

Women and Socioeconomic Change in Malaysia: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic transformation has significantly influenced the position, roles, and well-being of women in contemporary society, particularly in relation to family structure, social participation, environmental adaptation, and community sustainability. Nevertheless, existing studies discussing women and socioeconomic change remain fragmented across multiple disciplines, resulting in limited holistic understanding of the interconnected social, cultural, health, and developmental dimensions affecting women. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to synthesize and analyse the current body of knowledge related to women and socioeconomic change. This study applied the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol to ensure a transparent and systematic review process. Data were retrieved from two major databases, namely Scopus and ERIC, using advanced search strategies based on the keywords “women”, “socioeconomic”, and “change”. The review covered publications from 2022 to 2026. Following the screening and eligibility process, 20 primary studies were selected for final analysis. The findings revealed three major themes. The first theme, Women, Gender Roles, and Sociocultural Transformation, highlighted issues related to gender norms, women’s leadership, sociocultural expectations, legal rights, and feminist discourse. The second theme, Family, Well-Being, and Social Health, emphasized family relationships, health quality, ageing, communication patterns, migration, and food insecurity. The third theme, Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability, focused on urbanisation, environmental vulnerability, water conservation, and sustainable community development. Overall, the review demonstrates that socioeconomic change has multidimensional implications for women’s lives and societal well-being. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated thematic understanding of women and socioeconomic transformation, while also highlighting the need for inclusive policies, sustainable social support systems, and future interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: women, socioeconomic, change

INTRODUCTION

Women’s roles have shifted dramatically over recent decades, driven by economic development, demographic change, and evolving social norms. Yet progress is highly uneven across and within countries, with persistent

gaps in labour market outcomes, education, political power, and control over resources. Research on women and socioeconomic change emphasizes both women's contribution to development and the constraints that limit their full participation. This literature review situates women within broader processes of structural transformation, poverty reduction, and gender equality, highlighting both advances and remaining challenges.

A central axis of socioeconomic change is women's labour force participation (FLFP). While many theories propose a "feminization U" in which women's work first declines then rises with development, empirical support is weak; cross-country differences are better explained by historical economic structures and gender norms than by a simple income–FLFP curve (Duflo, 2012). In some regions, structural transformation and mechanization have pushed women out of agriculture without creating sufficient suitable jobs in industry and services, as seen in India's declining FLFP despite rising education and wages (Le & Nguyen, 2020). More broadly in developing countries, initial conditions, sectorial composition, and social norms continue to circumscribe women's opportunities, with socialism or other major shocks sometimes triggering abrupt changes in participation (Islam & Ghosh, 2024). Even in high-income contexts like the United States, earlier rapid gains in participation, occupational status, and wages have slowed or stalled since the 1990s, with income inequality and top male earnings reducing married women's labour supply and hampering further convergence (Blau, 2024) (Ullah et al., 2024). Cross-national analysis shows that national income and female unemployment are key determinants of FLFP, while tertiary enrolment alone does not guarantee access to formal, secure jobs, especially in rural and less developed areas (Albanesi & Prados, 2022) (Sahin, 2025). Overall, economic growth without deliberate policies on care, transport, labour regulation, and land access is insufficient to achieve gender-equal labor markets (Klasen, 2019)(Albanesi & Prados, 2022)[1834](#).

Major Channels Linking Women and Socioeconomic Outcomes

Channel	Main effects on socioeconomic change	Citations
Labor force participation	Raises household income, reduces poverty, lowers gender inequality	18310 +2 MORE
Education	Increases productivity, earnings, empowerment, and intergenerational gains	1314715 +3 MORE
Empowerment programs & rights	Improve decision-making, reduce multidimensional poverty, raise living standards	13181019
Political participation	Reduces aggregate gender inequality	101612

Figure 1 Key pathways from women's status to development

Education is widely recognized as one of the most powerful drivers of women's economic and social transformation. Studies from diverse contexts show that girls' and women's schooling boosts labour market competitiveness, earning potential, and control over resources [1471516](#)+1 MORE. Female education is strongly associated with higher productivity, more robust labour markets, and broad poverty-reducing synergies, including better health and well-being and large intergenerational gains [1017](#). Community-based empowerment programs that explicitly target gender norms, such as Mahila Samakhya in India, can amplify these effects: girls who were young when the program was rolled out gained over a year of additional schooling relative to boys, indicating that empowerment can shift trajectories even within decentralized systems [14](#). Qualitative evidence from Pakistan and India emphasizes that education fosters self-confidence, legal awareness, and participation in policy-making, enabling women to challenge restrictive norms and contribute more fully to family and national

income [716](#). However, research also stresses that education alone cannot overcome labour market barriers where suitable jobs, safe workplaces, and supportive social policies are lacking [1834](#)+1 MORE.

Women's empowerment which is defined as increased control over resources, decision-making, and mobility has emerges as both a driver and outcome of socioeconomic change. Empirical work from Bangladesh and China shows that when women gain education, asset ownership, and authority over health and education decisions, household income and multidimensional poverty indicators improve markedly [1319](#). In Bangladesh, empowerment through education, assets, and healthcare access reduces both income and multidimensional poverty, whereas gender violence and restrictions on work outside the home increase poverty [13](#). A multi-component program in rural China combining training, microfinance, and associations simultaneously raised women's empowerment and household incomes, underlining the value of integrated, gender-focused interventions [19](#). Cross-country panel evidence confirms that higher FLFP and female primary completion rates are associated with lower poverty headcounts, reinforcing the idea that women's paid work and basic education are central to poverty reduction strategies [11](#). Conceptual syntheses argue that the bidirectional links between empowerment and development—while real—are too weak to be self-sustaining; sustained policy commitment to gender equality in rights, services, and markets is required [1810](#). Technological innovations (e.g., digital platforms, mobile finance, and solar technology) can further expand women's access to work, credit, and services, but their long-term empowerment impact is depended on accessibility, affordability, and institutional support [18](#).

Finally, women's socioeconomic change is tightly bound up with gender inequality and political inclusion. Despite progress, women remain less likely to work, earn less for similar work, shoulder more unpaid care, and face legal and social constraints on property rights and mobility [61810](#). Persistent occupational segregation and subtle discrimination limit access to high-status, high-paying fields, especially for mothers and those facing long-hours cultures [6](#). Traditional norms in settings like India restrict women's autonomy and mobility, hindering re-entry into non-agricultural jobs even when education levels rise [34](#). At the same time, macro-level evidence from OECD countries shows that increased female political representation and labour force participation are each associated with sizable reductions in overall gender inequality, suggesting that economic and political inclusion reinforce each other [12](#). World Bank and other syntheses argue that educating girls and integrating women into economic and political life are among the most cost-effective strategies for inclusive growth and poverty reduction [1017](#).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this research, PRISMA refers to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, which is an internationally recognized guideline used to ensure that systematic literature reviews are conducted and reported in a transparent, systematic, and replicable manner. PRISMA provides a structured framework for identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and selecting relevant studies throughout the review process. In the context of this study on Women and Socioeconomic Change, the PRISMA protocol was applied to organize the review process beginning from database searching in Scopus and ERIC, followed by the removal of irrelevant or duplicated articles, screening of titles and abstracts, eligibility assessment based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and final selection of studies for analysis. Through this process, the study systematically identified 20 primary articles published between 2022 and 2026 that were relevant to the research objectives. The PRISMA framework is commonly illustrated using a PRISMA flow diagram, which demonstrates the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and retained at each stage of the review process. The use of PRISMA strengthens the methodological rigor, credibility, transparency, and reproducibility of systematic literature review studies.

Identification

In this study, the principal stages of the systematic review methodology were employed to obtain a comprehensive body of relevant scholarly literature. The process commenced with the identification and refinement of keywords, followed by the exploration of associated terms through dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopaedias, and existing scholarly works. Subsequently, all pertinent terms were consolidated to construct search strings for the ERIC and Scopus databases (see Table 1). This preliminary stage of the systematic review process resulted in the retrieval of 774 publications relevant to the focus of the study across the two databases

TABLE 1 The search string.

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((women OR "female" OR "woman") AND ("socioeconomic" OR "socio-economic" OR "economic" OR "social") AND (change OR "transformation" OR "shift" OR "transition") AND (malaysia OR "malaysian")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "MULT") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND PUBYEAR > 2021 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 Date of Access: May 2026
Eric	(women OR "female" OR "woman") AND ("socioeconomic" OR "socio-economic" OR "economic" OR "social") AND (change OR "transformation" OR "shift" OR "transition") AND (malaysia OR "malaysian") pubyearmin:2022 pubyearmax:2026 Date of Access: May 2026

Screening

During the screening step, potentially relevant research items are evaluated to ensure that they are aligned with the predefined research question(s). This phase often involves selecting research items based on the Women and Socioeconomic Change. Duplicate papers are removed at this stage. Initially, 706 publications were excluded, leaving 68 papers for further examination based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2). The first criterion was literature, as it is the main source of practical recommendations, including Non-English < 2022, Conference, Book, Review, In Press, Besides Social science, Art Humanities and Multidisciplinary, reviews, meta-syntheses, meta-analyses, books, book series, chapters, and conference proceedings not covered in the most recent study. The review was limited to English-language publications from 2022 to 2024. The review focused on publications published between 2022 and 2026 because this period reflects the most recent developments in women-related socioeconomic research following the post-pandemic recovery period, during which substantial social, economic, and policy changes affected women's participation, family well-being, labour markets, and sustainable development. Restricting the review to recent literature ensures that the synthesized evidence reflects current socioeconomic conditions and contemporary policy discussions in Malaysia. Overall, zero publications were rejected due to duplication.

TABLE 2 The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2022 – 2026	< 2022
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference,Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject	Social science, Art Humanities and Multidisciplinary	Besides Social science, Art Humanities and Multidisciplinary

Eligibility

In the third step, known as the eligibility phase, 110 articles were prepared for review. During this stage, the titles and key content of all articles were carefully examined to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and aligned with the current research objectives. Consequently, 60 data/paper/article were excluded as they did not qualify as due to the out of field, title possess no significant effects, abstract not related on the objective of the study and no full text access founded on empirical evidence. As a result, a total of 50 articles remain for the upcoming review.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analytical approach was employed as a key assessment strategy in this study to critically examine and synthesise findings derived from diverse research designs, particularly quantitative-based studies. The primary objective of this analytical procedure was to identify recurring patterns, dominant themes, and emerging

subthemes related to the phenomenon under investigation. The thematic development process commenced with systematic data extraction and organisation. As illustrated in Figure 2, the authors conducted a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of 20 selected publications to identify statements, findings, and discussions relevant to the study on Women and Socioeconomic Change in Malaysia. Subsequently, the selected studies were critically evaluated with particular emphasis on their methodological approaches, empirical findings, and contextual contributions to the existing body of knowledge. The researchers then engaged collaboratively in an iterative process to construct and refine themes grounded in the evidence obtained from the reviewed literature. Throughout the data analysis process, an analytical log was maintained to document interpretations, reflections, emerging ideas, analytical observations, and issues related to data interpretation. Finally, cross-comparison of the identified themes was undertaken to ensure consistency and coherence in the thematic development process. Any discrepancies or differing interpretations that emerged during the analysis were resolved through continuous discussion and consensus among the authors.

RQ 1 :How do sociocultural norms and gender roles influence women’s participation, leadership, and rights within the context of contemporary socioeconomic transformation in Malaysia and Southeast Asia?

RQ 2 : How do socioeconomic changes affect family well-being, social health, and quality of life among women and vulnerable communities in Malaysia?

RQ 3 : How do socioeconomic development and environmental changes shape community sustainability and adaptive practices among households and women in Malaysia?

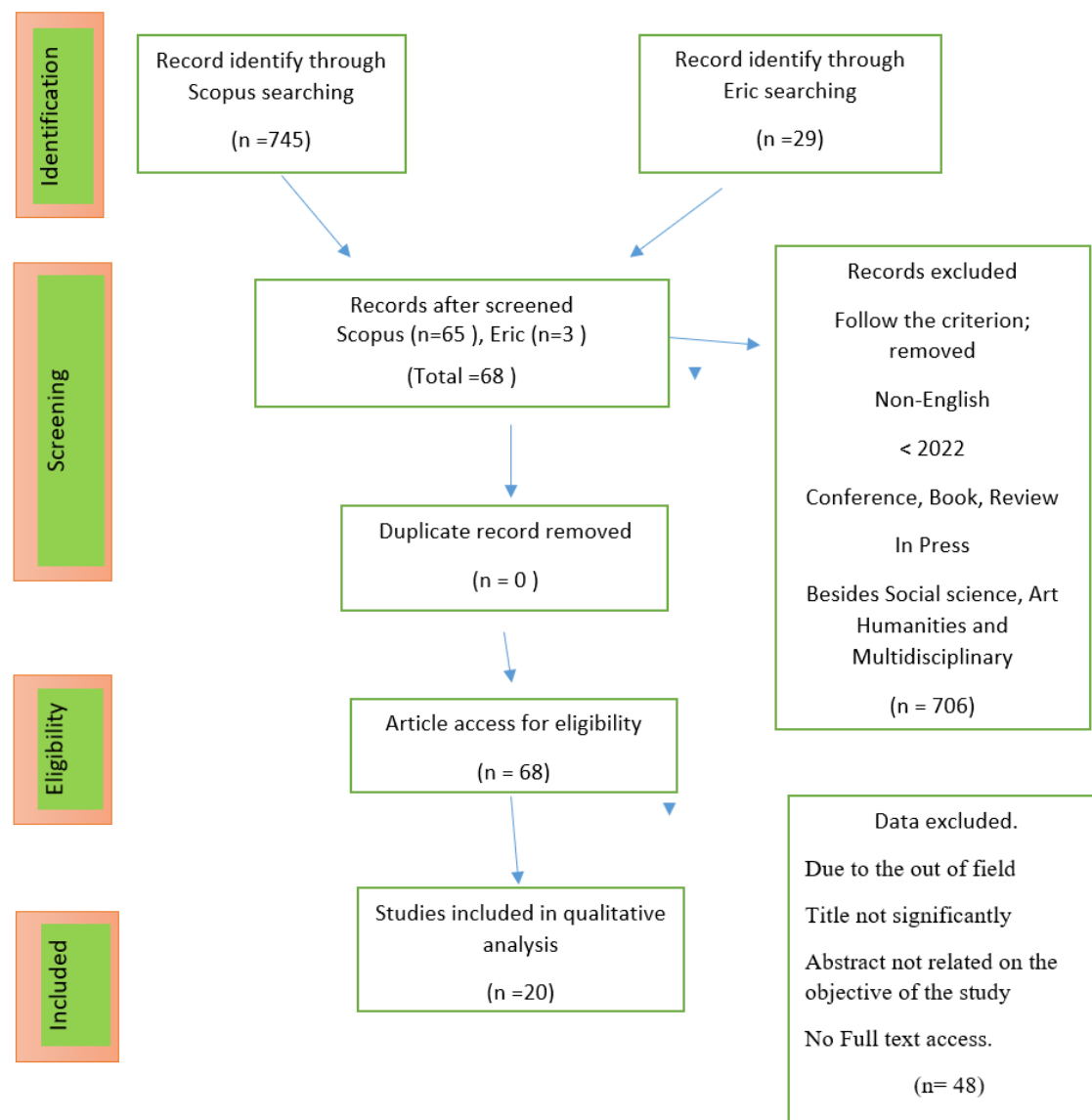


FIGURE 2. Flow diagram of the proposed searching study(Page et al., 2021)

RESULT AND FINDING

The analysis of the selected studies revealed that the literature on women and socioeconomic change is concentrated within three major thematic dimensions that reflect the multidimensional nature of contemporary social transformation in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. The first theme, Women, Gender Roles, and Sociocultural Transformation, discusses issues related to women's participation, leadership, gender norms, sociocultural expectations, legal rights, and feminist discourse within changing socioeconomic contexts. The second theme, Family, Well-Being, and Social Health, focuses on the influence of socioeconomic transition on family relationships, health conditions, communication patterns, quality of life, ageing, and vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, the third theme, Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability, highlights the relationship between urbanisation, environmental vulnerability, household adaptation, resource management, and sustainable community development. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that socioeconomic change affects women not only in terms of economic participation, but also through broader structural, cultural, environmental, and social dimensions that shape everyday life, community resilience, and societal well-being.

Women, Gender Roles, and Sociocultural Transformation

Women, gender roles, and sociocultural transformation emerge as a significant theme in the reviewed literature because the selected studies collectively show that women's socioeconomic positioning in Malaysia and Southeast Asia is shaped not only by economic participation, but also by cultural expectations, institutional structures, legal traditions, religious interpretations, and public discourse. Bahrudin and Bakar (Bahrudin & Bakar, 2022) show that women's voices in Malaysia are increasingly expressed through public protest and multimodal communication, particularly through the use of visual and textual signs in the 2019 Women's March MY, where feminist ideas were communicated as part of a wider negotiation for social change. This finding is important because it presents women not merely as passive subjects of development, but as active participants in shaping public discourse. A related concern appears in Saxena's analysis of Malaysian novels, where women are positioned within the contradictory framework of national development, in which modernization promises progress but still reproduces inherited structures of racial and gender marginalization. Gopal and Sathyanarayanan (Gopal & Sathyanarayanan, 2022) also support this argument by highlighting that poor urban women may possess educational, entrepreneurial, employment, creative, and social abilities, yet these capabilities are often restricted by gender socialization and social labelling. Taken together these two, Bahrudin and Bakar, Saxena, and Gopal and Sathyanarayanan indicate that women's socioeconomic change cannot be understood through employment or education alone, since symbolic representation, social expectations, and cultural narratives continue to influence how women's potential is recognized or suppressed.

The reviewed abstracts also show that women's advancement within formal institutions remains uneven, particularly when professional achievement intersects with domestic responsibility and social stigma. (Thien et al., 2025) Thien et al. reveal that middle-level women academics in Malaysian public universities experience both enabling and limiting factors in their movement toward senior leadership. Gender-neutral policies, personal competencies, mentorship, and role models function as important supports, yet traditional expectations of women's roles, social stigma, and personal constraints still limit leadership progression. (Sabri & Mahmood, 2025) Sabri and Mahmood extend this discussion by focusing on professional working mothers in institutions of higher education, showing that women's experiences are marked by the need to set priorities, manage family and work demands, compromise, and navigate social expectations. The issue is not simply that women are present in professional spaces, but that professional systems often require women to manage competing responsibilities without sufficient structural support. (Chin et al., 2022) Chin et al. provide a related perspective through the case of Malaysian Chinese women in the workforce, where labour participation is influenced by traditional Chinese values and choices within the family and society. Although Malaysian Chinese women participate in the workforce more than some other groups, the abstract suggests that traditional norms continue to shape decisions about paid employment. Therefore, Thien et al., Sabri and Mahmood, and Chin et al. collectively demonstrate that women's socioeconomic participation is advancing, but this progress remains mediated by cultural values, family roles, and institutional readiness to support women beyond symbolic inclusion.

Legal and religious frameworks form another important dimension of the theme, especially in relation to gender

equality, family formation, inheritance, and reproductive rights. (Sudrajat et al., 2026) Sudrajat et al. show that Islamic inheritance law in Indonesia and Malaysia retains the two-to-one male-to-female ratio as a baseline, yet both countries provide different mechanisms for consensual modification to respond to contemporary family welfare. Indonesia is presented as more flexible through consensual agreement at the initial distribution stage, while Malaysia maintains formal faraid procedures before allowing modification through mechanisms such as taksim taradi. Turnip, Fuad, and Nurhayati similarly demonstrate that marriage age provisions in Indonesia and Malaysia are shaped by socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics. Indonesia has moved toward equalizing the minimum marriage age for men and women at 19, whereas most Malaysian states continue to maintain different age limits, except Selangor. Radics further deepens this legal-religious discussion by examining abortion rights in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam, arguing that reproductive access has often been treated as a matter of population control or health management rather than as a personal right. These three studies suggest that women's rights in Southeast Asia are negotiated through legal pluralism, religious influence, cultural legitimacy, and political caution. Rather than presenting law as a neutral instrument, Sudrajat et al., Turnip et al., and Radics show that legal structures can both accommodate and restrict women's socioeconomic agency depending on how gender justice is interpreted. Issues of vulnerability, violence, and social protection also appear strongly within the selected abstracts. Aboul-Enein, Kelly, and Ballout demonstrate that preventive interventions addressing violence against women in Southeast Asia have produced positive outcomes in knowledge, attitudes, empowerment, and help-seeking, but evidence of sustained behavioural change and actual reduction in violence remains limited. The finding is crucial because it suggests that intervention programmes exist, but their impact is still fragmented, under-evaluated, and unevenly distributed across countries and populations. Gopal and Sathyanarayanan's discussion of urban poor women complements this point by showing that gender socialization can deepen poverty when women's abilities remain invisible or undervalued. In this sense, vulnerability is not only caused by income poverty but also by social systems that assign limited roles to women. Sabri and Mahmood also contribute to this issue through the emotional and mental burden experienced by working mothers, where the need for flexible workplace policies and mental health support becomes visible. When read together, Aboul-Enein et al., Gopal and Sathyanarayanan, and Sabri and Mahmood suggest that women's socioeconomic transformation requires protection from violence, recognition of hidden capabilities, and institutional systems that reduce unequal burdens. The studies also show that empowerment should not be limited to individual resilience, because structural barriers, cultural labelling, and weak evaluation of interventions may continue to reproduce inequality.

Overall, the abstracts suggest that the theme of Women, Gender Roles, and Sociocultural Transformation is best understood as a multidimensional process involving public voice, institutional participation, legal reform, cultural negotiation, and social protection. Bahrudin and Bakar show women's agency through protest discourse; Thien et al. and Sabri and Mahmood reveal the institutional and family pressures affecting professional women; Sudrajat et al., Turnip et al., and Radics highlight the continuing importance of religious and legal interpretation; while Saxena, Gopal and Sathyanarayanan, Chin et al., and Aboul-Enein et al. demonstrate that women's development remains shaped by social class, race, tradition, violence, and inherited structures of inequality. The main pattern across the reviewed abstracts is that women's socioeconomic change is occurring, but it is not linear. Progress in education, employment, leadership, and public participation is frequently accompanied by persistent constraints arising from patriarchal norms, family expectations, religious pressures, legal limitations, and uneven institutional support.

Family, Well-Being, and Social Health

The theme of Family, Well-Being, and Social Health shows that socioeconomic change has shifted the meaning of family welfare from a private household matter into a wider social and policy concern. Across the selected abstracts, family health is linked with lifestyle behaviour, ageing, disability, communication, migration, and food security. Zulkifli et al. show that second-hand smoke exposure inside Malaysian homes remains a domestic health risk, although national regulation already exists to reduce exposure among non-smokers. Their findings indicate that personalized air-quality feedback using low-cost monitoring devices may encourage smokers to reduce indoor smoking and support smoke-free home practices, even though the measured reduction in PM2.5 was not statistically significant. This finding is closely related to Chow et al., who identify smoking as a major factor associated with lower physical, social, and environmental quality of life among HIV-positive patients in northern Malaysia. Both studies suggest that lifestyle behaviour affects not only individual health, but also the social

environment surrounding families. Teh et al. add that health among older Malaysians improves when individuals remain active in economic, religious, social, and physical activities, while Aziz et al. show that the probability of disability increases with age and is higher among females. Therefore, family well-being is not only determined by medical access, but also by daily behaviour, household environment, social participation, and long-term demographic change. Health vulnerability is further shown through studies that connect household conditions with inequality, malnutrition, and the need for preventive intervention. Hasni et al. reveal that Orang Asli Kintak women and children experience serious effects of food insecurity, with a high proportion of children recorded as underweight and women showing different nutritional conditions ranging from underweight to obesity. This situation suggests that family well-being among indigenous communities is affected by food access, nutritional imbalance, dependence on purchased food sources, and limited local production capacity. Zulkifli et al. similarly highlight that household-based intervention can be practical when families receive direct information about health risks in their own homes. Chow et al. support this preventive perspective by recommending lifestyle screening, behavioural intervention, and re-employment assistance for HIV-positive patients, since quality of life is connected with smoking, employment, ethnicity, and adverse drug reaction. Teh et al. also show that older adults require intervention strategies to promote social and economic engagement because limited participation may increase dependency and health problems. When combined, Hasni et al., Zulkifli et al., Chow et al., and Teh et al. suggest that family health cannot be improved through clinical treatment alone. A stronger approach requires household education, community support, food security planning, lifestyle change, and policies that are sensitive to social class, age, ethnicity, and local belief systems.

The ageing population represents another central issue in the discussion of family, well-being, and social health. Teh et al. explain that Malaysia is moving toward ageing nation status, and this shift creates pressure on the healthcare system and social protection arrangements. Their findings show that about one-quarter of older Malaysians were still working, many participated in religious activities, but only a small number were involved in community activities and regular exercise. This pattern indicates that older adults may remain socially connected in certain areas, yet wider active engagement is still limited. Aziz et al. strengthen this concern by projecting that Malaysia may have nearly 1.7 million disabled older persons by 2040, with physical limitation increasing as age advances. Their study also notes that disability probability is higher among females, suggesting that gender-sensitive eldercare planning is necessary. Chow et al. provide a related argument because poor physical health among HIV-positive patients is associated with unemployment and medical complications, showing that socioeconomic status remains important in quality-of-life outcomes. Rasit et al. also connect well-being with family communication, especially as digital platforms change interaction between parents and children. Thus, Teh et al., Aziz et al., Chow et al., and Rasit et al. collectively indicate that ageing, disability, employment, health behaviour, and family communication must be considered together in future social health planning. Family relationships also appear as a fragile area affected by migration, digital communication, and changing social conditions. Sari et al. show that Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia may experience serious family-system disruption in their hometowns, including estrangement, marital conflict, debt, domestic violence, divorce, child delinquency, loss of parental roles, and conflict over remittances. This finding shows that migration may produce economic benefit, but at the same time may weaken emotional stability and family structure when separation is not supported by strong social assistance. Rasit et al. examine a different form of family change by showing that WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and other digital tools have transformed Muslim family communication. Although such platforms help family members remain connected across distance, reduced face-to-face interaction can affect the quality of interpersonal relationships. Their proposed Muslim Family Communication Model, validated through expert consensus, offers a structured framework for strengthening family communication in line with the Madani society approach and well-being goals. Hasni et al. add that the family unit is also affected by material vulnerability, especially when mothers and children face food insecurity and health problems. Teh et al. further demonstrate that social participation contributes positively to older adults' health. Therefore, Sari et al., Rasit et al., Hasni et al., and Teh et al. show that social health depends on stable relationships, meaningful communication, economic security, nutrition, and community participation.

Overall, the reviewed abstracts suggest that Family, Well-Being, and Social Health is a multidimensional theme shaped by household risk, social participation, ageing, disability, migration, digital communication, and food insecurity. Zulkifli et al. and Chow et al. show that smoking and lifestyle practices influence health quality at both individual and domestic levels, while Teh et al. and Aziz et al. demonstrate that Malaysia's ageing process requires stronger eldercare, disability support, and active engagement strategies. Sari et al. and Rasit et al. indicate

that family relationships are increasingly affected by migration and digital media, requiring counselling, communication models, and social support. Hasni et al. highlight that indigenous women and children face health risks that demand culturally appropriate food and community-based intervention. The main conclusion from these abstracts is that socioeconomic change does not automatically improve family welfare; instead, it creates new pressures that require integrated policy, preventive health education, social protection, and family-centred support.

Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability

The theme Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability shows that socioeconomic change in Malaysia is closely connected with urban growth, environmental vulnerability, and household resource behaviour. The reviewed abstracts indicate that development is not only a matter of economic expansion, but also involves demographic pressure, settlement patterns, coastal risk, environmental protection, and community participation. Danial and Williamson explain that Malaysia experienced continuous urbanisation from 1980 to 2010, with strong growth in the largest metropolitan area and no clear evidence of counter-urbanisation or polarisation reversal. This finding suggests that development has remained concentrated, especially in major urban centres, and such concentration may create long-term pressure on the infrastructure, land use, and population distribution. Ariffin et al. extend this issue into the coastal context by showing that physical and socioeconomic variables influence vulnerability along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, especially in northern states that are more exposed to erosion and monsoon-related hazards. Anang et al. add a household-level view by showing that water conservation attitudes in Johor Bahru and Kuala Terengganu are shaped by income, number of children, education, age, and gender. When read together, Danial and Williamson, Ariffin et al., and Anang et al. show that sustainability must be understood across different scales, from national urban systems to coastal districts and household consumption practices. A major pattern across the studies concerns the relationship between population change and environmental pressure. Danial and Williamson found that Malaysia's urbanisation was driven more by natural increase than by migration flows, mainly due to population momentum after the Second World War, when large cohorts later entered reproductive age. This finding is important because it shows that urban growth was not caused only by people moving into cities, but also by internal demographic expansion. Such growth may intensify demand for housing, employment, transport, water, and public services. Ariffin et al. also show that population and socioeconomic factors are important in understanding coastal vulnerability, particularly because coastal communities face infrastructure risks caused by littoral erosion and seasonal monsoon effects. Their study shows that coastal planning cannot rely only on physical indicators, because social and economic variables strongly affect risk exposure. Anang et al. similarly demonstrate that household characteristics influence water-saving attitudes, especially income and education, which affect awareness and willingness to adopt water-efficient appliances. Thus, Danial and Williamson, Ariffin et al., and Anang et al. collectively suggest that sustainable development requires stronger integration between demographic planning, environmental risk assessment, and public behaviour. The reviewed studies also reveal that gender is indirectly but significantly present in socioeconomic and environmental sustainability. Danial and Williamson note that Malaysia's population momentum was linked to a large number of females who later reached childbearing age, contributing to natural increase and urban expansion. Although the study is not directly centred on women, the finding shows that demographic patterns involving women have long-term implications for urbanisation and national development. Ariffin et al. provide a more direct gender-related finding by identifying gender composition as the most dominant coastal vulnerability factor in Kelantan and northern Terengganu, mainly due to the presence of many women involved in coastal trade and commerce. This suggests that environmental hazards may affect women's livelihoods and community roles in specific coastal economies. Anang et al. also identify gender as one of the major socioeconomic factors influencing household water conservation attitudes, alongside income, children, education, and age. These findings show that women and gender composition should not be treated as marginal variables in sustainability studies. Instead, Danial and Williamson, Ariffin et al., and Anang et al. indicate that gender-sensitive analysis can improve understanding of demographic change, coastal vulnerability, and household environmental behaviour.

Another important discussion concerns policy and community-level intervention. Danial and Williamson's findings imply that if current migration and urban growth trends continue, Malaysia may remain concentrated around major metropolitan areas and may not experience counter-urbanisation. This situation suggests the need for urban planning that is more responsive to population concentration, infrastructure demand, and balanced

regional development. Ariffin et al. recommend that coastal vulnerability findings can be used by authorities to forecast shoreline recession and design adaptation strategies for coastal erosion. Their analysis, which combines physical and socioeconomic indicators, provides a practical basis for district-level planning and disaster risk reduction. Anang et al. argue that policymakers should design education and awareness programmes that encourage households to integrate water conservation into daily routines, while civil society should support government accountability, water research, and participation of women, youth, and indigenous peoples in resource management. Therefore, Danial and Williamson, Ariffin et al., and Anang et al. show that sustainability cannot depend only on technical solutions. It also requires governance, public awareness, community participation, and policies that consider socioeconomic differences. Overall, the abstracts under this theme suggest that Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability is built around three connected concerns: urban concentration, environmental vulnerability, and household conservation behaviour. Danial and Williamson show that Malaysia's urbanisation pattern between 1980 and 2010 remained strong and concentrated, with no evidence of counter-urbanisation. Ariffin et al. demonstrate that coastal vulnerability along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia is shaped by both physical hazards and socioeconomic variables, with gender composition becoming especially important in some states. Anang et al. show that water conservation awareness exists among many households, but attitudes and adoption of water-efficient practices are influenced by socioeconomic factors such as income, education, age, number of children, and gender. The main conclusion is that socioeconomic change brings both development opportunities and sustainability challenges. Urban growth, coastal risk, and domestic resource use must be managed through integrated planning that includes demographic understanding, environmental adaptation, gender-sensitive analysis, and community participation.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review was conducted to examine the multidimensional relationship between women and socioeconomic change in Malaysia within the context of contemporary social transformation. The review aimed to synthesize existing scholarly evidence related to women's participation, family well-being, social health, environmental adaptation, and community sustainability. Using the PRISMA protocol as a systematic framework, the study identified, screened, and analysed relevant literature retrieved from the Scopus and ERIC databases. The review focused on journal articles published between 2022 and 2026 and selected 20 primary studies that fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The analysis was guided by three research questions concerning sociocultural transformation and gender roles, family well-being and social health, and the relationship between socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability in Malaysia. The findings of the review demonstrate that women's socioeconomic experiences are strongly influenced by interconnected structural, cultural, institutional, environmental, and social factors. Three major themes emerged from the analysis. The first theme, Women, Gender Roles, and Sociocultural Transformation, highlighted persistent gender norms, sociocultural expectations, leadership challenges, feminist discourse, legal rights, and institutional inequalities affecting women's participation and empowerment. The second theme, Family, Well-Being, and Social Health, revealed that socioeconomic change has substantial implications for family structures, ageing populations, migration, communication patterns, lifestyle behaviour, and quality of life among vulnerable communities. The third theme, Socioeconomic Development, Environment, and Community Sustainability, emphasized urbanisation, environmental vulnerability, household adaptation, resource conservation, and sustainable community practices. Across the selected studies, qualitative approaches, thematic analyses, cross-sectional methods, and systematic review designs were commonly applied to explore women's lived experiences and broader societal transformation.

This review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating fragmented discussions related to women and socioeconomic change into a more comprehensive thematic synthesis. Previous studies frequently examined women's issues from isolated perspectives such as labour participation, family welfare, environmental sustainability, or health-related outcomes without considering their broader interconnections. Through the development of three major thematic categories, the present review provides a more holistic understanding of how socioeconomic transformation simultaneously shapes women's identities, opportunities, vulnerabilities, and adaptive capacities. The review also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in examining women's socioeconomic realities, particularly within rapidly changing social and developmental contexts. The thematic framework developed in this study may serve as a conceptual reference for future systematic reviews, comparative studies, and policy-oriented research involving gender and socioeconomic transformation. Several

practical implications emerge from the findings of this review. The synthesized evidence indicates the necessity of strengthening gender-inclusive policies, expanding women's leadership opportunities, improving family-centred support systems, and enhancing social protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups. Greater attention is also required in relation to women's health, ageing populations, food insecurity, environmental adaptation, and sustainable community participation. In educational and institutional settings, support mechanisms such as flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and inclusive leadership development may contribute to reducing structural barriers faced by women. Furthermore, sustainable development initiatives should incorporate gender-sensitive planning and community-based participation to ensure that women's experiences and contributions are adequately represented in decision-making processes. These findings suggest that socioeconomic development should not be evaluated solely through economic indicators, but also through broader dimensions of social well-being, environmental sustainability, and gender equity. Despite its contributions, this review contains several limitations that should be acknowledged. The study was restricted to publications indexed in Scopus and ERIC, which may have excluded relevant studies available in other academic databases or unpublished sources. The review was also limited to English-language publications between 2022 and 2026, potentially reducing the inclusion of earlier studies and local scholarly works published in other languages. In addition, the selected literature primarily focused on Malaysia and selected Southeast Asian contexts, limiting broader international comparison. Future research should expand database selection, include longer publication periods, and explore comparative regional studies involving different socioeconomic settings. Additional empirical research is also necessary to investigate emerging issues such as digital inequality, climate-related vulnerability, women's informal labour participation, rural socioeconomic adaptation, and long-term sustainability challenges affecting women and communities. Overall, systematic literature reviews remain essential in consolidating fragmented evidence, identifying research gaps, and advancing theoretical as well as practical understanding in the field of women and socioeconomic change.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study

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