

**Abstract**

**Trends and Correlates of Delayed Marriage in Malaysia,  
and Implications for Development**

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The marriage pattern in Malaysia has changed dramatically over the last three decades. The general trend is one of postponement of and flight from marriage for all sub-groups of the population. The singulate mean age at first marriage among men and women increased from 25.5 and 22.0 years in 1970 to 28.6 and 25.1 years in 2000. During the same period, the proportion of those aged 30-34 who had never been married doubled from 12 percent to 24 percent among the males and from 6 percent to 13 percent among the females.

This paper provides an analysis of the census data on the trends of marriage postponement among males and females by ethnicity, religion, educational level, region, place of residence, work and migration status. The educational effect shows an interesting pattern in marriage. The proportion never married among the females is directly related to educational level while the reverse is true among the males. This marriage pattern may be attributed to the fact that women have overtaken the men in education, and traditionally it has been less acceptable for women to marry “downwards”. However, such trend may be changing as more and more younger females are marrying “downwards”.

Flight from marriage and marriage postponement has far reaching consequences on future population growth, family structure and labour force participation rate. The paper examines the social and economic implications of delayed marriage, using population census data.