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## **Same-Sex Couples' Lived Experience in Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In Malaysia, same-sex relationships are legally and culturally unaccepted, leading to discrimination and stigma. While previous studies focused on individual challenges, this paper addresses the gap by exploring the lived experiences, challenges, and management strategies of same-sex couples in Malaysia. Six participants - two females and four males - were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants were interviewed one-to-one with semistructured questions. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and 15 themes were found.

These 15 themes can be categorised into 'Challenges' and 'Management'. The themes under 'Challenges' are (i) couple challenges, (ii) coming out to parents, (iii) siblings' acceptance and support + younger generation's acceptance, (iv) conflicting religious views, (v) importance of mother's acceptance in coming out process, (vi) being questioned for failing to meet societal expectations, (vii) effects of religion, (viii) the unchanging nature of the law, (ix) undesiring of marriage, (x) country's increasing non-acceptance of LGBTQ+ culture and (xi) being judged negatively in public. The themes under 'Management' are (xii) being sensitive based on parents' readiness, (xiii) concealing same-sex relationship identity, (xiv) privacy on social media and (xv) living separately. The study's implications include raising awareness to reduce stigma against same-sex couples in Malaysia, offering mental health practitioners insights for better support, and validating the challenges LGBTQ+ individuals face, as well as providing guidance on navigating same-sex relationships in the country.

**Keywords:** Same-sex couples, challenges, LGBTQ+, societal expectation