

# Parenting Styles, Peer Relations, General Self-Concept, and Life Satisfaction among Adolescents in Klang Valley

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## Abstract

Empirical studies recognised parenting styles and peer relations as correlates of adolescents' life satisfaction. However, most past studies only examined one of the correlates of adolescents' life satisfaction simultaneously. The present study aimed to examine the relationships of parenting styles, peer relations and general self-concept to adolescents' life satisfaction in the Klang Valley. Using a multi-stage cluster sampling, 153 respondents aged between 14 to 17 years old were involved in the study. A self-administered questionnaire consisting of four instruments (Parental Authority Questionnaire, Positive Relations with Other Scale, general items from Self-Description Questionnaire II, and Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction) was used for data collection. Results of the study showed that adolescents were moderately satisfied with their lives. Results of Pearson Correlations revealed that authoritative parenting, peer relations, and general self-concept were positively related to life satisfaction. The results of hierarchical multiple regression demonstrated that peer relations, general self-concept, and authoritative parenting could predict 46.7% of the variability in life satisfaction. Overall, the study contributes to the fundamental understanding of Malaysian adolescents' development, specifically life satisfaction. Findings from this study may provide helpful information regarding adolescents' life satisfaction to educators, policymakers, parents and caregivers, counsellors and professionals who work closely with adolescents.

**Keywords:** Parenting Styles, Peer Relations, General Self-Concept, Life Satisfaction, Adolescents

## Introduction

Traditionally, research has focused on the problems that Malaysian adolescents face. Still, more is needed to explore how adolescents evaluate their life satisfaction, which subsequently navigates their development into adulthood. What personal characteristics

played a role in adolescents' life satisfaction? How did Malaysian communities and families support their adolescents? Answers to these critical questions could provide a deeper understanding of how Malaysian adolescents experience life satisfaction and how to endorse and prevent psychopathology in adolescents, which later facilitated life satisfaction for those who struggled to find it. After years of focusing on pathology, the field of positive psychology has awakened empirical investigations to discover positive psychological qualities in individuals (Soares et al., 2019), such as how adolescents achieve satisfaction in life, contentment, and happiness (Proctor et al., 2008). This phenomenon shifts away from an almost exclusive emphasis on psychopathology among adolescents to an increased emphasis on the positive end of what makes life worth living (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Proctor et al., 2008). Life satisfaction is one particular domain of positive psychology research, comprised of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (Diener & Diener, 1995; Proctor et al., 2008).

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is viewed as central to a person's experience, containing cognitive evaluations or appraisals of life satisfaction as a whole and emotional reactions or positive aspects to life events (Diener & Diener, 1995). Some psychologists redefined SWB as "an umbrella term for different evaluations that people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live" (Diener, 2013; Diener et al., 2012). SWB is also inferred as a scientific analysis of how persons evaluate their immediate and ongoing life circumstances in both affective and cognitive components (Diener et al., 2003). Among all, life satisfaction from the cognitive component received the most research attention (e.g., Bradley, Cunningham, & Gilman, 2014; Diener, 2013; Diener et al., 2012) since life satisfaction is less ephemeral than affect components, more stable in terms of time frame and degree of sensitivity is higher in capture the changes in life circumstances (Diener & Diener, 1995; Piko, 2006). Accordingly, life satisfaction has been treated as a salient concept (Camfield & Skevington, 2008) and considered as the ultimate goal of human development (Chang et al., 2003) since it has been viewed as an individual's conscious, cognitive, and affective evaluation of life quality (Bradley et al., 2014). An individual's life satisfaction level also constitutes one's mental health indicators (Mansour et al., 2015).

Existing research depicted that high life satisfaction is not just a pleasant outcome; it can also predict and cause adolescents' future behaviour (Kwan, 2008). Often, adolescents who feel satisfied and experience positive feelings act differently from those who are unhappy (Diener, 2013). In the same trend, high life satisfaction is associated with positive outcomes (e.g., good psychological well-being, socialisation relationships and academic achievements) for adolescents and children (Marcionetti & Rossier, 2021; Ang & Mansor, 2011). Similar to the life satisfaction study among adults, assessing life satisfaction is considered the key indicator of psychological well-being among adolescents (Bradley et al., 2014; Huebner, 2004). Additionally, life satisfaction may buffer against adolescents' aggressive behaviour development (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). On the other hand, changes in life satisfaction have been shown to precede changes in various psychological states (Bradley et al., 2014).

Youth were perceived as an essential resource to ensure the nation's continuous growth, especially in the developing country, Malaysia. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the total number of students who stopped schooling from March 2020 to July 2021 is 21,316 or 0.22 per cent of students. A survey that was jointly commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that the number of students from many of Klang Valley's poor communities returning to the

classroom is dropping at an alarming rate as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak's disruption of school (Ida, 2021). Children had become demotivated or lost interest in continuing school, while some families had difficulties paying tuition fees, transportation fees or giving pocket money. Others need access to suitable gadgets for online learning. The drop in school enrollment can be linked to adolescents' well-being and psychological and social problems.

Additionally, the transition from adolescence into adulthood is not smooth, and the resulting emotional instability often causes mental health problems. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS 2019), some 424,000 children in Malaysia are struggling with mental health problems, indicating that mental health issues among the group have become an epidemic (Erda, 2022). Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 1 in 7 (14%) 10–19-year-olds experience mental health conditions, yet these remain largely unrecognised and untreated (WHO, 2021). In 2021, the Department of Statistics Malaysia reported that the number of children involved in crime in 2020 had increased by 10.5% to 5342 cases, compared to 2019 (4833 cases). First offence cases have increased by 15.7% to 4916 cases, whereas repeated offences recorded a decrease of 27.2% to 426 cases, compared to 2019 (DOSM, 2021). In many ways, researchers have illustrated those who are at risk for a variety of psychological and social problems, for instance, low self-esteem, inadequate social interactions, interpersonal problems, physical health, depression, high involvement in substance abuse, delinquent behaviour and suicidal tendencies among adolescents are associated with lower life satisfaction (Bradley et al., 2014; Park et al., 2004). Recently, research has found that life satisfaction among adolescents generally shows a declining trend, which is more rapid than at any other time during adulthood (Orben et al., 2022).

Nishikawa (2009) explained adolescence as a time of heightened sensitivity; adolescents' goals are reformed, and ideas regarding pursuing goals are reevaluated. In a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world, the issue of life satisfaction among adolescents is considered one of the important research topics. To date, many researchers have been interested in understanding life satisfaction. Many studies have been conducted to discover factors leading to or preventing adolescent attainment of life satisfaction, especially at the individual level (Ang & Mansor, 2011; Chang et al., 2003; Salleh & Zuria, 2009). The emerging strength of goals that involved family, friends and self during adolescence was likely to imbue life satisfaction with considerable psychological meaning (Nishikawa, 2009). Based on a model proposed by Huebner (2004), an adolescent's life satisfaction is determined by five unique yet relevant second-order life domains: family, friends, school, self, and living environment. Adolescents begin to be involved in different roles, activities and behaviours during the transition period from childhood to adulthood. By now, they attempt to find their identity and build a sense of self. However, some might have started to have confusion and insecure feelings about themselves, struggle with social interactions and worry they could not fit into society. Accordingly, adolescents start valuing peer relations as an essential component besides perceived parenting styles while developing self-concept. Parenting environments have been found to play a vital role in adolescents' life satisfaction and mental health development (Perez-Fuentes et al., 2019). It has been documented that a supportive parenting style is a factor that affects adolescents' life satisfaction, especially in this autonomy-related change period during adolescence. A study conducted by Cenkseven-Onder (2012) among Turkish adolescents showed that adolescents who perceived their parents as authoritative had high life satisfaction. On the contrary, adolescents raised in authoritarian families have lower life satisfaction than those raised in authoritative parenting (Piko & Hamvai, 2010).

Besides parents, peer relations are another key to socialisation for adolescents (Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014). High-quality peer interactions are believed to contribute to developing adolescents' life satisfaction (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004). Peer relations have also been acknowledged as among the most influential factors during adolescence, as peers are the ones they begin to spend more time with (Schwarz et al., 2012). Since adolescents face decreased life satisfaction today, researchers have examined the relationship between perceived parenting styles and peer relations on life satisfaction. Thus far, studies focusing on this relationship have shown conflicting results. Earlier research did not consistently find correlations, where it has been reported that authoritative and permissive parenting have a positive relationship with life satisfaction (e.g., Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014).

On the contrary, another study also indicates that only authoritative parenting is more advantageous for adolescents' life satisfaction and relates to higher self-esteem (Milevsky et al., 2007). In a comparison of parents and peers, a study by Ma and Huebner (2008) reported that the association between parent relations and adolescents' life satisfaction was higher than between peer relations and adolescents' life satisfaction. However, the finding is contradicted by the finding from Nickerson and Nigle (2004) that peer relations were the best predictor of adolescents' life satisfaction.

Demo (1992) defined general self-concept as a moving baseline with fluctuations across situations and life stages. It is often recognised as the extent to which an individual feels positively about him/herself. Since adolescent is going through rapid changes, the concept of self is required to restructure to integrate these changes into the individual's personality (Blyth & Traeger, 1983). General self-concept summarises an individual's behaviours and personal characteristics and is an essential factor that facilitates attaining other desirable outcomes (Delany, 2015). If individuals feel competent, confident, and optimistic about themselves, they are more likely to accomplish more and perform well in various domains of life. For this reason, general self-concept is seen as an indicator of life satisfaction. It is well established that supportive parenting and peer relations lead to a greater general self-concept. Furthermore, Delany (2015) indicated that a favourable self-evaluation is essential to healthy development and, eventually, greater life satisfaction.

The importance of life satisfaction among adolescents must be revealed since the nature and determinants of life satisfaction may not be equivalent for every adolescent, given the differential stressors inherent in each population (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Literature has shown that substantial empirical studies explore satisfaction with life from the Western adolescents' perspective. However, little attention has been given to investigating adolescents' life satisfaction in the context of parenting styles, peer relations, and general self-concept among adolescents in the Klang Valley. Conflicting findings have also provided a strong impetus for current research to examine it in depth, especially in the Malaysian context. Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between parenting styles, peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction among adolescents in Kuala Lumpur empirically rather than assumed.

## **Methods**

The present cross-sectional study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design. It has been conducted in an international school in the urban area of Klang Valley. The school selection was based on the population of the students, which comprises approximately 90%

local Malaysians. A total of 153 participants participated in this study. This study aimed to examine the relationships between parenting styles, peer relations, general self-concept and adolescents' life satisfaction. Hence, four instruments were used in this study to assess the respondents' perceptions of the variables under study. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) developed by Buri (1991) was used to measure parents' parenting style in terms of authority and disciplinary practices exhibited from the adolescents' perspective. A total of 30 items of the PAQ were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "agree", and 5 = "strongly agree". The results were categorised into three subscales, which are authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Positive Relations with Other Scale developed by Ryff (1989) was used to assess the level of positive peer relations among respondents in this study. This scale contained 14 items and was rated using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "moderately disagree", 3 = "slightly disagree", 4 = "slightly agree", 5 = "moderately agree", and 6 = "strongly agree". General items from Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQII) developed by Marsh (1992) were used to assess the level of general self-concept among students in this study. This scale contained a total of 10 items and was administered using a 6-point Likert scale: 1 = "false, not like me at all", 2 = "mostly false", 3 = "more false than true", 4 = "more true than false", 5 = "mostly true", and 6 = "true".

Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction (MSLSS), developed by Huebner (1994), assessed the student's overall life satisfaction. The MSLSS is a 40-item self-report scale designed to provide a multidimensional profile of students' life satisfaction judgments within five important domains, i.e., school, self, family, friends and living environment. This scale was administered using a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "moderately disagree", 3 = "mildly disagree", 4 = "mildly agree", 5 = "moderately agree", and 6 = "strongly agree". Higher scores indicate a greater sense of perceived satisfaction with life in general. A pilot study has been done before the actual data collection. A total of 30 adolescents with similar characteristics as the respondents in the study have been involved in the pilot study. All instruments were reliable and within an acceptable level of internal consistency (Table 1). Collected data were coded, computed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviations, minimum and maximum) and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation, multiple hierarchical regression, and mediation analysis) were employed in the descriptive and hypotheses testing.

Table 1

*Reliability analysis*

Instruments	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	
		Pilot study (n=30)	Actual study (n=153)
Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)	30	0.838	0.638
Positive Relations with Other Scale	14	0.751	0.730
General items from Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQII)	10	0.817	0.810
Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS)	40	0.824	0.890

**Results and Discussions**

As shown in Table 2, the age of respondents ranged between 14 and 17 years ( $M = 15.38$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). In gender distribution, 86 (56.2%) of the samples were built up by females compared to 67 (43.8%) male respondents. For respondents' ethnicity, the data revealed that 36 (23.5%) of the respondents were Malay, 78 (51%) were Chinese, 34 (22.2%) were Indian, and 5 (3.3%) were from other categories. For religion, the data showed that 36 (23.5%) of the respondents were Muslims, 48 (31.4%) were Buddhists, 18 (11.8%) were Hinduists, 48 (31.4%) were Christians, and 3 (2%) were other religions. Regarding parents' education level, respondents 124 (81.0%) reported that their fathers had a university education (Bachelor, Master, PhD). For mothers' education level, there were more than half, 106 (69.3%) respondents who reported that their mothers had a university education (Bachelor, Master, PhD) (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (n=153)*

Variables	n (%)
<b>Age:</b>	
14	60 (39.2)
15	34 (22.2)
17	59 (38.6)
Mean: 15.38, SD: 1.34	
<b>Gender:</b>	
Male	67 (43.8)
Female	86 (56.2)
<b>Ethnic:</b>	
Malay	36 (23.5)
Chinese	78 (51.0)
Indian	34 (22.2)
Others	5 (3.3)
<b>Religion:</b>	
Islam	36 (23.5)
Buddhism	48 (31.4)
Hinduism	18 (11.8)

Christian	48 (31.4)
Others	3 (2.0)
<b>Fathers' Education:</b>	
Diploma	29 (19.0)
Bachelor	74 (48.4)
Master	40 (26.1)
PhD	10 (6.5)
<b>Mothers' Education:</b>	
School	6 (3.9)
Diploma	41 (26.8)
Bachelor	70 (45.8)
Master	28 (18.3)
PhD	8 (5.2)

Results on parenting styles indicated that half (55.6%) of the respondents, with a total of 85, reported having perceived their parents practice authoritative parenting styles. This is followed by 40 (26.1%) respondents who reported having perceived authoritarian parenting styles, and 28 (18.3%) of the respondents reported having perceived permissive parenting styles among their parents (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Parenting Styles as Perceived by the Respondents (n=153)*

Variable	n (%)	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Parenting Styles:</b>					
Authoritative	85 (55.6)	35.05	6.563	12	50
Authoritarian	40 (26.1)	30.20	6.334	14	49
Permissive	28 (18.3)	29.56	5.564	14	43

Note: **SD** = Standard Deviation, **Min** = Minimum, **Max** = Maximum

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analyses were used to explore the relationship between personal and family characteristics, parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive) and life satisfaction. As shown in Table 4, findings manifested that only respondents' age ( $r = -.182, p < .02$ ) and fathers' education level ( $r = .199, p < .01$ ) were found to have a significant correlation with life satisfaction. Authoritative parenting and life satisfaction were also significantly correlated ( $r = .464, p < .01$ ). Adolescents who perceived and reported their parents as authoritative parenting tend to score higher in life satisfaction (Cenkseven-Onder, 2012; Lee et al., 2006; Milevsky et al., 2007; Petito & Cummins, 2000). Authoritative parenting was more likely to accommodate adolescents' developmental needs. Once their developmental needs have been fulfilled, they tend to display more significant levels of life satisfaction. However, findings from the Pearson Correlation test showed no significant relationships between authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting with life satisfaction.

Table 4

*Correlates of Life Satisfaction among Respondents (n=153)*

Variables	Life Satisfaction	
	(r)	p
Age	-.182*	.024
Fathers' Education	0.199*	.014
Authoritative Parenting Style	.464**	.000
Peer Relations	.557**	.000
General Self-concept	.543**	.000

Note: \* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ 

As shown in Table 4, the Pearson Correlation test manifested that peer relations and life satisfaction were significantly correlated ( $r = .557, p < .01$ ). Similar findings have also been reported by Gilman and Huebner (2006) that more positive perceptions of peers for adolescents who reported average and higher life satisfaction levels. Peer relations have been recognised as the most influential factor during adolescence. Adolescents who scored high in life satisfaction were socially well-adjusted despite ongoing peer stressors or lack of peer resources (Park, 2004). Finally, it was found that there was a significant relationship between the general self-concept and life satisfaction ( $r = .543, p < .01$ ). This result is consistent with past research by Chang et al (2003); Nadia Ayub (2010) adolescents with high levels of general self-concept adapt more readily to the developmental and environmental stressors they face daily, and as a result have more significant opportunities for experiencing greater life satisfaction.

Hierarchical multiple regression has been employed to determine the significant predictors of adolescents' life satisfaction. Based on the strength of correlations between all variables to life satisfaction, peer relations were the first independent variable to enter the regression model, followed by general self-concept, authoritative parenting, fathers' education level, and age. Results of Models 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 analyses are presented in Table 5. In Model 1, peer relations have uniquely contributed to 31% of the variance in adolescents' life satisfaction ( $R^2 = .310, F(1, 151) = 67.856, p < .001$ ) and in Model 2, general self-concept and peer relations jointly accounted for 39.3% of the variance in life satisfaction ( $R^2 = .393, F(2, 150) = 20.577, p < .001$ ). General self-concept had a significantly high incremental effect on adolescents' life satisfaction after the effect of peer relations was accounted for. Likewise, after accounting for the effects of peer relations and general self-concept, authoritative parenting had a significantly high incremental effect on adolescents' life satisfaction. In Model 3, general self-concept, peer relations, and authoritative parenting jointly accounted for 43.6% of the variance in life satisfaction ( $R^2 = .436, F(3, 149) = 11.266, p < .01$ ). Next, after accounting for the effects of peer relations, general self-concept, and authoritative parenting, fathers' education level did not have an incremental effect on adolescents' life satisfaction. In Model 4, general self-concept, peer relations, authoritative parenting, and fathers' education level jointly accounted for 43.8% of the variance in life satisfaction. However, fathers' education level was not a unique predictor of life satisfaction (Beta = .050,  $p > .05$ ). In addition, after accounting for the effects of peer relations, general self-concept, and authoritative parenting, respondents' age had a significant detrimental effect on adolescents' life satisfaction. Finally, in Model 5, general self-concept, peer relations, authoritative parenting, fathers' education



level, and respondents' age jointly accounted for 46.7% of the variance in life satisfaction ( $R^2 = .467$ ,  $F(5, 147) = 8.022$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In summary, the present findings denote that peer relations, general self-concept, authoritative parenting, and respondents' age are critical factors in the development of life satisfaction among adolescents.

Table 5

*Predictors of Life Satisfaction among Respondents (n=153)*

Model	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	R <sup>2</sup> Change
<b>Model 1</b>					
Peer Relations	.557***	.557	.310	67.856***	.310
<b>Model 2</b>					
Peer Relations	.372***	.627	.393	20.577***	.083
General Self-Concept	.343***				
<b>Model 3</b>					
Peer Relations	.339***	.660	.436	11.266**	.043
General Self-Concept	.255**				
Authoritative Parenting	.233**				
<b>Model 4</b>					
Peer Relations	.339***	.662	.438	.621	.002
General Self-Concept	.250**				
Authoritative Parenting	.224**				
Fathers' Education	.050				
<b>Model 5</b>					
Peer Relations	.331***	.684	.467	8.022**	.029
General Self-Concept	.274***				
Authoritative Parenting	.202**				
Fathers' Education	.047				
Age	-.172**				

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study mainly focused on three factors of life satisfaction among adolescents: parenting styles, peer relations and general self-concept. The findings highlighted the significant relationships between authoritative parenting, peer relations and general self-concept with adolescents' life satisfaction. Additionally, peer relations emerged as the strongest unique predictor of life satisfaction. The findings also revealed that 46.7% of the variability of adolescents' life satisfaction could be predicted by peer relations, general self-concept and authoritative parenting.

Hence, this study helps to clarify the network and structure of constructs related to adolescents' life satisfaction and, thus, the structure of adolescents' SWB. Consistent with Huebner's Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model (2004), this study showed parenting styles, peer

relations, and general self-concept as elementary sources in predicting an adolescent's life satisfaction. Also, more comprehensive knowledge has been found through implementing parenting styles (typology approach) across different parenting situations. This typological approach is essential to examine parenting styles with a better understanding of different child-rearing practices on adolescents' life satisfaction. For instance, the authoritative parenting style significantly increased adolescents' life satisfaction more than the permissive and authoritative parenting in the present study.

Peer relations and the general self-concept are crucial in fostering positive adolescent development. This study has added to growing evidence and literature on life satisfaction and its predictors among adolescents from Klang Valley, Malaysia. Findings from the present study yielded essential implications for parenting education on boosting their awareness and sensitivity to adolescents' well-being and communicating support and other positive feelings toward their children. Besides, these findings may be utilised by counsellors and education workers to aid in designing interventions and support services that improve the adolescents' life quality. Future research may focus on the same variables using a longitudinal design or a dyadic analysis of the parent-child relationship. The location of the study and the sample size might be increased to enable data comparison.

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