The pandemic and the obstacles in job hunting did not deter participants from seeking employment. When hospitality opportunities were unavailable (with the exception of China), participants made strategic moves to seek employment in other industries and were successful in getting jobs. This indicates that they were resilient and were able to use the knowledge gained in hospitality in their current positions/jobs to varying degrees, meaning that their hospitality education had not gone to waste. Instead of viewing the pandemic as a threat or loss, it was helpful to perceive it as an opportunity to explore other professions and be exposed to non-hospitality jobs. This added experience outside of hospitality would add value to their resumes and work experience, helping them to become better-rounded individuals.

## Recommendations

Being adaptable to a rapidly changing and dynamic environment is an essential trait that is valued by employers. Participants flexibility and openness to new experiences was commendable and definitely an excellent tool for survival in an ever-changing world that is filled with uncertainties. It would be interesting to replicate this study with a different group of participants, such as flight attendant trainees or other majors that were greatly impacted by the pandemic.

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1.4. Manuscripts should use Calibri font size 11.
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## 6. Recommended Verb Tenses for APA Style Articles (p. 118)

| Paper Section | Recommended Tense | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Literature review (or whenever discussing other researchers' work) | Past<br>Present perfect | Quinn (2020) presented<br>Since then, many investigators have used |
| Method<br>Description of procedure | Past<br>Present perfect | Participants completed a survey<br>Others have used similar methods |
| Reporting results | Past | Results were nonsignificant<br>Scores increased<br>Hypotheses were supported |
| Discuss implications of results | Present | The results indicate |
| Presentation of conclusions, limitations, future directions, etc. | Present | We conclude<br>Limitations of the study are |

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