ACHIEVEMENT OF DESIRED FERTILITY IN MALAYSIA AND ASSOCIATION WITH SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the recent projection, Malaysia's population is estimated to achieve about 42 million by 2050. However, several worrying trends showed today may lower the estimation. The declining fertility is a global trend that occurred in almost all countries in the world. In 2019, the fertility rate of Malaysia was at 1.9 children per woman, and this number ranked at the bottom three within ASEAN countries, together with Singapore (1.1)and Thailand (1.5). If no intervention is taken to address the issue, Malaysia will experience population shrinkage by 2072 [7]. This situation will have a significant impact on the labor market and the aging population.

Based on the demographic transition theory, there was a relationship between women's empowerment and fertility preferences. This theory considers women's participation in the workforce as one of the causes for actual declines in fertility and fertility preferences [2,3]. While some women have more than they desire, others have fewer than wanted. Most of the research showed that there was always a disjoint between desired and actual family size. The difference between the actual and the desired number of children also be called unmet fertility desired [6]. Understanding the fertility gap between the desired and actual number of children is essential as it indicates the inability of women to enjoy their fertility intention. The fertility gap also impacts policy and program intervention plan in addressing the fertility decline [4].

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the patterns of desired fertility achievement and the differences according to socio - demographic characteristics among married women.

METHODOLOGY

Data used in this study was obtained from the Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS5), a cross-sectional survey in 2014,conducted by the National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia. The descriptive analysis was used to compute based sample of women covered in this study. Only the women who wanted no more children and were sterilized constituted as the study sample. Out of 6,879 women in the survey, about 57 percent of the women in the survey who are assumed completed their reproductive careers.

The differences between the actual number of children (number of children ever born) with the desired number of children is the number of children that the women desired in their whole life produced three groups of desired fertility achievement: women who were having actual equal to desired, having more than desired and having fewer than desired. The last part of the analysis in this study was the bivariate analysis used to identify whether there were differences in desired fertility achievement according to socio - demographic characteristics.

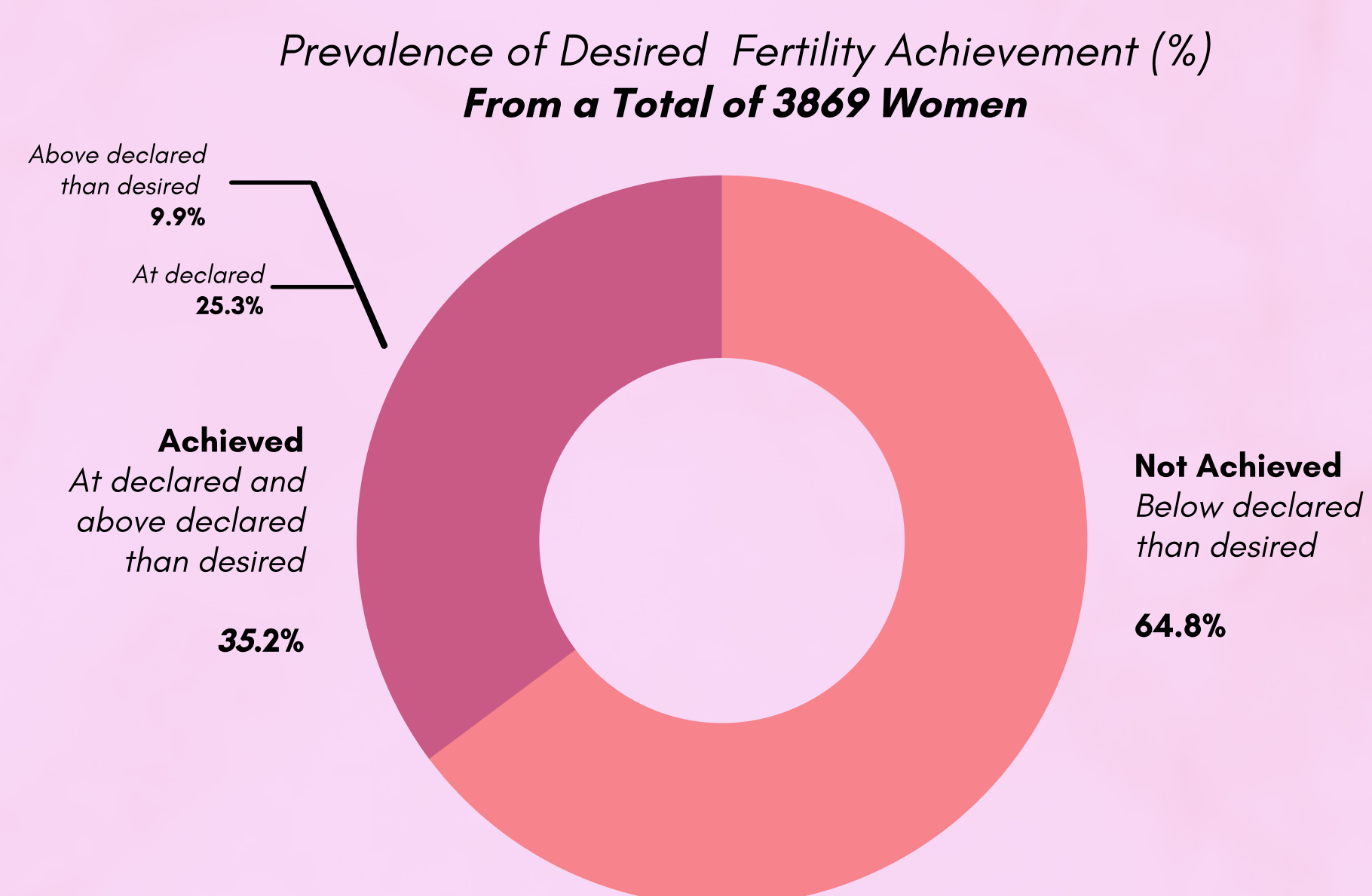## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

In this study, the sample was the women who had 'theoretically' completed their reproductive career. Out of 6,879 women in the survey, about 57 percent assumed to have completed their reproductive career. The breakdown of women with completed their fertility by selected socio-demographic characteristics showed in Table 1.

Table 1 : The Proportion of Respondents with Completed Fertility by Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Categories	Women with Completed Fertility (%)
TOTAL	56.8
AGE GROUP	
• Below 20	95.9
• 20-29	87.2
• 30-39	49.9
• 40-49	11.8
• 50-59	100.0
LOCALITY	
• Urban	55.5
• Rural	58.8
REGION	
• Peninsular Malaysia	56.9
• Sabah	56.7
• Sarawak	55.8
ETHNICS	
• Malay	60.0
• Other Bumiputera	55.2
• Chinese	46.3
• Indian	47.2
• Others	46.0
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	
• No schooling	66.7
• Primary level	65.8
• Secondary level	51.6
• Tertiary level	62.5

Prevalence and Socio-Demographic Associations

Table 2 presents the prevalence of desired fertility achievement by socio-demographic characteristics. Out of 3869 married women, 25.3% declared having the same number of children as desired, 9.9% reported having more than desired, and 64.8% have fewer than desired. Thus, overall about 35% of the women have achieved their desired fertility.

Prevalence of Desired Fertility Achievement (%)
From a Total of 3869 Women

Above declared than desired 9.9%
At declared 25.3%

Achieved
At declared and above declared than desired
35.2%

Not Achieved
Below declared than desired
64.8%

From the analysis, it was found that there were significant differences in terms of achievement of desired fertility with age group, region, ethnicity, and educational attainment. There was no significant difference found in the locality factor. Among those differentials, ethnicity and educational attainment showed a different pattern in achieving the desired fertility. Every single breakdown group in each differential showed the same pattern: the proportion of attaining the desired fertility is lower than the proportion of not achieving the desired fertility except for the Chinese ethnic and lower educational attainment.

The trends of fertility rate vary significantly across ethnic groups in Malaysia. Since the late 1960s, the Chinese fertility rate has been lowest than the other two main ethnic groups, Malay and Indian. The lower fertility rate indicates the lower number of children ever born. The result had shown the proportion of Chinese women declared had met their desired fertility was the highest compared to other women from other ethnicities. If the actual fertility among Chinese women is low, thus those who declared had met their desired fertility had targetted the low number of children that they wanted to have in their life.

Generally, the percentage distribution of women with unmet fertility desires increases with age, while the percentage decreases with educational attainment. In this study, women with a higher level of education are less likely to achieve desired fertility than women with lower education. In Malaysia, the numbers of female enrolment post-secondary and university are higher than males. Education will encourage a woman to work and earn income. This changing situation eventually will cause them to limit the number of children.

Table 2 : Prevalence of Desired Fertility Achievement by Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics Among Women In Malaysia, MPFS 2014

Variable	Prevalence of Desired Fertility Achievement (%)			Not achieved (Below declared than desired)	Total Number of Women (n)	Chi-Square (p-value)
	Achieved (at declared and above declared than desired)					
	Total	At Declared	Above declared than desired			
AGE GROUP						
• Below 20	4.3	4.3	0.0	95.7	46	0.000
• 20-29	4.5	3.2	1.3	95.5	917	
• 30-39	10.2	7.5	2.7	89.8	970	
• 40-49	20.7	13.8	6.9	79.3	246	
• 50-59	69.3	49.8	19.5	30.8	1690	
LOCALITY						
• Urban	34.1	24.7	9.4	65.9	2356	0.063
• Rural	37.0	26.2	10.8	63.0	1513	
REGION						
• Peninsular	36.6	26.3	10.3	63.4	3042	0.002
• Sabah	29.6	19.9	9.7	70.3	381	
• Sarawak	30.5	23.1	7.4	69.5	446	
ETHNICS						
• Malay	33.9	24.4	9.5	66.1	2688	0.000
• Other Bumiputera	28.2	18.9	9.3	71.8	581	
• Chinese	54.4	41.1	13.3	45.6	360	
• Indian	38.7	27.6	11.1	61.3	217	
• Others	39.1	26.1	13	60.9	23	
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT						
• No schooling	54.5	25.5	29.0	45.5	145	0.000
• Primary level	60.1	42.5	17.6	39.8	738	
• Secondary level	34.0	25.4	8.6	66.0	2078	
• Tertiary level	14.6	11.0	3.6	85.4	908	

CONCLUSION

The gap between the desired and actual number of children shows the inability of women to enjoy their reproductive intentions. Some women have more than they desire, some have fewer than desired, or some may have as they desired. Those women were facing different challenges, and facing the challenges may require different strategies. Thus, further studies are needed in addressing the issue of meeting the desired fertility of each woman. A review of literature listed the factors such as age at first birth, the experience of child death, fecundity, marital status, occupation, the current age of respondent, place, and region of residence, the highest level of education, religion, household wealth and contraceptive behavior expected to contribute in the determine the achievement of desired fertility of a woman [1,5,6].

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