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WHAT'S MINE IS MINE, WHAT'S YOURS IS NEGOTIABLE: MONEY MANAGEMENT AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN URBAN SARAWAK

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated money management among married couples with special reference to bank accounts and their implications on the individual's economic wellbeing. Forty married couples from urban Sarawak were located and interviewed. Results indicated that the most common preferred money management system seemed to be the separate account system. This practice appeared to enable the respective individuals in the family to maintain their financial autonomy and to avoid financial conflicts. However, the practice caused reduced visibility in terms of financial transactions among spouses. It is deduced that such a practice could introduce economic inequality for the lower earning spouse. The consequence of this may be generated by the low income of the couples but it can lead to unequal contributions between spouses to joint expenses and a lack of access to the income of the higher earning spouse.

Keywords: Money, Resource Allocation, Family Power, Households, Financial Management

INTRODUCTION

The study of how money is managed in a marriage is important for it enhances the understanding a society has about the effects of social changes on families. Due to the increasing number of married women's participation in the workforce, many households including those in Malaysia are now characterised by dual income families. There are certain factors that affect this including economic growth, increased years of education, improved mother and child care, greater access to family planning and improved gender-based economic incentives as well as employment policies (see Aminah & Gregory (1997). It was also noted that these factors also contribute to the increased labour force participation of Malaysian women. An equity related issue, which is of great concern and debated among sociologists and feminists, is the extent of women's greater participation in the workforce and its impact on gender equity between husbands and wives in contemporary families.

Studies in Malaysia (Noor Rahmad, 1996; R Noraini M Noor, 1999; Rahmad Ismail & Fatimah, 1999; Roziah Omar, 2003) have observed that even though more married women are participating in the workforce, their responsibilities as the primary care giver in the family have not diminished. Many are still experiencing work-family conflicts when juggling their multiple roles as an employee, mother and wife (Aminah Ahmad, 1995). Similar findings have been noted in the West (Coltrane, 2000; Pyke, 1994). These finding raise the additional question of to what extent is this inequality transferred to other areas such as the power to control and access to household money. There are no studies to date which focus on gender and family finances in Malaysia. This paper aims to fill this research gap by examining money management among married couples in urban Sarawak with special reference to bank accounts and the consequences for individuals' access to money and personal spending.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most influential and cited study that explains how couples organise household money was by Jan Pahl (1983) who looked at how British couples managed their household income. From this study, four basic types of money management were identified.

a. *Whole wage system* where one person, usually the wife manages all the finances of the household except the personal spending money of the partner. If the husband manages the whole wage system, then the wife will not have any access to the money without permission.
b. *Allowance system* where the main breadwinner will give allowance for the household expenditure and keep the rest to himself.
c. *Pooling or joint system* where all, or nearly all of the household money is pooled and managed together. Both have access and equal responsibility for expenditure.
d. *Independent system* where each partner has an independent account to which the other does not have access and each is responsible for specific expenditure.

In a subsequent research, Pahl (2005)included an additional management type, the *partial pooling system* where couples pool some of their money and manage the pool jointly while at the same time, having their own money saved somewhere for personal spending. From Pahl's original study published in 1983, the shared management system was detected as being the most common type of allocative system (more than 50 per cent) adopted in Britain. As a system, it remained popular among western couplesin the United Kingdom – UK (Volger, Lyonette& Wiggins, 2008; Burgoyne &Morrison, 1997; Pahl, 1989), the United States (Tichenor, 1999; Treas, 1993), Canada (Woolley, 2000), Sweden (Nyman, 1999), Australia (Singh, 1997) and New Zealand (Fleming, 1997). However, due to significant changes in both demographic and cultural factors, there have been noticeable shifts in the adoption of housekeeping allowances and independent management system among western couples. One factor is the increasing number of women entering and remaining in the labour force. Women are beginning to contribute, on a more equal basis, to a couple's joint household income. This practice has diminished the importance of the sole breadwinner's income.

The next influential factor is caused by cultural changes such as an increase in divorce rates, second marriages and couples co-habiting. The housekeeping allowance system appears to be on the decline while there is a growth in independent management system among married couples(Pahl, 2006;Pahl, 1995;Volger&Pahl, 1994). The adoption of the independent management system in the UK has become more prominent among younger and more affluent couples, especially those with no children (Pahl, 2008), couples in their second marriage (Ashby &Burgoyne, 2008; Burgoyne &Morrison, 1997) and co-habiting couples (Singh &Lindsay, 1996; Volger, 2005). In addition, partial pooling was observed to be another popular alternative among co-habiting and married couples (Ashby &Burgoyne, 2005; Pahl, 2005; Burgyone, Clarke, Reibstein& Edmunds, 2006).Of a study conducted by Alliance and Leicester Bank in 2004 on 1001 married or cohabiting British couples, Pahl (2008) notes that34% managed their finances through a joint account, 38% had both joint and individual accounts and 28% maintained separate individual accounts. The reasons cited by men and women for keeping separate accounts, however, differed.It was further noted that of those women who did not have a joint account, majority wanted a separate account so as to affirm their independence. Less than 25% of men and only 12.5% of women wanted separate accounts in order to avoid financial conflict. Among this group of men and women, 21% of men and eight percent (8%) of women did not want a joint account. The reason cited was to prevent their partners from accessing their money without the respective spouses' permission. An earlier study by Lewis

(2001) looking at money management among 61 couples revealed that independent money management helps to ensure that couples have individual personal and private spending money. The way couples organise their household income not only reflects issues of power and inequality in marital relationship but also the respective individual's welfare such as having personal spending money. Burgoyne (1990) demonstrates that when couples in the UK pooled their household income, women, especially non-earning wives, felt more inhibited and less entitled to using the pooled money on themselves. Burgoyne (1990) also notes that men were less inclined to experience the same restraint. Men, it appears, tended to be "more extravagant, more acquisitive and more relaxed about spending" even when their financial circumstances were tight. Burgoyne (ibid.) explains that this could be because the men felt that they had the right to spend as they were the breadwinners. Couples who adopted the independent money management system experienced another form of inequality, a lack of access to the income of the higher earning spouse. Such a system appears to be used by a higher earning spouse so as to prevent the spouse with the lower income any financial access. Since it is usually women who earn less than men, it is thus not surprising that women would suffer financially. due to the combined effects of low income, equal contributions to joint consumption and the lack of access to the income of higher earning spouse (Elizabeth, 2001; Nyman, 1999, 2003; Pahl, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative data which were extracted from interviews conducted of married couples living in Kuching and Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Respondents

Respondents were sought through the snowballing technique through friends and acquaintances. The two main criteria used in the selection of respondents were ethnicity and socio economic status (income level). The final group of respondents comprises of Chinese, Malays, Ibans, Bidayuhsand Melanaus. There were two reasons why it was important that the group of respondents were multi-ethnic: firstly, Sarawak is a multi-ethnic society so it was important that the respondents are multi-ethnic too; secondly, the multi-ethnic characteristics of the respondents might provide interesting variations to the findings as individuals with different cultural backgrounds may give rise to different attitudes, opinions and behaviours in the management of household income and when making expenditure decisions. Even though the author has made the effort to ensure that therespondents were multi-ethnic, the author did not however analyse the data according to individual ethnicity.The group of respondents were further categorised into household income levels categorised as high income (a net monthly household income of above RM3,000) and low income (with a net monthly household income above RM3,000).The author only includepart-time and full time employed couples in this study and each couple had to have at least one dependent child still living with them.Childlesscouples, or those without dependent children were excluded because studies (Fox, 2001; Nyman, 1999) have demonstrated that women's economic inequality is connected to their caregiving roles. The majority of the respondents (77) were in full-time employment while three (two females and one male) were part-time workers.

The ages of the respondents range from 30 to more than 50 years and the duration of marriage among the couples ranged from one month to 34 years with a mean of 14.4 years. The occupations of the respondents rangedfrom professionals to entrepreneurs and a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs. The higher income group consisted of lawyers, lecturers, engineers, financial consultants, accountants and one IT consultant. Respondents from the lower income

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group mainly worked in the personal services sector and consisted of a chef, a hairdresser, cleaners, drivers, a customer assistant at a bank, shop assistants and a dispatch office worker.

Semi-Structured Interviews

It is hereby noted that the topic in study is a sensitive one as it involves looking at money. Most Asians, particularly Malaysians, do not consider this as an easy topic to discuss (Kuang, Wong and David, 2010). Due to the sensitivity and complexity of the research topic, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. First, a semi-structured set of questions developed from earlier research and refined in pilot study was used as a guide for interviews. The topics covered included individual demographic details, household expenditure decisions, financial arrangements, personal expenditure and hobbies and factors affecting decisions in a marriage. The respondents were first contacted by phone to explain the nature of the study. There were a few that were wary and wanted to meet in person before agreeing to be interviewed. A relatively high proportion (30 per cent) refused to be interviewed due to the sensitivity of the research topic. In addition, there were many willing participants who did not become part of the sample because their spouse was unwilling to be interviewed; men were more likely to refuse than women. For those who agreed to be interviewed, a date, time and place to conduct the interview was then arranged according to the respondents' preferences. The interviews could be conducted at the respondents' homes, their workplace, public places like coffee shops and eateries.

Husbands and wives were interviewed separately either consecutively or after a few days interval by the researcher. Couples interviewed on separate days were requested not to divulge the content of the interview to the other. Most of the interviews were conducted in English and for respondents who preferred speaking in Malay or a native language, a translator was available during these interviews. The interview began with an ice-breaker where the author shared her family and background information with the respondents. This was followed by giving assurances that any information gathered during the interviews would be kept confidential and only pseudonyms would be used in the final report. Depending on respondents' ease of conversation, the duration of the interview varied from 45 minutes to 3 hours with the average time being 90 minutes. Only two interviews were tape-recorded as most participants were reluctant to have their voices recorded. All the tape recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Those not tape recorded were manually written into a journal. All interviewees were identified by a code.

Analysis

The interviews were fully transcribed prior to analysis. The transcripts were coded in order to select data relevant to money management and organization, attitudes towards money and personal spending, involvement in and knowledge about the finances of each respondent's spouse. Data were then compared for similarities and differences according to who the spouses are (husband or wife), their earning levels (high or low income), and the gender of the respondent (male or female).The analysis of the data generated a few conspicuous themes which will be presented in the results section.

RESULTS

From the analysis conducted, it appears that 29 out of 40 couples (72.5 percent) preferred having separate accounts system or the independent system. For the rest of the discussion, these two terms will be used interchangeably.These couples do not own any joint accounts. Each spouse has their own account and, with the exception of two couples, the rest do not have access to each other's account. Among the 29 couples, all but four women had a regular source of earnings. Of the couples interviewed, there were two wives earning more than the husband in the higher income group. In total, more husbands were earning better than their wives. They were also the primary breadwinners of the families. The three most common reasons cited by couples for adopting the separate account system are: (a) the ability to control one's own money and to avoid money conflict, (b) to deny spouse access to one's money and (c) to be practical

Separate account system requires couples to differentiate between joint and personal expenditures. For example, joint expenditures include expenses such as rent or mortgage, food, utility bills and children's expenses. Personal expenses include expenditure on clothes, books, haircuts, make-up and hobbies. After each spouse has contributed his/her share to the joint expenses, the remainder of the money becomes an individually owned and controlled resource. Hence, personal monies are affected by the size of the respondent's income and his/her contribution to joint expenditure.

a. The Ability to Control one's Money

The most common reason given by both husband and wife respondents for opting to have a separate account is the autonomy to control one's money. Sophia, who is a bank assistant, says,

"We both have separate accounts and is better this way because it is my money. I feel good that the money is in my hands and I can decide what I want to do with it without the need to tell him…"

Sophia's husband, Mathew, a driver, shares a similar view.

"We have separate accounts…both of us have the freedom to decide how we are going to spend out personal money and we never volunteer to tell each other or feel the need to 'seek permission' from each other because we feel that how we spend our personal money is our own business."

Mathew's narrative suggests that having a separate account is related to the issue of autonomy – the freedom to decide how one's money should be spent. Such autonomy however, is not easy to maintain and may be subjected to negotiation between couples due to conflicting priorities in joint and personal expenditures. This is reflected in the case of Gary and Rosaline who have been married for 20 years and have three children. Gary is a civil servant and Rosaline works as a secretary in a law firm. Both are from the high income level group. Gary initiated having a separate account after they got married and Rosaline was happy to go along with her husband as she herself preferred such as arrangement.

"…I am happy to go along with him because I prefer such an arrangement too. It is better in terms of my own expenditure because I don't like telling him what I spend on…even though we both have separate accounts; he still bosses me on how I should spend my money. I never ask him about his spending and yet he nags and get cross with me when he sees me buying new things for myself."

It seems clear that Gary had some grievances as he complains about his wife's spending habits.

"…we both contribute to the household but I contribute much more than her, which is fair enough because I earn more and I am the head of the family…I wish she could cut down on her personal spending and 'help' me by contributing more to the household

expenses…especially when money is tight…I feel she spends too much money on unnecessary things like shoes and handbags."

The narratives extracted from the couple, Gary and Rosaline, illustrate how the freedom to spend personal money is not conflict free. In another interview, Lance, a technician in his mid-30s shares the following:

"…I don't think it is a good idea to have a joint account. Let's say if I spend a lot, then I will be spending her money and whoever finished the money first, the other will suffer and we will end up arguing."

Peter, a lecturer shares similar views. Like the others above, he too implies that having a separate account not only prevents money conflict but also allows him to enjoy his personal spending without guilt:

"I don't tell her, for example, when I spend money on my bicycles. This is my own money and I am not 'disturbing' the family money so I don't feel the need to tell her. Having a separate account allows me to do that (laugh)…if our money was pooled, then she would know and I would have a lot of explanation to do."

In the interview with Lina, Peter's wife, the following extract discloses her own observation of her husband's spending activities. She also shares her own views about money.

"I never like to use money as a yardstick in my relationship and directly confront my husband about his personal spending. After all, it is his money and I shouldn't interfere. If we have a joint account, I would probably get pretty mad…sometimes if Ifind he's got carried away, I will say something…but I never pick a fight with him directly. Like I said, it is his money and he has the right to do whatever he wants."

Lina attributes her husband's spending habits as his legitimate right since he has the financial resources. Likewise, Peter justifies his right to spend money that he had earned. For him, as long as his personal expenditure does not affect the joint expenditure, he has the power to decide on how he uses his own money:

"In our house, my wife and I allocate our responsibilities, as in who pays for what…When we go out; I pay most of the time. When we buy things, whoever suggest, pays. If she doesn't volunteer, then I am on my own."

b. To Deny Spouse Access to One's Money

Aishah, who works as a cleaner at a government hospital, expresses her complete objection against joint account as she does not want her husband to access her money. Aishah and her husband, Ahmad, are from the lower income group. They have been married for 21 years and have five children. When they first got married, they had a joint account and every month after Aishah received her salary, she would hand it over to Ahmad and he would give her some money for personal spending which, according to Aishah, is too little:

"I realised my mistake because what he gave me was very little. There were many times when I am afraid to ask for money from him as he is very bad tempered; I would rather borrow from others. So I told myself that I need to take care of myself so I suggested having separate

account. Initially, my husband was against it but he soon listened to me because I managed to persuade him and told him it was more convenient and it would avoid overspending each other's money…the real reason why I did not want a joint account was because, if the money was with me, I could control it."

Like Aishah, Eve is another female respondent who uses the separate account system in order to keep her husband from accessing her money. Eve and her husband, Alexander, have been married for three years and have a two-and-a-half year old daughter. Both of them have been running a bakery business for almost five years. Eve notes:

"I think it is important to have our personal accounts for private spending. My monthly salary belongs to me and I get to decide what I want to do with the money…I think we all have the right to keep our bank account information private…I never reveal any information to him. One of the reasons I don't tell him is because I do not want him to know that I sometimes use my money to help my siblings. I am using my own money…but he (Alexander) is not happy about it and we often quarrel over this issue…he (Alexander) just does not understand the difficult position I am in…"

c. To Be Practical

Mr and Mrs Ngu had a joint account when they got married, but eventually choose to close the account because according to Mr Ngu, the joint account was useless.
"Initially we had a joint account and I was the main person putting money into it. During that time, the joint account was more like a saving account for us and we sometimes used the money to pay for different things in the house. We both also had our individual accounts where our monthly salary goes. With today's technology, we started to use our individual accounts more often such as paying bills online. We do not need a joint account to be transparent. We are very 'open' with our individual accounts as each of us can access one another's account through internet banking. I know her password and she knows mine…

Sylvia and Ben is another couple who maintain separate bank accounts but the way they manage their family money is very similar to couples with joint accounts. Each has complete access to each other's account. Throughout the interview, Sylvia especially insisted that their money was pooled and there was no distinction between 'her money' and 'his money'. Ben shares similar views and he also considers their money as jointly owned, "There isn't any sort of individual money as all money belongs to the family." Sylvia was originally from India and when Sylvia completed her bachelor's degree, she married Ben and came with him to live in Malaysia. When her two boys got older, she decided to help support the family. Sylvia initiated separate accounts and the reason she cites is:

"He has already had an individual account for many years, ever since he started working. I feel there isn't a need to change to a joint account just because we are married. Even though we both have individual accounts, we manage our money together and we do not have a clear cut division as to who pays for what items or whether we take money from my or his account. For us, whichever account has money, we take it from there…I just need to make sure that neither of our account balances is running low."

Serena and Edwin is another couple for whom a joint account did not work. Serena, a clinical teacher has been married Edwin, an account administrator, for 29 years. When they first got married, Edwin initiated opening a joint account because he felt that the pooling of funds would

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allow him to do the financial planning better: “You can see the pool of money, and so it is easier to plan and decide from there. With individual accounts, you cannot see anything.” In their early years of marriage, Edwin managed the family finances because Serena’s work required her to travel abroad frequently. Thus she was seldom home with the family. Every month, her salary would be banked into the joint account and, when Serena needed the money, she would ask for some from Edwin. In subsequent years when Serena was posted to Malacca for two and half years, she initiated separate accounts because she felt it was much easier that way: “It was difficult to manage the joint account at that time and I had a bad experience with the bank regarding my claims”. Edwin, however cited a different reason for switching to separate accounts:

“I decide to split after so many years of managing the joint account. Managing the joint account wasn’t easy because if she asked for money from me and I couldn’t give her, she would start querying me about where the money had gone. Going separate is good for her, and me too. For her, she will have to learn how to manage her own money and if she runs out of money, it will be her problem. When I was managing the family money, all she knew was how to ask for money from me and money was given to her, now she needs to learn to be independent and responsible. It is good for me too since I now feel less pressure.”

The different reasons provided by Serena and Edwin in abandoning the joint account system demonstrate a conflict of interest over money and power issues. It is interesting to note that when Serena did not object to Edwin’s initial suggestion to have a joint account, she was at that time earning less than her husband. Thus, it appears that having a joint account would be beneficial for her as she could have access to more money. However, over the years, her wage increased steadily and so did her bargaining power. In addition, she had to be away from home for long periods of time (two and half years in Malacca). Hence, asking for money from Edwin became inconvenient. From Serena’s perspective, having and managing her own money was better for her as she had the freedom to decide how she spends her own money: “Now that I am managing my own money, it is so much easier; I don’t have to ask for money from him every time. Now he has to ask from me”. Edwin describes his wife as being less knowledgeable about the management of money and he wanted her to be more responsible so they decided to switch to the separate accounts system. It is uncertain if Serena is as how Edwin described. Nonetheless, it appears as if, Edwin’s reason for using the separate account system is a demonstration of protecting his male ego. This is attributed to the Malaysian/Asian culture which defines manhood through breadwinning abilities. It is likely that as the male, Edwin chose to not reveal the fact that, over the years, he had lost his power to bargain (now that he is earning less than his wife) and control the family finances.

Joint Account Couples

Only two couples from this study can be considered as joint account couples. These couples maintain only one active joint account and each spouse has full access to the account where most of the family income is channelled into. The joint accounts were opened shortly after marriage and couples cited both practical and economic reasons for having this account Charis and Donald is a joint account couple. According to Charis, a joint account was more practical, “I suggested opening a joint account early in my marriage. I felt that if we put our money together, we would then decide together, especially when we buy ‘big’ things for the house.” Donald, on the other hand, describes having a joint account as a symbol of togetherness, “It is good to have a joint account as a symbol of togetherness and no separation. I don’t like the idea of ‘use your money or use my money.” Donald manages the joint account even though Charis is the breadwinner. When asked if she ever worries about leaving her savings with her husband, she replies, “My friends used to ask me the same question and I would say I am not because I trust him.” She confesses, however, that trust in her husband did not come instantly:

“After so many years of being married to him, I know he is careful with money. I don’t bother checking on him anymore. We were different in our spending priorities in our early years of marriage so we had a few hiccups. In those days, I was controlling because I did not want to have any money problems, especially with my children’s education later. But as the year passed, and my children got older, I started to relax more…when I was studying in Australia; he handled all the household money and took care of the family so I have complete trust in him. So nowadays, I let him manage –so less work for me (she laughs). I will only make noise when necessary. For example, the other day, my husband and son wanted to get the latest LCD TV and sound system and I was against it because it was going to be too noisy. In the end, they didn’t get one…in the family I do usually have the last say, so you can say I am bossy (she laughs again)”

Donald takes pride in his role as manager of the family household income.

“I think trust is extremely important in a marriage. My wife trust that I can manage the family money well because she knows I am knowledgeable and I am a good decision maker…my wife prefers to be in the backseat and I don’t mind being the driver…”
Sandy and Tony is another joint account couple who shares similar views. Sandy is a clinical teacher and her husband, Tony works for a travel agency. Sandy was the initiator of the joint account as she felt it was practical and it symbolised openness in their relationship.

“After we got married, my husband wanted me to handle the family money as he did not want to handle it. He was worried that if money was with him, he might spend it and save nothing…before he said that to me, I thought to myself that since we were planning to have children, it meant that I might not be able to go back to work so soon and I would not have my own income. I could always ask him for money and I am sure he would give me but I just didn’t feel good about it. So when he suggested I should manage the money, deep down inside I was secretly pleased so I suggest a joint account immediately where we can both access the money and it is ‘open’. Besides, the joint account is used for paying different household expenditure. It is just much easier this way.”

DISCUSSION

Having separate accounts appears to be the most preferred choice among couples in this study. Even though the separate account systemoffers greater autonomy over one’s income, itsimultaneously also creates reduced visibility in terms of financial transactions between spouses. One reason cited by most couples in favour of the separate account system when compared to couples in the UK and United States (where the majority of them pool their income) is that majority value the autonomy and privacy that the separate account system offers. The separate account system also helps to protect one’s financial resources. In addition, it is seen as a main strategy to avoid marital conflicts that frequently occur as a result of individual differences in spending behaviour. Services offered by online banking and automated teller machines meant that many individuals can access their own as well as their partner’s accounts (with access rights granted). The practice is especially prevalent among high income couples. Hence, the benefit of visibility that is associated with having a joint account is now also available to separate account couples. Consequently, many separate account holders do not feel the urge to pool their resources into a joint account in order to be transparent. The third reason for maintaining the separate account system concerns a woman's access to her husband's income following childbirth.

In the previous study, it was noted that many women in the UK and United States initiated joint accounts in order to access their husband's income, especially following childbirth because these women stopped working due to the lack of affordable childcare arrangement. In contrast, the results drawn from the circumstances in Sarawak show a different input although affordable childcare is readily available. In the Sarawak study, many women could turn to their parents, in-laws or relatives to take care of their babies. Under these circumstances, many working mothers were able to return to paid work fairly soon after giving birth. These women only have a short interruption in their earnings which decreases the need for them to access their husband's income through a joint account. In this study, it was observed that joint account couples were in the minority group. These couples cited symbolic, practical and economic reasons for having a joint account. In addition, some respondents initiated the joint account system so as to protect their financial interests in the marriage. For example, a woman might not be able to return to paid work straight away following childbirth. This means that she would no longer receive a wage from paid employment. Under such circumstances, having a joint account with her husband would offer her more financial security as she would be able to access her husband's earnings, seen in the case of Sandy above. The joint account system offers greater transparency and access to finances for the couples. However, it tends to introduce inequality by conferring extra entitlements to the higher earning spouse. In this study, evidence is traced to what Charis and Donald had mentioned in the interview where Charis as the breadwinner in the family brings in the most income for the family. Even though Donald manages the family income, it was acknowledged in the family that Charis is the main decision maker for most household decisions.

CONCLUSION

From the outcome shown in this study, it can be deduced that the type of bank accounts which Malaysian couples choose to adopt, very often, reflect underlying issues of power, control and access to money. This study has shown that the most common type of system adopted by couples is the independent management system with couples citing conflict avoidance and financial autonomy as the two main reasons for choosing this system. The independent management system is characterised by independent control of earnings and the ability to make independent decisions. Couples who adopt this system would each be responsible for paying certain joint expenditure. Whatever that remains from one's income would be considered as personal income. As the majority of female respondents in this study were earning less than their husbands, the independent management system would affect the individual's welfare, particularly the wives, as they would then suffer from lower economic standing in terms of lower income and yet, they have to make equal contributions to the joint expenses. Ultimately, they also have a lack of access to the income of the higher-earning spouse.

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