

Construction of Sexual and Gender Minority Identity among Malay-Muslim Natal Females: A Meta-Synthesis

Syed Jaapar SZ^a, Muhamad R^b, Abdul Razak A^a, Bakar M^c, Mokhtar RH^d

^aDepartment of Psychiatry, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kelantan, Malaysia;

^bDepartment of Family Medicine, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kelantan, Malaysia

^cInterdisciplinary Health Science Unit, School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kelantan, Malaysia

^dFaculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan

ABSTRACT

Malay-Muslim identity is the regular norm among Malays in Malaysia; however, this identity has been challenged with the emergence of sexual-and-gender minority (SGM). Even though Malay cultural values and Islamic teachings prohibit same-sex orientation and cross-gender, a SGM group has evolved among Malay-Muslim natal females. This meta-synthesis was conducted to explore the psychosocial factors involved in the construction of SGM and its consequences among Malay natal females in Malaysia using the Sandelowski-Barroso approach. A systematic search of articles was done in the selected databases by using identified keywords between October to December 2020. Twelve full articles were included after proper screening and in-depth reviews. The quality of these articles was assessed independently by two researchers. The articles were then analysed using ATLAS.ti 8 software to group the data into subthemes and themes. Lastly, the effect sizes of each subtheme were calculated. Three main themes were identified: affection seeking, hurtful experience and nurturing influences. Malay natal females also shared consequences following construction of SGM identity which include acceptance from community, continuous conflicts in life and mental health consequences. This meta-synthesis revealed the influences that shape the construction of Malay SGM women. Thus, interventions shall be planned to aid them according to cultural and psychosocial factors.

Keywords

sexual and gender minority, Malay women, meta-synthesis, psychosocial factors, consequences.

Corresponding Author

Dr. Rosediani Muhamad
Department of Family Medicine,
School of Medical Sciences,
Universiti Sains Malaysia,
16150 Kubang Kerian,
Kelantan, Malaysia
E-mail : droosediani@gmail.com

Received: 14th July 2022; Accepted: 14th March 2023

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.31436/imjm.v22i3>

INTRODUCTION

In this context, sexual and gender minority (SGM) among Malay-Muslim natal females (MNF) refers to Malay-Muslims who were born female but have a sexual orientation towards women and/or who express their gender in masculine rather than feminine ways. Among them are lesbians (women with a sexual orientation towards women), bisexuals (women with a sexual orientation towards both women and men), femmes (lesbians with a feminine identity), butch or *pengkidas* (lesbians with a masculine identity), and androgynous (lesbians with both a feminine and masculine identity).^{1,2}

The social construction of self-identity and sexual behaviour is a dynamic process that integrates personal experiences with one's surroundings. In Malaysia, the construction of the MNF's self-identity is shaped by their

culture and their religious affiliation as Muslims. This is strengthened and documented in the Constitution of the Malaysian Federation, which states that a Malay is one who communicates in Malay, adheres to Malay customs, and embraces Islam as their religion.³

Therefore, Malay and Muslim identities are intertwined in Malaysia. Malay-Muslim identities shapes everyday life, from childhood to death. Malay-Muslims are traditionally raised with clear gender roles for men and women from childhood, and sexual intimacy is intended to occur only with the opposite sex and after marriage.⁴ Additionally, Islam prohibits same-sex sexual orientation and curses women who resemble men in many aspects, and vice versa.⁵ However, despite Islamic teachings and Malay values, some MNF still develop sexual attraction towards

women and resemble men for most of their lives, which leads them to be part of the SGM. Thus, this meta-synthesis aims to explore the psychosocial factors in the construction of the SGM identity and its consequences among MNF in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This meta-synthesis followed the procedures described by Sandelowski and Barroso.⁶ The steps are: (i) determining research questions and eligibility criteria; (ii) systematic searching; (iii) reviewing and selecting; (iv) quality appraisal; (v) synthesising and analysing data; and (vi) presenting results (under the section results).

Step 1: Research Questions and Eligibility Criteria

The research questions of this meta-synthesis were: (i) What were the contributing psychosocial factors in the construction of SGM identity among MNF? (ii) What were the consequences of SGM identity for MNF?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies included in this meta-synthesis met the following criteria: (i) they were qualitative or mixed-method studies, (ii) they were research articles and conference proceedings, (iii) the contents or quotations were related to the SGM among MNF and were able to answer research questions, (iv) they were published during 2011–2020, and (v) they were written in English and Malay. The articles that were excluded were: (i) quantitative studies; (ii) articles containing duplication; (iii) reports; (iv) literature reviews; (v) unoriginal articles; (vi) comments; and (vii) chapters in books, book series, and books. The proposal was then registered in the Prospero on November 24, 2020 (CRD42020213383).⁷

Step 2: Systematic Searching

The following terms were used for the systematic search of articles: “lesbian,” “homosexual,” “bisexual,” “pengkid,” “butch,” “femme,” “transman,” “non-heterosexuals,” “LGBT,” “queer,” “sexual minority,” and “gender minority.” These were combined with “Malay,” “female,” and “women” using the Boolean operators OR and AND. The search was conducted between October 2019 and December 2020 in the databases Scopus,

PubMed, Science Direct, CINAHL, Google Scholar, Academia, and ResearchGate.

Step 3: Reviewing and Selecting Appropriate Articles

After proper screening and in-depth reviews were conducted, 12 articles were included, as illustrated in Figure 1. The first reviewer performed an initial screening by title to exclude clearly nonrelevant articles. Then, two reviewers independently screened the potentially relevant texts by title and abstract and, if necessary, by full text using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Disagreements between both reviewers were resolved via discussion.

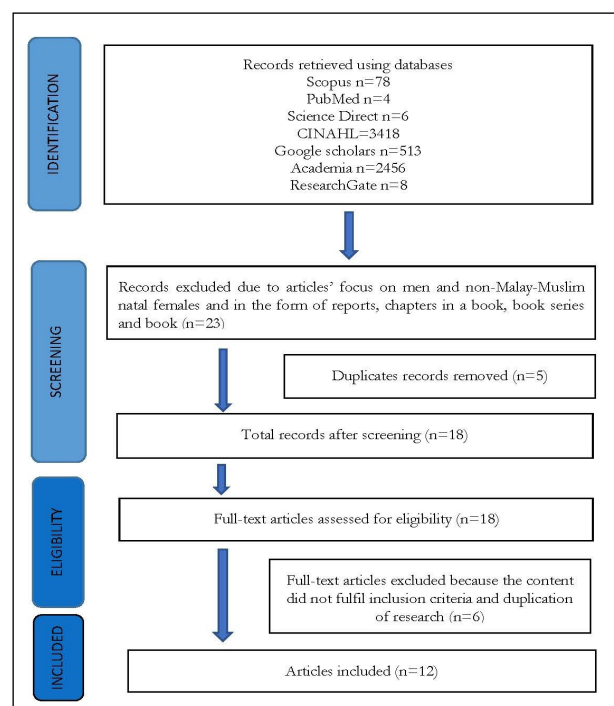


Figure 1. A Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram for psychosocial factors in the construction of SGM identity among MNF.

Step 4: Appraising the Quality of the Articles

The quality of the articles was separately assessed by two reviewers using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), which includes 10 items.⁸ The first two questions, which required a “yes” or “no” answer, were used to identify the availability of a clear aim and the correct methodology. The rest of the questions were assessed by giving a score from 1 to 3-1 for articles with little or no clarification of a certain issue, 2 for articles discussing the issue without an explanation, and 3 for articles with a vast explanation of the issue. Then, the scores were summed up, with total scores ranging from 8 to 24. The quality of the articles was classified as weak

(total score of 8–15), moderate (total score of 16–23), or strong (total score of 24).

Step 5: Synthesising and Analysing Data

Data from the articles were extracted and analysed qualitatively using the software ATLAS.ti 8. To answer the research questions, data extraction focused mainly on MNF, psychosocial factors that contributed to SGM identity construction, and the consequences of their identity construction. Each article was read and reread to appraise, familiarise, recognise, extract, write, arrange, compare, relate, map, induce, and verify data.

First, the extracted data were coded accordingly, line by line. The similarities and differences between the codes were examined to group them meaningfully. The codes were then grouped into themes, which were later grouped into subthemes according to their meanings. Following that, the effect size in each subtheme was calculated by dividing the number of articles by the total number of articles across the review.⁶ For example, the effect size of

42% in the affection seeking subtheme was derived by dividing 5 (the number of articles in the subtheme) by 12 (the total number of articles in this review). The degree to which each article contained the findings across all articles was represented by the strength of the effect size.⁶

Validity

For this meta-analysis to be as accurate as possible, the articles were carefully searched using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, as shown in Figure 1.⁹ Serial discussions with all the authors, quality checks, and keeping a record of search results and decisions were also completed. The primary authors of the reviewed studies were contacted for consent and any additional information.

RESULTS

The characteristics and quality of the articles are summarised in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Most of the

Table 1. The characteristics of the studies (including instruments/measures).

No	Author (Year)	Aim	Theoretical Framework	Methods	Sample Size	Participants (Age)	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1	Wong (2012)	To understand same-sex desires and transgender practices.	Not specified	Ethnography	15	<i>Pengkids</i> & their girlfriends (age 22–45 years)	Participant observation, IDI* & oral histories	Thematic analysis
2	Jerome (2013)	To explore the complexity of Malay identity (mainly queer Malay Muslims).	Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet	Narrative research	1	N/A	Documents	Content analysis
3	Sabri et al. (2014)	To determine whether LGBT is a natural or an ideological issue.	"Born That Way"	Not specified	1	Counsellor (age 60 years)	IDI	Content analysis
4	Ahmad et al. (2015)	To determine the possibility of returning to normal for lesbians.	Not specified	Phenomenological study	6	Malay lesbians (age 18–25 years)	IDI	Thematic analysis
5	Zhooryati & Intan (2014)	To focus on lesbians' sources and levels of stress.	Not specified	Phenomenological study	25	<i>Pengkids</i> (age 18–25 years)	IDI	Content analysis
6	Juaini & Halim (2017)	To determine teenagers' tendency to be involved in lesbian activity.	Not specified	Not specified	6	Malay lesbians (age 15–19 years)	IDI	Content analysis
7	Juaini et al. (2017)	To determine the extent to which social media is used as a hidden world and safe haven for lesbians in Malaysia.	Not specified	Not specified	34	Facebook, Twitter accounts and web sites	Online observation	Descriptive statistical analysis
8	Aziz et al. (2019)	To identify leading factors in the relationship establishment of "Femme" women with "Pengkid."	Not specified	Phenomenological study	10	Malays Muslims femme (in their 30s)		Content analysis
9	Mokhtar et al. (2019)	To examine social media's role in propagating influence on spreading LGBT movements in Malaysia.	Uses and Gratifications Theory	Phenomenological study	10	SGM	IDI Observation	Thematic analysis
10	Hesamuddin et al. (2019)	To study the factors, identify the effects and challenges faced by those who experienced, and to determine on how those people affecting with their surroundings.	Deduction Theory	Phenomenological study	3	SGM Malay women (age 19–21 years)	IDI	Unit of analysis
11	Jamal et al. (2019)	To investigate the likelihood of suicide among gays and lesbians from the perspective of counsellors.	Cass Theory of Gay/Lesbian Identity	Single-case multi-site case	6	Counsellors	IDI	Three-tier data analysis
12	Tuah & Mazlan (2020)	To identify motivation for self-disclosure on Twitter and recognise the reciprocity and consequences gained in the process.	Queer theory	Phenomenological study	10	SGM (age 21–34 years)	IDI	Thematic analysis

*IDI: in-depth interview

research used phenomenological studies and in-depth interviews. The total CASP score ranged from 10 to 24. Despite their weak quality, all articles were included, as suggested by Sandelowski & Barroso.⁶ Lachal et al. also suggested the same thing since the goal of the quality assessment is to improve the global understanding of this topic, which is to gain an understanding of the construction of the SGM identity among MNF and the consequences of the identity.¹⁰

Table 2. Quality appraisal of articles using critical appraisal skills programme (CASP).

Author (year)	Wong (2012)	Jerome (2013)	Sabri et al. (2014)	Ahmad et al. (2015)	Zhoocyati & Intan (2014)	Juaini & Halim (2017)	Juaini et al. (2017)	Asiz et al. (2019)	Mokhtar et al. (2019)	Hesamuddin et al. (2019)	Jamal et al. (2019)	Tuash & Maslan (2020)
1. Aim	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
2. Methodology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
3. Research design	3	2	2	1	3	2	3	1	2	2	3	3
4. Recruitment strategy	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3
5. Data collection	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	3	3
6. Researcher and participants relationship	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	3
7. Ethical issues	3	2	1	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	3
8. Data analysis rigorousness	3	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	3
9. Statement of findings	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	2	3	1	3	3
10. Valuable research	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	3	3
Total score	24	16	13	11	20	20	18	12	16	10	23	24

For the first research question, the psychosocial factors contributing to the construction of the SGM among MNF were divided into three main themes: affection seeking, hurtful experiences, and nurturing influences (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and subthemes of psychosocial factors on the construction of sexual-and-gender minorities among Malay-Muslim natal females and their effect sizes.

Themes	Affection Seeking		Hurtful Experience		Nurturing Influences			
Subthemes								
Author (year)	Absent parent	Emotional validation by peers	Receive greater affection from same-sex partners	Relationship failure	History of abuse	Detach from religious education	Staying in same school	Extensive promotion from social media
1. Wong (2012)	/							
2. Jerome (2013)								
3. Sabri et al. (2014)	/	/		/	/	/		
4. Ahmad et al. (2015)	/	/	/	/	/	/		
5. Zhoocyati & Intan (2014)								
6. Juaini & Halim (2017)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
7. Juaini et al. (2017)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
8. Asiz et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
9. Mokhtar et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
10. Hesamuddin et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
11. Jamal et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
12. Tuash & Maslan (2020)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Effect size (%)	42	50	25	33	25	25	25	25

The second research question also identified three themes as consequences of MNF being in the SGM: identity acceptance by the community, continuous conflicts in life, and mental health consequences (Table 4). The Malay-Muslim quotations used in the study were sent to professional translators for translation.

Table 4. Consequences of sexual and gender minority construction among Malay-Muslim natal females and their effect sizes.

Themes	Identity Acceptance from Community	Continuous Conflicts in Life			Mental Health Consequences			
Subthemes	Acceptance from virtual space	Neo-culture	Conflicting cultural/spiritual values	Live with a minority identity	Relationship disharmony	Depression and Suicide	Anxiety/Neurosis	Engaging with risky behaviours
Author (year)								
1. Wong (2012)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
2. Jerome (2013)		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
3. Sabri et al. (2014)				/	/	/	/	/
4. Ahmad et al. (2015)		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
5. Zhoocyati & Intan (2014)		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
6. Juaini & Halim (2017)		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
7. Juaini et al. (2017)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
8. Asiz et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
9. Mokhtar et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
10. Hesamuddin et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
11. Jamal et al. (2019)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
12. Tuash & Maslan (2020)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Effect size (%)	25	25	33	25	17	25	25	17

The psychosocial factors contributing to the construction of the SGM

Theme 1. Affection Seeking

Three subthemes emerged under affection seeking: absent parents, emotional validation by peers, and receiving greater affection from same-sex partners.

Absent parent

The term “absent parent” implies little to no affection from one or both parents for a child. This subtheme had the second-highest effect size (42%), as illustrated in Table 3. It was discovered that a parent’s affection and bonding influence a child’s gender and sexual identity.^{12,13} Likewise, parents’ ignorance about their child’s clothes or girls wearing boys’ clothes influenced the child to behave masculinely.¹¹ Some parents took whatever the child was trying to say lightly.¹⁴

Furthermore, having an absent parent implied that some MNF could not share things with their parents.^{14,18} ‘Both my mother and father work [...]it’s normal [...] go out in the morning [...] come back at night [...] even if we meet before going to bed [...] I want to tell them anything, [it is] difficult.’¹⁴ A lack of parental affection drove some MNF out of the house.^{11,14,18} A participant mentioned, ‘Mom and dad always quarrel [...] argue [...] I decided to get out of the house. Stay separately.’¹⁴ A lack of affection from parents could cause a child to seek affection from peers.^{14,18,21}

Emotional validation by peers

Emotional validation by peers revealed the highest effect size (50%; Table 3). Most MNF preferred spending time with peers compared to parents, as peers were more understanding.^{14,16,18,20,22,23} As one participant said, 'I always hang out at her place [...] share our problems [...] We understand each other.'¹⁶

Additionally, under the influence of peers, MNF accepted that same-sex relationships are a normal phenomenon, as mentioned by one participant: 'Previously, I was uninterested and ridiculed this type of homosexual behaviour. But when I get closer to them, [I] found it's not bad. Finally, it became a normal phenomenon.'¹⁸ Likewise, MNF adopted gender identity expression cues from their peers.^{13,18}

Receive greater affection from same-sex partners

The greater affection, understanding, and treatment of MNF's same-sex partners encouraged the construction of SGM.^{14,16,18} The commitment and acceptance from same-sex partners were better than those from male partners because of the comparable thinking styles and emotions among women.^{14,18} A participant shared, 'I am comfortable with my "pengkid" treatments and caring. Sham will always do the best for me, she is very understanding, possibly because she is also a woman, so of course she understands better.'¹⁸

Theme 2. Hurtful Experiences

There were two subthemes under hurtful experience: relationship failure and a history of abuse.

Relationship failure

Previous relationship failures or being rejected by men imprinted a negative view of men, which led to a deeper affection towards women than men.^{14,16,18,20} One participant said, 'Why can't men treat women with tenderness and love? I have experienced a man who treated me badly, I hate this kind of treatment. He was not even romantic, and yet selfish, and I am the one who always needs to care about our relationship. I am fed up and exhausted.'¹⁸

Some MNF have been rejected by several ex-boyfriends in the past, and the fact that a woman can console them more effectively than a man motivated them to pursue a close relationship with a woman.²⁰

History of abuse

MNF with a history of being abused and witnessing abuse develop a fear of men.^{13,16,18} This was mentioned by one participant, who said, 'I never had any experience or incident that made me be in "awe" of or made me want to get close to men. I consider men only want fun and their victims are women. My sister became a victim of domestic violence and a cheating husband. I went through my childhood seeing my uncles getting divorced and hitting their wives.'¹⁶

Theme 3. Nurturing Influences

Under nurturing influences, three subthemes emerged: detachment from Islamic education, studying in the same school, and extensive promotion on social media.

Detachment from Islamic education

The SGM among MNF rarely practice prayers, which is one of the Islamic ritualistic obligations. One participant mentioned, 'I haven't prayed for a long time [...] I don't know [...] even if I pray, I still commit sins, too.'¹⁴ MNF who were detached from religious teaching and did not practice it closely tended to become involved in same-sex relationships.^{13,14,18}

Apart from this, some MNF were weak in Islamic comprehension and teachings.¹⁸ They remained in a same-sex intimate relationship without knowing that it was wrong.

Studying in the same school

In school, MNF learned from and observed their peers who were involved in same-sex relationships.¹⁸ The curiosity and excitement of having someone who loved and appreciated them influenced them to become involved in same-sex relationships. Those who believed their families did not love them and who experienced rejection from their families were more likely to seek out

affection from their peers at school. They had greater chances of gaining this love in an all-girls school, as girls are more understanding, soft, and empathetic compared to males.^{18,20} 'In the old days of my schooling, there were no boys in my school, in any kind of activity, acting, camping, it's girls that would take the lead as boys or men, especially the tomboys,' one participant said.¹⁸

Extensive promotion on social media

The extensive promotion of SGM activities, human rights, and their activities on social media attracted MNF to look for information and affirmation about their identity on social media.^{16,19,22} Lesbians chose social media to communicate because it allowed them to conceal their identities and be away from public eyes.¹⁹ They felt safe on social media, as others did not know their real identities.^{17,19} Nevertheless, social media easily attracted more people to become actively involved in the SGM community by reducing stress associated with confronting social stigma and providing reassurance.^{17,19}

Consequences of SGM Development among MNF

Theme 4. Identity Acceptance by the Community

Acceptance by virtual space

The SGM among MNF can easily express their feelings without the fear of being judged, receive positive responses from the SGM community, and make friends virtually by disclosing their profile.^{17,22} Thus, they proudly shared their gratitude on social media for being part of the SGM community and shared activities and information about their movements.^{17,19,22}

Neo-culture

A neo-culture is a new culture created by the mixing of different cultures. SGM among MNF was accepted in certain families, friends, healthcare providers, and social circles in neo-culture.^{11,12,20,23} A participant said, 'If it's the holiday season, I hang out with cousins. He knows about me, and he is always sarcastic, too, but it's ok.'²³ However, some who accepted MNF with SGM identities, on the other hand, intended to advise and assist them in changing their lifestyle.¹⁵

Theme 5. Continuous Conflicts in Life

Conflicting cultural and spiritual values

Conflicting cultural and spiritual values had the highest effect size (33%) of the subthemes under the consequences of SGM among MNF (Table 4). Because of the disapproval of same-sex orientation, cross-dressing, and transgender identity, MNF experienced continuous conflicts of cultural and spiritual values related to their SGM identity.^{11,12,20,22}

Some SGM among MNF experienced rejection, discrimination, and prejudice from family, friends, society, and colleagues.^{11,20,22} Consequently, they had poor interpersonal relationships with family and friends; some lost their friends and had no support.^{22,23}

Living with a minority identity

Most of the SGM among MNF were confused about their own identity and revealed the frequent conflicts they had in developing their own self-identity.¹² Strongly religious women who complied with Islamic teachings hated their strong same-sex desire and failed to stop it, continuing to live as strongly religious women with the desire for a same-sex relationship.¹² These conflicts caused most of them to opt to conceal their sexual identity, causing stress, anxiety, and depression, which may lead to suicide.²¹

Relationship disharmony

Some SGM among MNF also experienced relationship disharmony with partners, family, friends, and colleagues.^{15,21} Arguments among partners were usually because of jealousy or an affair with a third person. They might break the relationships, or some would have suicidal ideation.¹⁵ Additionally, some received negative remarks once their family, friends, and colleagues knew about their sexual identity.²¹

Theme 6. Mental Health Consequences

Engaging in risky behaviours

Some SGM among MNF dealt with conflicts by engaging in risky behaviours, such as speedy driving, clubbing, smoking, using substances, drinking alcohol, and self-harm.^{11,15}

Anxiety neurosis

The consequences of being part of a SGM put MNF at risk of anxiety, in which they developed fear, confusion, problems with sleep, excessive thinking, poor concentration, breathing problems, and dizziness.^{12,15,21} Sometimes, this anxiety led to an impairment of their performance in whatever they did.¹⁵ Two participants reported, 'I feel angry and irritated when there is a problem' and 'I will think too much and hard to be happy whenever I have a problem.'¹⁵

Depression and suicide

The majority of SGM among MNF were at risk for depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.^{15,18,21} As one participant shared, 'I feel so sad when I have a problem.'¹⁵

DISCUSSION

This meta-synthesis revealed that the themes for the psychosocial factors contributing to the construction of SGM among MNF were affection seeking, hurtful experiences, and nurturing influences.

In an affection-seeking theme, a family with a lack of parental affection pushed MNF to seek affection outside the house. Most of the time, MNF received affection and validation of emotion from their female peers, which gradually developed into an intimate relationship, which was also highlighted in Juaini and Azman's study.²⁴ Emotional validation by peers showed the highest effect size among the subthemes, which reflected that it was the most frequent subtheme mentioned in the included studies. Female peers or partners typically provide financial and emotional support as well as identity affirmation and a sense of belonging in the minority group. This finding is consistent with other studies showing that poor familial upbringing eventually leads to SGM.^{24–26}

The third subtheme, which was receiving greater affection from same-sex partners, further strengthened the SGM identity. This can be explained by better understanding, greater affection, and greater

responsibility of same-sex partners in a relationship compared to a heterosexual partner. This was also evident in a study among lesbians in Indonesia, which portrayed that personality, familiarity, intimacy, warmth, and understanding strengthened their relationships.²⁷

With regard to the second theme, the failure of heterosexual relationships and the history of abuse with men led to a perception among MNF that men are bad and irresponsible people. This negative perception pushed MNF to build intimate relationships with women rather than men. Likewise, Nigerian women also engaged in same-sex relationships after marital failure.²⁸ Additionally, histories of abusive relationships, sexual abuse, rape, or attempted rape also influenced the development of SGM women in various countries.^{29,30}

Nurturing influences, such as detachment from religious education, studying at the same school, and extensive promotion on social media, encouraged the development of SGM. The prohibition of same-sex sexual activities in Islamic teaching can prevent same-sex sexual behaviour among MNF if they comply with the teaching. However, a lack of knowledge and practise of Islamic teachings encouraged same-sex sexual behaviour.³¹ Similarly, SGMW in the USA reported that their religiosity was slightly lower than that of non-SGMW.³²

Furthermore, the social environment influenced the development of SGM among MNF who attended the same school. According to social cognitive theory, this can be explained by observing, imitating, and learning from peers at school who practised the same-sex relationship, which gradually builds up the identity of SGM.³³

About 81% of Malaysians were said to use social media as of January 2020, with Facebook being the most popular platform.³⁴ Malays were the second highest SGM social media users after the Chinese, with most lesbians in the age range of 20–29 years.³⁵ Nonetheless, social media easily attracts more people to become actively involved in the SGM among women (SGMW) community by providing information, affirmation, and reassurance.¹

Therefore, SGM among MNF was being accepted without being judged, especially in virtual worlds, because of the neo-culture of globalisation, liberalism, and human rights.^{19,36} This acceptance was also reported in other studies.^{36,37}

However, SGM identity had some negative consequences. The highest effect size of the consequences' subthemes of SGM among MNF was conflicting cultural and spiritual values. This conflict arose from the differences between SGM's sexual behaviour and local values, which resulted in discrimination, prejudice, and rejection. This finding is consistent with most studies on the lived experiences of SGMW.³⁸⁻⁴¹

Similarly, internal conflicts also occurred among the SGMW in Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country. They also felt guilty and worried about their decision to live as lesbians.⁴² Nonetheless, British Muslim lesbians overcame religious conflict by acknowledging that their faith can be both encouraging and redeeming.⁴³ They understood that being a lesbian was a 'test from Allah', with which they needed to live.⁴⁴ If they chose to abandon and evade religion in their lives, it may have caused sadness.⁴⁵ Christian SGMW, on the other hand, depicted similar conflicts between religious and sexual identities.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸

In terms of relationships, some SGM among MNF faced relationship disharmony with their family, partners, and friends because of their behaviour and lifestyles that were against the local cultural values. Studies in other countries have also revealed discord in SGM relationships.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹

In managing the conflicts, it was found that SGM engaged in risky behaviours such as reckless driving, smoking, and substance use as reported by Salvatore and Daftary-Kapur.⁵² This is consistent with a finding by Ahmad et al. that lesbian adolescents used avoidance coping strategies compared to heterosexual female adolescents.⁵³ Apart from that, chronic consumption of substances among SGM led to psychosis and mood disorders, which require

frequent hospitalisations and indirectly increase the national health burden.^{52,54,55}

It can be explained from the minority stress theory that being female and being an SGM means exposure to perceived experiences of prejudice, expectations of stigma, internalised homophobia, and concealment of sexual orientation.⁵⁶ Likewise, major depressive disorder among the SGM was found to be 3-20 times more prevalent than in the general Malaysian population.⁵⁷⁻⁵⁹ Studies in the West have also shown that SGMW is associated with anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, suicide attempt, and suicide.^{55,60-62}

LIMITATIONS

Despite some studies having low quality upon critical appraisal, the included studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria, and the depth of the findings reported was able to answer the research questions. Thus, the systematic review of local qualitative papers is able to contribute scientific knowledge pertaining to SGM among MNF.

CONCLUSIONS

This meta-synthesis showed that the development of SGM among MNF is socially constructed by parents, peers, same-sex partners, hurtful experiences, detached Islamic education, school, and social media. The consequences of being in the SGM for MNF were acceptance in virtual space and neo-culture, continuous conflicts, and poor mental health. Thus, parents need to be educated on good parenting so as to provide affection, education, and good role modelling of sexual and gender identity to their children. Holistic interventions need to be done to aid the SGM among MNF dealing with conflicts and mental health issues. Future studies on interventions that incorporate the Islamic components are important to help the SGM among MNF deal with any negative consequences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the primary authors for providing us with permission to use their findings and quotes for this review.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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