FAMILY FUNCTIONING, PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG ADOLESCENT OF LOW INCOME FAMILY

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Abstract— The purpose of this study is to determine the influences of family functioning and peer relationships towards adolescent life satisfaction among low income families in Malacca. A sample of 304 respondents was selected and information collected using a questionnaire filled out by the respondents. The results from this study showed that there were a significant relationship between family functioning and peer relationships with life satisfaction. The study also showed that there were significant differences in peer relationships and life satisfaction between boys and girls. Moreover, the findings imply that adolescents with higher level of life satisfaction came from families with higher level of family functioning.

Keywords— Family Functioning, Peer Relationships, Life Satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is the quality of life of individuals based on their own criteria (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Previous study found that adolescents life satisfaction is influenced by socio-demographic (eg, age, gender and SES) (Proctor et al., 2009) Hudson (2013) also found that the amount of total income can affect life satisfaction among adolescents, especially among low-income families. Whereas, Becchetti and Pisani (2013) studied the relationship between secondary school students' household wealth and life satisfaction that live in Rome, Milan and Genoa. They found that family home ownership, mortgages and wealth relative (class) significantly affect to student life satisfaction improvements. Study by Ash and Huebner (2001) found that adolescents who came from low-income families tend to have low life satisfaction. However, there is also evidence that life satisfaction may act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress and behavioral psychopathology (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Previous study also found that life satisfaction displays substantial linkages with several key school outcomes (Huebner et al., 2014).

There are two factors that can affect adolescent's life satisfaction among low-income families which are family functioning and relationships with peers. Family functioning has been defined as quality of family life in the systemic health, competencies, strengths and weaknesses of the family (Shek, 2002a). Meanwhile, peer relationships are relationships that symbolize belonging, self-worth, friendship and identity (Gumbiner, 2003). Based on the previous study found that generally the social relationships will affect the life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick (2008) stated that social support from parents, relatives and friends play an important role in adolescent life satisfaction. In addition, Joronen and Astedt - Kurki (2005) found that families can have an impact on subjective well-being of adolescents with secure communication or joint activities, like eating dinner together (Piko & Fitzpatrick, 2002 Allen et al. (2006) found that adolescents also tend to get together with their friends and spend less time with their parents. Then this indicates that the relationship with peers can influence the well-being of adolescents, especially related to life satisfaction. The study by Ueno (2005) on adolescent has shown that teenager who has a network of friendships in school have better mental health than those who are less sociable. In summary, there were few questions arise in this study, which are:

1. Are the family functioning, peer relationships and life satisfaction related to life satisfaction among adolescents of low income families?
2. Are there any differences in family functioning, peer relationships and life satisfaction between male and female adolescents of low income families?
3. What factors are uniquely predicting life satisfaction among adolescents of low income families?

II. METHODS

2.1. Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of 304 (169 girls and 135 boys) adolescents of low income families in Malacca. Prior to data collection, approval was obtain from Ministry of Education Malaysia and Department of Education in Malacca. Four school were involved in this study.

Based on Bank Negara Malaysia (2012) low-income families is defined as households that earning less than RM 3000.00 per month. Therefore, only adolescents who have family monthly income less and equal to RM3000 were selected in this study. The structured questionnaire was distributed to all students that had been selected. Lastly, the

respondents were given a token of appreciation upon the completion of the questionnaire.

2.2. Data Analysis

Firstly, the magnitude and strength of the relationsip of study variables were quantitavely measured using Pearson product-moment corelatios. Secondly, a t-test analysis was used to measure the strength of association between two variables whereby one was nominal variable with only two levels while the other one was interval variable. Finally,the multiple regression analyis was conducted to determine the best set of predictors of adolescents life satisfaction .

2.3. Measurements

All measurements used in this study were either translated from English into or design in Bahasa Malaysia. The back-to-back translation was used for this purpose. Moreover, Bahasa Malaysia is the native language for the Malaysian-Malay and also the national language of Malaysia.

2.3.1.Family background

Information of the respondents' family background was obtained by asking the respondents to report on their age, race, number of siblings, parents' age, educational level of their parents', parents' occupation and family monthly income.

2.3.2.Life Satisfaction

The *Satisfaction With Life Scale (*WLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), consists of five items such as " I am satisfied with my life ". This questionnaire has seven Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Cronbach alpha values for European-Americans were .82 and .80 for Vietnamese-American. Results showed that the Cronbach alpha for this study was .73.

2.3.3.Family Functioning

Family functioning was measured using Malaysian Family Strenghts Scale (MFSS) developed by Arshat, Baharudin, Juhari, Hasbullah, and Ishak (2012). A total 27 items were used to assess seven strengths of family dimensions: 1) Communication (3 items); 2) Love (5 items); 3) Support (4 items); 4) Commitments (4 items); 5) Acceptance (4 items); 6) Religious (4 items); 7) Relationship (3 items). Respondents have to answer the question on six Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Some of the items included were "our family members help each other" and "our family members take care of each other when needed". Cronbach alpha values for this instruments was 0.95 (Arshat, 2013). The results from this study showed that the Cronbach alpha for this instrument was .93

2.3.4.Peers Relationships

The Inventory of Peer Attachment—Revised (IPPA-R) which has been modified by Gullone and Robinson (2005) had been used to examine the relationship between peers based on 25 items (eg. "My friends do not understand my problem".). Item 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 18, 22 and 23 are reversed scored items. The Peer Relationships Scale was rated on three Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (sometimes) and 3 (always). Cronbach alpha reliability value of these instruments was 0.91 (Gullone & Robinson, 2005). In this study, the reliability of the scale in the actual study was.70.

III. RESULTS

3.1. Family Background

Based on the findings from this study, the respondents' average age was 15.34 years old. Most of the respondents (78.0%) are Malay . As for number of sibling, most of the respondents (48.0%) have 3-5 siblings with a mean 4.20.

Meanwhile, most of the respondent's father age was at the range between 44-50 years old (35.2%). In term of mother's age, average of respondents' mother age was 44.3. As for parents' occupation, father's occupation was classified into 3 categories which were not working, working and retired. Majority of the respondents' father (88.5%) are working while about 65.5% of respondets' mother are not working.

More than half of respondents' parents seemed to be completed basic education level which is at least pursued SPM level with 55.9% for father and 51.6% for mother. In this study the minimum and maximum family monthly income are RM500 and RM3000.

3.2.Relationship between Family Functioning, Peer Relationships and Life Satisfaction

The correlation matrix for all variables in this study is shown in Table 1. The finding showed that there was a significant relationship between family functioning and life satisfaction among adolescents of low-income families (r=.29, p=.000). Moreover, peer relationships also were found to significantly correlated with life satisfaction (r =.12, p =.034). This indicates that adolescents who have high level of family functioning and peer relationships tend to have better life satisfaction.

Table 1: Correlation between family functioning and peer relationships with life satisfaction

Variable	Life Satisfaction	
	r	p
Family Functioning	.29***	.000
Peer Relationships	.12*	.034

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

3.3. Differences in family functioning, peer relationships and life satisfaction between male and female adolescents

The t-test results for all the variables included in this study is presented in Table 2. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in family functioning (t =.17, p= .866). Meanwhile, this study showed that there were significant differences between male and female adolescents in peer relationships (t = -2.41, p = .017)

and life satisfaction (t = 2.73, p= .007). Based on the mean score for peer relationships, female adolescents (57.40) are higher than male adolescents (55.67). While, mean score of life satisfaction for male adolescents is 26.63 and female adolescents is 24.98. This indicates that the level of life satisfaction among male adolescents is higher than female adolescents.

Table 2: T-test analysis of family functioning, peer relationships and life satisfaction between male and female adolescents of low-income families

Variable	Mean		t	P
	Male	Female		
Family Functioning	137.49	137.19	.17	.866
Peer Relationships	55.67	57.40	-2.41*	.017
Life Satisfaction	26.63	24.98	2.73**	.007

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

3.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

To determine the factors that best predict the life satisfaction, multiple regression analysis were conducted. The results are summarize in Table 3. The finding revealed that the variants for life satisfaction was 8.9% and F (2,301) = 14.65. These findings showed that the family's functioning (β =.28, p =.000, p<.001) were contribute significantly and uniquely to the life satisfaction. The results illustrated that the adolescents with low income family with higher level of family functioning tended to demonstrate greater life satisfaction compared to other factors.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis

Variable	Life Satisfaction		
	B	SE B	Beta, β
Family Functioning	.09	.03	.28***
Peer Relationships	.04	.05	.05
Adjusted R^2		.083	
F		14.65***	

Note : Life Satisfaction $F(2,301) = 14.65$,*p <.05, **p <.01, *** p<.001

IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine family functioning, peer relationships and the contribution of these variables to the life satisfaction among adolescents of low income families in Malacca. The present study found that there were significant relationships between family functioning, peer relationship and adolescent life satisfaction. As expected, higher level of family functioning and peer relationship was associated with higher level of teenagers' life satisfaction. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Leung, Wong, Wong and McBride-Chang (2010) which found that parental warmth played an important role in adolescent life satisfaction. In addition, the finding are also consistent with other previous research (Casas et al. ,2007) which revealed that support from parents has a positive correlation to the adolescent life satisfaction. This particular outcome is consistent with the previous study which showed that adolescents tend to do activities together with their friends that can affect their behavior and life satisfaction (Keresztes, Piko, Pluhar and Page, 2008). The present study also revealed that there was significant difference in peer relationship and life satisfaction between male and female adolescents. This result is consistent with the previous studies which found that friendships played a central role in life satisfaction among teenage girls in increasing their life satisfaction rather than boys (Keresztes et al., 2008). More over the results of this study are in agreement with the findings of Neto (1993), who found that the level of life satisfaction among girls is lower than boys. The results of this study also consistent with the previous studies which found that gender differences began to increase during adolescence due to hormonal changes in psychosocial and biological (Piko, 2001). Whereas, for the next variables showed that there was no significant difference in family functioning between male and female adolescents of low-income families. This study is consistent with the previous study which revealed that family functioning continues to be an important relationship in life satisfaction, especially during adolescence (Hair et al., 2008). Finding also shows that family functioning is the most significant predictor to adolescent life satisfaction. This result was consistent with the previous study conducted by Brodrick (2008) that was found social support from parents play an important role in the life satisfaction of adolescents.

In summary, the findings on this study emphasize the importance of family functioning and peer relationships towards adolescents life satisfactions. Therefore, the recommendations of this study are expected to get the attention of certain parties to formulate a program or system that is effective and appropriate education for adolescents, especially those who come from low-income families in order to increase their life satisfaction. Finally, this study also could be used by researchers in the future research to obtain more clearly and accurate information.

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