

Do Interaction & Openness in Friendship Matter among Working Women in Malaysia? Comparing Between Married and Single Women

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of interaction and openness in friendships among working women in Malaysia. Specifically, it aims to identify differences between single and married working women in their engagement with interaction and openness behaviours in maintaining friendships, as well as their levels of friendship satisfaction. This quantitative study employed a questionnaire survey involving 500 female respondents working in public universities across Malaysia. The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 23. The findings revealed that single working women exhibited higher levels of interaction and openness behaviours in friendships compared to their married counterparts. They also reported greater friendship satisfaction. Additionally, the study found a positive relationship between interaction and openness and friendship satisfaction. Overall, the results indicate that marital status influences the way working women engage in maintaining friendships and the satisfaction they derive from them. Furthermore, the study highlights that interaction and openness are significant predictors of friendship satisfaction, regardless of marital status. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on women's friendships and emphasize the importance of fostering interaction and communication to enhance friendship quality. The study also advocates for a more inclusive and supportive social approach toward single and married women in the context of community and social development in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Interaction, openness, friendship satisfaction, maintenance, single and married, women.*

INTRODUCTION

Women play an essential role in national development, not only as caregivers but also as contributors to the workforce. In Malaysia, women make up nearly half of the population, and a substantial proportion of them are employed (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Their dual contributions, as a worker and as family caregivers are vital, and this is reflected in national development plans (Abdul Razak et al., 2019). However, juggling multiple roles poses significant challenges, especially in terms of their psychological well-being. One major contributor to women's psychological well-being is the presence of meaningful relationships (Machu et al., 2022). These relationships foster social connectedness and a sense of belonging, which are crucial for emotional health (Lange & Crawford, 2024). Apart from family ties, friendships are also a significant form of social support that can protect against stress and depression (Reiner & Steinhoff, 2024).

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Research indicates that women tend to have more intimate and emotionally rich friendships than men, with stronger emotional bonds and open communication (Demir & Orthel, 2011; Vanderheiden, 2021). This emotional closeness often stems from frequent interaction and openness, the two elements that are central to the development and maintenance of strong friendships. Interaction allows friends to share experiences and remain engaged in one another's lives, while openness fosters trust, self-disclosure, and emotional validation. These aspects not only strengthen the quality of the friendship but also contribute positively to mental health, especially during times of work-family conflict (Zakaria et al., 2018).

However, friendships can be fragile and easily disrupted, particularly as life circumstances change. Unlike family or romantic relationships, friendships often lack formal commitments and structure. For many women, marriage can diminish the time and energy available for friendships due to increased responsibilities at home and at work (Offer & Bear, 2020). Consequently, married women may withdraw from friendships or view them as less important (Santucci et al., 2024; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). In contrast, while singlehood has often been linked to loneliness (Soons & Liefbroer, 2008), newer studies reveal that single women may enjoy stronger, broader and more active social networks, including with friends (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). With fewer competing demands from family or romantic partners, single women often engage more consistently in social interaction and are more open with their friends. Single women are more likely to interact and invest in their friendships as they may not have time constraints issues associated with marriage and family.

The ability to interact and be open with friends is an important element in maintaining friendship. Both are the crucial components that women expect in their friendship, which thus lead to friendship satisfaction (Hall et al., 2011). A mismatch between expectations and the actual quality of the relationship can reduce satisfaction (Bavik et al., 2022). Married women, who often struggle to meet the demands of both family and work, may experience this imbalance more acutely, feeling unable to maintain the level of closeness they desire in their friendships. In contrast, single women may be more capable of meeting their relational expectations, thus reporting greater satisfaction.

Despite the recognized importance of interpersonal relationships for women's well-being, little recent research has focused on women's friendships, especially outside of the family context. Marital status may play a key role in shaping how women engage in and feel about their friendships. Research shows that married individuals tend to become more socially isolated over time and participate less in communal activities (Dush & Amato, 2005). Conversely, single individuals, though less tied to traditional family structures, are typically more available, more responsive to friends, and more open to reciprocal support (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016).

These shifts suggest that modern single women may be adapting more successfully to today's evolving social structures. Conversely, while marriage and family undoubtedly bring joy, they may inadvertently limit opportunities for social interaction and openness with friends, particularly among working women. Married working women may experience reduced social interaction due to the demands of family and career.

Recent studies also suggest that people in committed relationships may experience more unmet needs in friendships compared to single individuals (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2015; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). As such, it is important to examine how friendship behaviours differ between single and married working women and to understand how marital status

affects not only the structure such as interaction and openness but also the satisfaction of friendships. Understanding these differences can help people better value and nurture the friendships in their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relational Maintenance Conceptual in Friendship

A relationship cannot be sustained without consistent effort to keep it active and meaningful. This is particularly true for friendships, which are inherently more fragile as they are not bound by legal or formal obligations and may fade over time due to shifting life priorities. In friendships, individuals must engage in specific behaviours to maintain a sense of commitment to the relationship (Oswald et al., 2004). These behaviours encompass a range of routine and strategic actions aimed at preserving the quality and satisfaction of the friendship. The foundation of such behaviours is rooted in the concept of relational maintenance as proposed by Dindia and Canary (1993).

Relational maintenance serves several key functions. First, it aims to ensure the continued existence of the relationship, recognizing that any bond can dissolve without ongoing interaction or mutual investment. Second, it involves preserving the relationship in a desired state such as maintaining feelings of closeness, affection, or emotional connection, even if this means maintaining the status quo. Third, relational maintenance includes deliberate efforts to enhance or improve the relationship, striving toward a higher level of satisfaction or commitment. Finally, it encompasses the process of repairing and adjusting the relationship in response to inevitable changes in individuals or external circumstances. As people grow and environments shift, conflicts or misunderstandings may arise; relational maintenance helps realign the relationship to meet the evolving needs and expectations of both parties.

Consistent with the above, Stafford and Canary (1991) developed a well-known typology of relational maintenance, which is initially based on the assumption that maintenance behaviour can be defined as the effort to sustain a relationship by making the relationship continuously perceived as equitable and rewarding, adjusting efforts so that it is suitable to keep, maintain or develop the relationship to the person's satisfaction.

Later, Dainton and Stafford (1993) distinguished between maintenance behaviours and maintenance strategies. In particular, maintenance behaviours are related to routine behaviours that unconsciously function as maintenance effort, while maintenance strategies involve planning and conscious effort to achieve maintenance goals. Canary and Stafford (1994) went on to describe maintenance behaviours as "actions and activities used to maintain desired relational definitions" emphasising that these actions and activities might pertain to both interactive and non-interactive behaviours. Collectively, these perspectives suggest that relational maintenance involves both strategic and routine behaviours aimed at preserving relationship satisfaction.

Interaction & Openness as indicator of Friendship Satisfaction

Friendship is a fundamental component of human social life and plays a crucial role in individual well-being, psychological development, and social functioning (Demir et al., 2025). Among the many elements that shape and sustain friendship, interaction and openness has been consistently highlighted as a core behavioural indicator of friendship quality and satisfaction (Syukur & Murdiana, 2024). Oswald et al. (2004) identified four key maintenance

behaviours in friendship which includes openness, and interaction. Openness refers to self-disclosure and mutual sharing between friends like sharing secret, while interaction involves the shared activities and behaviours that friends engage in together. Their study revealed that women in same-sex friendships tend to engage more in interaction, support, and openness than men.

Interaction refers not only to the frequency of communication between friends but also to the depth, reciprocity, and emotional quality of these exchanges (Reis & Itzchakov, 2025). Interaction serves as the medium through which friendships are formed and maintained. According to Fehr and Harasymchuk (2017), initial interactions provide the basis for individuals to assess similarity, trustworthiness, and shared values, which are essential for friendship initiation. As friendships develop, ongoing interaction supports emotional disclosure, shared experiences, and the negotiation of relational boundaries (Reis & Itzchakov, 2025). Regular and meaningful interactions reinforce emotional bonds and signal commitment to the relationship (Oswald & Clark, 2003).

Roberts and Dunbar (2015) further demonstrated that emotional closeness during life transitions depends on the mode of interaction, which varies by gender such as shared activities for men and conversation for women. In addition, Oswald and Clark (2003) reported that friendship satisfaction among high school best friends declined during the transition to college, not due to physical distance, but a lack of interaction. This is supported by McEwan and Guerrero (2012), who emphasized that communication and support sustain friendship satisfaction.

Meanwhile, friendship is a dynamic interpersonal relationship characterized by mutual affection, trust, and shared understanding thus openness plays a central role. Openness in friendship refers to the willingness to share personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with another person, as well as the capacity to receive and respond to such disclosures from others. It fosters emotional intimacy, trust, and satisfaction indicates a high-quality friendship (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Openness is instrumental in the early stages of friendship development. According to Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), relationships progress from superficial to more intimate levels through reciprocal self-disclosure. Friends who are open tend to deepen their emotional connection, allowing for greater interpersonal understanding. As noted by Laurenceau et al. (1998), the act of being open fosters intimacy, which in turn strengthens the emotional bond between individuals. In maintaining friendships, openness contributes to transparency, reduces misunderstandings, and builds resilience during conflicts. Friendships characterized by high openness tend to endure longer and be perceived as more meaningful due to the strong foundation of trust and authenticity.

Although the concept of friendship maintenance behaviour is relatively new, a growing body of research consistently supports its positive relationship with friendship satisfaction (McEwan & Guerrero, 2012; Oswald & Clark, 2003). Maintenance behaviours refer to strategies used to sustain friendships, and their fulfilment has been found to predict relational satisfaction (Hall et al., 2011). However, the effectiveness of specific behaviours may vary based on situational factors (Johnson, 2001), cultural context (Shariffadeen, 2018), or gender differences (Roberts & Dunbar, 2015).

Single Vs Married Women's Friendship

Friendship dynamics often change with marital status, particularly in terms of self-disclosure and engagement. Reis and Itzchakov, (2025) found that married individuals, especially men, engage in less non-intimate disclosure with friends than their single counterparts. However, married women showed similar levels of intimate disclosure to both spouses and friends, suggesting comfort in emotional sharing across relationships.

Frequency of contact with friends also varies by marital status. Guadalupe and Vicente (2022) noted that older widowed women maintained more frequent contact with friends, while Chetty et. al. (2022) found that singles and those in accessible social environments (e.g., students) sustained stronger social ties. This suggests that being single may allow greater access and availability to maintain friendships, especially for women.

Contrary to the stereotype that marriage protects against loneliness, research by Sarkisian and Gerstel (2016) showed that single individuals are more socially engaged than married individuals. Singles reported more frequent interactions, and were more likely to give and receive help from friends and family. Similarly, Roth and Peng (2022) found unmarried women spent more time with friends, although their level of interaction varied depending on personal preference for relationships. Kislev (2020) supported this, noting that the importance of friendships among singles was influenced by their desire (or lack thereof) for romantic relationships.

Friendship choices are also shaped by marital status and age. Pahl and Pevalin (2005) observed that single adults were more likely to consider non-relatives as close friends. Younger married adults also leaned towards non-kin friendships, while older adults preferred relatives as close companions, reflecting shifts in relationship priorities across the life course.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that friendship dynamics are influenced by marital status, particularly in terms of emotional openness, frequency of contact, and the type of social connections formed. Single individuals, especially women, tend to maintain more frequent and emotionally supportive friendships, likely due to greater availability and reliance on non-romantic relationships. In contrast, married individuals often show reduced engagement with friends, while married women may still maintain emotional closeness through friendships alongside their spousal relationships.

These patterns suggest that marital status shapes how individuals experience, value, and invest in friendships. As people transition through different life stages, their social priorities and relational needs also evolve. Therefore, understanding friendship dynamics requires considering marital status as a key contextual factor. Recognizing these differences is important not only for advancing relational research but also for designing more inclusive support systems that acknowledge diverse social needs especially for women across varying marital experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

For the purpose of this study, a survey was conducted to collect the data. A method of sampling known as multi-stage random sampling was utilised, and the major focus was placed on working women who work at Public Universities in Malaysia. The required sample size for this study was 385, however the researcher obtained 500 qualified respondents, which was more than required. A larger sample size is better as it can help to reduce sampling errors and better represents the population because it reduces the difference between the sample and

the population (Zainudin, 2010). Thus, at the end of the data collection period, a total of 500 working women which includes 295 married women and 205 single women had completed and submitted the survey, and their responses were subsequently used for the analysis of this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instrument employed in this study was a structured questionnaire administered online via Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised three main section which are Section A, Section B, and Section C, each designed to measure specific constructs aligned with the research objectives.

Section A consisted of demographic items aimed at gathering background information about the respondents, including marital status, age, race, and level of education. These items were self-developed following standard demographic data collection practices commonly employed in social science research. The purpose of this section was to establish the profile of the respondents and to facilitate subgroup analyses based on key socio-demographic variables. Marital status was included to explore potential differences in friendship dynamics and satisfaction, while age provided insights into generational variations. Race and education level were included to ensure diversity in the sample and to examine any cultural or educational influences on friendship behaviours. The demographic data also served to assess the representativeness of the sample and enhance the generalizability of the study findings.

Section B was designed to assess the frequency of interaction and openness behaviour engaged in by a respondent in their particular friendship). The scale was derived from a friendship maintenance behaviour scale developed by Oswald et al. (2004). The items in this section aimed to evaluate the frequency of participants engaging with interaction and openness behaviour with their one best friend. The scale began with the statement, "How often do you and your friend ..." and continued with lists of items such as, "Let each other know you want the relationship to last in the future". Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they engaged in that behaviour in their friendship using a ten-point scale (1=never, 10= frequently).

While, Section C focused on measuring the friendship satisfaction of the respondents. This section adopted his study adapted from McGill's friendship questionnaire-respondent's affection (MFQ-RA) (Mendelson & Aboud, 2012), which consists of 16 items. Generally, it measures two subscales: positive feelings and satisfaction. Positive feelings refer to the feeling one may have toward their friend and satisfaction refers to the feeling of friendship. According to Mendelson and Aboud (2012), even though the scale was divided into two subscales that were conceptually different, both of them were found to be empirically highly correlated, thus it can be counted as one scale. In this section, an instruction was given to the respondents to use the same friend they referred to while answering section B. Using the chosen friend, the respondents rated their feelings such as, "I am happy with my friendship with ___" based on the indicators of a seven-point Likert scale. The use of this instrument allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the friendship satisfaction of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and percentiles were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.0. The normality of the variables was confirmed through the examination of skewness and kurtosis values. These statistical measures provided a comprehensive overview of the data distribution and

guaranteed a strong investigation of the study variables. The reliability results displayed in Table 2 present details regarding the measurement reliability and internal consistency of the study's primary constructs. A measure of internal consistency called Cronbach's alpha shows how closely connected a group of items is to one another. It is frequently employed in research to evaluate the dependability of scales.

Each construct is measured which indicates Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.82 for openness, 0.80 for interaction and the last friendship satisfaction score is 0.95. This score indicates that the items used to measure the constructs are very trustworthy and consistent, as it is far higher than the generally accepted threshold of 0.60.

Table 2: Reliability results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Openness	0.82	5
Interaction	0.80	5
Friendship Satisfaction	0.95	16

FINDINGS

Table 3 summarizes the demographic profile of the study participants and offers comprehensive details regarding the distribution of respondents by marital status, age, race and level of education. A thorough examination of the connections between interaction as well as openness and friendship satisfaction are made possible by the sample's diversity. A total of 500 respondents make up the study's sample. The data show that 295 (59%) out of 500 respondents were married and only 205 (41%) were single women. According to the sample's age breakdown, 252 (50.4%) respondents in the study were in the age range of 31 to 40 years old. Respondents whose age ranged between 41 to 50 years old constituted 138 (27.6%) of the total respondents. Meanwhile, 63 (12.6%) respondents were within the age range of 24 to 30 years old and only 47 respondents were in the age range of between 51 years old and above, accounting for only 9.4% of the entire sample. These findings showed that the most active age for women to have a career and working was between 31 to 40 years old, representing the majority of the entire sample of the study. Findings also show that 457 respondents, or 91.4% were Malay. Meanwhile, 21 respondents (4.2%) were from other races, referring to those that were not stated in the answer options (Malay, Chinese, or Indian). Next, 14 respondents (2.8%) were Chinese, followed closely by only 8 respondents (1.6%) who were Indian. The larger percentage of Malay raises the possibility of a race gap in the population the sample was taken from or in participation rates. Given that race may have an impact on both interaction and openness, this race distribution should be taken into account when evaluating the study's conclusions. It may be necessary for the study to take into account how this race discrepancy affects the outcomes and whether it is representative of women's friendship engagement and satisfaction trends in Malaysia. In terms of the level of education, 223 respondents in this study were PhD holders, accounting for 44.6% of the entire study sample. Next, respondents who have obtained a Master's degree accounted for 28.4%, or 142 out of the total sample. This trend was followed by 99 respondents, or 19.8% with a Bachelor's degree, and 24 respondents, or 4.8%, holding a diploma. Meanwhile, those who finished their secondary school were represented in the study sample as SPM and STPM leavers, consisting of 7 respondents (1.4%) and 5 respondents (1%), respectively. Therefore, the sample appears to be primarily composed of respondents who are highly educated with most of the respondents having tertiary education. This could have an effect on the study's

conclusions since lower levels of education users may have a different link between their way of socializing with friends and on how they feel about friendship. The study may need to take into account how the results are influenced by this factor of education level and whether a more diverse or focused sample will show comparable trends.

Table 3: Demographic profile

Demography	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status	Married	295	59.0
	Single	205	41.0
Age	24–30	63	12.6
	31–40	252	50.4
	41–50	138	27.6
	51 and above	47	9.4
Race	Malay	457	91.4
	Chinese	14	2.8
	Indian	8	1.6
	Other	21	4.2
Level of Education	SPM or Equivalent	7	1.4
	STPM or Equivalent	5	1.0
	Diploma	24	4.8
	Bachelor	99	19.8
	Master	142	28.4
	PhD	223	44.6

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of the study constructs which are openness, interaction and friendship satisfaction. These data offer a glimpse of the central patterns and variability within the sample. Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the key constructs measured in this study. The results indicate that all constructs recorded relatively high mean values, suggesting positive perceptions among respondents. Openness ($M = 8.07$, $SD = 1.18$) had high mean scores, indicating that respondents showed strong engagement of sharing, trustworthiness and willingness to share personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with their women friends. Meanwhile, although interaction ($M = 7.54$, $SD = 1.40$) scored slightly less than openness, it is still in the range of high mean score, which also suggest that respondents were actively engage and still doing things together with their women's friends

In terms of friendship satisfaction, the construct recorded a high mean score of 6.27 ($SD = 0.61$), indicating that the majority of respondents reported a strong sense of satisfaction toward their relationship with the women's best friend. The relatively low standard deviations across all constructs suggest consistency in responses, indicating that most participants shared similar perceptions and experiences related to friendship behaviour of openness and interaction as well as friendship satisfaction.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Item	Mean	SD	Level
Openness	5	8.07	1.18	High
Interaction	5	7.54	1.40	High
Friendship Satisfaction	16	6.27	0.61	High

The data shown in Table 5 provide light on the differences of the study constructs between single and married working women between. These differences and strength are measured by independent sample t-test coefficients, and their statistical significance is indicated by significance levels. Effect size was also calculated to identify the magnitude or size of differences between the means of married and single respondent groups. According to Cohen (1992), a value of 0.2 is interpreted as a small effect size, 0.5 is a medium effect size, and 0.8 is a large effect size. The results show all the differences in the studied variables between married and single groups were proven to be statistically significant. In particular openness and interaction were found to be statistically significant in openness ($t(498) = -2.73, p < .05, d = 0.25$) and interaction ($t(498) = -3.21, p < .001, d = 0.29$). An effect size between $d = 0.20$ and 0.29 would be in the range of small to medium effect based on Cohen's (1992) convention. These results indicated that those in the married group practiced lesser openness ($M = 7.97, SD = 1.14$) and had lower frequency of interaction ($M = 7.38, SD = 1.36$). On the other hand, respondents in the single group practiced more openness ($M = 8.26, SD = 1.22$) and interaction ($M = 7.78, SD = 1.44$). Interaction, with the highest effect size value ($d = 0.29$), was considered to be the dimension with the biggest effect difference. In other words, compared to other dimensions, interaction was the behaviour least practiced by married respondents compared to individuals in the single group. These findings suggest that deeper engagement with friends is more evident in single working women compared to married working women.

Table 5: Independent t-test analysis

Dimensions	Married		Single		t-test (t)	Sig. (p)	Effect size (d)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Openness	7.97	1.14	8.26	1.22	-2.73	0.007**	0.25
Interaction	7.38	1.36	7.78	1.44	-3.21	0.00***	0.29
Friendship Satisfaction	6.17	0.60	6.40	0.60	-4.14	0.00***	0.38

Note: **significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

The association data shown in Table 5 provide light on the connections between research participants' new media literacy and psychological well-being. These relationships' direction and strength are measured by Pearson correlation coefficients, and their statistical significance is indicated by significance levels. The results show regardless of marital status there are significant positive correlations between both openness and interaction constructs and friendship satisfaction. The positive correlation was observed between openness and friendship satisfaction ($r = .509, p < .001$), suggesting that behaviour of sharing and trustworthiness in friendship is an important factor for friendship satisfaction. Interaction was also positively correlated with friendship satisfaction ($r = .373, p < .001$), indicating that those who are feeling good with their friendship are also capable of either receiving or giving their energy and time as an effort to keep interacting with their friends.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the differences between single and married working women in their engagement with interaction and openness behaviours in maintaining friendships, as well as their levels of friendship satisfaction. The findings reveal that there are significant differences between single and married working women in their engagement of openness and interaction behaviour in their relationship with friends. The study also found a significant positive

correlation between these behaviours and friendship satisfaction. These results contribute to the growing body of friendship literature that underscores the importance of openness and interaction in women's friendships and how both behaviours are essential in promoting healthy and satisfying relationships particularly within environments increasingly populated by career-oriented women.

The findings highlight that single women are more actively engaged in openness and interaction with their friends, potentially due to greater availability of time and social energy for maintaining these relationships. This supports previous studies which found that single individuals often invest more in their friendships and rely on them for emotional and social support (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016; Fisher et al., 2021). In contrast, married women may prioritize family and household responsibilities, which can limit their opportunities to engage meaningfully with friends (Santucci et al., 2024). This distinction underscores the need to recognize the value of friendships as a separate source of support for women, irrespective of marital status.

Furthermore, the positive association between openness, interaction, and friendship satisfaction reinforces the foundational role of communication and shared experiences in relationship quality. As supported by Oswald et al. (2004) and Ledbetter (2008), openness through self-disclosure and frequent interaction are critical relational maintenance behaviours that directly contribute to emotional closeness and satisfaction in friendships. By confirming these associations among working women, this study extends the applicability of relational maintenance theory to a population that must balance personal and professional responsibilities. It also highlights the potential of friendships to serve as a buffer against stress and social isolation, particularly in work-intensive lifestyles.

Importantly, this study carries several practical and social implications. One of the key insights is the need to promote and support friendships as a vital aspect of adult women's social lives, especially in the context of growing professional demands. As women's participation in the labour force increases, fostering strong social connections outside of the family becomes increasingly important for psychological well-being (Walen & Lachman, 2000). For employers, this could mean fostering environments that encourage peer bonding through women's networks, informal gatherings, or team-based social initiatives. Peer support within the workplace has been shown to mitigate stress, boost morale, and enhance overall job satisfaction (Blau, 1964), especially for those navigating life transitions such as marriage or motherhood. For working women who often juggle professional, family, and social roles, friendships can serve as essential spaces for emotional validation and self-expression, especially when familial or spousal support is not always accessible or adequate. Additionally, the evidence suggests that strengthening interpersonal communication skills, particularly openness, could enhance women's ability to form and maintain supportive friendships, contributing positively to their mental health and work-life balance.

From a psychological and well-being perspective, the implications are particularly meaningful. Research has consistently shown that emotional support from friends can serve as a buffer against psychological distress and loneliness (Walen & Lachman, 2000; Han et al., 2017). The present study strengthens this understanding by showing that the quality of friendship which is reflected in openness and interaction has tangible effects on satisfaction levels. This is crucial for policy makers and counsellors working in women's health and mental well-being. Social interventions or counselling programs could be designed to reinforce the value of friendships in women's lives and help women especially married women in order to

find practical ways to engage with their friends despite time constraints. Additionally, educational programs that build women's interpersonal communication and relational maintenance skills may enhance their ability to sustain meaningful friendships.

There are also broader implications for gender equity and social development policies. As nations strive to empower women in both personal and professional spheres, it is essential to recognize that social support systems including friendships play a foundational role in women's success and well-being. In many societies, including Malaysia, friendship remains an underemphasized resource in public discourse on women's mental health. Policymakers, NGOs, and women's advocacy groups can draw from these findings to develop community programs or peer-support initiatives aimed at strengthening relational networks for both single and married women. These programs can be particularly beneficial in urban settings, where fast-paced lifestyles and dispersed families increase dependence on friendships as a source of belonging and support.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights to the understanding of friendship dynamics among working women in Malaysia. It highlights the differential experiences of single and married women in friendship maintenance, affirms the vital role of interaction and openness, and underscores the broader implications for women's well-being and social development. Given the limited research in this area within the Malaysian context, especially comparing women based on marital status, this study provides a foundation for future work exploring how friendship maintenance can support emotional resilience, workplace satisfaction, and life satisfaction among diverse groups of women.

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