Relationship between Self-Esteem, Social Support, and Life Satisfaction among Single Mothers in Selangor

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Abstract
This study aims to determine the relationship between self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction among single mothers in Selangor. 360 respondents were obtained from four single mothers associations in Selangor selected through a cluster random sampling technique. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), Support Functions Scale (SFS) (Dunst et al. 1984), and Life Satisfaction Scale (SWL) Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) were used to measure self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction respectively. The results revealed that more than half of the respondents scored a low level of social support; most of the respondents had a normal level of self-esteem and reported a slight dissatisfaction with their life satisfaction. Social support and self-esteem were positively correlated with life satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the antecedent and independent variables' relative strength in predicting single mothers' life satisfaction. It was found that self-esteem was the most important predictor of the respondents' life satisfaction followed by social support. This study concluded that social support and self-esteem influence the life satisfaction of single mothers. Thus, any effort and intervention to increase single mothers' life satisfaction must consider these variables.
Keywords: Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Social Support, Single Mothers, Selangor

Introduction
The number of households headed by a single parent has been steadily increasing, and divorce has grown in popularity as a way for people to resolve their marital problems. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) in the 2020 Population and Housing Census reported the number of single mothers in Malaysia was 910,091. Being a single parent may not be a problem, but it is alarming that most of Malaysia's single women come from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, especially in urban areas Muhammad Suhaimi et al, 2021).

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in its Single Mothers' Action Plan (2015-2020) defines single mothers as women who are the breadwinners of the family, widowed or divorced, have separated from their partners permanently, and those whose children are not yet married. Single mothers experience a heavy burden of caring for and educating their children. In addition, they are also responsible for meeting the needs and obligations of the family (Suhaimi et al., 2021; Stack & Meredith, 2018; Nawawy & Fatmawati, 2020). When single mothers are compared with mothers from homes with two parents, they have much lower life satisfaction, due to more than just having to bear the costs of raising children (Muzalwana et al., 2020; Kim and Kim, 2020). Single mothers have inadequate income and have been reported to have a high level of psychological distress due to a lack of additional support in dealing with household issues (Hamid & Salleh, 2013). Living in a household led by a woman is often linked to economic and psychological pressures, impacting their overall satisfaction with life (Pollmann-Schult, 2016).

Wan et al (1996), delve into the intricate dynamics of single mothers' life satisfaction, revealing a profound connection with two key determinants: social support and self-esteem. The study underscores that the ability of single mothers to find satisfaction in their lives is significantly influenced by the quality and extent of the social support they receive. Social support plays a significant role in offering emotional, practical, and occasionally financial aid to a lone mother. Studies indicate that the general life satisfaction of single mothers is greatly influenced by the presence of a robust support system, be it from friends, relatives, or the local community.

This highlights the importance of fostering a supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges faced by single mothers. Furthermore, the study focused on the role of self-esteem as another pivotal factor. Single mothers with a positive self-image and sense of self-worth tend to experience higher levels of life satisfaction. This insight underscores the need for interventions and programs that focus not only on external support mechanisms but also on nurturing and enhancing the self-esteem of single mothers. Long-term single parenting has generally resulted in high levels of emotional and financial stress, which significantly impacted many elements of their overall life satisfaction (Hansen, 2012; Nelson et al., 2014; Intan Hashimah et al., 2015).

In sum, self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction are all interrelated variables in a single mother's life. There is still limited research regarding the association of these variables in Malaysia. The existing studies mainly focused on financial and economic entrepreneurship as a viable option for single mothers to earn a living (Muzalwana et al, 2020; Mulia, 2017; Hamid & Salleh, 2013). Considering the importance of family and mothers' circumstances, and the limited focus on the relationship between social support and life satisfaction of single mothers in Selangor, this research aims to investigate the relationship between social support and life satisfaction of single mothers in Selangor.

Life Satisfaction

The term "life satisfaction" relates to how much a person likes their life (Diener et al., 1998). Life satisfaction is a cognitive and global assessment of one's overall quality of life. Numerous variables influence life satisfaction, including sociodemographic factors like health, job, household, family, age (Dongwook, 2023), gender (Joshanloo et al., 2020) psychological

characteristics, lifestyle, leisure activity involvement, and leisure enjoyment (Malvaso and Kang, 2022; Kuykendall et al., 2015; Loewe et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2014; Agyar, 2013; Magee et al., 2013). Life satisfaction is a key component or indicator of subjective well-being since it measures positive and negative effects in one's life (Proctor, Linley & Maltby, 2009). As a key component in attaining positive mental health, life satisfaction is closely associated with a broad range of behavioral, psychological, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal outcomes, such as stress mitigation.

Life satisfaction studies concentrate on the reasons for happiness, and the aspects and processes that influence life happiness. Diverse academics have offered varying interpretations of life satisfaction, yet the fundamental concept revolves around assessing the overall quality of life in multiple dimensions. Various scholars have provided different definitions of life satisfaction, but overall, it refers to the overall quality of life across different aspects. Key factors influencing an individual's life satisfaction encompass demographic traits, family dynamics, and other relevant aspects (Badri et al, 2022). Higher self-esteem, greater emotional support, and improved living situations are all linked to life satisfaction. Furthermore, life satisfaction is also associated with sadness and suicidal thoughts negatively (Zhang et al., 2014). Meaning in life positively and significantly predicts life satisfaction (Karatas et al., 2021).

Self-esteem
Self-esteem is a judgment or self-evaluation of our work or goodness and how well we feel we are doing in areas of our life that we rate as important (Yang, et al., 2016). Webster's dictionary defines self-esteem as "satisfaction with oneself" and "one's good opinion of one's dignity or worth." People with higher self-esteem have an inherently strong sense of worth, while people with low self-esteem can sometimes feel valueless and even hate themselves (Jordan, Zeigler-Hill, and Cameron, 2017). High self-esteem and self-worth judgments are associated with improved stress management (Leão et al, 2017). Self-esteem is substantially and negatively correlated with distress and depression (Rosenberg et al., 1989). Despite cross-cultural variability, typically those higher in self-esteem are more satisfied, happier, and have fewer negative moods

Social Support
Social support refers to a person's belief in support from family, friends, and significant others (Wu et al, 2022). It is an important and effective psychological resource that allows individuals to deal with psychological tension, protects them from stressful and oppressive events, enhances their social adaptability, and makes them more resilient to adverse conditions. In general, social support is composed of both received social support and perceived social support. Received social support is the objective support provided by other close people focusing on the quality and quantity of the given support, whereas perceived social support reflects the perceived availability and adequacy of social connections, referring to the subjective perception and assessment of support originating from family, friends, and significant others (Oh et al., 2014). Compared to received social support, perceived support provides a more important and effective assessment of an individual's mental health (Yang & Zhou, 2020). Siedlecki et al (2014) asserted that perceived support was a significant predictor of life satisfaction and negative affect, enacted support was a significant predictor of life satisfaction, and family embeddedness had unique relations with positive affect.

Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction

Studies have proven a direct relationship between life satisfaction and self-esteem (Moksnes & Epnes, 2013). Single mothers with higher self-esteem, greater social support, and higher personal resilience were more likely to report greater life satisfaction. Thus, single mothers who have difficulties in providing for their basic needs and suffer from a degree of prolonged anxiety about their financial situation will also experience lower self-esteem related to daily financial stress and chronic financial strain, which ultimately leads to lower quality of life. Cast and Burke (2002), identified that self-esteem could influence how individuals feel about life events, social relationships, and quality of life.

According to Ilyani et al (2022), self-esteem contributed to higher levels of life satisfaction. Self-esteem will provide a buffer against the negative emotions associated with a disruption in feelings, behaviors, or thoughts. Self-esteem protects single mothers from being emotionally drained as they work to re-establish and maintain a match between standards and perceptions. For instance, the perception of matter among single mothers might be associated with their well-being. If they have high self-esteem, they are more likely to feel valued by others and more confident in their interpersonal relationship, which eventually will contribute to their quality of life. Prattley et al., (2020) stated that lower self-esteem has also been significantly correlated to poor quality of life in terms of deprived neighborhoods and social exclusion.

Social Support and Life Satisfaction

Social support benefits mental health, eliciting an increased sense of well-being and life satisfaction. In recent years, perceived social support has been confirmed to be an important indicator of life satisfaction in a wide variety of population groups such as the elderly (Zanjari et al., 2022), adolescents (Liu et al., 2021), pregnant women (Al-Mutawtah et al., 2023), single mothers (Muarifah et al., 2019), individuals with substance use disorders, and medical social workers (Wu et al., 2022). These previous studies have confirmed that perceived social support was positively associated with people's life satisfaction. The higher the perceived social support, the higher one's life satisfaction (Yu et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a correlational and cross-sectional research design with a quantitative research methodology to gather information regarding the relationship between self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction among single mothers in Selangor.

Respondents

The respondents in this study were 360 single mothers who are registered members of the Single Mothers Associations in Gombak and Shah Alam, Selangor.

Instruments

Life Satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS scores have been proven to be predictive of future behaviors, such as suicide attempts, and to correspond with indicators of mental health. The SWLS has been employed in health psychology to gauge the subjective quality of life of those with significant health issues. The SWLS consist of 5 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1=

Strongly Dissatisfied to 7 = Strongly Satisfied). Scores were classified into extremely dissatisfied (0-5 points), dissatisfied (6-10 -points), slightly dissatisfied (11-15 points), neutral (16-20 points), slightly satisfied (21-25 points), satisfied (26-30 points) and extremely satisfied (31-35 points). Examples of items are: "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal"; "The condition of my life is excellent"; "I am satisfied with my life". Higher scores indicated higher levels of life satisfaction whilst lower scores indicated lower levels of life satisfaction. The reliability of the SWLS in this study was 0.70.

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). RSES was developed by Rosenberg (1965) to define individuals' self-esteem levels. RSES is a unidimensional scale including a total of 10 items with 5 positive and 5 negative items. Examples of items are: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself"; "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"; "I am able to do things as well as most other people." The ratings for the statements were summed, with negative statements reverse-coded. The scale ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within the normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The reliability for RSES in this study was 0.83.

Social Support was measured by using the Support Functions Scale (SFS) (Dunst et al. 1984). This scale assessed sources of available support, including practical support (e.g., someone to help take care of your child) and emotional support (e.g., someone to talk about things that worry you). This 12-item scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = definitely false, 5 = definitely true), and both the total score and the total subscale score were used for analysis. Higher scores indicate more social support. The internal consistency coefficient for SFS in this study was 0.76.

Research Procedures
The sample size for the study was chosen using multi-stage cluster random sampling. Using a random method (lottery method), two districts (Shah Alam and Gombak) in Selangor were chosen as the location for the research. Three single-mother associations were selected from these two districts. A total of 60 single mothers were randomly selected from each association based on the member list provided. The total number of respondents in this study was 360. A set of bilingual Bahasa Melayu-English self-administered questionnaires was used to measure parental involvement, academic resilience, and academic stress. The distribution of the questionnaires was made possible with the help of the person in charge from all the participating associations and consent from the respondents to participate voluntarily was obtained before the distribution of the questionnaires. The confidentiality of the information provided was also conveyed to the respondents.

Statistical Analysis
Descriptive statistics measured the respondent's characteristics, self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Test measured the relationship between self-esteem, social support, and the respondents' life satisfaction. In addition, multiple regression was used to determine the unique predictor for the respondents' life satisfaction.

Result of Analysis
Personal Characteristics of the Respondents
Table 1 shows data on the respondent's age and monthly income. As indicated in Table, the mean age of the respondents reported in the study was 45.21 years old with a standard deviation of 10.730. The respondents' ages ranged from 23 to 69, with 23 being the youngest and 69 being the oldest. It was found that 57.8% of the respondents were aged between 23 years old to 47 years old, and 40.0% were aged between 48 to 62 years old. The remaining 2.2% of the respondents were aged 63 years old and above.

Table 1 also illustrated the respondents' income based on three categories following the percentiles: low - below RM3000, moderate income - from RM3000 to RM5999, and high income - from RM6000 a RM9000. Data from Table 1 showed that most respondents were in the low-income group (92.2%), 5.6% were in the moderate-income group, and only 2.2% were in the high-income group. The mean for monthly income was RM1379.38 with a standard deviation of RM1304.557.

Table 1
Personal characteristics of respondents (n=360)

Variables	n (%)	Mean	Sd.	Min.	Max.
Age (years)		45.21	10.730	23	69
23 – 47	208 (57.8)				
48 – 62	144 (40.0)				
63 and above	8 (2.2)				
Monthly income		1379.38	1304.557	0	9000
0 – 3000	332 (92.2)				
3001 – 6000	20 (5.6				
6001 – 9000	8 (2.2				

Note: Sd. = Standard deviation, Min. = Minimum, Max. = Maximum

Levels of Self-esteem, Social Support, and Life satisfaction of the Respondents.
Self-esteem was measured by using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (SFS) (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965). The scores were divided into three categories which were low, normal, and high following the manual instrument (Rosenberg, 1965). A higher score indicated better self-esteem; a normal score indicated normal self-esteem while a low score indicated poor self-esteem. As depicted in Table 2, the low score was 0-14, the normal score was 15-25 while the high score was 26-30. A total of 96.9% (n=349) of the respondents scored normal self-esteem, 2.8% (n-10) scored high self-esteem, and 0.3% (n=1) respondents scored low self-esteem. The result revealed that the mean score of the respondents' self-esteem was 15.90 with a standard deviation of 4.21. Overall, the findings illustrated that most of the respondents have normal self-esteem.

Table 2
Description of Self-Esteem (n = 360)

Variables	n (%)	Mean	Sd.	Min.	Max.
Self-Esteem		15.9028	4.21 088	11	32
Low (0-14)	1 (.3%)				
Normal (15-25)	349 (96.9%)				
High (26-30	10 (2.8%)				

Note: Sd. = Standard deviation, Min. = Minimum, Max. = Maximum
The scores for social support were divided into two categories which were low, and high based on the mean score. Table 3 shows that 63.5% (n=230) of respondents reported having low social support while 36.5% (n=130) reported having high social support. The mean score of the respondents' social support was 20.80 with a standard deviation of 2.88865. Overall, the data indicated that most of the respondents received low social support.

Table 3
Level of Social Support (n = 360)

Variables	n (%)	Mean	Sd.	Min.	Max.
Social Support		20.80	2.88865	14.00	30.00
Low (≤ 20.80)	230 (63.5%)				
High (≥ 20.80)	130 (36.5%)				

Note: Sd. = Standard deviation, Min. = Minimum, Max. = Maximum

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985). The scale score was divided into six categories: extremely dissatisfied, dissatisfied, slightly dissatisfied, neutral, slightly satisfied, and satisfied using the manual instrument. A higher score indicated the respondents' good life satisfaction while a lower indicated poor life satisfaction. Based on the data are shown in Table 4, the score range for the scale was extremely dissatisfied (5-9), dissatisfied (10-14), slightly dissatisfied (15-19), neutral (20), slightly satisfied (21-25), satisfied (26-30) and extremely satisfied (31-35). Data revealed that more than half of the respondents (58.6%, n=211) scored slightly dissatisfied, followed by 21.4% (n=77) respondents who scored slightly satisfied, 10.3% (n=37) scored satisfied, 4.1% (n=15) scored neutral, 5.0% scored dissatisfied and 0.6% (n=2) scored extremely satisfied. The results revealed that the mean score of the respondent on the scale was 18.80 with a standard deviation of 4.33. The findings indicated that overall, the data on the respondents' life experiences leans more toward dissatisfaction.

Table 4
Description of Life Satisfaction (n = 360)

Variables	n (%)	Mean	Sd.	Min.	Max.
Life Satisfaction		18.80	4.33	10.00	33.00
Extremely Dissatisfied (5-9)	0				
Dissatisfied (10-14)	18 (5.0%)				
Slightly Dissatisfied (15-19)	211 (58.6%)				
Neutral (20)	15 (4.1%)				
Slightly Satisfied (21-25)	77 (21.4%)				
Satisfied (26-30)	37 (10.3%)				
Extremely Satisfied (31-35)	2 (0.6%)				

Relationship Between Age, Income, Self-esteem, Social Support, and the Respondents' Life Satisfaction

The finding revealed a significant negative relationship between age and life satisfaction (r= -0.112*, p= <0.05). This demonstrated that as age increased, the respondents' life satisfaction decreased. The result was consistent with previous studies that found age was negatively correlated with life satisfaction (Dongwook, 2023). It can be concluded that age affects life satisfaction.

Table 5
Relationship between Age and Life Satisfaction

Variable	Life Satisfaction	
	r	P
Age	-0.112	0.05

The findings also revealed a significant positive relationship between monthly income and life satisfaction (r= 0.200**, p= <0.01). The positive correlation implies that an increase in monthly income will increase the respondents' life satisfaction. The result was consistent with the study by Sabri et al, (2021) and Pollman-Schult, (2016) which showed that income and financial aspects were important in a person's life and influenced the life satisfaction of single mothers.

Table 6
Relationship between Monthly Income and Life Satisfaction

Variable	Life Satisfaction	
	r	P
Monthly Income	0.200**	0.01

Note: p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001

For the correlation between social support and life satisfaction, the finding in Table 7 revealed a significant positive relationship (r= 0.585**, p= <0.01). The positive correlation implies that increases in social support will increase the respondents' life satisfaction. The result was consistent with the study of Yu et al., (2020) which showed that social support was positively associated with people's life satisfaction. The higher the social support, the higher one's life satisfaction.

Table 7
Relationship between Social Support and Life Satisfaction

Variable	Life Satisfaction	
	r	P
Social Support	0.585**	0.01

Note: p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001

Table 8 depicted a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction of the respondents (r =0.656**, p<0.01). This was consistent with a study by Prattley et al., (2020) which affirmed that lower self-esteem significantly correlated to poor life satisfaction.

Table 8
Relationship between Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction

Variable	Life Satisfaction	
	r	P
Self-Esteem	0.656***	0.01

Note: p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001

Multiple Regression Analysis (Multivariate Analysis)
A multiple regression analysis was used to determine the unique predictors of the respondents' life satisfaction. The results of the regression coefficient analysis showed that self-esteem was the main predictor of the respondent's life satisfaction where 48.8% of the variance (R^2 = 0.488) of the respondent's life satisfaction can be explained by self-esteem with a value of F=86.48. As depicted in Table 9, the Beta value (β) which showed the factor that most strongly affects life satisfaction was self-esteem with the (β) value = 0.468, p <0.01 followed by social support with the (β) value = 0.310, p < 0.01. The result affirmed the finding in a study conducted by Ilyani et al., (2022) who found that self-esteem contributed to higher levels of life satisfaction. Self-esteem is one of the aspects of emotional support that eventually leads to an individual's life satisfaction (Liu & Yu, 2013).

Table 9
Multiple Regression Analysis for Life Satisfaction (n=360)

Variables	Life Satisfaction		
	B	Beta, β	P
Age	0.001	0.005	0.900
Monthly Income	0.165	0.130	0.452
Self-esteem	0.770	0.468	0.001
Social Support	0.743	0.310	0.001
Adjusted R^2		0.488	
F		86.48	

Note: ***$p < 0.001$, β = Beta Coefficient

Study Implication
This study proves that age, monthly income, self-esteem, and social support influence the life satisfaction of single mothers in Selangor. Experiencing low social support may result in dissatisfaction in life. Single mothers may find the findings useful in planning coping mechanisms to ensure better life satisfaction. In addition, the findings also provide some support and better understanding to local researchers, practitioners, and educators to conduct more studies of this nature throughout Malaysia so that more generalized data can be churned and reflected. When it comes to addressing issues of life satisfaction among single mothers, authorities can take more effective action when they are aware of the high-risk variables that influence it. These variables can arise from personal factors like self-esteem or environmental factors like social support. Thus, the findings of this study can be used as a baseline reference by relevant authorities to increase programs that can improve the well-being and quality of life of single mothers.

Conclusion
Dissatisfaction in life may also affect health issues such as fatigue, lack of appetite, trouble sleeping, sadness, anxiety, despair, social isolation, and, in severe cases, self-harm or attempts at/commitments to suicide. The government and relevant agencies should collaborate on developing and implementing programs that improve self-esteem and promote family-oriented initiatives. This is crucial in addressing the dissatisfaction experienced by single mothers, as research has shown that self-esteem and social support play a significant role in their overall well-being. Parenting is a challenging task for a married mother, and it is harder for single mothers. Single mothers are more likely to reach their full optimal function as great mothers when they are confident, happy and in better mental health. Therefore, the authorities should take action to provide a conducive environment, needed services, and skills that can facilitate single mothers in their quest to achieve a better and more meaningful life. The best life experiences of mothers will have a positive spillover effect on their heavy and important role in child-rearing and managing the family.

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