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Post-locked down mental wellbeing among Malaysian adults: Factors of life satisfaction in urban Malaysia

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Under the enforcement of the recovery movement control order (RMCO), citizens of Malaysia were allowed to commute for work with tight protocols of social distancing. In this period of time, most individuals were adjusting to the new norm after being locked down for about six weeks. With an assumption that the social dynamics could have been different from the pre-pandemic era, this study aims to investigate how mattering predicts life satisfaction among individuals who live in the urban area of western Malaysia in the aforementioned timeframe. The role of other variables, namely perceived social support (PSS), resilience, and spirituality was also investigated. Data was collected from 402 adults between 18 and 66 years of age (M=25.44) who reside in the urban areas of Malaysia. A moderated serial mediation hypothesis was tested by employing the Bootstrap method in PROCESS Macro model 92. Our findings suggested that resilience does not play a significant role in the equation due to its insignificance in predicting life satisfaction after controlling the rest of the variables.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In mid-June 2020, the government of Malaysia has ended the previously enforced lockdown or movement control order (MCO). The implication of MCO, albeit necessary to curb the virus infections, induced other phenomena, such as being away from loved ones, loneliness, misinformation on social media, financial insecurity and stigmatization [1]. Studies indicated that lockdown amidst the pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was deteriorating to mental health [2]. In the context of Malaysia, the short notice of the enforcement of MCO deprived certain individuals of means of planning and preparation [3]. Moreover, the MCO was prolonged into six weeks, while it was initially planned to be two weeks. Longer quarantine duration, together with the fear of the virus itself, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma pushed many individuals into posttraumatic stress, even when the lockdown policy was gradually loosened up [4].

In this time of adversity, it was evident that individuals who believe that they have adequate support from the people around them develop higher levels of resilience that enabled them to move on [5], [6]. In the context of post-lockdown Malaysia (Right after the first MCO, before the COVID infection cases spiked back up near the end of the year), people were allowed to gather in public places in limited numbers through social distancing, offices and educational institutions were gradually opened to accommodate their workers and students [7], [8]. This 'new normal' should have created a different social dynamic as to how the

lockdown era did to the pre-pandemic era. This possible change in the dynamics of the social pattern led us to attempt in examining the formation of satisfaction with life (SWL) among urban adult Malaysians after the first lockdown amidst the pandemic was lifted.

Historically, SWL is a component of a larger construct, subjective well-being [9], but since Diener *et al*. [10] introduced the separated scale of SWL, it has been used extensively in many studies on SWL due to its correlations with measures of mental health and its predictive feature of future behaviour and attitude constructs such as suicide attempts, relationship satisfaction, and many others. In the context of our study, SWL is defined as how individuals in our research population perceived their life to be satisfying during the transition from the MCO to the new normal. Additionally, studies in the last decade of pre-pandemic indicated that SWL is significantly predicted by the sense that one matters to others [11]–[13].

By definition, mattering is a construct that measures how much we feel we matter to others [14]. Mattering was reported as a significant predictor of SWL before the pandemic [12], [15]. Consistently, a study on the formation of SWL during the lockdown in the Malaysian context reported that mattering was a robust significant predictor of SWL, partially mediated by perceived social inclusion among individuals with low and moderate levels of extraversion [16]. They also reported that the mediation did not occur among individuals with a high level of extraversion, whose levels of mattering robustly predicted the SWL. Another study in the same population and time frame suggested that the formation of SWL among locked-down young adults predicted by social comparison in social media, mediated by perceived social inclusion [17]. The robustness of mattering in predicting SWL can be justified by other studies in the Malaysian MCO context, mattering was reported as a significant predictor of other components of subjective well-being, such as unconditional self-acceptance [18], hedonic well-being [19], and perceived social inclusion [16], as well as a protective factor against depressive symptoms and suicide ideation [20]. Most of the Malaysian MCO context studies had reported that SWL and other components of subjective well-being are significantly predicted by mattering. Therefore, we hypothesized that mattering would significantly predict SWL among Malaysian urban adults during the post MCO 1.0.

Another study in the Malaysian context during the enforcement of MCO reported that perceived social support (PSS) and optimism partially, but significantly, explained the contribution of mattering on SWL among university students [21], and the significant role of PSS in predicting SWL has been consistently reported since the pre-pandemic era [22], [23]. Nevertheless, it was evident that individuals can only believe that they are socially supported when they have developed an adequate sense of mattering [24]–[26]. Individuals who believe that they matter to others also tend to believe that they are supported by others. Thus, the question lies in whether people who believe that they matter to others need to feel that others support them back in order to be satisfied with their lives.

In the post-pandemic, people are gradually getting back to offline social connectivity. Therefore, a different social dynamic might have taken place in this period, and it is essential to be studied. Moreover, mixed results were reported on whether offline social bonding is stronger than online social bonding in predicting PSS. A study among Korean young adults with gambling problems stated that offline bonding predicts stronger PSS than online bonding [27], while another study among individuals with HIV in China suggested the other way around [28]. In our context, the population was switching from the dominant reliance on digital communication into offline in the new normal. Therefore, we hypothesized that the significant connection between mattering and SWL occurred through a full mediation of PSS.

However, our further literature review indicated that SWL in the post-hardship situation was significantly predicted by resilience. For instance, in the post-war population of Baghdad, Iraq, in 2014, it was reported that resilience fully explained the link between PSS and personal growth and SWL [29]. Another example of the studies was that among young adults with severe disease of epilepsy, PSS lost its significance in predicting SWL after controlling for resilience [30]. In other words, in a post-hardship atmosphere, individuals require their social support to elevate their resilience, the ability to mentally or emotionally return to pre-crisis status quickly [31] before they can start to feel satisfied with their life again. Other studies reported that PSS is required to develop resilience not only in the post-hardship situation. It can build resilience even during times of hardships. For instance, Malaysian parents under the constant hardships of rising children with autism also reported that they consistent believe that they have the support from the people around them has kept them to believe that they can survive and move on stronger [32]. The similar phenomenon was also reported among Brazilians cancer patients [33], individuals with mental health issue [6] and locked-down adults amidst the pandemic in the USA [5]. Furthermore, other studies also reported that resilience predicted SWL among individuals without any experience of an extreme critical situation [34]–[36]. Additionally, mattering was also reported as a significant predictor of resilience, for example, studies among college students indicated that students with lower mattering tend to develop inadequate levels of resilience [37], [11]. Similar findings were also reported among elderlies [38], as well as on the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic [39].

Because this current study was conducted in Malaysia, we could not neglect the role of spirituality in explaining how most people perceive satisfying lives. First of all, 96% of the citizens of Malaysia are attached to organized belief systems, namely Buddhism (19.8%), Hinduism (6.3%), Islam (61.3%), and Christianity (9.2%) [40], and every religious practice are freely conducted by each of their devotees [41], who considered their religion contributes a significant amount of thoughts and attitudes in life [42]. We included spirituality instead of religiosity in our study as the moderator variable because of the distinction between the two constructs. Religiosity is described as a structured framework of a particular set of beliefs and it refers to the compliance to religious organizations and engagement in their rituals [43]. Spirituality, on the other hand, refers to individual transcendental journey in finding purposes [44] and connection to others and individual version of the divine power of their belief [45]. Moreover, spirituality tends to be improved during such a lockdown [46], instead of religiosity, because many activities in the worshipping houses were not allowed by the government due to social distancing protocols. The next subsections will be our supporting references on the link between spirituality and the other variables.

Greater spirituality had been reported to predict greater subjective happiness and SWL [47]. In line with that, Alorani and Alradayeh [48] reported a positive, significant and prevalent (r-sq=.53) correlation between spirituality and SWL among university students in Jordan. It is also important to notice that individuals with low levels of spirituality tend to develop lower levels of SWL [49] because spirituality is one of the most significant factors that help individuals cope with stressful situations [50], even among individuals with mental illness [51]. In other words, we hypothesized that spirituality played a conditional (moderation) role in the link between SWL and any of its predictors, where the positive links tend to be the strongest among individuals with higher spirituality because it interacts with how individuals value and identify their roles in the society [52].

Defined as having a deep connection with self, divine being, and others, spirituality helps one to identify and share the feelings of others [53], [54]. In line with that, Miguel-Rojas *et al.* [55] suggested that spirituality is positively correlated with a positive understanding that others have sympathy and empathy towards oneself, which led to the sense of receiving support from others. Consistent with that, our previous study in the Malaysian context before the MCO suggested that spirituality significantly predicts one of the preconditions of PSS, which is emotional intelligence [56] and some previous studies also confirmed that spirituality predicts another precondition, social-connectedness [53], [54]. Accordingly, various studies from various settings reported a positive link between spirituality and PSS, such as among university students in Jordan [48], women with preeclampsia [57], burn survivors in Iran [58], African American women with breast cancer [59].

In the same light as the previous paragraph, Gerson [60] reported that spirituality predicted PSS, resilience, and life satisfaction and added that spirituality was a more robust predictor of resilience than PSS, which required positive emotions to mediate its contribution on resilience. Confirming that, Dey *et al.* [61] advocated that a greater level of spirituality predicted greater resilience, which explains the further link to greater levels of life satisfaction and positive affect. Almost similarly, studies on resilience in nations with recent war history disclosed that spirituality predicted resilience through the decreased aggressive behaviour [62]. Higher spirituality tends to contribute to higher resilience levels among adolescents [45], individuals with abuse history [44], facing midlife crisis [63], and the general population [64], [65].

The aforementioned studies suggested that spirituality would moderate all the paths between mattering to SWL, directly or indirectly. This led us to our moderated serial mediation hypothesis, as illustrated in Figure 1. The hypothesized model in Figure 1 was our attempt to conceptualize the theoretical framework discussed in the previous paragraphs.
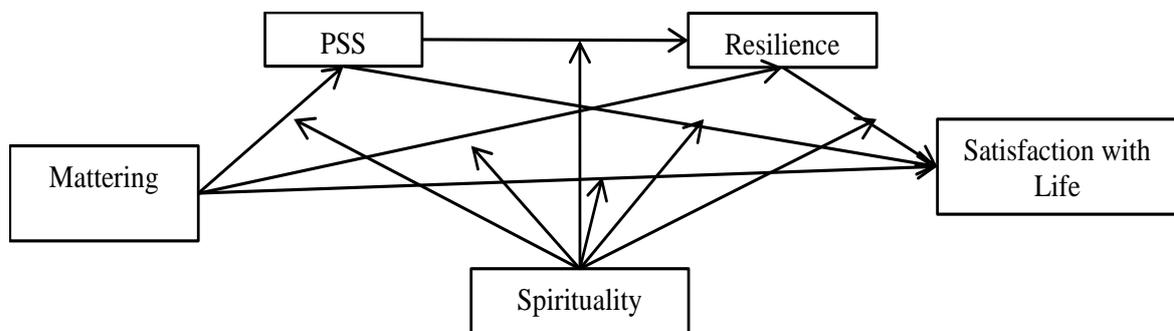

Figure 1. Moderated serial mediation hypothesis

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The proposal of this current study has been approved by the ethic review board of the Department of Psychology, HELP University (ERB: E202011-S003). Several adjustments, such as back translation of the scales and modifications of the informed consent form were conducted based on their suggestions. Four hundred and two adults between 18-66 years old reside in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor states during the post-MCO 1.0 period were randomly recruited by using social media. They had given their informed consent before taking part in data collection by giving their approval remark in the google form, without their approval, items of the scales would not be accessible. Each participant was compensated with an e-wallet credit of 5 Malaysian Ringgit, and there is no conflict of interest between the investigators and the participants. The participants were asked to submit their informed consent and responses to the aforementioned scales through online forms.

SWL was measured by the participant's mean score on the bilingual Life Satisfaction Inventory [10], with the internal reliability is $\alpha=.87$ [10]. Mattering was measured using the general mattering scale (GMS) [66], with the internal reliability of the scale ranges from .89. Perceived social support was assessed with multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) [67], the internal reliability is $\alpha=.92$. Resilience was assessed using the Brief Resilience Scale [68] with the Cronbach Alpha was $\alpha=.91$. Spirituality is measured through the total score obtained from the Spirituality Assessment Scale [69], with the Cronbach Alpha was $\alpha=.87$.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Assumption tests

Saphiro-Wilk test was conducted in order to test the normality of the distribution of the data, and as shown in Table 1, we discovered that none of our data is normally distributed (p<00). This result is expected because the data was collected after a prolonged lockdown, where individuals tend to perceive higher levels of resilience for surviving the lockdown, as well as higher PSS for the same reason. Table 2 indicated that there is no multicollinearity among our variables as variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance (=1/VIF) of all predictors in the current study were below values of 2.00 and 1.00, respectively.

Table 1. Tests of normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Mat	.974	405	.000
PSS	.950	405	.000
Res	.904	405	.000
Spir	.957	405	.000
LifSat	.984	405	.000

Table 2. Collinearity diagnostics (*a*)

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition index	Variance proportions				
				(Constant)	Mat	PSS	Res	Spir
1	1	4.844	1.000	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	2	.075	8.043	.01	.05	.01	.02	.97
	3	.045	10.394	.05	.61	.01	.18	.00
	4	.024	14.188	.00	.33	.77	.18	.02
	5	.012	19.878	.93	.00	.21	.63	.00

a dependent variable: LifSat

The absence of multicolinearity depicted in Table 2 indicates that the hypothesized model is fit because there is no correlation among the predicting variables (mattering, PSS, resilience, and spirituality). In other words, these variables do not explain the same variance in SWL, therefore, their statistical significance would not be reduced by overlapping prediction. The aforementioned assumption tests confirmed our choice in utilizing bootstrap method due to its robustness in analyzing non-normally distributed data. We chose to have 10,000 sampling and 95% confidence interval for our bootstrapping to gain a better screenshot of ech path. Figure 2 illustrates the results of the path analyses that have been conducted through the bootstrapping method with 10,000 sampling and 95% confidence intervals by utilizing PROCESS Macro Model 92 for SPSS.
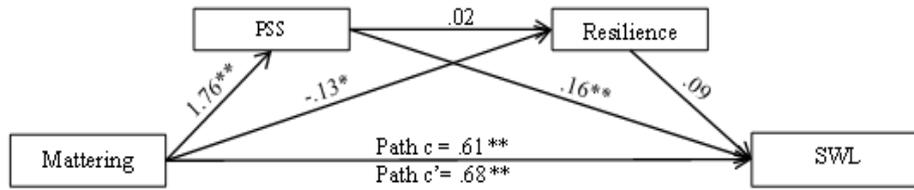
Figure 2. Results of the path analysis of the serial mediation model

As illustrated in Figure 2, all of the paths are significant except for the path d_{21} (PSS to resilience) and b_2 (resilience to SWL). In other words, PSS did not significantly predict resilience, and resilience did not significantly predict SWL. The insignificance of these two paths confirmed that resilience did not play any significant mediating role in the link between mattering and SWL neither did it in the moderated serial mediation model. Additionally, the mediation of PSS can be seen as partial, despite significant, because path c' was significant, which means that after controlling for PSS, mattering was still considered a significant predictor of SWL. Table 3 depicts that the direct effect of mattering on SWL was significant at all levels of spirituality, which means that spirituality did not interact significantly with mattering in predicting SWL.

Table 3. Conditional indirect effects

Indirect effect	Spirituality	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Mat→PSS→SWL	26.96	.18	.06	.06	.30
	41.00	.21	.04	.13	.29
	54.00	.22	.06	.12	.36
Mat→Res→SWL	26.96	.01	.01	-.01	.04
	41.00	.01	.01	-.01	.03
	54.00	-.00	.02	-.05	.04
Mat→ PSS→Res→SWL	26.96	.01	.01	-.00	.04
	41.00	-.00	.00	-.01	.01
	54.00	.00	.01	-.02	.02

4. DISCUSSION

The findings suggested that the PSS partially mediated the link between mattering and SWL. Every path of this model was consistent with the previous findings. The significance of mattering in predicting SWL had been reported by previous studies since before the pandemic [12], [15], as well as our findings that mattering predicts PSS [24]–[26]. Another study during the lockdown in Malaysia also yielded the same findings that PSS partially mediated the link between mattering and SWL [21]. The similarity of the results across the time indicated that the significance of mattering in predicting SWL was not affected by the social dynamic changes, such as lockdown or elevated inclination towards social media.

Nevertheless, no similar situation can be reported on resilience; our findings suggested that resilience seemed did not play any significant role in the equation. It was inconsistent with the report that PSS significantly predicted it [29], [30], [32] and that it predicted SWL [34]–[36]. It could be explained that our participants might not see themselves as being resilient as the data was not collected during the hardship or that the six weeks of lockdown was not considered stressful enough to feel that they required extraordinary resilience in order to move on with their lives.

Our results also suggested that none of the conditional indirect effects was significant; in other words, spirituality did not have any moderation effect in the proposed model. While spirituality might predict SWL [49]–[51], it did not show any significant interaction with the other variables. This phenomenon indicated that spirituality in our participants was not social-based; they being spiritual and non-spiritual was not affected by their mattering or PSS, because online social feedback relating to spirituality might have been less prevalent compared to the offline social feedback in ritual activities in worshipping houses and social gathering as studied previously [53], [58].

4.1. Limitation

Our study was not without limitations. First of all, we did not take into account the individual degree of adjustment people needs to make based on their profession. Different professions might require different degrees of adjustment when practised from home, and therefore they might produce different social dynamics; in other words, the degree of adjustment to work from home (WFH) might play a moderation role

in the equation. The second methodological limitation is that we did not take into account of the separation between intrinsic and extrinsic spirituality, as suggested in the study of Ng and Prihadi [56]. It was questionable that our findings were not consistent with the recent studies that spirituality predicted SWL [50], PSS [56] and resilience [45]. The only possible explanation we can obtain is that spirituality levels of our participants were predominantly extrinsic or social-driven, and when the social religious activities were absent due to the lockdown, their spirituality score tend to be declined. It is suggested for future studies to focus merely on the intrinsic spirituality in order to isolate individuals' spirituality from the influence of their social aspects of spirituality.

5. CONCLUSION

Every aspect of the study has been discussed thoroughly, including the limitations of our studies and the suggestion for future studies. It is important to note that the findings of our studies have confirmed the robustness and significance of mattering in predicting PSS, resilience, and SWL. Thus, it is expected that future studies in social contexts paying more attention to this particular variable.

Knowing that mattering holds significance in predicting SWL, and that SWL holds importance in so many psychological constructs. It is suggested for authorities and employers to implement codes of conduct/ethics that promote mattering by taking into account of the positives effect that it could bring.

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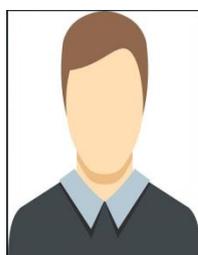
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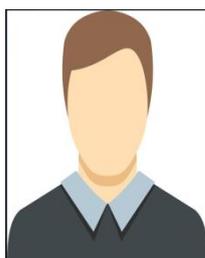
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