EXPLORING THE FACTORS, CHALLENGES, AND SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF

COHABITATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN MALAYSIA

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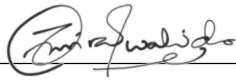
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APPROVAL FORM

This research paper attached hereto, entitled "Exploring the Factors, Challenges, And Social Perceptions of Cohabitation Among Young Adults in Malaysia" prepared and submitted by Chan May Kuan, Ng Jia Ying and Ong Kun Quan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Psychology is hereby accepted.

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Abstract

Cohabitation has become an increasingly popular choice among young adults globally, often seen as a "trial marriage" to assess compatibility before committing to long-term relationships. In Malaysia, while cohabitation is becoming more visible, it remains a sensitive and stigmatized practice due to cultural and religious norms. This qualitative study explores the factors influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia, identifies challenges faced by cohabiting couples, and examines the extent of social judgment they experience. In depth online interviews with four participants aged 22-28, including university students and working adults, were conducted using open-ended questions with content validity. Thematic analysis identified key themes, including emotional intimacy, financial convenience, and compatibility testing as primary drivers of cohabitation. Challenges such as internal relationship issues and external pressures, particularly from cultural and religious norms, were also highlighted. Participants experienced varying degrees of social judgment, including unspoken disapproval, direct criticism, and direct interference. The practical implications of this research offer guidance for young adults navigating cohabitation, emphasizing communication, household responsibilities, and managing external pressures. The study also calls for broader and more diverse research, including a dyadic approach, to deepen understanding of cohabitation dynamics in Malaysia.

Keywords: cohabitation, young adults, emotional intimacy, compatibility testing, social judgment

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Abbreviations	
KL	Kuala Lumpur
SDT	Second Demographic Transition
SET	Social Exchange Theory

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Cohabitation has become an increasingly common lifestyle choice globally, especially among young adults (Gregorio, 2023). Young adults are in a stage of life where they are actively exploring romantic relationships and considering long-term commitments, including marriage (Arnett, 2014). For many, cohabitation serves as a "trial marriage," offering an opportunity to assess compatibility and evaluate their readiness for a lasting partnership (Mu, 2023). Given this context, young adults are therefore a key group for studying cohabitation, as their choices reflect broader societal shifts in attitudes toward traditional norms and evolving relationship dynamics.

Traditionally, cohabitation was uncommon in Malaysia. However, the practice has become more visible in recent years, although it remains a sensitive and controversial topic. Accurate statistics on cohabitation in Malaysia are unclear, as many couples choose not to disclose their living arrangements due to the sensitivity of the topic and the associated stigma (Gregorio, 2023). Furthermore, although there are no specific legal provisions against cohabitation in Malaysia, cultural and religious norms still play a significant role in discouraging such arrangements, making cohabitation less prevalent compared to other countries (Karuppiah, 2017). For instance, Christianity emphasizes that marriage should be honored and kept pure, viewing cohabitation as a violation of the faithfulness and commitment expected in marriage. This perspective raises moral and ethical concerns within the Christian community, reinforcing the sanctity of marriage and discouraging premarital cohabitation (Normi, 2016).

Cohabitation is also heavily stigmatized, especially among Asian women, due to societal norms that emphasize preserving women's chastity before marriage (Mu, 2023). This cultural expectation contributes to the lower prevalence of cohabitation in Malaysia

compared to Western countries, where such practices are more widely accepted. Apart from that, the stigma attached to cohabiting women often extends to perceptions of bringing shame to their families and communities, which further discouraging the practice (Mu, 2023).

Given the sensitive and multifaceted nature of cohabitation in Malaysia, understanding its dynamics requires more than theoretical exploration. To capture a comprehensive understanding, it is essential to have direct conversations with individuals about their lived experiences. This approach provides valuable insights into the realities of cohabitation, offering a more comprehensive perspective on this evolving social phenomenon.

1.2 Problem Statement

Cohabitation is reshaping relationship patterns globally, challenging traditional, marriage-centered norms. While studies in Western regions, such as Latin America (Cruz, 2023) and Canada (Goussé & Leturcq, 2022), have thoroughly examined the effects and societal implications of cohabitation (Di Giulio et al., 2019; Kravdal et al., 2022; Manning, 2020; Mashabela & Kheswa, 2020; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019), research on cohabitation in Malaysia remains limited, outdated, and predominantly focused on its negative implications (Marshina et al., 2023; Normi, 2016). For example, the study by Normi (2016) argued that cohabitation contributed to relationship instability, with higher rates of separation or divorce among couples who cohabit before marriage. Furthermore, cohabiting individuals often reported higher levels of depression, and domestic violence tended to be more frequent and severe compared to married couples. These findings emphasize the urgent need for updated and nuanced research to better understand the diverse experiences and challenges faced by cohabiting couples in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, traditional cultural and religious norms heavily influence relationship expectations, with marriage viewed as the socially acceptable and expected pathway (Lee,

2020; Karuppiah, 2017). However, with the influence of urbanization and global trends, cohabitation has gradually gained popularity among young adults, who increasingly see it as a flexible alternative to marriage (Normi, 2016). Despite this shift, cohabitation remains a contentious issue due to societal stigma, familial resistance, and gendered expectations, all of which create significant challenges for those who choose to cohabit (Marshina et al., 2023; Mu, 2023; Wu & Liew, 2025). This dichotomy between traditional norms and evolving relationship practices underscores the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the societal and cultural barriers faced by young adults who cohabit in Malaysia. Such insights can help equip individuals who have the idea to cohabit with a clearer understanding of the challenges they may face, support informed decision-making, and foster greater awareness of the changing dynamics in relationships.

Therefore, this research aims to fill these gaps by exploring the motivations, challenges, and societal perceptions surrounding cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia. By examining how these factors intersect with Malaysia's contexts, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of cohabitation in the country.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore the factors influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia.

2. To identify the challenges young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia.

3. To explore the extent to which young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia?

2. What challenges do young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia?

3. To what extent do young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia?

1.5 Significance of the study

Firstly, this study bridges an important gap in the academic literature on cohabitation in Malaysia, where research has often been limited, outdated, or disproportionately focused on its negative implications (Marshina et al., 2023; Normi, 2016). Prior studies neglected the broader motivations and lives experiences of cohabiting couples, leaving critical aspects of this phenomenon underexplored. By examining the factors that influence young adults' decisions to cohabit and the challenges they face, this research provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of cohabitation within Malaysia's unique sociocultural and religious context.

Secondly, understanding the factors influencing cohabitation decisions provides valuable insights for key stakeholders, including policymakers, mental health professionals, and parents. For policymakers, these insights can guide the development of policies that address the needs of cohabiting young adults, such as promoting societal awareness and establishing supportive social structures to mitigate the mental health challenges associated with cohabitation stigma. For mental health professionals, the research sheds light on the emotional and relational challenges cohabiting couples may face, enabling them to offer tailored support. For parents, gaining a deeper understanding of the motivations and challenges behind cohabitation can foster more empathetic and informed interactions with young adults, ultimately reducing stigma and encouraging open communication.

Thirdly, this study serves as a valuable reference for young adults considering cohabitation. By understanding these challenges, the study helps foster mental preparedness, enabling individuals to weigh the potential risks and rewards of cohabitation. Besides, by equipping young adults with a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, it can

proactively help them mitigate potential negative impacts, leading to healthier and more resilient relationships.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Cohabitation

Cohabitation, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, refers to the practice of living together and engaging in a sexual relationship without marriage (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.). This arrangement may serve various purposes, such as testing compatibility, sharing resources, or expressing commitment to one another (Mu, 2023; Rhoades et al., 2008). While cohabitation can offer many benefits, it often differs from marriage in several ways. For instance, cohabiting couples often face lower relationship stability, reduced commitment to their relationship, and a higher likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms compared to married couples (DeRose, 2023; Foran et al., 2022).

1.6.2 Young Adult

A developmental stage typically encompassing individuals aged 18 to 29 years and is characterized by the transition from adolescence to full adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This period is marked by significant milestones, including pursuing higher education, entering the workforce, forming romantic relationships, and exploring identity and autonomy (Arnett, 2014).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Cohabitation Trends & Patterns

Globally, cohabitation has become increasingly prevalent, particularly among younger adults, as societal norms evolve and economic factors shift. However, the pace of acceptance and practice varies across regions.

2.1.1 Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, which includes Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (Center for Southeast Asian Studies, n.d.), cohabitation is on the rise, though at a slower pace compared to Western countries. In Malaysia, younger generations are increasingly open to cohabitation, seeing it as a practical step in their relationships (Yeung & Jones, 2023). In the Philippines, cohabitation is often driven by the prohibition of divorce, making it an attractive alternative for those wary of relationship instability but unable to afford an annulment. Additionally, the rising costs of marriage celebrations have further contributed to this trend (Kuang et al., 2019).

2.1.2 East Asia

In China, cohabitation is increasingly common, particularly among younger generations. Despite the significant influence of Confucian values, which emphasize the importance of marriage, about one-third of the 2010–2012 marriage cohort engaged in premarital cohabitation. For many, cohabitation serves as a "trial marriage," allowing couples to test their compatibility before committing to marriage. Additionally, cohabitation is more prevalent in urban areas, where high housing costs make it a practical and cost-effective living arrangement. Highly educated individuals in China, who are often more exposed to Western culture, are also more likely to embrace cohabitation as a reflection of their greater autonomy in making marital decisions (Mu, 2023).

2.1.3 Western Countries

In Western countries, cohabitation is widely accepted. By 2019, the percentage of United States had risen to 25%, translating to approximately 2.3 million people cohabiting (Julian, 2022). This acceptance is supported by progressive family policies that accommodate various types of family structures, including cohabiting couples (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

2.1.4 Africa

In Ethiopia, premarital cohabitation is relatively rare but is gradually increasing among young women. Economic and educational factors play significant roles in influencing decisions to cohabit, while urbanization playing a crucial role in shifting traditional social norms (Nimani et al., 2024).

2.2 Factors Influencing the Decision to Cohabit

2.2.1 Cultural and Religious Influences

Cultural and religious norms significantly shape attitudes toward cohabitation, particularly in societies with strong traditional values like Malaysia, where cohabitation is less prevalent and often discouraged. For example, Christianity emphasizes the sanctity of marriage, viewing it as a sacred institution that should remain pure, with cohabitation seen as undermining the commitment and fidelity expected in marriage. This belief fosters moral and ethical concerns within Christian communities, further discouraging premarital cohabitation (Normi, 2016). In contrast, cohabitation is more widely accepted in many Western nations, where cultural attitudes create a more supportive environment for non-marital relationships (Salmi et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Economic Considerations

Economic stability and financial considerations play a crucial role in influencing cohabitation decisions. Rising living costs and financial constraints often lead young adults to

opt for cohabitation as a practical solution, allowing them to attain financial stability before committing to marriage (Karney, 2020). Globally, cohabitation is frequently seen as a pragmatic arrangement that allows individuals to share expenses and reduce financial burdens while navigating the high costs of living. For instance, in Western countries such as the UK and U.S., cohabitation is widely accepted as a step toward achieving financial security before transitioning to marriage (Barker, 2018; Salmi et al., 2021).

In Malaysia, the financial landscape reflects this trend but is compounded by unique local challenges. Despite a steadily growing economy and low unemployment rates, wage growth has struggled to keep pace with rising living costs. The average monthly salary increased from 1,800 ringgit in 2010 to 3,000 ringgit in 2022, yet over 40% of income is allocated to basic needs such as housing and food (Statista, 2024). Although the government raised the minimum wage to 1,500 ringgit in 2022 to help alleviate these pressures, financial constraints continue to impact relationship dynamics. For many young adults, cohabitation provides an opportunity to pool resources and achieve greater financial stability before committing to marriage (Karney, 2020).

This pattern is also evident in other Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, where the high cost of traditional marriage ceremonies makes cohabitation an attractive alternative (Mu, 2023).

2.2.3 Urbanization

Urbanization plays a significant role in influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit. As urban areas expand, they reduced social scrutiny and exposure to diverse lifestyles, which often include cohabitation as an accepted norm (Luca et al., 2023). Furthermore, the high cost of living in urban centers incentivizes cohabitation as a practical solution for sharing expenses like rent and utilities, making it an attractive option for young couples seeking financial stability (Xie, 2021). Urban living also increases access to globalized ideas and

lifestyles through media and peer interactions, further normalizing cohabitation as a viable relationship choice (Ritchie et al., 2018). Thus, urbanization not only reshapes societal attitudes toward cohabitation but also provides the economic and cultural conditions that encourage young adults to consider it.

2.3 Challenges in Cohabitation

Cohabitation among young adults is becoming more common, but it presents several significant challenges that can strain relationships and impact emotional well-being. One major challenge is the lack of clarity in relationship intentions, which can lead to negative outcomes (Busby, 2019; Uhlich et al., 2021). For instance, one partner may expect the relationship to evolve toward marriage, while the other may view it as temporary or experimental. These differences, when left unaddressed, can create tension, erode trust, and increase the likelihood of conflict, which can ultimately undermine the stability and emotional health of the relationship.

On the other hands, clear communication about goals, needs, and commitments is essential, yet many couples fail to engage in these crucial discussions. Research by Busby (2019) highlights that cohabitation without such communication increases the likelihood of unresolved conflicts over time. These unresolved issues, when compounded by a lack of agreement on key relationship matters, can lead to greater instability and emotional strain (Uhlich et al., 2021). Moreover, cohabitation often involves a more casual approach to dating and sexual relationships compared to marriage, which can weaken the emotional foundation of the relationship, making it more vulnerable to disconnection and dissatisfaction (Busby, 2019).

Additionally, financial challenges also significantly impact the quality of cohabitation among young adults. While many couples cohabit to share expenses and reduce costs (Gill, 2019), poor financial management often leads to conflicts. Baryła-Matejczuk et al. (2020)

highlighted that neglecting budgets, missing bill payments, and ineffective credit management can strain relationships and decrease satisfaction. Furthermore, differing financial priorities, such as disagreements over saving versus spending or conflicting long-term goals, can further disrupt harmony. On top of that, the lack of financial security, including poor credit management and inadequate insurance, adds stress and uncertainty, ultimately weakening the emotional and psychological bond between partners (Baryła-Matejczuk et al., 2020).

Moreover, in Malaysia, cohabitation poses legal vulnerabilities due to the lack of rights and protections afforded to unmarried couples. Unlike in England, where principles like constructive trusts can grant property rights to cohabiting partners, Malaysian courts maintain a conservative approach, prioritizing marriage as the basis for legal recognition (Wu & Liew, 2025). This leaves cohabiting couples without legal recourse in property or financial disputes, especially when financial contributions cannot be substantiated (Karuppiah, 2017). The absence of such protections not only subjects cohabiting couples to practical challenges but also perpetuates societal and systemic barriers to the long-term stability of these relationships.

2.4 Social Perception and Stigma

Cohabitation among young adults often faces significant stigma, particularly in culturally or religiously conservative societies like Malaysia. Cohabiting couples often face less favourable perceptions compared to singles or dating individuals (Dagar & Chawla, 2024). It is frequently tied to societal stigma and disapproval in culturally or religiously conservative contexts, such as India or the U.S. Bible Belt, where traditional norms heavily favor marriage (Dagar & Chawla, 2024; McGhee et al., 2021). Additionally, cohabiting individuals, who are often younger, less educated, and less financially stable than their married peers, may deprioritize seeking family approval. While they might view their

relationships as independent or progressive, the absence of family support weakens their

social networks, leaving them more vulnerable to relational challenges.

Although some progress has been made toward reducing stigma, acceptance of

cohabitation remains limited and requires shifts in both family and community perceptions

(Gregorio, 2023). For families, this involves embracing new partners, supporting stepfamily

formations, and redefining traditional relationship roles, particularly for women. In

communities, acceptance is shaped by positive interactions with friends and neighbors and

reinforced, as well as broader societal validation through public acknowledgment and social

media support (Gregorio, 2023).

In collectivist societies, such as Malaysia, where family and societal harmony are

emphasized, cohabitation is viewed as undermining traditional marriage structures and

cultural expectations. These societal norms prioritize adherence to communal values and

discourage behaviours that might disrupt familial approval or social harmony (Marshina et

al., 2023). However, the increasing influence of individualism, particularly in urban or

modernized contexts, has led to a more open attitude toward cohabitation among certain

groups. While some view cohabitation as a way to foster intimacy or assess compatibility,

others, particularly those with high attachment anxiety, may avoid it due to fears of familial

disapproval and relational instability (Marshina et al., 2023). This tension highlights the

interplay between traditional collectivist values and emerging individualistic tendencies.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework to examine the factors

influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia. The framework

incorporates Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory and Social Exchange Theory

(SET). These perspectives collectively provide insights into the interplay of individual,

societal, and familial factors shaping cohabitation behaviour in the Malaysian context.

2.5.1 Second Demographic Transition (SDT) Theory

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory, as presented by Lesthaeghe (2020a), provides a framework for understanding shifts in family structures driven by societal trends toward individualization and a decline in adherence to traditional norms. This theory links the rise in cohabitation to factors such as higher education levels, urbanization, and economic transformations, which foster less conventional attitudes toward marriage and family life (Cruz, 2023; Di Giulio et al., 2019; Kreidl & Žilinčíková, 2021; Lesthaeghe, 2020a). Notably, the early adoption of cohabitation is often observed among highly educated individuals, particularly women, who prioritize self-realization and reject traditional institutions like marriage, making cohabitation a preferred choice (Cruz, 2023).

Differences in the timing and progression of SDT adoption across countries explain variations in family formation patterns and cohabitation prevalence. For instance, Eastern European countries remain in earlier phases of the transition, where cohabitation is still considered atypical despite gradual increases. In contrast, more secularized and economically advanced societies have seen cohabitation become a normalized part of family formation (Di Giulio et al., 2019; Kreidl & Žilinčíková, 2021). Over time, global trends such as secularization, reduced dependency on familial structures, and the emphasis on self-fulfillment are expected to influence cohabitation patterns universally (Lesthaeghe, 2020a).

In Malaysia, cohabitation among young adults reflects the interplay of education, economic challenges, and cultural dynamics. Urban youth, particularly those with higher education levels, increasingly view cohabitation as a flexible and pragmatic alternative to marriage. Economic pressures, including rising living costs and stagnant wages, further accelerate this shift, as cohabitation is seen as offering financial relief and emotional support (Lee, 2020). Consequently, urban areas show greater acceptance of cohabitation, influenced by modern lifestyles and economic constraints. In contrast, rural and conservative

populations continue to uphold traditional marital norms, shaped by Malaysia's strong

cultural and religious values (Di Giulio et al., 2019).

2.5.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a lens to understand how young adults in

Malaysia navigate the decision to cohabit by weighing the costs and benefits of their

relationships. The theory posits that individuals seek to maximize rewards while minimizing

costs in their interpersonal exchanges, making it a relevant framework for analyzing the

practical, emotional, and social dimensions of cohabitation (Caprinali et al., 2023; Gill,

2019).

In Malaysia, economic factors play a central role in shaping cohabitation decisions

among young adults. While Malaysia has one of Southeast Asia's strongest economies,

wages have not kept pace with rising living costs. For instance, the average monthly salary

grew from approximately 1,800 Malaysian Ringgit in 2010 to 3,000 Ringgit in 2022, yet

inflation and escalating expenses have eroded the purchasing power of these earnings

(Statista, 2023). Even with measures like the government's minimum wage increase to 1,500

Ringgit in 2022, many young adults continue to face financial strain. These economic

pressures are particularly pronounced in urban areas, where the cost of living is significantly

higher.

In this context, SET provides a clear rationale for why cohabitation is an attractive

option for young Malaysians. Sharing expenses such as rent and utilities reduces financial

burdens, allowing couples to achieve greater economic stability compared to living

independently (Lee, 2020; Gill, 2019). This aligns with the theory's principle of cost

reduction as a driver of relational behavior.

Beyond financial considerations, SET also highlights the emotional and social

rewards of cohabitation, which are particularly relevant for young adults living away from

their families. Many Malaysians migrate to urban areas for work or education, often leading

to feelings of loneliness and social disconnection (Shamzaeffa et al., 2024). Cohabitation

provides emotional support and companionship, fulfilling the need for intimacy and reducing

isolation (Kravdal et al., 2022; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019). These emotional benefits reinforce

the appeal of cohabitation as a mutually rewarding arrangement, even in the face of societal

stigma.

However, SET also acknowledges the costs associated with cohabitation, such as

cultural and familial disapproval, particularly in Malaysia's conservative regions (Dagar &

Chawla, 2024; McGhee et al., 2021). While urban areas are more progressive and accepting

of cohabitation, traditional norms in rural communities and among older generations continue

to stigmatize non-marital unions (Gill, 2019). Despite these challenges, young adults often

find that the practical and emotional rewards of cohabitation outweigh the social costs,

especially in contexts where economic and emotional pressures are high.

By applying SET, this study illustrates how cohabitation among young adults in

Malaysia is shaped by a complex interplay of financial, emotional, and societal factors. The

theory underscores the transactional nature of these relationships, where individuals actively

weigh the benefits of companionship and cost-sharing against the potential risks of social

disapproval, providing a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the complexities of human experiences and social phenomena (Tenny et al., 2022). Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on measuring and quantifying variables, qualitative research delves into the deeper meanings, emotions, and subjective perspectives that drive behaviors. By addressing the "5W1H" questions—who, what, where, when, why, and how—it uncovers the underlying factors that shape individuals' actions, providing rich, context-driven insights (Lim, 2023).

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological research design, to explore the lived experiences of Malaysian young adults regarding cohabitation. Rooted in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, phenomenology emphasizes the exploration of participants' "lived experiences," seeking to understand how and why individuals act in particular ways based on their perspectives (Tenny et al., 2022).

In this context, the design was well-suited to the complex and personal nature of cohabitation, as it centered on participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they attached to their decisions and actions. At the same time, it allowed an in-depth exploration of the factors that influenced young adults' decisions to cohabit, as well as the challenges and social criticism they encountered. By focusing on these individual perspectives, phenomenology also enabled a deeper understanding of what drove cohabitation, and of the difficulties faced by those who chose to live together.

To capture these experiences, the study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which gave participants the opportunity to openly share their unique experiences, thoughts, and emotions regarding cohabitation. This method also provided flexibility to adapt the

conversation to individual responses (Gill, 2019). As a result, the participants' voices remained central to the research, with their personal narratives guiding the analysis.

Overall, by emphasizing lived experiences, the phenomenological approach offered rich insights into the phenomenon of cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia, generating findings that might remain hidden with other research methods.

3.3 Sampling Procedures

3.3.1 Sampling Method

This study used *purposive sampling* to recruit participants who met the research criteria. With this approach, participants who had direct experience of cohabitation were intentionally chosen. This ensured valuable insights into what influenced their decision to cohabit, the challenges they faced, and the extent of criticism or social judgment they encountered during cohabitation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method was especially suitable for a qualitative phenomenological study, where the aim was to gather deep, meaningful perspectives rather than produce results that could be generalized statistically.

3.3.2 Participant Criteria

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of cohabitation among Malaysian young adults by focusing on diverse demographics, particularly age and ethnicity. Participants were Malaysian young adults aged 18 to 29 years old who were currently cohabiting or with past cohabitation experiences. This age range was selected because it encompasses the emerging adulthood stage, where individuals are exploring their identities and making key life decisions, such as romantic relationships and living arrangements (Arnett, 2014). By including participants as young as 18, the study ensured it captures experiences from the onset of legal adulthood; while extending to 29, it accommodated individuals who may delay cohabitation due to factors like education or early career development.

Ethnicity was also a primary demographic to reflect the multicultural environment of Malaysia consisting of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous communities. Malaysian cultural diversity mainly determines the norms and expectations of cohabitation in society with a few communities maintaining strict tradition adherence and other communities more liberal perspectives. Hence, with the inclusion of participants of varied ethnic communities, it is ensured that the study is capable of taking into account the impact of cultural norms, religion and ethnicity on perception and experience of cohabitation.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Young adults aged 18–29 years

- Either currently cohabiting or having cohabited for more than one year in the past

- Malaysian

- Willing to provide informed consent for participation

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals under 18 or over 29 years old

- Married participants, as the study focuses on cohabitation outside of marriage

- Those unwilling to provide informed consent or participate in recorded interviews

3.4 Sample Size Rationale

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), phenomenological research usually involves three to ten participants, as this range is sufficient to capture varied perspectives while still allowing for detailed analysis. Based on this guideline, the proposed sample size for this study was set at three to six participants, which falls within the recommended range.

The rationale for selecting this sample size was rooted in the concept of data saturation, where additional data no longer yields new insights (Sarfo et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2024). In other words, this meant recruitment continued until no new themes or perspectives emerged from the interviews.

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In the study, if saturation was reached within the initial range of three to six participants, recruitment was concluded. However, if new themes were still emerging, additional participants were recruited until saturation was fully achieved. This flexible approach ensured a balance between methodological rigor and practical constraints, keeping the study both feasible and comprehensive.

3.5 Recruitment Process

A Google Form (see Appendix C) was created for participant registration, where respondents provided their demographic details to determine eligibility. From this, potential participants who met the criteria were identified. Once being selected, they were contacted through WhatsApp to arrange the interview.

3.5.1 Location of Study

The study was conducted virtually using online platforms, which allowed participants to join interviews from locations that were most convenient for them. This approach was especially helpful for those with time constraints, distance barriers, or personal preferences that made face-to-face meetings difficult. This flexibility ensured inclusivity and enabled participants from different geographical areas, allowing the researchers to capture a wider and more diverse range of insights.

3.5.2 Ethical Considerations

To uphold ethical standards, the study followed a structured process for obtaining ethical approval and protecting participants' rights throughout the research. A detailed proposal outlining the study's objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations was first submitted to the supervisor for review. This proposal was carefully reviewed to ensure that the study aligned with ethical guidelines and standards. Recruitment of interviewees began only after approval was obtained.

Besides, before each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form. This form explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To further safeguard privacy, several data protection measures were applied. For example, participants' real names were not used in the study; instead, pseudonyms or nicknames were assigned. In addition, personal information, recordings, and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the researchers and supervisor. Furthermore, upon completion of the study, all sensitive data were permanently deleted.

Together, these steps ensured that participants' privacy and safety were protected while maintaining the ethical integrity of the study.

3.6 Instruments

Before the interviews were conducted, a set of structured open-ended questions (see Appendix A) was developed to align with the study's objectives on cohabitation. To ensure these questions were appropriate, they were reviewed by an expert using the Content Validity Index (CVI). Content validity, as defined by Polit and Beck (2006), refers to the extent to which items or questions reflect the focus of a study. The expert evaluated each question based on four criteria: relevance, clarity, simplicity, and freedom from ambiguity. This process ensured that every item was both aligned with the research goals and phrased in a way that participants could easily understand and relate to the context of cohabitation.

To address the first research question, *"What factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia?",* participants were asked questions such as, *"Could you please elaborate on the reasons that led to your decision to cohabit with your partner?"* These questions were designed to uncover the reasons behind their decisions while allowing interviewees to share their lived experiences and perspectives. In addition, follow-up prompts

were used where necessary, helping to elicit deeper insights into the considerations and

circumstances that shaped their choice to cohabit.

For the second question, *"What challenges do young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia?"*, participants were asked, *"What challenges have you encountered while cohabiting with your partner?"* This encouraged them to reflect on difficulties, disagreements, or unexpected conflicts that arose when they cohabited. Their responses provided valuable insights into the common challenges faced by cohabiting couples.

Finally, to explore the question, *"To what extent do young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia?"*, participants were asked, *"Have you ever received any feedback, social reactions, or responses from others that differed from your own view on cohabitation?"* There were also some follow-up questions that further prompted interviewees to identify the sources of such criticism and to describe how these reactions were expressed. These questions together enabled the researchers to examine not only the extent of external pressure and social disapproval, but also how cohabitation is generally perceived in Malaysia.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by secondary data analysis. At first, participants were recruited through purposive sampling using personal networks, social media, and referrals. Their eligibility was then confirmed by cross-checking the information provided in the Google Form against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted virtually via Zoom, with each session lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. A set of standardized open-ended questions was used to guide the interviews. This approach also allowed flexibility to ask follow-up questions and explore relevant themes in greater depth. Before each interview, participants were fully

informed of the study's purpose and gave their consent for both participation and audio

recording. It ensured that interviews were conducted in a respectful and comfortable manner,

which encourages participants to share their experiences openly and honestly.

All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and later transcribed verbatim to

capture participants' exact words. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names to protect

confidentiality, and all data was stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to

the research team.

3.7.1 Data Sources

The primary data source for this study was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with

participants who met the inclusion criteria. This method is widely used in qualitative research

because it allows participants to share their perspectives and experiences openly and in detail

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was particularly suitable here, as it provided the flexibility

needed to explore a complex social phenomenon such as the factors, challenges, and social

perceptions of cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia.

Through this approach, the researchers guided the conversation while still giving

participants the freedom to express themselves in their own words. This not only ensured the

collection of rich and nuanced data but also fostered a deeper understanding of the topic and

helped build meaningful rapport with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The direct

involvement of the researchers further allowed real-time observation and interaction, which

enhanced both the quality and the relevance of the data.

In addition to interviews, the study made use of secondary data. This included

documents, academic articles, and reports about cohabitation. These materials helped to

contextualize and supported the interpretation of findings from the primary interviews. As

Cheong et al. (2023) note, secondary data can strengthen qualitative research by offering

additional perspectives and supporting triangulation. By incorporating these materials, the

study was enriched with multiple viewpoints, contributing to a broader understanding of the research problem.

The integration of both primary and secondary data was consistent with the qualitative research approach, which seeks to explore subjective topics through detailed inquiry and diverse forms of evidence. Together, the interviews and secondary sources enabled the study to capture not only the lived experiences of individuals but also the broader sociocultural context, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia.

3.7.2 Procedures for Obtaining Consent

With prior ethical clearance, eligible participants were contacted through WhatsApp and provided with an informed consent form. The form explained clearly about the purposes of the study, procedures, possible risks, and confidentiality arrangements. Besides, they were allowed to ask questions or raise any concerns before agreeing to take part. Once all the concerns were cleared, they signed the consent form electronically. Only those who gave their consent proceeded to the interview stage.

3.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative studies is the subjectivity of the researchers that could influence the data gathering, analysis, and interpretation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). In our study, reflexivity was a key factor in making the research more centered in the participants' experiences and not the researchers's views and assumptions. First, we recognized that our own background, including the social and cultural environment that we grew up in, could influence how we looked at the data. We might introduce unconscious biases in our interpretation and interactions with the participants. We therefore kept an open and non-judgmental attitude in the entire study to make the participants feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment and criticism.

We also regularly engaged in self-reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process to reduce the personal bias. This involved keeping a journal to record thoughts and reactions during interviews and analysis. Additionally, regular peer discussions and supervisor feedback were also used to further ensure that our interpretations of the data were not influenced by personal bias. By being transparent about our role in the research and reflecting on how our position may impact the study, we hope to improve the rigor of the research process and ensure the findings truly reflect the participants' experiences with cohabitation in Malaysia.

3.9 Data Analysis Method

The data from the study were analysed with thematic analysis, a frequently used method in qualitative studies for the identification, exploration, and description of patterns or themes in the data (Muhammad et al., 2023). It was selected because it enabled a rigorous exploration of patterns and themes in the data, making it particularly suitable for understanding the factors that influence in the decision of young adults to cohabit and the challenges they encountered, and the social perception they received in the cohabitation in Malaysia. While doing the thematic analysis, it was important to ensure that the researchers's personal assumptions do not come into account in the exploration of the prominent themes (Morse & Mitcham, 2002).

Identified by Muhammad et al. (2023), thematic analysis consists of a number of central steps to ensure systematic and rigorous analysis. The first is data familiarization in which the researchers had transcribed the interviews and familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. It helps the researchers gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and views regarding cohabitation which in turn allows for early impressions and nuance to arise.

The researchers then developed initial codes by focusing on specific elements of the data that are relevant to the objectives of the study, such as why the couples cohabit, challenges the couples faced, and societal views that the couples got exposed to. These codes were then integrated into broader themes that embodied key patterns across the data.

As themes emerged, they were reviewed and refined to ensure accurate reflection of the data and address the research questions. This step involved comparing themes across interviewees to identify similarities and differences in their experiences. The next phase involved defining and naming the themes so that each theme captured the core essence of the participants' experiences.

Finally, the researchers completed the write-up phase by synthesizing the themes into a coherent narrative that linked the results back to the objectives of the study. An inductive approach was adopted in the whole analysis, which meant that the themes directly resulted from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).. This ensured that the results stood well-grounded in the participants' real lives and offered a nuanced and authentic understanding of cohabitation among young Malaysians.

3.10 Data Triangulation

Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple approaches to make research findings more credible and reliable (Denzin, 2017). According to Carter et al. (2014), triangulation can take several forms, including method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source triangulation. By drawing on diverse sources, researchers can double-check their findings, identify recurring patterns, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Specifically, this study used data source triangulation. It being applied into two ways. First, the researchers gathered information primarily from interviewees with diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds. Including participants from different backgrounds

helped reduce the risk of bias that might occur if the study relied on a single source of information.

Second, these personal stories were further supported with secondary sources such as academic articles, reports, and cultural analyses. Combining lived experience with wider perspectives provided a more balanced view and helped capture the complexity of cohabitation.

The use of triangulation was particularly important for three reasons. First, it enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings, as data were verified across multiple sources (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Second, the inclusion of secondary sources enriched contextual understanding, showing how cultural and social factors shaped individual decisions and challenges. Third, triangulation supported the development of well-founded themes, allowing the study to present a complete picture of the reasons, challenges, and social attitudes related to cohabitation.

Overall, data source triangulation helped ensure the study was methodologically rigorous and produced meaningful and credible insights into a complex social issue.

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Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Demographics

Overall, a total of four interviewees participated in this study. The final sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation which additional interviews no longer yielded new insights. By the fourth interview, recurring patterns and themes were observed, and no new themes emerged. Therefore, recruitment was concluded at four participants, ensuring both methodological rigor and feasibility.

Among them, two are male and the other two are female, aged 22, 23, and 28 years old. In addition, all of the interviewees had been cohabiting for more than one year. Currently, one of them is a working adult, whereas the remaining three is a university student living in Kuala Lumpur. In terms of racial background, two interviewees were Indian, while the other two were Chinese.

4.2 First Research Question: What factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia?

The research question seeks to identify the complex interplay of motivations and barriers that shape this life choice within the country's unique socio-cultural context. It aims to move beyond outdated assumptions and explore a spectrum of potential influences. By investigating this question, the study provided a nuanced understanding of how young adults navigate the tension between traditional norms and evolving relationship practices in contemporary Malaysia.

Figure 4.2

Overview of Themes and Subthemes
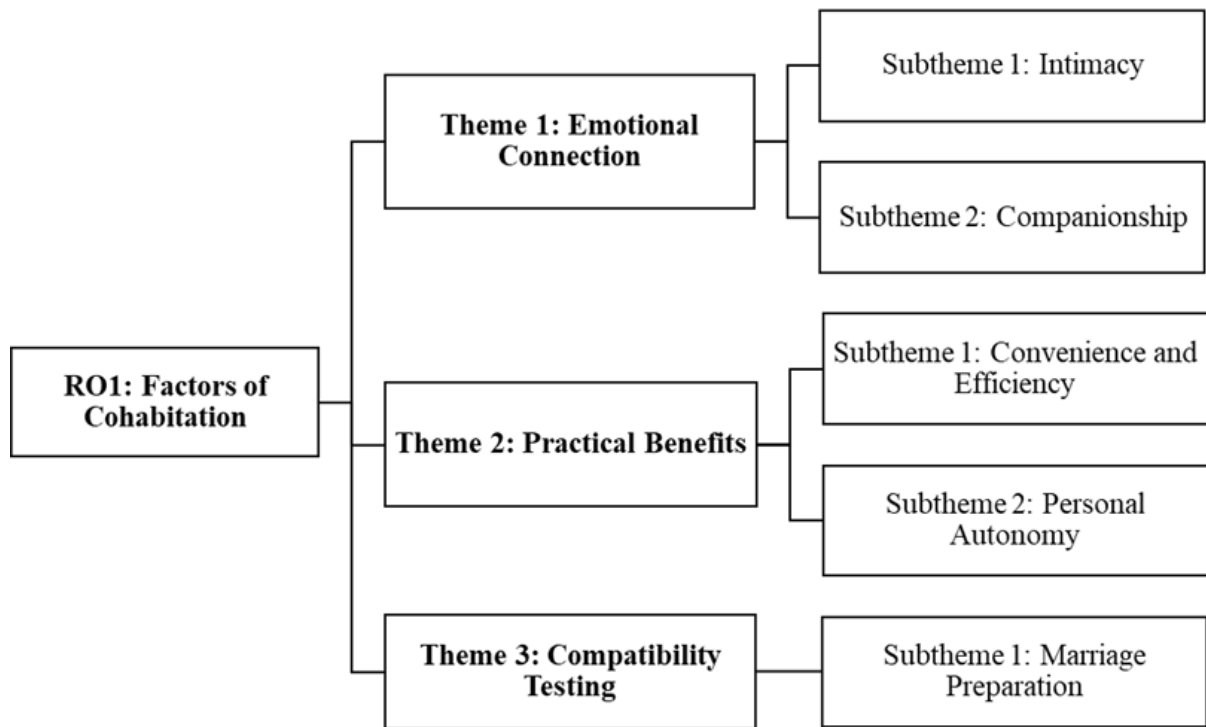
Young adults in Malaysia choose to cohabit for several key reasons. These factors fall into three main themes. First, the theme of emotional connection emphasized intimacy and companionship, where cohabitation became a way to strengthen emotional bonds and foster a sense of closeness. Second, the theme of practical benefits highlighted the pursuit of convenience, efficiency, and personal autonomy, as living together made daily life more manageable and allowed for greater independence within a shared space. Finally, the theme of compatibility testing revealed that cohabitation was often viewed as a trial phase, enabling couples to evaluate their compatibility with their partner in real-life scenarios before committing to marriage.

4.2.1 Emotional Connection

Figure 4.2.1

Theme 1: Emotional Connection

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Theme 1: Emotional      │
│        Connection           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
      │                    │
┌─────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Subtheme 1:     │  │ Subtheme 2:              │
│ Intimacy        │  │ Companionship            │
└─────────────────┘  └──────────────────────────┘
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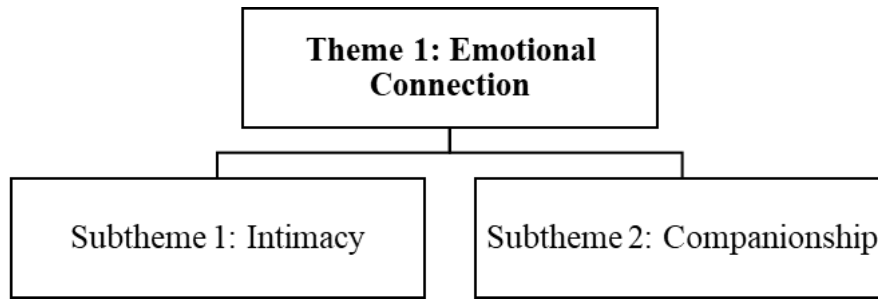
This theme explores how intimacy and companionship influence young adults' decision to cohabit. Emotional connection not only fosters a sense of closeness and understanding but also provides the emotional security that many young adults seek as they navigate the challenges of relationships and transition into adulthood. For these individuals, cohabitation became a way to deepen their bond and gain emotional fulfilment by living closely with their partner.

Intimacy. The desire for intimacy was a key reason behind interviewees' decision to cohabit. They described wanting to move beyond the limited interactions of dating into a space where they could truly know each other. Cohabitation, to them, offered the chance to be closer, more authentic, and less restrained in their relationship.

Interviewee 1 explained this simply as:

"Just the feeling of wanting to live together and wanting to know each other more deeply." (Interviewee 1)

Similarly, Interviewee 2 highlighted that the distance in dating did not provide the opportunity to grow closer or to understand each other's everyday habits. Thus, it motivated their decision to cohabit:

"You know, when we're in different places, we don't know about the person, but staying together, we get to know who they are, who I am, who she is. We get to know how we behave, how we react to things."

Interviewee 3 reinforced this, stating that the main motivation for moving in was to achieve a deeper understanding of each other:

"The main reason was to get to know each other better, like how we live, our lifestyles, and our personalities." (Interviewee 3)

She further reflected that cohabitation helped strengthen their closeness over time:

"Before we moved in together, there was still a bit of distance. We cared more about appearances and did not dare to act too casually. But after cohabiting, we became more open and less restrained." (Interviewee 3)

Companionship. Another key factor behind the decision to cohabit was the desire for companionship. Interviewees viewed cohabitation as a way to ensure constant support and presence in their relationship. By living together, it provided someone to rely on and care for during times of stress, loneliness, or uncertainty, which made cohabitation particularly appealing.

Interviewee 3 shared that when starting university, the absence of other social support made companionship especially important, which led them to cohabit:

"When we first entered university, we did not know anyone else; we only knew each other. So, living together allowed us to rely on and take care of each other." (Interviewee 3)

She further explained that she wished to have a partner presence during stressful periods which also pushed her to cohabit:

"Besides, during stressful periods or when facing problems, I can have someone around to share the emotional burdens." (Interviewee 3)

Similarly, Interviewee 2 highlighted that his decision was grounded in the belief that a relationship means facing struggles side by side:

"A relationship is also all about going through struggles together. It's like a team actually, it's working like a team. OK, one person could be down another person has to be there to lift them up. I could be like, OK, my girlfriend might have any problem at their

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university. I have to be there, "OK, no worries. OK, let's do this together, I can help you

out"" (Interviewee 2)

Together, these accounts show that the expectation of constant companionship and

mutual care was not merely a benefit of cohabitation, but a decisive factor motivating

participants to live together.

4.2.2 Practical Benefits

Figure 4.2.2

Theme 2: Practical Benefits

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              ┌──────────────────────────────┐
              │  Theme 2: Practical Benefits  │
              └──────────────────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────┴───────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Subtheme 1: Convenience │   │ Subtheme 2: Personal Autonomy │
│    and Efficiency       │   │                               │
└─────────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────────┘
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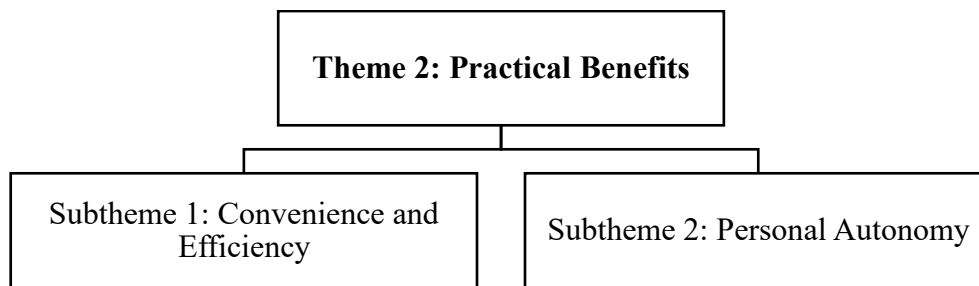
This theme reflected the tangible and functional reasons young adults in Malaysia

choose to cohabit. It highlighted that how the practical aspects of cohabitation which offer

convenience, efficiency, and autonomy, are key factors that influence the choice to live

together.

Convenience and Efficiency. Convenience and efficiency were a recurring factor

that influenced participants' choice to cohabit. Cohabitation was seen as a practical living

arrangement that saved time, reduced costs, and streamlined daily routines. One of the

primary reasons for cohabitation was to address the issue of commuting. The difficulty of

traveling daily between separate homes was a common reason participants chose to cohabit.

Interviewee 2 explained how the lack of transport and traffic congestion made living apart

increasingly impractical, hence they chose to cohabit:

"She didn't have transport, and I was staying in another place. So, it's difficult for me

to fetch and always go. Especially in the morning, at 8:00am, the jam is quite heavy, right? in

UTAR. So, it's quite inconvenient. Therefore, we decided to, why not move together, stay in the same place so that it will be easy for us ..." (Interviewee 2)

For Interviewee 3, the same concern about commuting which led her to see cohabitation as a more efficient way of managing her time and expenses as a student:

"Since we study at the same university, living together helped us save living expenses and commuting time. Besides, if we live together, we can also drive and hang out together." *(Interviewee 3)*

Beyond commuting, the pressure of financial burdens also motivated interviewees to cohabit. Living together allowed couples to share expenses and avoid unnecessary duplication of costs. Sharing a home meant splitting key expenses such as rent, groceries, and petrol, which made student life more affordable. As Interviewee 3 described:

"Rental fees, living expenses, groceries, and petrol fees." (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 3 also mentioned that:

"Besides, if we live together, we can also drive and hang out together; hence, we do not have to bear some extra expenses separately" (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 4 similarly emphasized cost savings, noting how this practical argument even helped persuade her parents:

"The second reason would definitely be cost-wise, because that's how we actually convinced our parents. If we both were to pay separately for our housing, it would be about RM1100 combined for the both of us, but for the studio unit in Kampar, we only paid RM650 for the both of us. So, it was very cost-efficient living together." (Interviewee 4)

For interviewees living in urban areas, high living costs made cohabitation even more attractive. For example, Interviewee 2 highlighted the expense of life in Kuala Lumpur:

"KL is very expensive. Everything is expensive." (Interviewee 2)

He further emphasized that he did not want financial stress from affecting his studies and relationship, hence decided to cohabit:

"I don't want my finances issue to come and always disturb me, so that I can focus on my education, so that I don't get distracted, so that affected me and affects my partner as well. So, I feel like in order for us to support each other, that's what motivated us to cohabit." *(Interviewee 2)*

Another example of how cohabitation reduces financial burdens is shown by Interviewee 3, who mentioned,

"Besides, if we live together, we can also drive and hang out together; hence, we do not have to bear some extra expenses separately" *(Interviewee 3)*

In some cases, cohabitation also provided an efficient way to handle new responsibilities. Interviewee 4 recalled how adopting a pet contributed to their decision to move in together:

"It was like 2 weeks before we came to Kampar; it was a very impulsive decision to get a dog, not responsible on our side. But yes, we did get a dog, and, in my opinion, that was definitely one of the external reasons that made us live together. I don't know what we were thinking at that moment, but we had an extra responsibility." *(Interviewee 4)*

Personal Autonomy. The desire for personal autonomy also motivated participants to cohabit. For many, choosing to live together was not only about convenience or intimacy but also about asserting independence over how they wanted to live. By cohabiting, they refused to follow the traditional expectations and cultural norms, prioritizing their own needs and choices over parental or societal approval.

Interviewee 1 explained that he and his partner decided to cohabit despite knowing their parents and community would disapprove. Their choice reflected a conscious effort to place their relationship above external restrictions:

"Before we decided this, we thought a lot. We discussed a lot with our parents, with our friends — we had many discussions beforehand. For sure, the older generation wouldn't allow it. Yeah, our parents wouldn't allow it. I think in our society, people also don't really accept living together before getting married. It's tough in our culture to do this before marriage. ... we decided to try first. Yeah, we just wanted to try before actually living together. We talked about it." (Interviewee 1)

Similarly, Interviewee 4 reflected on how cohabitation gave young adults the space to act on their own values, even if they clashed with cultural traditions:

"In my opinion, everybody can have their own opinion on cohabiting. What floats your boat? Whatever you think is proper, you can go for it. Malaysians definitely have a very strong opinion on this; some agree they're all for it, and some think it's bad because they are shaped by their culture and also by their parents, whatever their parents say." (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 2 also emphasized autonomy as a central reason for cohabiting, framing it as a personal right to make his own choices although he still as a student:

"As a student, I feel it's a valid reason for me to like living with my girlfriend because I have my own choice and reason." (Interviewee 2)

He further explained that, although criticism from others was inevitable, he and his partner prioritized their struggles and needs over societal judgment:

"This snarky comment came here and there, but in the end, we don't care. We start to not care about what other people think about us. We know what our struggle is, we are not just doing it for fun." (Interviewee 2)

For Interviewee 3, autonomy was expressed less through defiance and more through personal judgment. Although her family voiced some concerns, she emphasized that she made the choice independently:

"I did not really consider what others think of me, but my family isn't really against it; they were okay with it… but at the same time, they also had some concerns about whether we would be able to take care of ourselves." (Interviewee 3)

4.2.3 Compatibility Testing

Figure 4.2.3

Theme 3: Compatibility Testing

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ Theme 3: Compatibility Testing  │──────│ Subtheme 1: Marriage Preparation │
└─────────────────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────────────┘
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The theme explores the notion of cohabitation as a way to assess the compatibility between partners before committing to marriage. It involves testing the relationship in real-life settings to understand each other's habits, behaviors, and compatibility at deeper levels beyond the surface-level traits exposed during dating. Young couples often view this as an important step toward marriage as it helped to reduce uncertainty and lower the risks of long-term commitment.

Marriage Preparation. Another important factor motivating cohabitation was the belief that it served as a "trial stage" for marriage. Interviewees described living together as a way to test their compatibility, observe each other's habits, and address potential issues before making a lifelong commitment. In this sense, cohabitation was not treated as an alternative to marriage, but as a preparatory step that reduced uncertainty and enabled more informed decisions about the future.

Interviewee 1 expressed this directly, framing cohabitation as practice for the next stage of life:

"Maybe because we want to know each other before we get married, we want to get used to our lifestyle and our habits … so we have to get used to the environment and my partner's behavior before we get into the next stage." (Interviewee 1)

For Interviewee 3, cohabitation revealed aspects of a partner's personality and lifestyle that dating alone could not, making it a more realistic way of preparing for marriage:

"Also, the main reason was to get to know each other better, like how we live, our lifestyles, and our personalities. Compared to dating, which only reveals surface-level traits, cohabitation allows for deeper understanding of how someone's personality and how they view various aspects of life." (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 4 echoed this view, emphasizing that cohabitation gave couples time to adjust to each other before marriage:

"I really do think that cohabiting is definitely something that you can try before you marry someone. Because it does open up how you can be with your partner and how you can adjust to each other, as once you're married, you're busy, you're working, and you don't have the time for all that." (Interviewee 4)

For some, cohabitation was also functioned as a precautionary step to avoid the risks of entering an incompatible marriage. Interviewee 2, for instance, highlighted that living together was a deliberate step toward marriage, but also a way to ensure they were making the right decision:

"Once we're done with our degree, we want to get married." (Interviewee 2)

"That's why you're taking such a huge decision, it's not like nevermind I want to leave because if never work out now and I can break up and I can go leave it." (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 4 also reflected on this precautionary function, pointing out that living together before marriage revealed differences that might otherwise only become apparent afterward:

"Plus, marriage is a very serious commitment; once you are in, you can't go out as fast. So, what if you marry and you see how badly your partner is behaving in a household and you just decide you don't want it anymore? You can't divorce immediately, right? But in a cohabitating relationship, there's still room for change, for improvement."(Interviewee 4)

4.3 Second Research Question: What challenges do young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia?

The research question seeks to uncover the multifaceted challenges that arise when couples cohabit. It aims to move beyond simplistic assumptions and capture the full spectrum of challenges that couples encounter in both private and social spheres. By examining this question, the study provided a clearer understanding of the challenges that young adults face when cohabitating in a setting where traditional norms remain influential.

Figure 4.3

Overview of Themes and Subthemes
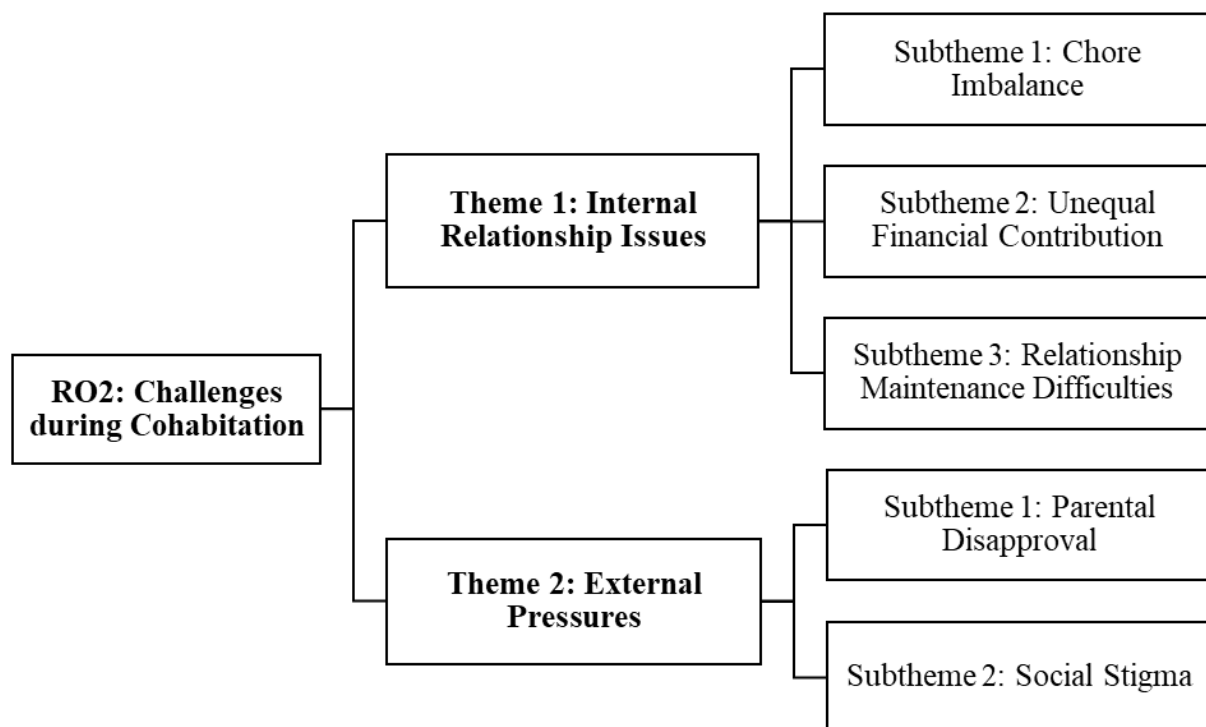
Young adults in Malaysia experienced a range of challenges when cohabiting, which can be grouped into two main themes. The first theme, internal relationship issues, referred to challenges that arose from within the couple as they managed their shared daily lives. These challenges often included chore imbalance, unequal financial contributions, and difficulties in maintaining effort and emotional closeness over time. The second theme, external pressures, captured the challenges that came from outside the relationship such as parents, relatives, colleagues or friends. In this study, the external pressures were most visible from parental disapproval and social stigma. Together, these themes highlight that cohabitation challenges are multifaceted, shaped not only by how couples manage their own relationship dynamics but also by how they navigate entrenched cultural norms and societal expectations in Malaysia.

4.3.1 Internal Relationship Issues

Figure 4.3.1

Theme 1: Internal Relationship Issues
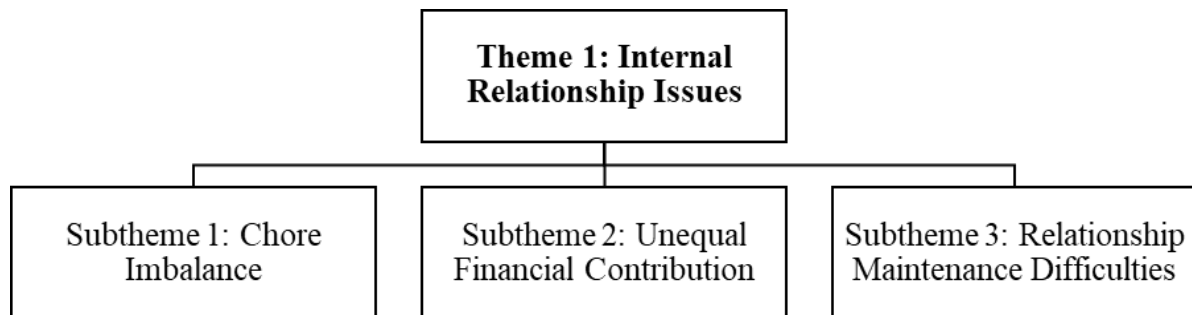
This theme captures the challenges that stemmed primarily from the couple's own interaction patterns rather than from parents, peers, or societal pressures. Across interviews, three recurrent challenges emerged: chore imbalance, unequal financial contributions, and relationship-maintenance difficulties. When left unresolved, these issues often led to repeated conflicts and reduced relationship satisfaction.

Chore Imbalance. A key challenge for most interviewees was the uneven division of household chores, which often turned into a recurring source of tension in daily life, leading to arguments and frustration. Across the interviews, three of the four interviewees consistently described household tasks as a challenge during cohabitation. For instance, Interviewee 2 reflected:

"Other than that, it's a very small problem but I feel that it's been very difficult, as I told you, it's the chores. Simple thing, I might also forget. Examples like chores, a simple thing, before, when we cohabitated, I thought that it would be fine. I never even thought about it, this would be a problem." (Interviewee 2)

Similarly, when asked whether household tasks posed a challenge, Interviewee 3 responded affirmatively and highlighted the imbalance in task division:

"Sometimes, the division of chores is not balanced. I might do more and get frustrated when he does less." (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 4 also stated:

"The main challenge is definitely the chores ..." (Interviewee 4)

To manage conflicts over household chores, interviewees shared that they tried different strategies, such as creating schedules, chore charts, or dividing responsibilities by area. However, these strategies initially worked, but they often failed eventually due to lack of cooperation or inconsistent follow-through from one partner. So, at the end, they just gave up on planning and adopted a more flexible approach toward household tasks. For instance, Interviewee 3 described handling tasks independently rather than coordinating with her partner:

"Like I said earlier, we used to have a conflict about cleaning the room, but now I've let it go. If he does not want to clean, I will clean my own space and let him handle his." (Interviewee 3)

Similarly, Interviewee 4 explained that she preferred to assign tasks to her partner based on personal preferences, rather than dividing them equally:

"In my relationship, my boyfriend cooks; I don't cook. I can barely do any. So, he cooks; he messes up the sink, right? So, I say that's your responsibility. It's a win for me because I really hate washing dishes. I don't know why; it's just I don't like it, and I don't like folding the clothes. So, he does those two chores, and then I'll be doing the others, and he will help me mop, because I hate mopping as well. So, whatever I hate, I give it to him." (Interviewee 4)

However, these "solutions" did not fully resolve the issue. Chores imbalance issue continued to resurface as an unresolved source of daily arguments. Even when tasks were divided, dissatisfaction still remained because one of them will do more compared to another, keeping chores as a recurring challenge in their cohabitation experience.

Unequal Financial Contribution. Another recurring challenge was imbalance in financial contributions. This pattern may trigger guilt and perceptions of unfairness. In two cases in the interviews, the male partner contributed more. For instance, Interviewee 3 reflected:

"At first, we took turns paying for meals. But later we realized there's a bit of an imbalance in the expenses between the two of us because he still has to pay for the car's fuel and such. And actually, he pays a bit more." (Interviewee 3)

Similarly, Interviewee 4 acknowledged her partner's willingness to contribute more, but this made her feel guilty about not sharing the load equally:

"He's never pinpointed money as a big thing; he's always offered, "I can take this. I can take that." But of course, I also feel guilty because it's a 50/50 relationship, right?" (Interviewee 4)

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This imbalance largely stemmed from the lack of prior discussion about how finances would be managed before moving in together. Most couples only discussed the issue after realizing the unfairness of their arrangement. Over time, however, all four interviewees managed to negotiate fairer systems by adopting a "Dutch" approach, splitting expenses equally:

"We split the rent equally. Like if it's RM1500, we each pay half, so RM750. In terms of other commitments, like food, we also share. Most of the time, maybe sometimes she buys, sometimes I buy, so it's not calculated very strictly. But overall, it's mostly AA (split equally)" (Interviewee 1)

"OK, so for financial issues, what we do is separate the rent into half and groceries we will buy weekly. I'll pay for the first week and she will pay for the second week. Then repeat the cycle, where we'll take turns. Usually, we will also share petrol ..." (Interviewee 2)

"When we started living together, we did not know how to manage shared expenses. That is why we started with taking turns paying, then eventually decided to go Dutch." (Interviewee 3)

"So, what we did was, he has his weekly allowances, I have my weekly allowances, and we have like commitments. For example, when we first started cohabitating, we bought a water filter. So, that water filter, for some reason, on that particular day, when we were booking it, he put his name under the water filter, so it's automatically his, and he's paying for it. Then for my dog, we have medical insurance for our dog. I put my name on it, so it's like I'm in charge of that. That's how we split it ... But other than that, like utilities and water, we share; we split the bill. So, if he takes electric this month, I'll take water. Our rent is, of course, 50/50. It rotates in that way." (Interviewee 4)

Although unequal contributions initially is a challenge for them, but open discussion and negotiation eventually allowed them to adopt fairer financial arrangements.

Relationship Maintenance Difficulties. Interviewees also struggled with sustaining effort and emotional investment over time. Across the interviews, three interconnected processes: repeated, unresolved conflicts (often about chores), a comfort-driven decline in relational effort and demanding academic schedules gradually reduced the energy available to maintain the relationship. Together, these strains shifted daily interactions from nurturing to depleting, gradually eroding relationship quality and stability.

Repeated, unresolved conflict, especially regarding chores, remains a persistent source of tension which in turn, may reduce the effort in maintaining the relationship. As Interviewee 4 reflected:

"The main highlight until today is chores ... it's still a very prominent issue. You would be surprised; even yesterday we had an argument about the chores." (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 2 similarly acknowledged the persistence of these disputes:

"As a guy ... we are like very relaxed, where when we go back home, we can put our bag anywhere we want, we can put our towel anywhere we want. But girls, it has to be clean ... if not, it was going to be a huge fight. Eventually that made us come to an understanding, but the argument that we have for the smallest thing, for example chores, always happens." (Interviewee 2)

In addition, cohabitation sometimes reduced effort to sustain intimacy, as partners became overly comfortable. As Interviewee 4 noted:

"When you cohabit, you and your partner grow very comfortable with each other, and you start to be lazy in the relationship. You don't put in the extra effort or do special things you might do when living apart, because you know at the end of the day, you're going

to come back to the same face and see the same thing. So that's also one of the issues I've

been having." (Interviewee 4)

Finally, heavy academic workloads drained the energy needed to maintain

relationships. It led to exhaustion to invest in their relationship, which partners sometimes

misinterpreted as neglect. Interviewee 2, a medical student, described how the demands of

university life left little energy for nurturing the relationship:

"Nowadays I realize I'm getting very tired, which is not usual. This is due to the very

pack lifestyle being a medical student, we have no time to rest at all … she'll be waiting for

me, then I immediately come back home, I'll be like, OK, OK, I'm very tired, I have to sleep.

Maybe then, she feels like there's not much attention spent on her and they tend to think that

maybe the love is not there. It's not about love or attention, instead it is about tiredness."

(Interviewee 2)

Taken together, the decline in effort driven by comfort, along with ongoing arguments

and academic fatigue, left couples struggling to maintain emotional closeness. These

relationship-maintenance difficulties shown that while cohabitation can be convenient,

however, it can also intensify strains that slowly weaken the quality of the relationship.

4.3.2 External Pressure

Figure 4.3.2

Theme 2: External Pressures
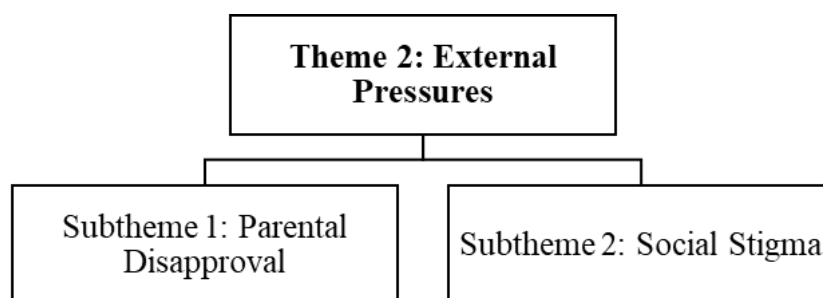
This theme highlights the external influences and societal expectations that young

adults face when engaging in cohabitation. These pressures arise primarily from parents and

the wider community. Such pressures make cohabitation not just a private arrangement between partners, but one that is influenced by external judgment, control and expectations.

Parental Disapproval. One of the main challenges interviewees faced was parental disapproval, which often escalated into ongoing conflict and emotional strain. Many parents rejected the idea of cohabitation, forcing young adults to either conceal their living arrangements or defy family expectations. Interviewee 1 reflected on the outright opposition he and his partner received:

"Our parents scolded us and had a negative perception towards both of us. Her parents also disagreed. But still, we — as a young couple — we are also stubborn. We didn't want to listen, so we just went for it." (Interviewee 1)

For Interviewee 4, this disapproval created ongoing stress. As Interviewee 4 explained:

"There was a lot of stress because both of our parents are very traditional Indian parents. They did not agree to what we were doing, but we just had to pull through because this is what we wanted." (Interviewee 4)

"But my family, that's a lot. Especially when I just spin on someone, on my mom, because I think she's given a lot of comments … She does not see where I'm coming from, where I'm trying to say, like, I want to save money and all. She does not see that …" (Interviewee 4)

Parents also drew on religious doctrine to reinforce the idea that living together before marriage was unacceptable. As Interviewee 4 noted:

"When it comes to Indian culture, they really believe that you marry, and then only you can live together. In their mindset as well, marriage is when you can also have sexual relationships." (Interviewee 4)

These expectations did not remain external but spilled over into the couple's relationship, as her partner also felt the burden of parental judgment:

"Well, there was a lot of pressure. To the point, it's not only towards me; I think it's safe to say that my boyfriend also felt a lot of that pressure because since I wasn't helping them to solve their social norms ... they went to my boyfriend instead. ... He would come to me, he would scold, and he would yell at me because he's saying your family is budding into my life, and I'll be like, 'Okay, you know what I see, and then I'll go and yell back at my mother. It's like we just yell at each other.'" (Interviewee 4)

For some, disapproval escalated into direct conflict or concealment of the relationship. Interviewee 2 described how he and his partner initially concealed their arrangement:

"Our family was so against cohabitation where they refused to let us stay in the same condo... We told them that house had two rooms. So that's how they actually agreed. Then after six months, my mom came to visit, and they found out — it became an issue." (Interviewee 2)

Meanwhile, Interviewee 4 described having direct conflict with her mother, as repeated criticisms about cohabitation:

"We've had a lot of arguments about it because she would say that it's bad to cohabit. Like, she does not agree with it because her family is talking to her about it, and you know she's coming and relaying that message to me. Of course, it's all very nasty; it's not even appropriate to say, but I have argued back to her ..." (Interviewee 4)

These examples show that parental disapproval was more than just disagreement. It was a persistent challenge that was viewed as an ongoing source of stress, forcing some couples into defiance, secrecy, or conflict in order to maintain their cohabiting arrangements.

Social Stigma. This was another major challenge. Interviewees experienced gossip, sarcasm, and negatively "talking" from peers, relatives, and community members. These created emotional discomfort and reinforced the idea that their relationship was socially unacceptable. Interviewee 1 recalled the sarcastic remarks he received from colleagues and friends:

"They said things like, 'What if she's not the one?' or 'What if you break up one day?' … Not really a good tone — maybe more like a sarcastic tone. Yeah, kind of sarcastic, which made me feel uncomfortable." (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 4 described a similar experience of sarcasm and persistent criticism from her own mother:

"It's never a good tone. Because it's always an argument. … Her tone was very sarcastic. It went from sarcastic, to at one point, she was trying to plead to me, saying that 'I don't know what to do.'" (Interviewee 4)

"We've had a lot of arguments about it because she would say that it's bad to cohabit. Like, she does not agree with it because her family is talking to her about it, and you know she's coming and relaying that message to me. Of course, it's all very nasty; it's not even appropriate to say, but I have argued back to her, saying, "I think you are secretly or subconsciously just allowing me to cohabitate just because it's also saving your money and it's also saving your time."" (Interviewee 4)

Besides, the stigma was extended beyond the immediate family to the wider community, creating a ripple effect of gossip and negative "talking." Interviewee 2 recalled how extended relatives spread rumors:

"If one person in the family starts commenting on it, obviously it's going to spread like a fire, everyone is going to know in the family already. They would say 'This girl is only

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so young yet already cohabits with others.' ... They think they're married already or what is

it? How is it legal? All that old aunties' comments." (Interviewee 2)

Interviewees also noted that the strength of stigma varied by region and generation.

For more open-minded areas like Kuala Lumpur has greater acceptance, whereas in

conservative towns like Penang remained highly judgmental. As Interviewee 2 observed:

"In KL, it's very common… But in Penang, you can see the judgmental face from all

the aunties and uncles." (Interviewee 2)

Similarly, generational differences were evident. Parents and older relatives were

generally more conservative, while peers of the same age group were often more accepting.

Interviewee 1 reflected:

"It's considered a taboo — something not allowed in our religion. But I think

nowadays, the younger generation is more open-minded about this kind of issue. We believe

that as long as we're not doing anything bad, it's not a big deal. Living together before

marriage, for me, is not a big issue — regardless of religion." (Interviewee 1)

Taken together, these accounts illustrate that social stigma was a significant challenge

for cohabiting young adults. It shaped their daily experiences and intensified emotional strain,

particularly in more traditional settings and among older generations.

4.4 Third Research Question: To what extent do young adults experience criticism or

social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia?

The research question explores the degree and forms of disapproval directed at young

adults who choose to cohabit. It aims to identify a spectrum of social judgement, which

ranges from unspoken disapproval to direct criticism and direct interference. By exploring

this question, the study provided a deeper understanding of how cultural norms and

generational expectation construct and reinforce the pressure faced by couples in Malaysia

conservative society.

Figure 4.4

Overview of Themes and Subthemes
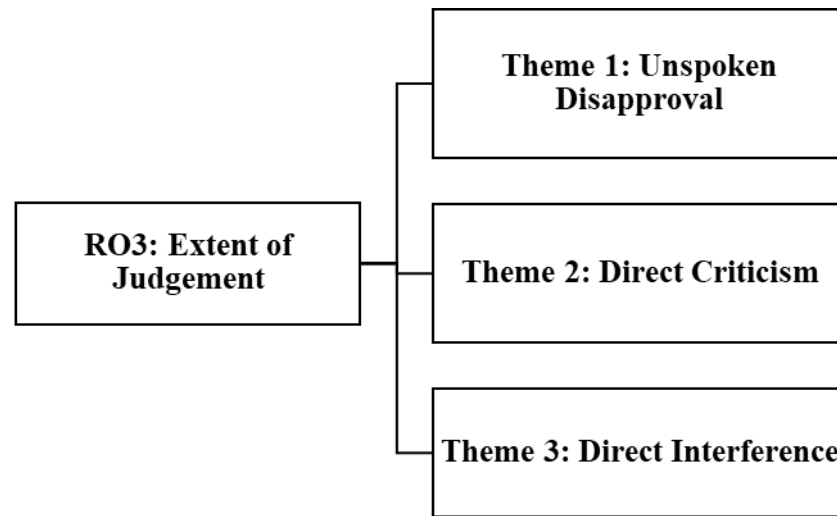
The extent of judgement faced by young adults who cohabit in Malaysia ranged from unspoken disapproval, direct criticism then to direct interference. At the level of unspoken disapproval, the disapproval is often spread secretly among people around them. Moreover, that disapproval often appeared as gossip or subtle remarks, which imply disapproval of the relationship without addressing it openly. When moving to a level of direct criticism, the judgement becomes straight forward. For example, somebody would voice out their anger or scold them for the decision to cohabit, even having repeated arguments with them. In the level of direct interference, it went beyond verbal disapproval and acted upon the couple's choices, such as parents forcing them to move out or trying to prevent them from cohabitating. These multiple layers of judgement demonstrate the disapproval was not just expressed in opinion but developed into practical attempts that restrict young adults' autonomy.

4.4.1 Unspoken Disapproval

This theme shown the extent of hidden or indirect disapproval or judgement from relatives, peers and some colleagues toward young adults' decision to cohabit, where the disapproval is often spread quietly through gossiping, surprised reaction or skeptical question

rather than open confrontation. Example as Interviewee 1, his peers and colleagues were surprised over his decision to cohabit and asked questions that doubted his decision with a sarcastic tone. This made him feel uncomfortable and unhappy about conversation with his colleagues.

"Yeah, for sure. Like, my colleagues and friends were surprised —they were surprised that we were staying together. For me, I don't think it's a big deal, but for them, it was." (Interviewee 1)

"They said things like, 'What if she's not the one?' or 'What if you break up one day?' That's the kind of question my colleague asked me, and honestly, it made me feel unhappy." (Interviewee 1)

"Not really a good tone — maybe more like a sarcastic tone. Yeah, kind of sarcastic, which made me feel uncomfortable." (Interviewee 1)

Similarly, in Interviewee 2, he faced almost the same scenario as Interviewee 1. Although the peers were considered close friends to Interviewee 2, but they also giving snarky comments at the same time.

"Most of my friends, as I told earlier, never react to this, but when I told my certain very close friend, they never say anything, but they kind of react, "Are you sure with this?", "How sure are you with this?", "What if you guys break up?", "What if this happened?", "What if that happened?", "How can you trust the person immediately?". This snarky comment came here and there." (Interviewee 2)

Besides, Interviewee 2 has noticed that his peers have a lot of opinion toward cohabitation, but they choose not to show it outright. Therefore, there might be a hidden disapproval behind, which he will never know. For example, Interviewee 2 reflected:

"Then I answered yes, I did stay with my girlfriend, then they acted like normal, but the first reaction that they gave means a lot. That itself you can tell that they all have a very

strong opinion, but they're just not showing it to you. So, I feel that they don't view

cohabitating in a good way." (Interviewee 2)

When it comes to relatives, they would be having legal or moral doubt as a form to express their hidden disapproval. For example, Interviewee 2 was secretly gossiping by his girlfriend's cousin who acts fine in front of them, but deep down they were not happy with it. Instead, they would have sarcastic comments or concerns.

"My girlfriend introduced me to her cousin. So, her cousins are chilled. They're very chill, and the mother seems very chill, but what I can tell is deep down there might not support it. Although they never asked me, they are fine in front of me, but to my girlfriend it is kind of different. They would say "This girl is only so young yet already cohabits with others.". In that case, the aunty never says anything, but we heard from the cousin, which is another person from the family says that Wow, they're living together already, they think they're married already or what is it?", "How is it legal?", all that old aunties comments." (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 4 reported a similar experience. After moving to KL where many of her cousins live in, the cousins became aware of their cohabitation and began commenting and gossiping toward her parents behind as a sign of hidden disapproval.

"It is because we are already three years into the relationship; it's not our parents anymore that know this. Relatives are starting to know everything. Because now we live in KL, and I have a lot of relatives in KL. So, a lot of them are starting to find out; they're talking." (Interviewee 4)

There is only one special case, where the people around Interviewee 3 was mostly not showing any form of disapproval, but just genuinely concerned about the ability to take care of herself.

"*My family isn't really against it; they were okay with it*. They agreed, but at the same time, *they also had some concerns about whether we would be able to take care of ourselves.*" (Interviewee 3)

4.4.2 Direct Criticism

This theme reflects the extent of direct verbally criticise through anger, scolding, quarrel and repeated argument. Across the interviews, it primarily from their parents. For instance, as Interviewee 1 stated, he and his girlfriend were being scolds for cohabitation.

"*Our parents scolded us and had a negative perception towards both of us. Her parents also disagreed.*" (Interviewee 1)

Similar as Interviewee 4, where her parents often argue with her that it was bad to cohabit.

"*We've had a lot of arguments about it because she would say that it's bad to cohabit. Like, she does not agree with it because her family is talking to her about it, and you know she's coming and relaying that message to me. Of course, it's all very nasty; it's not even appropriate to say.*" (Interviewee 4)

In addition, Interviewee 4 further elaborated that on a daily basis, although the conversation was not over the topic of cohabitation, the parents tended to bring it up and criticise them badly on the issue.

"*Parents were initially a challenge because they gave us quite a hard time. Every time we could do something very simple, we could be eating and not even be talking about relationships. But for some reason, the conversation keeps coming up: "Oh, it's because of your boyfriend you're like this," or "It's because of your girlfriend you're like that." Indian parents and Asian parents will do that.*" (Interviewee 4)

In some cases, like Interviewee 4, her parent was being influenced by what others family members said, and the criticism shifted from criticism to guilt-tripping or even

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emotional blackmail. The extended family members was often justified by appealing to culture or religion as if they were absolute rules.

It went from sarcastic, to at one point, she was trying to plead to me, saying that "I don't know what to do." Her family, as in my cousins and my grandmother, they are giving her a hard time about my life. (Interviewee 4)

The absolute rule was agreed by Interviewee 2, as both interviewees are from the same culture, where their families claimed that "our culture says" or "our god says", even though such expectation is operated implicitly rather than explicitly voiced out.

"When a family thinks like this, it becomes a society thing, a lot of old people, they eventually make it a cultural thing. They would say "Our culture says this, although our culture never says, but they said "our God says, you couldn't do this, our god says never or don't do that.", but in fact the god never says anything. It's just they assume everything." (Interviewee 2)

The wellbeing of young adults was being affected under direct criticism, where the persistent direct criticism leads to frustration, worry about the relationship and ongoing stress. Example as Interviewee 2 repeatedly mentioned about frustration was closely tied to uncertainty about family reactions, perceived relationship risk, and spillover into both academics and finances.

"To be honest, obviously it's a very new thing, right? Especially in Malaysia, the first feeling I would say is frustration. This is because first, we don't know what the families are going to say. Second, we make a big decision, in the end if let's say the relationship doesn't work out, the damage is going to be huge, not only in the relationship but to ourselves. Three, if let's say I'm a student, I'm going through relationship issues and financial issues at the same time. It's going to damage my education at the same time." (Interviewee 2)

On the other hand, Interviewee 4 was experiencing emotional bursts as she has repeated a cycle of argument with her partner whenever family pressure increased. She explained that they would "just yell at each other," showing how outside judgment often triggered heated conflicts between them.

"Yeah. Well, there was a lot of pressure. To the point, it's not only towards me; I think it's safe to say that my boyfriend also felt a lot of that pressure. They went to my boyfriend, and then my boyfriend, he started feeling precious. Then, he would come to me, he would scold, and he would yell at me because he's saying your family is budding into my life, and I'll be like, "Okay, you know what I see, and then I'll go and yell back at my mother. It's like we just yell at each other." (Interviewee 4)

4.4.3 Direct Interference

This theme captures the extent of situations where others move beyond words and directly act on the couple's living arrangements. The most severe case was Interviewee 1 being forced to relocate. He was forced to move out from his parent house and rent a house outside with his partner together, which caused a certain extent of inconvenience on living cost arrangement.

"Not really, I don't think so. Only maybe the issue that our parents didn't want to see us — they wanted us to move out of the house. So, we had to rent a place outside. We couldn't stay in the house anymore." (Interviewee 1)

The remaining interviewee also received a certain level of interferences, as faced by Interviewee 2, his family directly refused him from cohabit with his partner,

"I don't know why for some reason; our family was so against cohabitation where they refused to let us stay in the same condo even in a different house." (Interviewee 2)

According to Interviewee 4, the parents tried redirecting pressure to her partner when she did not "solve" the family's social-norm concerns. Although the redirecting pressure was

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considered as direct criticism, it also acts as an interference for Interviewee 4, where her

family tried to literally separate them for cohabitation.

"Yeah. Well, there was a lot of pressure. To the point, it's not only towards me; I

think it's safe to say that my boyfriend also felt a lot of that pressure because since I wasn't

helping them to solve their social norms or what you said, they went to my boyfriend

instead." (Interviewee 4)

4.5 Summary of Results

Table 4.5

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
1. What factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia?	1. Emotional Connection	1. Intimacy 2. Companionship
	2. Practical Benefits	1. Convenience and Efficiency 2. Personal Autonomy
	3. Compatibility Testing	1. Marriage Preparation
2. What challenges do young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia?	1. Internal Relationship Issues	1. Chore Imbalance 2. Unequal Financial Contribution 3. Relationship Maintenance Difficulties
	2. External Pressures	1. Parental Disapproval 2. Social Stigma
3. To what extent do young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia?	1. Unspoken Disapproval	-
	2. Direct Criticism	-
	3. Direct Interference	-

Based on the findings, the research questions were comprehensively addressed. The

first research question, which asked what factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit

in Malaysia, revealed that the decision was driven by a complex interplay of emotional

connection, practical benefits, and compatibility testing. Key motivations included the desire

for deepened intimacy, financial efficiency, shared responsibility, and the use of cohabitation

as a crucial trial phase for marriage preparation. The second research question, concerning the challenges faced, identified significant internal relationship issues such as chore imbalance, financial disputes and relationship-maintenance difficulties, alongside intense external pressures from parental disapproval and social stigma rooted in cultural and religious norms. The third question asked to what extent young adults experience social judgment due to cohabitation. The results showed that criticism exists on a spectrum. Some faced unspoken disapproval or gossip, while others experienced direct criticism. In the most severe cases, there was even interference in living arrangements. Together, these findings provide a clearer picture of how young adults in Malaysia make sense of cohabitation within their unique social and cultural context.

Chapter 5 Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 First Research Objective: To explore the factors influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia

The decision of young adults in Malaysia to cohabit was shaped by emotional connection, practical benefits, and compatibility testing. These factors reflect both personal goals and wider changes in how society views relationships and living arrangements.

Emotional connection is a key factor leading to the decision to cohabit. In this study, three out of four participants emphasized the importance of intimacy and companionship. They viewed cohabitation as a meaningful way to deepen emotional bonds and strengthen their connection with their partner. This aligned with existing research which underscore the role of emotional support in promoting mental well-being in both marital and cohabiting relationships (Perelli-Harris & Styrc, 2018). Besides, the perspectives of this study's interviewees, specifically those currently is a university student, aligned with Iyekolo's (2021) research at the University of Ilorin, which found that cohabitation helped reduce loneliness, supported students in their academic success, and allowed couples to spend more quality time together.

Practical benefits significantly influenced participants' decisions to cohabit. These benefits included financial savings, daily convenience, and personal autonomy. Financial considerations were particularly important for the three student participants. Sharing living expenses such as rent, petrol, and groceries helped reduce individual financial pressure, especially given the high cost of living in Kuala Lumpur. This finding aligned with the research by Addo (2016), who found that young adults in the U.S. often cohabit to alleviate financial stress in expensive urban areas.

Daily convenience also emerged as a crucial factor. The student participants reported that cohabitation streamlined their daily routines. Partners distributed household chores, pet

care, and other domestic tasks, creating an efficient living arrangement that supported their

academic pursuits. This allowed them to concentrate more effectively on their studies while

maintaining their relationships. Similarly, Graf (2019) reported that financial reasons (38%)

and convenience (37%) were common motivations for cohabitation in the U.S.

Beyond the theme of convenience and efficiency, a desire for personal autonomy was

a strong motivator for cohabitation. All participants emphasized their conscious decision to

cohabit despite potential cultural or familial objections, reflecting a growing sense of

individualism among young adults in Malaysia. They prioritized personal goals, and

relationship needs above traditional norms. This was supported by Lesthaeghe (2020b), who

noted that young people increasingly value autonomy in their relationship decisions, often

moving away from marriage as a fixed institution toward more flexible and self-directed

arrangements.

The third significant factor was *compatibility testing*. Many participants viewed

cohabitation as a 'trial stage' before marriage. Cohabitation allowed them to observe their

partner's lifestyle, and daily habits and see how well they adjusted to sharing the same space.

Research by Boyle and Kulu (2010) supports this idea. They described cohabitation as a "trial

marriage." Their study found that couples who feel compatible during this stage often move

on to marriage. If the couples do not feel compatible, they can separate more easily and with

fewer costs. Similarly, Harris (2020) explained that cohabitation acts as a testing ground. It

allows couples to experience a marriage-like setting without the legal or social obligations of

marriage. This trial period gives partners a chance to face real challenges together. In

addition, it also helps them decide if they are ready to commit for life.

5.2 Second Research Objective: To identify the challenges young adults face during

cohabitation in Malaysia

This study found that cohabiting young adults in Malaysia faced challenges that were both internal to the relationship and externally imposed by family and society. While many of these difficulties mirror universal struggles among cohabiting couples, but the findings also revealed culture-specific dynamics shaped by Malaysia's social and religious norms.

Chores imbalance emerged as one of the most persistent sources of conflict among participants. Three interviewees identified it as their main challenge, describing how the uneven division of tasks often led to arguments, frustration, and even erode the relationship. These experiences align with finding by Harris et al. (2022), who noted that chore imbalance creates feelings of unfairness, which in turn reduce partners' effort in maintaining the relationship. Similarly, Carlson et al. (2020) highlighted that an inequitable division of housework is a strong predictor of relational dissatisfaction, while Karananeethi et al. (2024) also reported a link between chore imbalance and lower relationship satisfaction.

In the Malaysian context, the issue of chore imbalance was often intensified by cultural expectations, where women are traditionally socialized to take on greater domestic responsibilities (Boo, 2021). A notable contribution of this study was that even when couples tried to address the issue through strategies like chore charts or role division, however, these solutions often failed due to a lack of cooperation or follow-through. This suggests that resolving household conflicts depends not only on how tasks are divided, but also on sustained communication and mutual accountability between partners.

Unequal financial contribution was another challenge that cut across participants. The cases in this study were that male were the ones who contributed more, which echoes with the global finding that the issue of financial inequality occured regardless of marriage or cohabit state (Gillespie et al., 2019). Also, coincidentally, over time, most couples came to an agreement of adopting a "Dutch" system of splitting costs equally. In addition, the transition from reliance on parental support to financial independence presented unique challenges like

the situation for Interviewee 1 which was forced to relocate, reflecting the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Moreover, a new insight from this study was that couples did not always plan finances before cohabiting; instead, they learned through trial and error, adjusting only after realizing the emotional burden of imbalance.

The study also highlighted how cohabitation sometimes led to *declining effort in sustaining closeness and intimacy*. One of the participants noted that the comfort of living together reduced their intentional effort in sustaining intimacy. This observation was supported by prior research, which indicates that without deliberate maintenance behaviors, such as communication and expressions of intimacy, relationship satisfaction tends to decline over time (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021). Academic and work demands further drained energy, with one participant describing how the pressures of medical school left him too exhausted to engage emotionally with his partner. This experience was further supported by Ting et al. (2024) which mentioned that individuals who have romantic relationships while studying will be more stressed and will lead to psychological problems such as anxiety and depression when they struggle with balancing the academic and relationship.

Importantly, this study also found that unresolved conflicts, especially over chores, did not remain isolated but accumulated into cycles of relational erosion. Even after attempts at negotiation, the same arguments resurfaced, leaving participants feeling emotionally stagnant. This illustrates how everyday stressors and unresolved disagreements, when combined with external demands, can gradually weaken relationship quality.

Beyond internal dynamics, *external pressures* such as parental disapproval and social stigma were significant challenges. Parents often framed cohabitation as morally unacceptable which consistent with past finding that premarital cohabitation remains taboo across Malaysia's religious and cultural communities (Normi, 2016). Several participants also reported that their parents viewed cohabitation as shameful, reinforcing the perception that it

not only reflected poorly on the individual but also on the family's honor. However, such cultural framing was inconsistent with the study by Smith (2023) and William (2023), in the context of other countries, cohabitation was gradually being accepted and no longer seen as a rejection of tradition.

Interestingly, not all experiences were negative. One participant described parents who, though aware of cultural norms, chose a more open-minded approach by offering advice rather than outright opposition. This exception highlights how generational change may be emerging in some families.

At the community level, stigma was evident through gossip, sarcasm, and subtle forms of social exclusion. These experiences were consistent with William (2023), who found that cohabiting couples in conservative societies often face ridicule that undermines their well-being. On the other hand, generational differences were also clear: peers were generally more supportive, whereas parents and older relatives remained critical. This aligns with Dagar and Chawla (2024), who observed that attitudes toward cohabitation are shifting unevenly, with younger cohorts more accepting.

Another unique contribution of this study was the way it shown how parental criticism did not remain external but spilled over into couples' private interactions, fueling arguments and emotional outbursts. For example, one participant described how her partner, overwhelmed by her mother's disapproval, redirected his frustration toward her, resulting in mutual conflict. This finding adds nuance by demonstrating how external stigma can indirectly accelerate relational decline within cohabiting relationships.

5.3 Third Research Objective: To what extent do young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia

This study discovered that the young adults' which cohabit in Malaysia have to face a judgement which evolved in three escalating layers, starting from unspoken disapproval by

peers and family, escalating to direct disapproval, and finally moving to direct interference with one's living arrangement. Although many societies face disagreement regarding cohabitation, what is most interesting here is that the Malaysian situation, where the combination of parental authority and collectivistic culture restricts young people's freedom far beyond the already harsh words of judgment literal in the barebones freedom.

At the level of *unspoken disapproval*, all participants encountered gossip, sarcastic comments, and skeptical questions from peers, relatives, and colleagues. Due to the reactions being indirect, it makes participants harder to address this issue and leaves them feeling nothing but uncomfortable. This finding was consistent in broader evidence where the stressful or unsupportive interactions between young adults with peers and family were linked to poorer psychological outcomes among young adults (Navaneetham & Kanth, 2022). There was also an interesting phenomenon where the level of closeness in a relationship does not always translate to greater acceptance or support. Two participants described even their closest friends could still respond with hidden disapproval behind the polite reaction they gave. This observation aligns with findings of Nur (2019), who stated that even the interaction within closest friendships will result in ambiguous reactions rather than open acceptance occasionally due to cultural expectations and social norms.

In the level of *direct criticism,* it appeared as a more explicit and verbal form of judgment on cohabitation. Parents emerged as the primary source of direct criticism, where multiple participants have reported that they used scold, guilt-tripped, or emotionally blackmailed as a form of direct criticism. These criticisms tend to stem from cultural contexts, social norms, or moral reasoning, which makes cohabitation seem immoral or something to be socially embarrassed about. The emotional consequences that stem from disapproval manifest as emotion management, which, in this specific example, leads to a sense of exasperation, family-induced anxiety, and the pressure to stress academically. The

participants believed that achieving good grades would prevent parents from blaming the purported 'academic decline' on cohabitation. It was significantly intriguing that the criticisms became internalized as a couple's struggle. Some participants narrated how parental disapproval not only caused inter-partner conflict but also conflict with parents, a loop of incessant quarrels. This was consistent with Lena et al. (2022)'s findings in Malaysia that parental hostility and negative family dynamics impact the emotional and relational health of young adults. Similarly, Eva et al. (2024) reported that family-based criticism and verbal conflict are significant risk factors for psychological distress among Malaysian youth. In short, these findings illustrate that direct criticism not just undermines individual well-being but also destabilises couple relationships by amplifying stress from the family environment.

Direct interference was the most intense judgment regarding cohabitation in this study, where parents not only verbally condemned it but actively tried to restrict it, interfering with the participants' autonomy. This included parents requiring participants to relocate, separating interviewees from their condominium, or shifting their demand to the interviewees' partner after attempts to separate them failed. These actions show attempts to control where young adults live in Malaysia goes far beyond offering judgment. Van Stee (2022) observes that many families exhibit prolonged involvement with young adults beyond the realm of finances, extending to the realm of offering insight, suggestion, supervision, and governance. These young adults might live in what could be termed as "privileged dependence" or "precarious autonomy" depending on the social class and family structure. This helped clarify the strategies of parental control observed in this study, especially how direct interference reveals deeper struggles over autonomy and control, or governance, regarding parents and their grown children.

Overall, this study discovers that the judgement faced by young adults who cohabit in Malaysia not only appears as an isolated incident but unfolded along a continuum, ranging

from unspoken disapproval, to direct criticism, and finally to direct interference. These findings not only illustrate the persistence of collectivist cultural norms but also show the ways families enforce these norms at multiple levels of intensity.

5.4 Theoretical Implication

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) helped explain why young adults in Malaysia choose to cohabit. These two theories show how societal change, cultural expectations, emotional needs, and practical reasons all influence relationship choices.

5.4.1 Second Demographic Transition Theory

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) was first introduced by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa in 1986. This theory helped explain how modern societies view family and relationships differently over time. It suggested that as societies become more modern, traditional norms about marriage begin to change.

In Malaysia, SDT helps us understand the growing acceptance of cohabitation. Young adults are now more likely to value personal freedom, emotional satisfaction, and testing compatibility. These priorities are becoming more important than following traditional marriage expectations.

Previously, marriage was viewed as the cornerstone of adulthood with stringent cultural and religious expectations that placed an emphasis on the sacred institution of marriage. Before marriage, cohabitation was strongly condemned. But consistent with the SDT, exposure to globalization and the Western ideal has been linked with a values shift toward individualism, secularism, and delayed marriage. In Australia, for example, the proportion of couples living in cohabitation increased from 6% in 1986 to 18% in 2016 (Qu, 2020). Similarly, in Chile and China, cohabitation is increasingly seen as a "trial phase" leading up to marriage (Ramm & Salinas, 2019; Yang, 2021).

The results of this paper concurred with the SDT framework. Malaysian young adults are increasingly expressing more personal autonomy in relationship choices, with emotional intimacy and testing of compatibility presented frequently in the study as main drivers of cohabitation. It is an expression of Lesthaeghe's (2020b) report that present-day society increasingly values personal choice and that cohabitation is a way of making informed choices on long-term commitments through shared experiences in life.

5.4.2 Social Exchange Theory

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) illuminates further in that it identifies the rational cost–benefit reasoning that individuals undergo in making relationship decisions. Individuals seek to maximize rewards such as emotional support, companioning, and economic security and minimize costs such as emotional strain, family disapproval, and public judgment, according to SET.

Interview results shown that many young adults in Malaysia believe the benefits of cohabitation are greater than the risks. Interviewees frequently mentioned rewards such as emotional intimacy, shared living expenses, and practical support like dividing household tasks. These findings support SET's main idea that people choose relationships where the benefits seem to outweigh the costs (Harris, 2020). Financial advantage in specific became a recurring theme in the answers of interviewees, in line with studies that show sharing of expenses is a primary motivator of cohabitation (McClintock & Sheehan, 2019).

Meanwhile, SET highlights the cultural price of cohabitation in Malaysia that continues to involve strong social disapproval and family repudiation. But many young adults found it is acceptable to take on these risks in favor of more relational returns. That is a larger societal move in the direction of individualism in which personal aspirations and wishes would continue to outweigh the stricture of conventional norms (Hamplová, 2002; Lesthaeghe, 2020b).

In combination, SDT and SET yield a complete explanation of the decision to cohabit. SDT identifies the changing cultural environment that supports expanded personal freedom, and SET describes the decision-making process that people render in this situation. In combination, the theories imply that cohabitation becomes acceptable in the normal development of a relationship and provides the prospect of emotional maturation, economic security, and testing of compatibility despite rule-of-role pressures present in many conservative societies.

5.5 Practical Implication

This study offers significant practical applications that extend beyond academic discourse, particularly as cohabitation becomes an increasingly visible reality in Malaysian society. The findings provide a critical evidence base for various stakeholders to develop informed responses.

As highlighted in the significance of the study, it serves as a foundational reference for future research on modern relationship structures in Malaysia. By moving beyond a deficit-focused lens, this study offers a nuanced exploration of the factors and challenges of cohabitation, equipping researchers with a contemporary framework. Subsequent studies can build upon these insights to explore specific areas in greater depth, such as the long-term outcomes of cohabiting couples or comparative studies across different cultural regions within the country.

Besides, this study serves as an essential resource for young adults navigating their relationship choices. For future cohabiters, it reminds them of the value of sharing household tasks, open communication, and financial contributions to avert conflict. It also reminds prospective cohabiters of the necessity of expecting and resolving possible disapproval from family or society in more conservative communities.

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Ultimately, this study equips both researchers and young adults with a deeper understanding of cohabitation in Malaysia. For researchers, it enriches the academic discourse on evolving relationship practices; for young adults, it serves as the reference to help to make informed, intentional decisions about cohabitation in a society where it remains met with mixed acceptance.

5.6 Limitations of Study

This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the limitations was the identity of the sample. The study involved four participants, with one working adult and three university students. While this was suitable for an in-depth phenomenological exploration of lived experiences, however, the findings could not fully represent the wider population of Malaysian young adults. Instead, the findings provided context-specific insights that may be transferable to similar settings but not generalisable to all cohabiting young adults.

Another limitation was the age group coverage. The target group was young adults aged 18 to 29 years, but the participants interviewed were aged 22, 23, and 28 only. Perspectives from those at the earlier and later ends of this age range may have offered additional insights, as individuals in different stages of young adulthood may view cohabitation differently.

A further limitation was the time available for data collection and analysis. Since this was a Final Year Project conducted by undergraduate students, the research had to be completed within a limited period. But, gathering and analysing qualitative data is a time-consuming process, particularly when interviewees expressed their thoughts in ways that required deeper understanding to interpret the reason behind. The restricted timeframe meant that certain subtle details, such as tone changes may not have been fully captured.

Finally, the involvement of only one member of each cohabiting couple posed a limitation. Since only one partner from each relationship was interviewed, the findings reflected that particular individual interpretation of shared experiences. This excluded how the other partner may interpret or experience cohabitation differently.

5.7 Recommendations of Study

Future research on cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia should aim to include more diverse samples. This study was limited to four participants, which, while appropriate for an in-depth phenomenological approach, but it limited the generalizability of the findings. Subsequent studies should consider recruiting participants from a wider pool that reflects Malaysia's ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity. This could be achieved through multi-site recruitment strategies, such as engaging participants from universities, workplaces, and community organizations, to capture a more representative spectrum of experiences. Such diversity would also allow researchers to identify both shared and unique challenges faced by different communities, thereby producing a richer and more representative picture of cohabitation in Malaysia.

Another recommendation is to broaden the age group coverage within the young adult category. Although the target age range for this study was 18 to 29 years, the participants represented only a narrow band within this range. Future studies should aim to recruit individuals across the full spectrum of emerging adulthood, from early adulthood (18–20 years) to those nearing the transition into later adulthood (late 20s). This would allow for more nuanced insights into how developmental stage, life responsibilities, and maturity influence views and experiences of cohabitation.

Additionally, future research could also benefit from adopting a dyadic approach by involving both partners from the same relationship. Since this study focused only on one partner's perspective, it was unable to fully capture the dynamics of shared experiences or

contrasting viewpoints. By interviewing both partners separately and, where appropriate, together would allow researchers to gain deeper insights into how couples negotiate household roles, handle conflicts, and cope with external pressures as a unit. Besides, this approach could also reveal hidden challenges and differences in perspective that might not surface through individual interviews alone.

5.8 Conclusion

This study explores why young adults in Malaysia choose to cohabit. The main reasons are emotional connection, practical benefits, and testing compatibility. These findings reflect a larger move toward individualism. Young adults now often value personal freedom and emotional happiness over traditional norms. Cohabiting couples also face several challenges. Internal issues include imbalances in household chores and financial contributions. External pressures involve societal stigma and disapproval from parents. Malaysian society often resists cohabitation. This resistance appears as unspoken judgment, direct criticism, or even direct interference. Theoretical frameworks help explain these decisions. The Second Demographic Transition theory connects cohabitation to the rise of personal autonomy. Social Exchange Theory suggests that people make relationship choices by weighing costs and benefits. This study has some limitations. The sample size was small. The age range of participants was limited. The research was also conducted under time constraints. Future studies should include more people and a wider age range. They should also consider the perspectives of both partners in the relationship.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Research Question 1

"What factors influence young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia?"

Interview Questions

1. Could you please elaborate on the reasons that led to your decision to cohabit with your partner?

1.1 Were there any external influences that played a role in your decision to cohabit?

1.2 What were some of your personal feelings, motivations, or desires that made you want to live with your partner at that time?

2.1 What were the main considerations that you carefully thought about before deciding to cohabit?

2.2 What considerations or hesitations arose when you discussed living together?

Research Question 2

"What challenges do young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia?"

Interview Questions

1. What challenges have you encountered while cohabiting with your partner?

2. What disagreements or conflicts arise due to cohabiting? If so, could you elaborate?

3. Were there any unique disagreements/conflicts that occurred during cohabiting?

4. What aspects of cohabitation have been more difficult than you initially expected?

Research Question 3

"To what extent do young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation in Malaysia? "

Interview Questions

1. What is your personal opinion or belief about cohabiting with your romantic partner?

2.1 Have you ever received any feedback, social reactions or social responses from others that differed from your own view on cohabitation? If yes, could you describe them?

2.2 Who shared those feedback, social reactions or social responses , and how did they express them?

3. In your opinion, how do people in Malaysia generally view cohabitation?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN DU012(A)
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<u>**Research Interview Consent Form**</u>

Title of the Research Study: Exploring the Factors, Challenges, and Social Perceptions of
Cohabitation Among Young Adults in Malaysia.
Principal Investigator: Chan May Kuan, Ng Jia Ying and Ong Kun Quan
Contact Information: mayyykuaaan@1utar.my, 011-58875640, jiaying0915@1utar.my, 011-
10960916, ongkunquan123@1utar.my, 014-9751143.
Research supervisors: Puan Wirawahida Binti Kamarul Zaman (Main supervisor)

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study as stated above. This study aims to explore
the factors, challenges, and social perceptions of cohabitation among young adults in
Malaysia. Before you decide to participate, it is essential to understand the nature of the study
and your role as a participant. Please read this consent form carefully, and if you have any
questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator listed above.

Purpose of the Study:

There are three main objectives of this study. (1) To explore the factors influencing young
adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia, (2)To identify the challenges young adults face
during cohabitation in Malaysia, (3) To explore the extent to which young adults experience
criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation.
By participating in this research interview, your valuable insights will contribute to
advancing knowledge in this area.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a research
interview conducted by all the research team members. Based on your preference, the
interview will be conducted in person or via Zoom. During the interview, the researchers will
ask you questions related to the research topic.

The interview is expected to take approximately 40 minutes to one hour. All interviews will
be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during data analysis. Rest assured that any information
obtained during the interview will be treated with strict confidentiality, and all identifying
information will be anonymised to protect your privacy.

Benefits of Participation:

COHABITATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Participation in this study is voluntary, and the researchers will give RM20 as a token of appreciation for your valuable input and involvement. Your participation will significantly contribute to the research objectives and may ultimately benefit society in the future.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research interview. Although unlikely, you may experience some discomfort while discussing sensitive topics. If you find any questions distressing, you have the right to decline to answer or terminate the interview at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality:

Your privacy is of utmost importance to us. All data collected during the interview will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity will remain anonymous in any publications or presentations resulting from this study. Audio recordings will be stored securely and accessed only by authorised research personnel. Access to the data will be restricted to the research team and any regulatory authorities who may require review.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the research team. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time during the study without providing a reason, and this will not result in any negative consequences.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns or wish to discuss any aspect of the research before, during, or after the study, please contact the principal investigator.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information provided in this consent form, and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate in the research interview for the study titled "Exploring the Factors, Challenges, and Social Perceptions of Cohabitation Among Young Adults in Malaysia". I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences. I also acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to my inquiries.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researchers's Name: Chan May Kuan, Ng Jia Ying and Ong Kun Quan

Researchers's Signature:

COHABITATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Kampar Campus
Jalan Universiti,
Bandar Barat
31900, Kampar,
Perak

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

	RO1: To explore the factors influencing young adults' decisions to cohabit in Malaysia
1	Could you please elaborate on the reasons that led to your decision to cohabit with your partner?
2	Were there any external influences that played a role in your decision to cohabit?
3	What were some of your personal feelings, motivations, or desires that made you want to live with your partner at that time?
1	What were the main considerations that you carefully thought about before deciding to cohabit?
2	What considerations or hesitations arose when you discussed living together?
	RO2: To identify the challenges young adults face during cohabitation in Malaysia
1	What challenges have you encountered while cohabiting with your partner?
2	What disagreements or conflicts arise due to cohabiting? If so, could you elaborate?
3	Were there any unique disagreements/conflicts that occurred during of cohabiting?
4	What aspects of cohabitation have been more difficult than you initially expected?
	RO3: To explore the extent to which young adults experience criticism or social judgment due to cohabitation
1	What is your personal opinion or belief about cohabiting with your romantic partner
2	Have you ever received any feedback, social reactions or social responses from others that differed from your own view on cohabitation? If yes, could you describe them?
3	Who shared those feedback, social reactions or social responses , and how did they express them?
4	In your opinion, how people in Malaysia generally view cohabitation (e.g., cultural, religious, or generational factors)?

Appendix C

Google Form for Interview Registration

Exploring Cohabitation Among Young Adults in Malaysia: Share Your Story!

We are conducting a study to understand the factors, challenges, and social perceptions of cohabitation among young adults in Malaysia.

Your insights can help us better understand this growing trend.

Please note that this form is used for screening purposes only. We will contact you if you meet the criteria for participation.

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

_____

2. **Personal Data Protection Notice**

Please be informed that in accordance with Personal Data Protection Act 2010 ("PDPA") which came into force on 15 November 2013, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman ("UTAR") is hereby bound to make notice and require consent in relation to collection, recording, storage, usage and retention of personal information.

1. Personal data refers to any information which may directly or indirectly identify a person which could include sensitive personal data and expression of opinion.
Among others it includes:
a) Name
b) Identity card
c) Place of Birth
d) Address
e) Education History
f) Employment History
g) Medical History
h) Blood type
i) Race
j) Religion
k) Photo
l) Personal Information and Associated Research Data

2. The purposes for which your personal data may be used are inclusive but not limited to:
a) For assessment of any application to UTAR
b) For processing any benefits and services
c) For communication purposes
d) For advertorial and news
e) For general administration and record purposes
f) For enhancing the value of education
g) For educational and related purposes consequential to UTAR
h) For replying any responds to complaints and enquiries
i) For the purpose of our corporate governance
j) For the purposes of conducting research/ collaboration

3. Your personal data may be transferred and/or disclosed to third party and/or UTAR collaborative partners including but not limited to the respective and appointed outsourcing agents for purpose of fulfilling our obligations to you in respect of the purposes and all such other purposes that are related to the purposes and also in providing integrated services, maintaining and storing records. Your data may be shared when required by laws and when disclosure is necessary to comply with applicable laws.

4. Any personal information retained by UTAR shall be destroyed and/or deleted in accordance with our retention policy applicable for us in the event such information is no longer required.

5. UTAR is committed in ensuring the confidentiality, protection, security and accuracy of your personal information made available to us and it has been our ongoing strict policy to ensure that your personal information is accurate, complete, not misleading and updated. UTAR would also ensure that your personal data shall not be used for political

and commercial purposes.

Consent:
6. By submitting or providing your personal data to UTAR, you had consented and agreed for your personal data to be used in accordance to the terms and conditions in the Notice and our relevant policy.

7. If you do not consent or subsequently withdraw your consent to the processing and disclosure of your personal data, UTAR will not be able to fulfill our obligations or to contact you or to assist you in respect of the purposes and/or for any other purposes related to the purpose.

8. You may access and update your personal data by writing to us at:

- Chan May Kuan - mayyykuaaan@1utar.my
- Ng Jia Ying - jiaying0915@1utar.my
- Ong Kun Quan - ongkunquan123@1utar.my

Mark only one oval.

⬭ I have been notified and that I hereby understood, consented and agreed per UTAR above notice.

⬭ I disagree, my personal data will not be processed.

Personal Information

3. **Full Name (Eg: WONG ONG ONG)** *

_____

4. **Age (Eg: 22)** *

_____

5. **Gender** *

Mark only one oval.

⬭ Male

⬭ Female

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6. **Phone Number (Eg: 011-1234567)** *

_____

7. **Race** *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Malay

◯ Chinese

◯ Indian

◯ Other: _____

8. **Are you a Malaysian citizen?**

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

Living Situation

9. **Are you currently in a cohabiting relationship?** *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

10. **If yes, how long have you been cohabiting?** *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Less than 1 year

◯ More than 1 year

Skip to question 11

Interview Preferences

The interview will be conducted ONLINE only.

11.   **Preferred Language for Interview** *

Tick all that apply.

☐ English
☐ Malay
☐ Chinese

12.   **Preferred Time for Interview (can choose more than one)**

Tick all that apply.

☐ Morning (10am - 11am)
☐ Afternoon (2pm - 3pm)
☐ Evening (4pm - 6pm)
☐ Weekend
☐ Weekday

Appendix D

Ethical Approval Letter

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN *DU012(A)*
Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation   *Co. No. 578227-M*

Re: U/SERC/78-442/2025

14 January 2025

Dr Lee Wan Ying
Head, Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat
31900 Kampar, Perak.

Dear Dr Lee,

Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to the application for ethical approval for your students' research project from Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) Psychology programme enrolled in course UAPZ3023. We are pleased to inform you that the application has been approved under <u>Expedited Review</u>.

The details of the research projects are as follows:

No	Research Title	Student's Name	Supervisor's Name	Approval Validity
1.	The Relationship Between Big Five Personality Traits, Social Support and Stress Among University Students	1. Chan Jia Lin 2. Ee Xue Rui	Pn Wirawahida Binti Kamarul Zaman	14 January 2025 – 13 January 2026
2.	Exploring the Factors, Challenges, and Social Perceptions of Cohabitation Among Young Adults in Malaysia	1. Chan May Kuan 2. Ng Jia Ying 3. Ong Kun Quan		
3.	Cohabitation and Relationship Stability: Understanding the Challenges and Adaptive Strategies of Unmarried Couples	1. Celeste Lee Xin Rou 2. Leong Qiao Yi		

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

(1)   The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research;

(2)   Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and

(3)   Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.

(4)   Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Should the students collect personal data of participants in their studies, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for records.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Ts Dr Faidz bin Abd Rahman
Chairman
UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c   Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science
         Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research