

How has the empowerment of women in Singapore shaped their economic worth and mental health?

Subject: World studies

Category: Health and development

Disciplines: Psychology and Economics

Word Count: 3,520

Table of Contents

i.	Acknowledgements.....	3
ii.	Abstract.....	4
iii.	Introduction	6
iv.	Methodology	10
v.	Analysis and Evaluation	11
	a. Impacts from the empowerment of women	11
	1. Impacts from Women's Charter.....	11
	2. Impacts from education and employment	13
	3. Impacts from provision of childcare services.....	17
	b. Psychological basis of mental health	18
	c. Economic theories	21
	d. Interactions between economic worth and mental health	22
vi.	Conclusion	23
vii.	Limitations of study	24
viii.	Bibliography	25
ix.	Appendices	28

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor for very generously giving her time and guidance to me. I am sincerely grateful for her commitment and dedication towards this research.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr Gifford Chan, clinical psychologist in Singapore, who very kindly shared his insight and expertise on the psychology of Singaporean women. I would also like to show appreciation to Ms Armi Aarni, programme executive of Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, for contributing expert opinion on women's rights in Singapore. Both of them contributed inputs and expertise that were of great value to this research.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their constant support and encouragement throughout this journey.

Abstract

This essay examines the research question: *How has the empowerment of women in Singapore shaped their economic worth and mental health?* The empowerment of women is a topic of global significance because it concerns the human rights and equality of opportunities for women, who constitute half the population on earth, and the pursuit of global efficiency in resource allocation and sustainable development. Hence it is worthy of further investigation in a unique context like Singapore, an Asian country known for her cosmopolitan culture and successful economy, yet her conventionally Asian ideology is challenged by western influences.

Investigation of the topic is done using the IB disciplines, psychology and economics. Psychology explores the mental processes and condition of an individual's mind and aids understanding of women's mental health and psychological development. Economics allows for examining of the economic worth of women, as well as the externalities of certain policies.

The essay is focused on analysing significant factors and their impacts on Singaporean women from the 1960s till today, which include the Women's Charter, accessibility to education, employment opportunities and provision of childcare services. These events in the empowerment of Singaporean women will be analysed using the two disciplines.

This essay concludes that as the level of empowerment of women increases, women are more economically active and independent, which is important in facilitating positive mental health. This essay finds that the Women's Charter, education and employment opportunities are all largely facilitative of positive mental health and psychological development. This essay also finds that education and employment opportunities are essential in increasing the economic worth of women

and has impacts on their mental health too. The paper also concludes that the relationship between women's economic worth and mental health is mostly one-directional – specifically, women's economic worth impacts their mental health but not vice-versa.

(300 words)

Introduction

As I was talking to my neighbour about the struggles of being a woman in this era, I could not help but feel immensely blessed that I live in Singapore. It made me realise that I have taken my rights as a woman for granted. Women throughout history were almost always subject to unfair treatment and discrimination. In a century, the women's empowerment movement has come a long way and is immensely significant because it not only concerns fighting for the basic human rights and equality of opportunities for women, who constitute half the population on earth, but also concerns the efficient allocation of resources around the world. Likewise in Singapore, the societal roles and views of women have changed significantly due to the empowerment of women and this makes me want to find out more about the impacts of empowerment on women's lives.

The ways which the empowerment of women impacts their lives is perhaps more interesting when we explore more than one aspect of it. Today, success is defined by success in an individual's career and their economic worth, thus the economic worth of women is an important area to investigate. Mental health is an important aspect of our everyday lives and is increasingly popular in the field of research. Therefore, it would be meaningful to investigate the impacts of the empowerment of women on these two aspects of women's lives.

As such, this essay aims to address: **How has the empowerment of women in Singapore shaped their economic worth and mental health?**

Context of Investigation

In Singapore, the empowerment of women over the recent generations have not only resulted in their political and social empowerment but also benefited their

economic worth. This is due to the increased opportunities presented to them, such as providing them with education and allowing them to obtain a job or hold their own property. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, in 2015, Singaporean women consists of 44.2% of the workforce and have a 95% literacy rate among those above 15 years¹. Singapore was also considered the top Asian country for gender equality by United Nations in 2014².

Women of the past were not as fortunate. As of 1957, women over age 15 only constituted 20% of the labour force³, and the literacy rate among women 10 years or above was only 34%⁴. The drastic improvements in the participation in the economy and literacy rates since 1957 clearly show the substantial positive effects of women empowerment. The empowerment of women also legally protects them from common problems that women face globally, such as domestic violence, sexual violence and discrimination. These problems may bring about unequal opportunities, psychological distress and mental health issues⁵. Therefore overall, the empowerment of women has a close relationship with their mental health and economic worth.

Significance of Investigation

The empowerment of women is crucial because it extensively shapes their daily lives and is almost inseparable to their identity as individuals and as a country. Women having economic independence and economic worth is fundamental in empowering

¹ Department of Statistics, Singapore. "Singstat Table Builder - Key Literacy Indicators, Annual". 16 Aug. 2016. <Tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg>.

²Hui Kok, Singapore is top Asian nation for gender equality: UN report (The Straits Times, 2015)

³ Lenore Manderson et al., Women's Work And Women's Roles: Economies And Everyday Life In Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore (The Australian National University, 1978)

⁴ Lenore Manderson et al., Women's Work And Women's Roles: Economies And Everyday Life In Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore (The Australian National University, 1978)

⁵ Florence Denmark and Michele Antoinette Paludi, Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories (Praeger: 2008)

women to make their own choices and contributing to society. The economic worth of women is especially important in Singapore's context where there is limited manpower due to an ageing population and heavy reliance on immigrants.

Though mental health has tremendous impact on society, it is often overlooked especially in Singapore where research in this field is still in infancy. It would be interesting to investigate the relationship between the empowerment of women and their mental health because it may be valuable to policy makers as it offers insight to the externalities of their policies.

The rising significance of the empowerment of women has led to an increase in the amount of literature on women psychology over recent decades. However, the existing literature are mostly based in the United States. Though they provide a meaningful avenue to gain insight on the issue, there are tremendous cultural and social differences between Singapore and America's domestic and working conventions, making it worthwhile to investigate the topic in Singapore. Furthermore the increase in women participating in the Singapore workforce brings forth huge discussion about women's economic worth, making it interesting to examine the impacts on their mental health.

Singapore has been chosen for the following reasons. Firstly, it is a progressive cosmopolitan Asian economy that has been influenced by the Western world. It challenges her stand on the traditional Asian roots and views. Thus it sets Singapore apart from other countries. Secondly, Singapore is a developed Asian economy where women contribute to the nation's economic growth. Despite the above, women empowerment and its relation to mental health and economic worth is still a relatively new area of research, making it worthwhile to investigate.

Scope of Investigation

This paper examines the research question using the IB disciplines, psychology and economics.

From the Psychology perspective, key theories including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development will be used to explore the mental health and psychological development of Singaporean women as a result of their empowerment.

From the Economics perspective, concepts of social efficiency, positive and negative externalities and economic indicators will be used to examine the correlation between the economic empowerment of women and their economic worth and to ascertain the true value of empowerment.

The main factors that will be examined in this paper will be the Women's Charter, accessibility to education and their right to employment as they are arguably the most impactful on the mental health and economic worth of Singaporean women.

This paper predicts that the empowerment of women would increase their economic worth due to the increased education and employment opportunities offered to women. Additionally, it greatly facilitates positive mental health due to the improved mental health care and increased awareness in mental illnesses. This paper also predicts that there is a correlation between the economic worth and mental health of Singaporean women.

Methodology

A. Primary data

To better understand women's mental health in Singapore, Mr Gifford Chan, a clinical psychologist based in Singapore, was interviewed to identify factors that cause Singaporean women to develop mental illnesses. Ms Armi Aarni, Programme Executive for the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, was also interviewed to further understand the impacts of the development of empowerment of women in Singapore on the daily lives of Singaporean women.

B. Secondary data

In order to understand the impacts of the empowerment of women on their economic worth and mental health, the following will be done:

- making time comparisons of statistical data concerning the economic worth of Singaporean women
- qualitative analysis of key events in Singapore history that has greatly impacted Singaporean women, such as the Women's Charter
- making time comparisons of the epidemiology of mental illnesses and examining the predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating and preventive factors
- meta-analysis of extant literature on the epidemiology of mental illnesses

More specifically, to measure the economic worth of Singaporean women, these indicators will be used: literacy rates, education levels, average monthly income and labour participation.

Analysis and Evaluation

a. Impacts from the empowerment of women

Impacts from the Women's Charter

Singaporean women today reap the benefits of what Singaporean women of the past have fought for. Perhaps the most significant event of the empowerment of Singaporean women was the implementation of the Women's Charter in 1961. Ms Armi highlights that it was a pivotal point for Singaporean women⁶ because many women's needs, such as protection from family violence and offences against women⁷ were henceforth protected by this legislation.

The most prominent feature of the Women's Charter is the outlawing of Polygamy for non-Muslims in Singapore⁸, which constitute 85.7% of the total population in 2015⁹. However, under the Muslim Law Act¹⁰, polygamy is still permitted for Muslims in Singapore. Yet the prevalence of polygamy in Singapore is very low, as seen in Table 1.

⁶ Refer to Appendix: Interview with Ms Armi Aarni

⁷ Singapore Council of Women's Organisations. "Women's Charter – SCWO". Scwo.org.sg. 4 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.scwo.org.sg/resources/womens-charter/>>.

⁸ The Women's Charter, 1961

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, US. "The World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency". Cia.Gov, 2016, 6 Feb. 2017. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>>.

¹⁰ Muslim Law Act>.

Year	Number of marriages under the Muslim Law Act	Number of polygamous marriages under Muslim Law Act	% of polygamous marriages under Muslim Law Act that year	Total marriages that year	% of polygamous marriages that year
1980	4,032	16	0.39%	22,444	0.07%
1985	4,563	41	0.89%	23,058	0.18%
1990	4,762	21	0.44%	23,953	0.09%
1995	4,412	19	0.43%	24,965	0.08%
2000	4,011	25	0.62%	22,561	0.11%
2005	3,950	24	0.61%	22,992	0.10%
2010	4,133	12	0.29%	24,363	0.05%
2015	5,778	17	0.29%	28,322	0.06%

Table 1 – Prevalence of polygamous marriages in Singapore¹¹

The low prevalence of polygamy in Singapore is primarily due to the Women's Charter. However, it could also be that in most progressive societies like Singapore, it is a social norm to have monogamous marriages, explaining the low prevalence of polygamy even among Singaporean Muslims. Outlawing polygamy amongst non-Muslims in Singapore was an important step in facilitating Singaporean women's positive mental health as it protects almost all of them from the effects of polygamy.

With limited literature on the effects of polygamy on women's mental health in Singapore, a proxy study based in Syria has been used. The proxy is suitable because Muslims constitute the majority in Syria and polygamy is only allowed for Muslims in Singapore. In Al-Krenawi's study, women in polygamous marriages showed higher

¹¹ Department of Statistics, Singapore. "Singstat Table Builder - Marriages under the Administration of Muslim Law Act by Age Group and Previous Marital Status of Grooms, Annual & Key Indicators On Marriages, Annual". Tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg. 16 Aug. 2016.
<<http://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/mainMenu.action>>.

mental health symptomology than women in monogamous marriages.¹² Symptoms include elevated somatization, depression, hostility and psychoticism¹³. Additionally, the general severity index of women in polygamous marriages was generally higher¹⁴. The Women's Charter has thereby protected the majority of Singaporean women from experiencing polygamy as a perpetuating risk factor for mental illnesses, thereby facilitating positive mental health among Singaporean women.

Impacts from accessibility to education and employment

Education arguably has the largest impact on Singaporean women's lives, impacting both their mental health and economic worth. Girls in Singapore were never banned from receiving education. However, a largely patriarchal post-independence Singapore¹⁵ meant that families would grant boys opportunities to education first. These family values learned by girls could have been a predisposing factor for women developing learned helplessness, hindering them from reaching their fullest potential.

The importance of educating girls became more evident when the government recognised the labour shortages in Singapore and encouraged women to join the workforce¹⁶. In 2003, the Singapore government implemented compulsory primary education¹⁷, ensuring children complete their primary education. These policies have equipped majority of Singaporean women with primary education, a protective factor against mental illnesses¹⁸.

¹² Alean Al-Krenawi, "Mental Health And Polygamy: The Syrian Case" World Journal Of Psychiatry, vol 3, no. 1, 2013.

¹³ Alean Al-Krenawi, "Mental Health And Polygamy: The Syrian Case" World Journal Of Psychiatry, vol 3, no. 1, 2013.

¹⁴ Alean Al-Krenawi, "Mental Health And Polygamy: The Syrian Case" World Journal Of Psychiatry, vol 3, no. 1, 2013.

¹⁵ Maja Mikula "Women, Activism And Social Change". 1st ed., Routledge, 2008.

¹⁶ Soon-Beng, Chew and Rosalind Chew. "Immigration And Foreign Labour In Singapore". Asean Economic Bulletin, vol 12, no. 2, 1995, pp. 191-200. Institute Of Southeast Asian Studies, doi:10.1355/ae12-2f.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education, "Compulsory Education". Moe.Gov.Sg, 2016, 6 Dec. 2016 <<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/compulsory-education>>.

¹⁸ Refer to Appendix: Interview with Mr Gifford Chan

However, excessive stress and high expectations imposed on students can be both a precipitating and perpetuating factor for women developing mental illnesses, and may explain increased the prevalence of mental illness amongst women. According to The Straits Times in 2015, self-mutilation is increasing amongst Singaporean students – from 36 reported cases in 2005 to 50 in 2015, two thirds of whom are girls¹⁹. The actual prevalence of self-harm among Singaporean youths may be much higher as such cases may be underreported. In addition, according to a 2012 mental health survey in Singapore, the lifetime prevalence rates of major depressive disorder were highest at 7.8% for university graduates and lowest for those with less than primary education at 3.3%²⁰. It could be that there is an increasingly overwhelming level of stress as education level progresses making stress from education a precipitating and perpetuating factor for developing mental illnesses.

Mr Chan explained however, the increase in prevalence of mental illnesses in Singapore may not reflect a real increase. It could be that there are more referrals due to improvements in mental healthcare and increased awareness of mental illnesses in Singapore, leading to higher numbers of reported cases²¹.

The provision of education to girls has many intangible external benefits, such effectiveness in homemaking²². An educated mother is more capable of managing the house finances, making decisions and nurturing her children. The effectiveness in multiple environments could also lead to higher self-esteem, a preventive factor against affective disorders²³.

¹⁹ Amelia Teng, "Rising Trend Of Self-Harm Among The Young" The Straits Times, 2015, 9 Dec. 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/rising-trend-of-self-harm-among-the-young>>.

²⁰ Chong, Siow Ann et al. A Population-based Survey of Mental Disorders in Singapore, 2012

²¹ Refer to Appendix: Interview with Mr Gifford Chan

²² Florence Denmark and Michele Antoinette Paludi, Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories (Praeger: 2008)

²³ Refer to Appendix: Interview with Mr Gifford Chan

However, even though Singaporean women are increasingly economically active, household duties are not being equally distributed. Although the Women's Charter provides guidelines for the shared responsibilities between spouses, stating that "husband and wife have equal rights and responsibilities in the running of the home and care of children"²⁴, it is unlikely that these policies have much control over the management of homes. As such, the roles and expectations of Singaporean women have thus doubled to being a co-breadwinner of the family as well as being in charge of home duties. It is not facilitative of women's psychological wellbeing and may be a perpetuating risk factor for women having depression and anxiety due to the additional responsibilities and stress²⁵. This may explain the increase in prevalence of mental illnesses among women in Singapore.

In contrast, Denmark and Paludi posited that women, like their male counterparts, women need multiple sources of satisfaction in their lives and working outside of homes has positive effects on the psychological adjustment of women, regardless of marital status²⁶. In fact, Crosby found that though having multiple roles are stressful, they are in fact, preventives against depression and aid positive mental health.²⁷

The economic worth of Singaporean women has significantly improved with access to education. These impacts can be seen from the improvements in literacy rates and economic participation. Singaporean women's literacy rates improved from 54.3% in 1970, to 95.2% in 2015²⁸. The labour force participation rate amongst women

²⁴ The Women's Charter, 1961

²⁵ Florence Denmark and Michele Antoinette Paludi, *Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories* (Praeger: 2008)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Faye J. Crosby, *Juggling: The Unexpected Advantages of Balancing Career and Home for Women and Their Families* (New York: Free Press, 1991)

²⁸ Department of Statistics, Singapore. "Singstat Table Builder - Key Literacy Indicators, Annual". Tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg. 16 Aug. 2016.
<<http://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/mainMenu.action>>.

was at 20.4% 1957²⁹. In 2015 the resident participation rate of women stands at 60.4% of the population³⁰. The increase in economic activity is both a cause and consequence of more girls receiving more education. Girls receiving education increases the likelihood of them entering the workforce and as more women enter the workforce and societal roles of women change, girls are more likely to receive education.

Access to education has also allowed women to obtain higher waged jobs. The Women's Charter states that married women are allowed to engage in any trade, profession or in social activities³¹ as if they were feme soles. Singaporean women during the colonial period mostly took up clerical, teaching and nursing jobs³² due to the low levels of education they received during the time. In 10 years, the mean wage of women in the workforce increased from SGD\$421 per month in 1980 to SGD\$1,161 per month in 1990 and in 2015, women earn an average monthly income of SGD\$4,172. Ms Armi expressed that presently many of the clerical work and childcare jobs are still taken up by women³³. Yet more Singaporean women hold positions higher up in the corporate ladder. However, there is still an underrepresentation of women's work and value as they nurture and build up the next generation³⁴.

Impacts from provision of childcare services

The provision of subsidy for childcare services has also increased the economic worth of working Singaporean mothers and is facilitative of positive mental health. The Singaporean government gives subsidized childcare services and implemented a

²⁹ Census of Population, 1957

³⁰ Census of Population, 2015

³¹ Women's Charter, 1961

³² Lenore Manderson et al., *Women's Work And Women's Roles: Economies And Everyday Life In Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore* (The Australian National University, 1978)

³³ Refer to Appendix: Interview with Ms Armi Aarni

³⁴ Shaheen Anam. "Women's Work: Unrecognised And Undervalued". The Daily Star, 2016. 2 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/25th-anniversary-special-part-4/womens-work-unrecognised-and-undervalued-212014>>.

foreign maid scheme to help relieve working mothers of their household duties³⁵. The subsidies have helped women with children focus on their career better, enabling women to progress up the corporate ladder. Also, it is found that working single mothers who had sole responsibility for their children had very high depression levels³⁶. Thus, subsidising childcare services would be of the most beneficial to single mothers' psychological well-being.

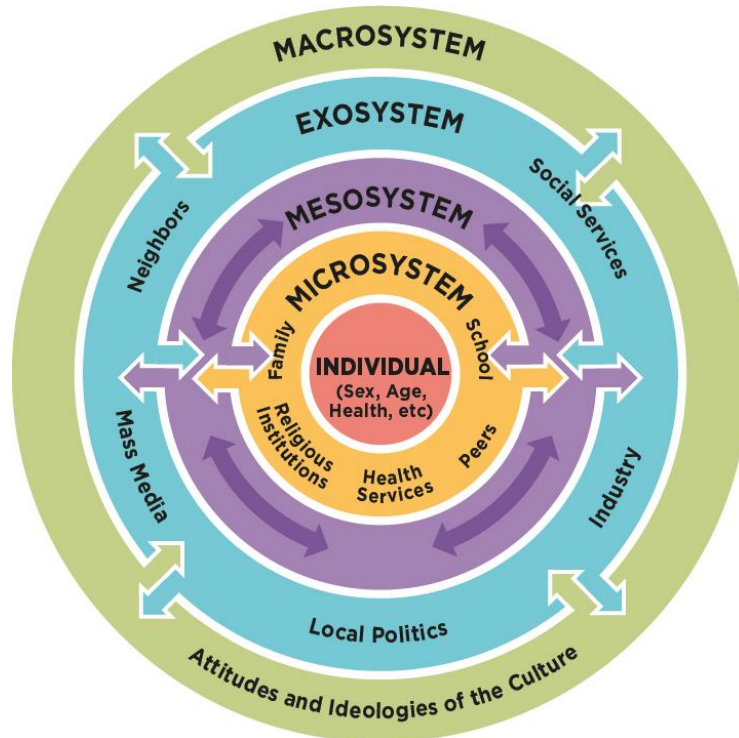
The ability to afford childcare services would be beneficial to only those with higher socio-economic status. Thus it may have put Singaporean women of lower economic status at higher risk of developing mental disorders. Due to the inability to afford childcare services, in the 1970s and 80s, many women gave up their jobs after giving birth. This is partly due to the traditional view that household responsibilities fall on the women's shoulders, resulting in women staying as housewives. Today, women giving up their jobs to take care of their children is still seen at a much smaller scale. This is due to the rising cost of living in Singapore, making it very tough to sustain a family with a sole breadwinner. Subsidizing childcare services has successfully increased the economic worth of Singaporean women by relieving them of some of their childcare responsibilities by making childcare more affordable to those of lower socioeconomic status, allowing them to participate in the economy.

³⁵ Ministry of Social and Family Development. "Child Care / Infant Care Subsidy". Msf.Gov.Sg, 2017 30 Mar, 2017, <<https://www.msf.gov.sg/assistance/Pages/Child-Care-Infant-Care-Subsidy.aspx>>.

³⁶ Florence Denmark and Michele Antoinette Paludi, *Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories* (Praeger: 2008)

b. Psychological basis of mental health

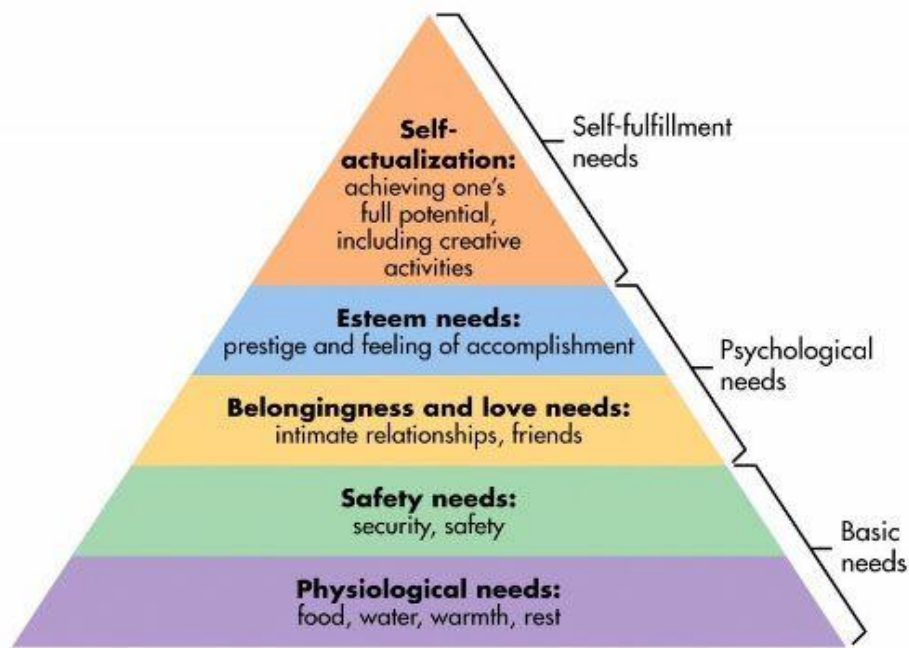
Figure 2: Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Development³⁷



The Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development illustrates how different aspects of an individual's life influences his/her development. Ms Armi has highlighted that the Women's Charter is the most pivotal point in the empowerment of Singaporean women³⁸. This is because the Women's Charter as legislation, belongs to the Exosystem and therefore has overarching influence over the microsystem, including the marriage structure in the household and schooling opportunities. This is evident in the extremely low prevalence of polygamy and increase in literacy rates. Thus the quality of women's lives is greatly impacted by the enactment of the Women's Charter and the compulsory education act because of its overarching influence over the family and school life of women.

³⁷ Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979)

³⁸ Refer to appendix: Interview with Ms Armi Aarni

Figure 3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs³⁹

Maslow's hierarchy of needs illustrates the order in which needs should be fulfilled to achieve self-actualisation, starting from the lowest need – physiological. Self-actualisation refers to an individual reaching his/her fullest potential or creativity and is important in facilitating positive mental health. Since the Women's Charter protects women from offences made against them, women's safety needs are met. More education and job opportunities lead to the fulfilment of esteem needs. The empowerment of women fulfils lower hierarchal needs therefore allowing more women to have the ability to achieve self-actualisation.

³⁹Saul McLeod, "Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs". Simply Psychology, 2007, 26 Feb. 2017 <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>.

Figure 4: Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development⁴⁰

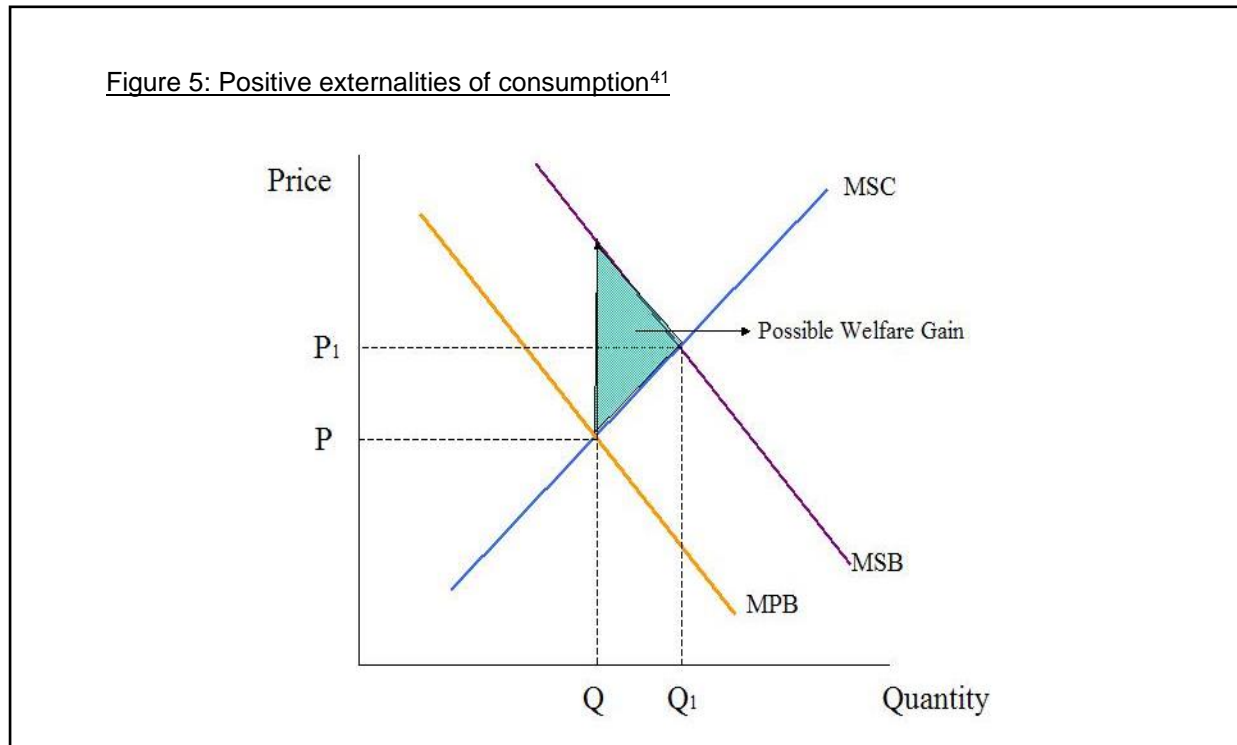
Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (0 to 1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to 3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development illustrates the psychosocial crisis at each stage of development based on different stages in life. Increased work and education opportunities for women has increased success in the psychosocial development of adolescent girls because it arguably reduces role confusion (the exploration of self) and increases ego identity (sense of identity). Though the Women's Charter reduced the prevalence of polygamous marriages in Singapore, which correlates with stronger feelings of intimacy rather than isolation, success in reducing isolation among young adult women is vague as these experiences are largely personal. The increase in economic participation facilitated the positive development of women in adulthood as Singaporean women arguably experience more generativity (caring for others) than stagnation (disconnection with society). Therefore overall,

⁴⁰Saul McLeod. "Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs". Simply Psychology, 2007. 26 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>.

based on this theory, the empowerment of women improves the social environment for psychological development and eases the psychosocial crisis at each stage.

c. Economic Theories



The diagram of social efficiency will be used to illustrate the “economy” for women education. Here, the marginal social cost (MSC) is the total cost society pays for the production of another unit⁴² of education for girls. Marginal personal benefit (MPB) refers to the benefit received by the women after receiving more education. Marginal social benefit (MSB) refers to the total benefit to society for consuming

⁴¹ "Positive Externalities - OCR Economics Revision". Sites.google.com. 2 Apr. 2017. <<https://sites.google.com/site/ocraseconomicsrevision/home/Economics-thingy/unit-1/externalities/positive-externalities>>.

⁴² Laura Dragonette. "Marginal Social Cost - MSC". *Investopedia*, 2017, 30 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marginalsocialcost.asp>>.

another unit of the good⁴³. Positive externalities of granting girls education include, having more educated women leading an increase in the Singaporean workforce, causing a higher national gross domestic product (GDP), thereby improving the standard of living. Educated mothers would mean more effectiveness in homemaking and parenting. According to the concept of social efficiency, anything that generates positive externalities is always under-consumed because there is possible welfare gain that is not exploited fully. Therefore in theory, education for girls is under-consumed, making education a greater emphasis in the empowerment of women because of the external benefits enjoyed by society.

d. Interaction between women's economic worth and their mental health.

It is interesting to note that accessibility to education has impacted both economic worth and mental health of women positively thus indicating that there may be interactions between the two. It is found that women's economic status correlates to their mental health⁴⁴. It could be that among married women, husbands are more likely to share home duties when his wife earns a higher income⁴⁵. Having higher income amongst women thus reduces the burden of bearing all home responsibilities by married women. It is clear that the economic worth of women have a positive correlation with their standard of living and quality of life. Thus, having a higher economic worth likely facilitates positive mental health due to less perpetuating factors for developing mental illnesses. However, it cannot be concluded that having better mental health results in having higher economic worth. Therefore, the interaction is

⁴³Tejvan Pettinger. "Social Benefit". *Economicshelp.Org*, 2013, 30 Mar. 2017.
<<http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/glossary/social-benefit/>>.

⁴⁴ Florence Denmark and Michele Antoinette Paludi, *Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories* (Praeger, 2008)

⁴⁵ Catherine E. Ross et al., "Dividing Work, Sharing Work, And In-Between: Marriage Patterns And Depression". *American Sociological Review*, p. 809. (SAGE Publications, 1983)

between the two is unidirectional – economic worth impacts the mental health of women but not the other way round.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women in Singapore has drastically improved the economic worth of Singaporean women, seen in the large increase in average wage rate. This was achieved through education and employment opportunities.

The empowerment of Singaporean women has removed many predisposing and precipitating risk factors for developing mental disorders. However it is hard to conclude that the prevalence of mental disorders amongst Singaporean women has decreased due to differences in life circumstances across generations. It can be concluded, however, that Singaporean women are much more educated about mental disorders than before⁴⁶. Therefore they are better equipped to deal with mental illnesses. This essay also concludes that because Singaporean women are more educated, they are at lower risk of developing mental illnesses because education is a significant preventive factor.

It is interesting to find that economic worth largely impacts mental health yet the reverse cannot be concluded. Thus it is deduced that mental health is affected by standard of living but having good mental health may not externalize to help attain success in the workplace.

These conclusions implicate that government policies are largely influential over the economic worth and the mental health of women. Providing legal infrastructure that ensure women get equal rights and employment opportunities to

⁴⁶Refer to Appendix: Interview with Mr Gifford Chan

increase their economic worth is essential for positive mental health and psychological development among women across the world.

Limitations of study

It should be noted that there are many different lifestyles of Singaporean women today that could not be explored sufficiently within this paper. This paper notes that psychology research in Singapore is still in infancy. The lack of longitudinal studies examining both mental health and economic worth to ascertain the true correlation between both factors is the main reason for the reliance on cross-sectional studies and literature within Singapore and other contexts as proxies to understand how the empowerment of women can influence the two factors.

Works Cited

1. Al-Krenawi, Alean. "Mental Health And Polygamy: The Syrian Case". *World Journal Of Psychiatry*, vol 3, no. 1, 2013, p. 1. Baishideng Publishing Group Inc, doi:10.5498/wjp.v3.i1.1.
2. Anam, Shaheen. "Women's Work: Unrecognised And Undervalued". *The Daily Star*. N.p., 2016. Web. 2 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/25th-anniversary-special-part-4/womens-work-unrecognised-and-undervalued-212014>>.
3. Bronfenbrenner, U. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Design and Nature*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 1979. Print
4. Brooks, Ann. *Gendered Work In Asian Cities: The New Economy And Changing Labour Markets*. 1st ed. Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006. Print.
5. Central Intelligence Agency. "The World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency". *Cia.gov*. N.p., 2017. Web. 6 Feb. 2017. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>>.
6. Chong, Siow Ann et al. A Population-based Survey of Mental Disorders in Singapore (2012): n. pag. Print.
7. Crosby, Faye J. *Juggling: The Unexpected Advantages of Balancing Career and Home for Women and Their Families*. New York: Free Press, 1991. Print.
8. Denmark, Florence and Michele Antoinette Paludi. *Psychology of Women*. 3rd ed, Westport, Conn, Praeger, 2008. Print.
9. Department of Statistics, Singapore. "Singstat Table Builder - Key Literacy Indicators, Annual". *Tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg*. Web. 16 Aug. 2016. <<http://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/mainMenu.action>>.

10. Department of Statistics, Singapore. "Singstat Table Builder - Marriages under the Administration of Muslim Law Act by Age Group and Previous Marital Status of Grooms, Annual & Key Indicators On Marriages, Annual".
Tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg. Web. 16 Aug. 2016.
<<http://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/mainMenu.action>>.
11. Dragonette, Laura. "Marginal Social Cost - MSC". *Investopedia*. N.p., 2017. Web. 30 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marginalsocialcost.asp>>.
12. KOK, XING HUI. "Singapore Is Top Asian Nation For Gender Equality: UN Report". *The Straits Times*. N.p., 2015. Web. 8 Sept. 2016.
<<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-is-top-asian-nation-for-gender-equality-un-report>>.
13. Manderson, Lenore. *Women's Work And Women's Roles: Economies And Everyday Life In Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore*. The Australian National University, 1978. Print.
14. McLeod, Saul. "Erikson's Psychosocial Stages Of Development". *Simply Psychology*. N.p., 2008. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.
<<http://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>>.
15. McLeod, Saul. "Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs". *Simply Psychology*. N.p., 2007. Web. 26 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>.
16. Mikula, Maja. *Women, Activism And Social Change*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2008. Print
17. Ministry of Education. "Compulsory Education". Moe.gov.sg. N.p., 2016. Web. 6 Dec. 2016. <<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/compulsory-education>>.
18. Ministry of Social and Family Development. "Child Care / Infant Care Subsidy". Msf.gov.sg. N.p., 2017. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.

<<https://www.msf.gov.sg/assistance/Pages/Child-Care-Infant-Care-Subsidy.aspx>>.

19. Pettinger, Tejvan. "Social Benefit". *Economicshelp.org*. N.p., 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/glossary/social-benefit/>>.
20. "Positive Externalities - OCR Economics Revision". *Sites.google.com*. Web. 2 Apr. 2017. <<https://sites.google.com/site/ocraseconomicsrevision/home/Economics-thingy/unit-1/externalities/positive-externalities>>.
21. Ross, Catherine E. et al. "Dividing Work, Sharing Work, And In-Between: Marriage Patterns And Depression". *American Sociological Review*, vol 48, no. 6, 1983, p.809. SAGE Publications, doi:10.2307/2095327.
22. Singapore Council of Women's Organisations. "Women's Charter – SCWO". *Scwo.org.sg*. N.p., 2017. Web. 4 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.scwo.org.sg/resources/womens-charter/>>.
23. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 1957*. 1957, Print.
24. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 1970*. 1970, Print.
25. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 1980*. 1980, Print.
26. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 1990*. 1990, Print.
27. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 2000*. 2000, Print.
28. Singapore: Department of Statistics. *Census of population 2010*. 2010, Print.
29. Singapore Government. "Singapore Statutes Online - 3 - Administration Of Muslim Law Act". *Statutes.agc.gov.sg*. N.p., 2017. Web. 5 Mar. 2017. <<http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A3e90fc65-b364-434b-b2dc-ced1d9608640%20%20Status%3Ainforce%20Depth%3A0;rec=0>>.

30. Singapore Government. "Singapore Statutes Online - 353 - Women'S Charter".
Statutes.agc.gov.sg. N.p., 2017. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.
<<http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A%22f0897dd7-1f3a-45a9-b1e7-ba30fef2dbba%22%20Status%3Ainforce%20Depth%3A0;rec=0>>.
31. Chew, Soon Beng and Chew, Rosalind. "Immigration And Foreign Labour In Singapore". *Asean Economic Bulletin*, vol 12, no. 2, 1995, pp. 191-200. Institute Of Southeast Asian Studies, doi:10.1355/ae12-2f.
32. TENG, AMELIA. "Rising Trend Of Self-Harm Among The Young". *The Straits Times*. N.p., 2015. Web. 9 Dec. 2016.
<<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/rising-trend-of-self-harm-among-the-young>>.
33. Wong, Aline K. "Planned Development, Social Stratification, And The Sexual Division Of Labor In Singapore". *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*, vol 7, no. 2, 1981, pp. 434-452. University Of Chicago Press, doi:10.1086/493890.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview with Mr Gifford Chan, Clinical Psychologist based in Singapore

1. *In your experience what are the most common psychological issues and illnesses that affect adult Singaporean women today?*

For young adults, relationships and career issues; for adults, family and work life balance.

2. *Are there any differences in psychological issues/illnesses between different age groups of Singaporean women today?*

In terms of diagnosis between the age groups, there is not any significant difference. Causing factors could be different at different age groups – overall people are most affected by depression and anxiety

Prevalence of mental disorders is not the same before and now, it has increased. However the factors that contribute to this increasing number is unclear, whether it is a true increase in mental health disorders due to increased stress or that there are simply more reported and referred cases due to increasingly awareness and available resources.

3. *Generally, are women in Singapore willing to seek help when they experience psychological distress?*

Women are more open to seek help compared to men (internationally), because they are more internalising. Women are generally more social and more likely to have a support group. Women are more likely to seek help in terms of depression and anxiety.

- Stigma is still a big thing – stigma about people have mental illness/ disorders being crazy

- Less educated people are less open to newer concepts (e.g. mental health is “dangerous” because the media sensationalise disorders such as schizophrenia)

4. What are some common life circumstances that may be linked to causing psychological issues among Singaporean women? (predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating factors or events)

(He states that his answers are not *a/ways* pertaining to women)

Split into biological/social/ psychological factors

Predisposing factors:

- Family history of mental illness – bio
- Untreated mental illness (e.g. childhood mental disorder not treated may cause low self-esteem, consequences seen during puberty) – bio
- Health conditions – bio
- Low self-esteem – psych
- Poor problem solving behaviour/ coping skills (linked to IQ) – psych
- Low IQ – psych
- Family background/ socioeconomic status (richer – less likely to develop mental disorder) – social
- Parenting styles (e.g. absent parenting → internalising disorders/ inconsistent parenting → externalising disorders) – social

Precipitative factors:

- Are dependent on life stage
- Younger adults: career, relationships
- Older adults: children, retirement plans

Perpetuating factors:

- Social support (one of the biggest factors) – social
- Coping skills – psych
- Resilience – psych
- *Interplay can be quite complex

5. How important is employability/ career opportunities and advancements in the modern Singaporean women's mental health?

Quite important – because it affects girls' education

- Parents encourage their girls to go to school because they have opportunities to work and be promoted (based on government policy)
- It allows women economic independence from their husbands → may lead to less cases of spousal abuse
- It affects aspirations – girls aim higher in life

6. How far do you think that the changes in women's rights in Singapore over the past decades since our independence have changed the rates and epidemiology of psychological issues/illnesses amongst Singaporean women?

Increase in referrals more than more stress, this is most likely due to the increasingly available resources and awareness regarding mental health and mental illnesses. It is hard to say.

7. What factors determine the prognosis for adult women suffering from clinical psychological disorders in Singapore?

Having intelligence, social support, good coping skills, good parenting styles and self-esteem are all important preventive factors.

Other things he noted:

Women tend to have more internalising disorders

Singapore has 8-10% lifetime prevalence of mental disorder

Factors that affect this statistic:

- Family history of mental disorders
- How old the mom gives birth
- Stress levels
- Availability of mental help (resources has increased – forums online/ platforms/ national mental health blueprint)

National mental health study – child, adult, Jurassic

- Child – ADHD, OCD, autism
- Adult – depression anxiety , psychosis
- Older people – psychosis, dementia

Depression and anxiety are the most common illnesses in Singapore

Appendix 2: Interview with Ms Armi Aarni, Programme Executive of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations

1. *In your opinion, what are the biggest improvements in women's rights in Singapore since our independence?*

The Women's Charter in 1961, which made women "legally visible" and accession to UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995.

2. *In your opinion, what are the 3 worst female rights violations in Singapore history and have they been addressed?*

Polygamy, this was outlawed with the passing of the Women's Charter (however, polygamy is still permitted for Muslims in Singapore).

Discrimination. This has been partly addressed and in some areas (e.g. discrimination of pregnant women is now against the law), but a lot remains to be done (e.g. single parents are not treated equally, nor women with disabilities)

Violence and harassment. Again, some forms of violence and harassment are addressed by some key pieces of legislation, such as the Penal Code, Women's Charter, and more recently introduced Protection from Harassment Act (2014). But the laws don't provide sufficient protection for all women (e.g. against family violence for women who are co-habiting and not married.)

3. *In your opinion, is Singapore a gender equal society? If yes, what are the indicators to show that we are a gender equal society? If not, what are the gaps in gender equality in Singapore today?*

Not yet. Women still shoulder the overwhelming burden of housework (and care work) despite going out to work; women still earn less than men & women are not equally represented in decision-making roles (e.g.in the government)

4. *In your opinion, how has women joining the workforce improved their economic worth and their welfare?*

It has given women more choices & independence. More could be done, however, to enable women to balance their double roles as mothers and workers to encourage more women to (re)join the workforce.

5. *In your opinion, how can Singapore achieve gender income equality?*

By addressing the following issues:

- Occupational segregation as women tend to be concentrated in less valued and low-paying jobs, such as childcare and clerical work.
- Discrimination in hiring, promotion and compensation practices in the workplace.
- Women needing to leave and re-enter the workforce in order to meet family care-giving responsibilities, resulting in a loss of seniority, advancement opportunities and lower wage.