International Journal of Public Health Science (IJPHS)
Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2022, pp. 1082~1091
ISSN: 2252-8806, DOI: 10.11591/ijphs.v11i3.21681

Satisfaction with life during the COVID-19 pandemic: the role of affect balance and self-concept clarity

Qing Erh Sow[1], Kususanto Ditto Prihadi[2], Ida Kusnawati Tjahjani[3]
[1]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioral Science, HELP University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[2]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Science and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[3]Department of Industrial Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas 45, Surabaya

Article Info

Article history:

Received Dec 23, 2021
Revised Apr 27, 2022
Accepted Jun 21, 2022

Keywords:

Affect balance
Life satisfaction
Pandemic
Self-concept clarity

ABSTRACT

As one significant indicator of mental wellbeing, satisfaction with life plays important roles in the society and among individuals. Nevertheless, studies have stated that the formation of life satisfaction was different between before and during the pandemic. Among most people, the differences were caused by the implication of social distancing protocols, where people were not fully connected to one another without the help of electronic media; therefore, some of their social roles were altered or became less meaningful. Such changes affected the clarity of how individuals see themselves, as well as the balance of their negative and positive emotional experiences (affect balance). We hypothesized that self-concept clarity predicts life satisfaction through affect balance. We collected our data from 139 Malaysian adults aged between 18 to 60 years through various social media platforms to complete the self-concept clarity scale (SCCS), satisfaction with life scale (SWLS), and scale of positive and negative experience (SPANE). Results of the bootstrap analysis with a 95% confidence interval indicated that the affect balance partially mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction.

Corresponding Author:

Kususanto Ditto Prihadi
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Science and Liberal Arts, UCSI University
Puncak Menara Gading, Taman Connaught, 56000 Cheras, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: prihadi@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic took place in 2019, social distancing has become part of everyone's daily life as many countries had implied lockdown policies and social distancing regulations to minimize the spread of the deadly virus [1]. Similar to other countries, the Malaysian government implemented the movement control order (MCO) in response to the COVID-19 outbreak within the country from March to May 2020 and May to June 2021 to curb the spread of the virus [2], [3]. During MCO, people are generally not allowed to travel interstate or even 10-kilometer from their respective residence unless valid reasons were provided [4], [5]. As a result, most people's daily life was heavily disrupted as they had to face some drastic changes in their daily routines, such as getting used to working from home, studying online and staying indoors at all times [6]. Consequently, the prevalence of mental health issues has been increasing rapidly in Malaysia as people are forced to adapt to the new normal and constantly deal with uncertainties about the pandemic [7], [8].

Recent studies suggested that the lockdown policy implemented by the government in all countries has resulted in social isolation among people due to the movement restriction and the closure of all public social places such as schools, universities, and offices [1], [6]. This has resulted in people's decreasing level

of life satisfaction, as they generally had no choice but to miss out on some important social activities that provide them with a sense of identity and meaning in life, for instance: taking part in religious events, engaging in outdoor sports activities or social events, volunteering, and/or traveling [9]. As mentioned by Slotter and Emery [10], an individual's self-concept is majorly shaped by their social roles, as they generally associate their sense of identity with important and meaningful group memberships which they identify with, such as being a student at a university or being part of a football team. Hence, positive or negative alterations in social roles can essentially affect an individual's certainty of their self-concepts, as well as their psychological well-being [10], [11]. Furthermore, Hanley and Garland [12] also mentioned that self-concept clarity plays an important role in predicting one's subjective well-being and life satisfaction as having a consistent self-concept allows individuals to cope with stress effectively and experience a balanced proportion of positive and negative emotions.

Mental health issues are rising in Malaysia due to the social isolation that took place during the MCO. Therefor, it is important to look into the factors behind the poor subjective well-being among Malaysians to tackle this issue efficiently. With that being said, this study aspired to examine the role of self-concept clarity in predicting people's level of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Self-concept clarity, defined as an individual's degree of consistency, stability, and definite of his or her self-beliefs, is known as an important predictor of an individual's subjective well-being and life satisfaction [13], [14]. Concerning that, life satisfaction is known as an individual's personal evaluation of the quality of their life [15]. According to Xiang and colleagues [16], the self-theory of well-being emphasized the importance of one's self-concept clarity in predicting happiness, whereby a discrepancy in the real self and true self can decrease an individual's subjective well-being, thus leading them to be dissatisfied with life. Additionally, Slotter and colleagues [17] stated that having a stable and firm self-concept enables an individual to develop a healthy level of self-confidence, which then predicts a higher level of self-esteem and better subjective well-being within the individual.

Specifically, past studies indicated that self-concept clarity plays a crucial role in regulating one's emotions and behaviors [18]. This is because high levels of self-concept clarity provide individuals with a stable set of values or beliefs that they can count on to make better decisions and seek further validations, thus allowing them to be more resilient and emotionally stable when facing stressful life events [19], [20]. Moreover, the high level of self-awareness among individuals with high levels of self-concept clarity also enables them to employ healthy coping styles, such as doing strategic planning and taking mindful actions, to deal with stress effectively [21]. Additionally, self-concept clarity was found to be beneficial for emotional regulation, as those with high levels of self-concept clarity tend to possess a positive attitude towards themselves while monitoring their emotions and thoughts, hence allowing them to experience lesser negative emotions [17], [20]. Furthermore, past studies stated that individuals with high levels of self-concept clarity usually have an internal locus of control which allows them to have a higher level of perceived self-efficacy [22]. Therefore, they generally have a lesser tendency to ruminate or avoid problems and will choose to encounter them with a more positive mindset, thus leading them to feel happier and more satisfied with life [23], [24].

Besides that, past studies indicated that affect balance, which is one's experience of positive and negative emotions in a balanced manner, plays a significant role in predicting one's life satisfaction as well [25]. As mentioned by past studies, an individual's appraisal of their life condition is mainly based on their emotional experience, whereby frequent exposure to positive emotional experience predicts a greater level of life satisfaction [26], [27]. Moreover, based on the broaden-and-build model proposed by Fredrickson [28], positive emotions, such as joy, interest, and contentment encourage people to be more broad-minded and widen their thought-action repertoires, thus enabling them to gain useful resources which are beneficial in coping with stress. This theory is consistent with recent findings, as Chang and colleagues [29] found out in their study that with positive emotions, participants were able to foster hope and utilize positive psychological adjustments while pursuing their goals, which result in them having a higher level of life satisfaction. Moreover, Veilleux and colleagues [30] also mentioned that individuals with a higher level of affect balance are generally equipped with sufficient mental resources to cope with stressful events efficiently, hence allowing them to have better subjective well-being as compared with those who have lower affect balance.

Heavy reliance on social media or any other means of internet-based communication has been reported to harm affect balance. The higher reliance on social media during the pandemic positively predicted the fear of missing out [31] and emotional distance among familiar individuals [32]. Moreover, it negatively predicts the sense of mattering [33], which eventually affected happiness [34], social comparison [35], and the capabilities of individuals to accept themselves unconditionally [36]. Before the pandemic, where individuals were forced to rely more on social media, they might utilize social media in such a way to improve one's self-esteem in an education setting [37], yet without social control, negative affect that came from being bullied lasted longer when the bullying was conducted online than offline [38] due to the

anonymity and permanence of the posts. In other words, when we still have the choice to be less dependent on social media, our affect balance might still be protected by our offline socialization nature; once we have no choice but to rely upon it, it might exploit our affect balance in uncertain ways.

As affect balance predicts life satisfaction through promoting effective stress and emotional regulation skills, the present study suggests that these positive psychological adjustments may be predicted by a high level of self-concept clarity. This is supported by past findings which indicated that self-concept clarity is known as a crucial predictor of one's affect balance, due to its major role in regulating one's emotional regulation and stress coping skills [39]. Moreover, a low level of self-concept clarity was also found to be strongly associated with common factors of negative emotional experience, such as neuroticism [40], ruminative behaviors [41], anxiety [42], and perceived stress [43]. According to a recent study done by Alessandri and colleagues [18], participants who have a higher level of self-concept clarity were found to have a lower level of negative affect during the COVID-19 pandemic as compared to participants with lower self-concept clarity, due to their good emotional regulation skills. Hence, per the above findings, it is safe to assume that affect balance might play a role in explaining the mechanisms between the relationship of self-concept clarity and life satisfaction.

As mentioned by Light [44], there are a limited number of past studies that investigated the mechanisms of self-concept clarity in predicting one's stress and emotional regulation process. Furthermore, studies related to negative emotions, like stress and burnout that are specifically triggered by unforeseen circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the MCO and lockdown are lacking as well [45]. Additionally, even though numerous past studies had investigated the role of self-concept clarity in predicting one's life satisfaction, studies related to the possible mediating role of affect balance in the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction are insufficient. Therefore, this study aims to address the aforementioned gaps by investigating the mediating role of affect balance on the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the study was to examine whether affect balance plays a role in mediating the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. By the literature review above, we hypothesized that: i) affect balance will mediate the relationship between one's self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ii) participants with higher levels of self-concept clarity will have higher levels of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study help identify the role of self-concept clarity and affect balance in predicting the low level of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic among Malaysians, thus allowing mental health professions to have a better understanding of the possible predictors of low life satisfaction and formulate effective therapy sessions for their clients during the pandemic. Furthermore, the theoretical findings of this study provide future researchers with a better insight into the mechanisms of the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction as well.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Participant

An effect size of .21 was obtained by squaring the correlation coefficient of self-concept clarity and life satisfaction (r=.41) from a study done by Na and colleagues [14]. Then, using G*Power, a minimum sample size of 50 participants was obtained by specifying an alpha level of .05, the statistical power of .80, and an effect size of .21 [46]. Following that, this study recruited 144 Malaysians (55 males, 89 females) who are aged between 18 to 60 years old (M = 23.45, SD=7.44) to meet the minimum power threshold and ensure external generalizability of the study's findings.

However, as five participants did not meet this study's criteria, which is: i) must be a Malaysian; ii) aged 18 to 60 years old; and iii) not diagnosed with any mental disorder, their data was excluded from the study, thus making the final sample to consist of 139 participants (54 males, 85 females) only. Participants in this study were recruited through a non-probability convenience sampling method as the study's description and Google form link were posted on the researcher's social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram to allow interested individuals to participate in the study voluntarily. Additionally, the snowball sampling method was also utilized in the recruitment process as participants were encouraged to share the study link with their friends or family who are eligible to participate in the study.

2.2. Materials

To collect the participants' descriptive information, such as age and gender, a demographic form was included in the Google form of the study. Furthermore, the self-concept clarity scale (SCCS) [13] was used to measure participants' level of self-concept clarity as past studies stated that it has a good internal consistency, Cronbach's α=.86 and test-retest correlations which range between .70 to .79 [13], [47].

Consisting of 12 items, the SCCS includes statements such as, “I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am” and “In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am” to evaluate the participants’ consistency and certainty of their self-concept.

Participants were required to rate their extent of agreement to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), whereby a higher total score obtained across the items indicates a higher level of self-concept clarity. As items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 were reverse-scored, a higher level of agreement with these items will reflect a lower level of self-concept clarity [13].

Besides that, the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) [15] was included to measure the participants’ level of life satisfaction as it is known to have a good internal consistency with values of Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .79 to .89 [48]. The SWLS consists of five items such as “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal” and “I am satisfied with my life”. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement towards the items on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest score (Strongly disagree) and 7 being the highest score (Strongly agree). As all items are structured positively, a higher level of agreement with the items will indicate a higher level of life satisfaction [15].

Lastly, the scale of positive and negative experience (SPANE) [49] was used to measure the level of affect balance among the participants as it has a good internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha values of .87, .81, and .89 for the positive affect, negative affect and affect balance scales respectively [49]. The SPANE consists of six positive adjectives and six negative adjectives, for instance, "Happy”, “Sad”, “Pleasant”, and “Unpleasant”. During the study, participants were instructed to recall their emotional experience throughout the past four weeks and report their frequency of experiencing the positive and negative adjectives stated in the SPANE using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being Very rarely or never and 5 being very often or always. A higher score attributed to the positive adjectives indicates a greater positive emotional experience; whereas a higher score attributed to the negative adjectives indicates a greater negative emotional experience. Participants’ level of affect balance is obtained by subtracting the total scores of positive feeling items with the total scores of negative feeling items on the scale, whereby a higher total score indicates a higher level of affect balance [49].

2.3. Procedures

Upon gaining access to the Google form of this study, participants were required to first read and understand the informed consent before they indicated their consent to participate in this study. Next, participants were asked to fill in the demographic form and complete the SCCS [13]. Then, participants were instructed to complete the SPANE [49], followed by the SWLS [15]. After completing the study, participants were led to a webpage whereby they were thanked for their participation and encouraged to share the link of the study to others who are eligible to participate. Then, participants clicked on the “Submit” button on the Google Form to submit their responses. It was anticipated that the entire study would not have taken longer than 30 minutes of the participants’ time.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Data collated and descriptive results

The current study aims to find out whether affect balance mediates the relationship between one’s self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant’s total score of the SCCS was calculated by summing up their respective scorings for the 12 items on the 5-point Likert scale after reversing the scores for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12, whereby a higher total score reflects a higher level of self-concept clarity. As for the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS), all participants’ scores were obtained by totaling their scores across the 5 items in the scale, whereby a higher total score indicates a higher level of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, the participant's scores on the scale of positive and negative experience (SPANE) were calculated by first adding up their scores for the six positive items and the six negative items separately. Then, the final total score was obtained by using the total score of the positive items to subtract the total scores of the negative items. A higher total score obtained on the SPANE indicates a higher level of affect balance. Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation for the variables of this study.

Table 1. Mean scores and standard deviation of the self-concept clarity scale, satisfaction with life scale, and scale of positive and negative experience

		D
Self-concept clarity	37.65	9.76
Life satisfaction	21.50	6.42
Affect balance	5.49	7.45

3.2. Assumptions testing

Several assumption tests were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the mediation analysis. Firstly, the assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test as the sample size of this study is lesser than 2000 participants. According to the results shown, the assumption of normality was met for the total scores of the SWLS, Shapiro-Wilk (139)=.99, p=.150, but not met for the total scores of SCCS, Shapiro-Wilk (139)=.98, p=.041, and SPANE, Shapiro-Wilk (139)=.98, p=.038, thus indicating that the assumption of normality was not assumed. Despite so, this will not hinder the mediation analysis as the indirect effect will be examined through bootstrapping by using PROCESS, whereby normality is not required [50]. Next, the assumption of homoscedasticity was found to be met as the residuals are shown on the scatterplot of standardized predicted values against standardized residual are evenly distributed and did not present a funneling pattern. Then, the assumption of linearity was also assumed by referring to the partial regression plots of self-concept clarity against affect balance, affect balance against life satisfaction, and self-concept clarity against life satisfaction, as these graphs indicated that there is a linear relationship between these variables. Based on the collinearity statistics displayed in the coefficients table, the predictors in this study, which are self-concept clarity and affect balance were shown to have a tolerance value above 0.2 as well as VIF values below 10, thus indicating that multicollinearity was not found in the current data [51]. Lastly, the assumption of independence of errors was indicated to be met as the value of Durbin-Watson shown in the model summary table is 1.84, which is close to 2 [51].

3.3. Inferential statistics

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to statistically test for the data of this study. The mediation analysis was run using the bootstrap analysis with 95% confidence interval on 5,000 samplings through utilizing PROCESS Macro v4.0 model 4 for SPSS v.28 [52]. Based on the results shown (see Appendix E), self-concept clarity as a model significantly predicted affect balance F (1, 137)=70.98, p<.001, R2=.32, explaining 31.9% of the variance in affect balance. Moreover, self-concept clarity was found to significantly predict affect balance, b= 0.43, 95% CI [0.33, 0.53], t (137) = 8.43, p<.001. Furthermore, results also indicated that the overall model of self-concept clarity and affect balance significantly predicted life satisfaction, F (2, 136)=53.67, p<.001, R2=.41, explaining 40.7% of the variance in life satisfaction. Specifically, affect balance was found to significantly predict life satisfaction when controlling for self-concept clarity, b= 0.33, 95% CI [0.19, 0.47], t (136)=4.76, p<.001. Similarly, self-concept clarity was also found to significantly predict life satisfaction when controlling for affect balance, b=0.22, 95% CI [0.11, 0.33], t (136)=3.91, p<.001. Apart from that, results shown in the total effect model indicated that self-concept clarity as a model significantly predicted life satisfaction, F (1, 137)=60.05, p<.001, R2=.31, explaining 30.5% of the variance in life satisfaction. Self-concept clarity was found to significantly predict life satisfaction, b=0.36, 95% CI [0.27, 0.46], t (137)=7.75, p<.001. As the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for indirect effect (b=0.14) based on 5000 bootstrap samples did not contain zero, BCa CI [0.08, 0.22], the indirect effect of self-concept clarity on life satisfaction through affect balance was found to be significant, indicating that mediation likely occurred. Despite so, as self-concept clarity still significantly predicted life satisfaction (b=0.22, p<.001) after controlling for affect balance, this suggests that affect balance only partially mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction. The completely standardized indirect effect was reported as a measure of the effect size for the mediation model, whereby abcs=.22. Figure 1 presents the summary of the overall results.

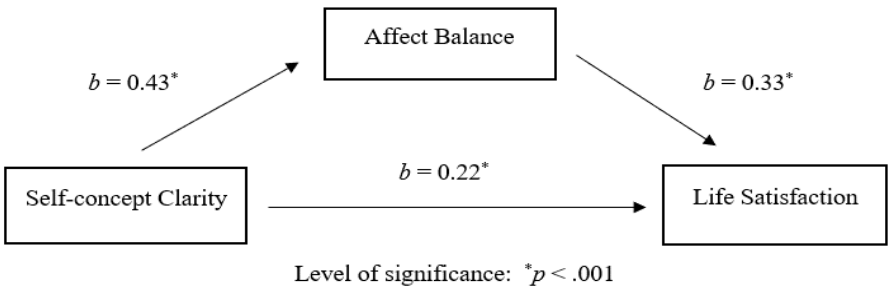

Figure 1. Statistical diagram for the indirect effect of self-concept clarity on life satisfaction through affect balance

As seen in Figure 1, the hypothesis that affect balance will mediate the relationship between one's self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic is supported. However, it is important to note that the mediating effect of affect balance on the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction is only partial. Moreover, the hypothesis that participants with higher levels of self-concept clarity will have higher levels of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic is also supported.

3.4. Discussion

The current study investigated the mediating role of affect balance on the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicated that participants who reported a higher level of self-concept clarity tend to have a higher level of affect balance, which subsequently predicts a higher level of life satisfaction among them. This finding is consistent with the first hypothesis of the study, which is affect balance will mediate the relationship of one's self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite so, the results indicated that only partial mediation occurred. Furthermore, the results also supported the second hypothesis, which is participants with higher levels of self-concept clarity will have higher levels of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, as self-concept clarity was found to be significantly and positively correlated to life satisfaction.

As predicted, the first hypothesis of this study was supported as results indicated that affect balance partially mediated the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction. Hence, this finding suggests that affect balance may explain the mechanisms of how self-concept clarity predicts life satisfaction. In other words, this might imply that the good emotional regulation and stress coping skills developed by participants with a high level of self-concept clarity allowed them to experience a balanced portion of positive and negative emotions during the MCO, which then result in them feeling more satisfied with the conditions of their life during the COVID-19 pandemic [12]. This is in line with aforementioned past studies, as high levels of self-concept clarity were found to enable individuals to develop good emotional regulation and stress coping skills through their high levels of self-awareness, hence reducing their frequency of experiencing negative emotions [17], [20], [21]. Subsequently, the positive emotions experienced by these individuals will then play a role in facilitating the stress coping mechanisms within them, thus allowing them to deal with stressful events during the MCO effectively and have a higher level of life satisfaction [28], [29].

However, as the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction is only partially mediated by affect balance, this might imply that other possible variables mediate this relationship. Mentioned by Shin and colleagues [53], self-concept clarity was found to be closely associated with meaning in life as having a firm self-concept enables individuals to in mind their personal goals while comprehend their life experiences and identifying relevant opportunities that are beneficial to their goals, thus allowing them to have a sense of meaning in life. Moreover, past studies also found that self-concept clarity is related to social comparison too, whereby individuals with a low level of self-concept clarity tend to compare themselves with others frequently due to their feelings of insecurity and uncertainty towards their self-concepts [54]. As mentioned by Loades and colleagues [55], lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic can cause people to feel lonely, frustrated, and lose meaning in life due to social isolation and refrainment of movement. Furthermore, the increased usage of social media due to the restriction of outdoor activities might also predict a decreased level of self-concept clarity among individuals who tend to engage in passive social media usage (i.e., scrolling through their social media feed instead of actively posting content), as these individuals might often compare themselves with others and end up feeling uncertain about their self-concepts [56]. As prior studies indicated that meaning in life and social comparison are strong predictors of life satisfaction, these variables might play a part in mediating the relationship between one's self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic [57], [58].

On the other hand, the findings of this study also supported the second hypothesis, which is participants with higher levels of self-concept clarity will have higher levels of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus implying that self-concept clarity plays an important part in predicting life satisfaction. This is consistent with past findings as self-concept clarity is known as a crucial component for subjective well-being, whereby a higher level of self-concept clarity promotes better stress coping mechanisms through high levels of self-awareness and self-esteem [12]. With that being said, participants who have high levels of self-concept clarity might be able to buffer the uncertainties and stressful events they faced during MCO with their healthy coping mechanisms, which enables them to be less neurotic and improve their life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Looking from a theoretical perspective, this study found out that the mechanisms of the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction can be explained by affect balance, thus contributing a novel finding to the existing studies. Additionally, despite requiring more future studies to affirm the findings, this

study also provided future researchers with a better insight into how self-concept clarity predicts life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a practical perspective, this study identified the importance of self-concept clarity in predicting one's affect balance and life satisfaction during social isolation, hence indicating that self-concept clarity might be one of the main factors to the worsened mental health state among Malaysians. The findings of this study enable mental health professionals to gain a better understanding of how self-concept clarity can predict one's emotional regulation skills, thus allowing them to utilize effective therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy to help patients develop a more stable self-concept, to improve their mental health.

Moreover, as recent studies found out that undergraduate students and working adults are more prone to stress and burnout during this pandemic, virtual interventions regarding ways to enhance self-concept clarity and emotions regulation skills should be held by universities or workplaces to help them foster a healthy stress coping mechanism which allows them to have a better level of affect balance throughout the pandemic [59]–[62]. Besides that, Lodi-Smith and Crocetti [43] stated that parenting style is crucial to develop a stable self-concept within children too. Following the social learning theory, parents are encouraged to portray themselves as role models to their children through practicing consistent parenting style and high emotional awareness, to enable their children to develop a consistent self-concept that allows them to regulate their emotions healthily during the COVID-19 pandemic [43].

3.4.2 Limitations and suggestions

This study contains a few limitations. Firstly, as the current study is conducted using a cross-sectional design, the data of the study might not be able to accurately capture the participants' level of self-concept clarity, affect balance, and life satisfaction throughout the long duration of the MCO. It is possible that participants in this study refer to their state of thoughts at that moment while reporting their level of self-concept clarity, affect balance, and life satisfaction using the scales instead of referring to their actual feelings throughout the whole MCO. Moreover, the nature of the correlational design utilized in this study does not allow any causality to be drawn within the variables as well. Therefore, future researchers are suggested to conduct a longitudinal experimental study to precisely measure participants' level of self-concept clarity, affect balance, and life satisfaction within a certain period, and gain more holistic findings of the relationship between these variables.

Secondly, as the variables of this study are measured using self-report scales, there might be a possibility that participants are prone to exhibit social desirability bias, which is to report their levels of self-concept clarity, affect balance and life satisfaction based on their biasness when evaluating themselves to present themselves as socially acceptable manner instead of reflecting a true and realistic image of themselves [63], [64]. Hence, this might have affected the accuracy of the data collected in this study. To address this limitation, future studies are recommended to provide a clear and detailed explanation of the purpose of the study to the participants to prevent them from treating the scales provided in the study as an evaluation of their social traits [63].

Lastly, as the participants in this study were majority young adults with the mean age of 23 years old, this might affect the generalizability of the studies' findings as past studies indicated that different age groups might react or interpret stressful events caused by the pandemic in various ways in accordance with their level of self-concept clarity [18]. Given this, future researchers are encouraged to include participants of different age groups while conducting a similar study, to gain more comprehensive findings that are generalizable to people of all age groups. Additionally, as prior studies indicated that culture also plays a role in influencing one's self-concept clarity, future studies should include this factor while replicating this study to find out how different levels of self-concept clarity predicts the affect balance and life satisfaction of people from different cultures [65].

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examined the mediating role of affect balance on the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the hypotheses, the results of this current study suggest that affect balance partially mediates the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction, whereby a higher level of self-concept clarity predicts a higher level of affect balance, which then subsequently predicts a higher level of life satisfaction. The findings of this study indicated that self-concept clarity and affect balance are essential for individuals to develop sufficient emotional regulation skills to cope with the unforeseen challenges and uncertainties during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic effectively. Moreover, it also provided a novel insight about the mediating role of affect balance on the relationship between self-concept clarity and life satisfaction to future researchers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication of this study is funded by Universitas 45, Surabaya, Indonesia.

REFERENCES

[1] M. Hartt, "COVID-19: a lonely pandemic," *Cities & Health*, pp. 1–3, Jul. 2020, doi: 10.1080/23748834.2020.1788770.
[2] T. S. M. Yassin, "Malaysia announces movement control order after spike in Covid-19 cases (updated)," *The Star*, 2020. https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/16/malaysia-announces-restricted-movement-measure-after-spike-in-covid-19-cases.
[3] S. Teoh, "Malaysia to impose total nationwide lockdown from June 1-14 as Covid-19 cases hit new record," *The Straits Times*, 2021. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/full-lockdown-for-malaysia-from-june-1-14.
[4] H. Hassan, "Malaysia bans interstate, inter-district travel from May 10 to June 6 to curb Covid-19," *The Straits Times*, 2021. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-to-ban-interstate-inter-district-travel-from-may-10-to-june-6.
[5] K. Tee, "NSC: 10km travel for fully vaccinated in phase one states removed, but cross-border ban still applies," *Malay Mail*, 2021. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/08/21/nsc-10-km-travel-limit-for-fully-vaccinated-under-phase-one-states-removed/1999303.
[6] J. Dymecka, R. Gerymski, and A. Machnik-Czerwik, "How does stress affect life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic? Moderated mediation analysis of sense of coherence and fear of coronavirus," Psychology, Health & Medicine, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 280–288, Jan. 2022, doi: 10.1080/13548506.2021.1906436.
[7] Z. Karatas and Ö. Tagay, "The relationships between resilience of the adults affected by the covid pandemic in Turkey and COVID-19 fear, meaning in life, life satisfaction, intolerance of uncertainty and hope," *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 172, p. 110592, Apr. 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2020.110592.
[8] H. Shanmugam, J. A. Juhari, P. Nair, C. S. Ken, and N. C. Guan, "Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in Malaysia: A single thread of hope," *Malaysian Journal of Psychiatry Ejournal*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2020.
[9] A. Ammar *et al.*, "COVID-19 home confinement negatively impacts social participation and life satisfaction: a worldwide multicenter study," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 17, no. 17, p. 6237, Aug. 2020, doi: 10.3390/ijerph17176237.
[10] E. B. Slotter and L. F. Emery, "Self-concept clarity and social role transitions," in *Self-Concept Clarity*, Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 85–106.
[11] A. E. Light and P. S. Visser, "The Ins and outs of the self: contrasting role exits and role entries as predictors of self-concept clarity," *Self and Identity*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 291–306, May 2013, doi: 10.1080/15298868.2012.667914.
[12] A. W. Hanley and E. L. Garland, "Clarity of mind: Structural equation modeling of associations between dispositional mindfulness, self-concept clarity and psychological well-being," *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 106, pp. 334–339, Feb. 2017, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.028.
[13] J. D. Campbell, P. D. Trapnell, S. J. Heine, I. M. Katz, L. F. Lavallee, and D. R. Lehman, "Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 141–156, Jan. 1996, doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.70.1.141.
[14] J. Na, M. Y. Chan, J. Lodi-Smith, and D. C. Park, "Social-class differences in self-concept clarity and their implications for well-being," *Journal of Health Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 7, pp. 951–960, Apr. 2016, doi: 10.1177/1359105316643597.
[15] E. Diener, R. A. Emmons, R. J. Larsen, and S. Griffin, "The satisfaction with life scale," *Journal of Personality Assessment*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 71–75, Feb. 1985, doi: 10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13.
[16] G. Xiang, Q. Li, X. Du, X. Liu, M. Xiao, and H. Chen, "Links between family cohesion and subjective well-being in adolescents and early adults: The mediating role of self-concept clarity and hope," *Current Psychology*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 76–85, May 2020, doi: 10.1007/s12144-020-00795-0.
[17] E. B. Slotter, L. Winger, and N. Soto, "Lost without each other: The influence of group identity loss on the self-concept.," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 15–30, 2015, doi: 10.1037/gdn0000020.
[18] G. Alessandri, E. De Longis, F. Golfieri, and E. Crocetti, "Can self-concept clarity protect against a pandemic? a daily study on self-concept clarity and negative affect during the COVID-19 Outbreak," *Identity*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 6–19, Dec. 2020, doi: 10.1080/15283488.2020.1846538.
[19] S. C. Lee-Flynn, G. Pomaki, A. DeLongis, J. C. Biesanz, and E. Puterman, "Daily cognitive appraisals, daily affect, and long-term depressive symptoms: the role of self-esteem and self-concept clarity in the stress process," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 255–268, Jan. 2011, doi: 10.1177/0146167210394204.
[20] G. W. Lewandowski, N. Nardone, and A. J. Raines, "The role of self-concept clarity in relationship quality," *Self and Identity*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 416–433, Oct. 2009, doi: 10.1080/15298860903332191.
[21] Q. Yang, K. van den Bos, X. Zhang, S. Adams, and O. Ybarra, "Identity lost and found: Self-concept clarity in social network site contexts," *Self and Identity*, pp. 1–24, Jun. 2021, doi: 10.1080/15298868.2021.1940270.
[22] T. D. Ritchie, C. Sedikides, T. Wildschut, J. Arndt, and Y. Gidron, "Self-concept clarity mediates the relation between stress and subjective well-being," *Self and Identity*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 493–508, Jul. 2010, doi: 10.1080/15298868.2010.493066.
[23] M. N. Bechtoldt, C. K. W. De Dreu, B. A. Nijstad, and D. Zapf, "Self-concept clarity and the management of social conflict," *Journal of Personality*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 539–574, Apr. 2010, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00626.x.
[24] A. A. Laskowska, T. Jankowski, P. Oleś, and Ł. Miciuk, "Positive orientation as a predictor of hedonicwell-being: mediating role of the self-concept," *Health Psychology Report*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 261–272, 2018, doi: 10.5114/hpr.2018.75752.
[25] D. Liang, D. Xu, L. Xia, and X. Ma, "Life satisfaction in Chinese rural-to-urban migrants: Investigating the roles of self-esteem and affect balance," *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 48, no. 5, pp. 1651–1659, Apr. 2020, doi: 10.1002/jcop.22360.
[26] S. Koydemir, Ö. F. Simsek, A. Schütz, and A. Tipandjan, "Differences in how trait emotional intelligence predicts life satisfaction: the role of affect balance versus social support in India and Germany," *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 51–66, Jan. 2012, doi: 10.1007/s10902-011-9315-1.
[27] Y. Liu, Z. Wang, and W. Lü, "Resilience and affect balance as mediators between trait emotional intelligence and life satisfaction," *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 54, no. 7, pp. 850–855, May 2013, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2012.12.010.
[28] B. L. Fredrickson, "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions.," *American Psychologist*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 218–226, 2001, doi: 10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218.
[29] E. C. Chang *et al.*, "Positive emotions, hope, and life satisfaction in Chinese adults: a test of the broaden-and-build model in accounting for subjective well-being in Chinese college students," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 829–

835, Feb. 2019, doi: 10.1080/17439760.2019.1579358.
[30] J. C. Veilleux *et al.*, "Affect balance predicts daily emotional experience," *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 154, p. 109683, Feb. 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2019.109683.
[31] G. Fioravanti *et al.*, "Fear of missing out and social networking sites use and abuse: A meta-analysis," *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 122, p. 106839, Sep. 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2021.106839.
[32] F. Gioia, G. Fioravanti, S. Casale, and V. Boursier, "The effects of the fear of missing out on people's social networking sites use during the COVID-19 pandemic: the mediating role of online relational closeness and individuals' online communication attitude," *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol. 12, Feb. 2021, doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2021.620442.
[33] S. Casale and G. L. Flett, "Interpersonally-based fears during the COVID-19 pandemic: Reflections on the fear of missing out and the fear of not mattering constructs," *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 88–93, 2020.
[34] Z. Foo and K. D. Prihadi, "Happiness of university students in new normal Malaysia: The role of mattering, optimism, and social support," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 448, Jun. 2021, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v10i2.21138.
[35] P. P. T. Sim and K. D. Prihadi, "Social comparison and life satisfaction in social media: The role of mattering and state self-esteem," *International Journal of Public Health Science (IJPHS)*, vol. 9, no. 3, p. 245, Sep. 2020, doi: 10.11591/ijphs.v9i3.20509.
[36] S.-Y. Kam and K. D. Prihadi, "Why students tend to compare themselves with each other? The role of mattering and unconditional self-acceptance," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 441, Jun. 2021, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v10i2.21238.
[37] P. Kususanto and M. Chua, "Students' self-esteem at school: the risk, the challenge, and the cure," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–14, Jan. 2012, doi: 10.11591/edulearn.v6i1.185.
[38] K. D. Prihadi, Y. L. Hui, M. J. Chua, and C. K. W. Chang, "Cyber-victimization and perceived depression: Serial mediation of self-esteem and learned-helplessness," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 563, Dec. 2019, doi: 10.11591/ijere.v8i4.20266.
[39] W. D. Ellison, M. E. Gillespie, and A. C. Trahan, "Individual differences and stability of dynamics among self-concept clarity, impatience, and negative affect," *Self and Identity*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 324–345, Feb. 2019, doi: 10.1080/15298868.2019.1580217.
[40] M. Diehl and E. L. Hay, "Self-concept differentiation and self-concept clarity across adulthood: associations with age and psychological well-being," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 125–152, Sep. 2011, doi: 10.2190/ag.73.2.b.
[41] K. D. Willis and H. J. Burnett, "The power of stress: Perceived stress and its relationship with rumination, self-concept clarity, and resilience," *North American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 483–498, 2016.
[42] M. Bigler, G. J. Neimeyer, and E. Brown, "The divided self revisited: effects of self-concept clarity and self-concept differentiation on psychological adjustment," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 396–415, Sep. 2001, doi: 10.1521/jscp.20.3.396.22302.
[43] J. Lodi-Smith and E. Crocetti, "Self-concept clarity development across the lifespan," in *Self-Concept Clarity*, Springer International Publishing, pp. 67–84, 2017.
[44] A. E. Light, "Self-concept clarity, self-regulation, and psychological well-being," in *Self-Concept Clarity*, Springer International Publishing, pp. 177–193, 2017.
[45] D.-J. Lee, "Relationships among the degree of participation in physical activity, self-concept clarity, and COVID-19 stress in Adolescents," *Healthcare*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 482, Apr. 2021, doi: 10.3390/healthcare9040482.
[46] F. Faul, E. Erdfelder, A. Buchner, and A.-G. Lang, "Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses," *Behavior Research Methods*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 1149–1160, Nov. 2009, doi: 10.3758/brm.41.4.1149.
[47] B. Butzer and N. A. Kuiper, "Relationships between the frequency of social comparisons and self-concept clarity, intolerance of uncertainty, anxiety, and depression," *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 167–176, Jul. 2006, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2005.12.017.
[48] W. Pavot and E. Diener, "The satisfaction with life scale and the emerging construct of life satisfaction," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 137–152, Apr. 2008, doi: 10.1080/17439760701756946.
[49] E. Diener *et al.*, "New well-being measures: short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings," *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 97, no. 2, pp. 143–156, May 2009, doi: 10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y.
[50] P. B. Gnilka, S. E. McLaulin, J. S. Ashby, and M. C. Allen, "Coping resources as mediators of multidimensional perfectionism and burnout.," *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, vol. 69, no. 3, pp. 209–222, Sep. 2017, doi: 10.1037/cpb0000078.
[51] A. Field, *Discovering Statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics*, 5th ed. London: Sage, 2018.
[52] A. F. Hayes, *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. The Guilford Press, 2017.
[53] J. Y. Shin, M. F. Steger, and K. L. Henry, "Self-concept clarity's role in meaning in life among American college students: A latent growth approach," *Self and Identity*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 206–223, Jan. 2016, doi: 10.1080/15298868.2015.1111844.
[54] R. Servidio, M. Sinatra, M. D. Griffiths, and L. Monacis, "Social comparison orientation and fear of missing out as mediators between self-concept clarity and problematic smartphone use," *Addictive Behaviors*, vol. 122, p. 107014, Nov. 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107014.
[55] M. E. Loades *et al.*, "Rapid systematic review: the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the mental health of children and adolescents in the context of COVID-19," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 59, no. 11, pp. 1218--1239.e3, Nov. 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009.
[56] S. Lin, D. Liu, W. Liu, Q. Hui, K. S. Cortina, and X. You, "Mediating effects of self-concept clarity on the relationship between passive social network sites use and subjective well-being," *Current Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 1348–1355, Nov. 2018, doi: 10.1007/s12144-018-0066-6.
[57] N. Civitci and A. Civitci, "Social comparison orientation, hardiness and life satisfaction in undergraduate students," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 205, pp. 516–523, Oct. 2015, doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.09.062.
[58] M. A. Karaman, J. C. Vela, and C. Garcia, "Do hope and meaning of life mediate resilience and life satisfaction among Latinx students?," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, vol. 48, no. 5, pp. 685–696, May 2020, doi: 10.1080/03069885.2020.1760206.
[59] K. Goldschmidt, "The COVID-19 pandemic: technology use to support the wellbeing of children," *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, vol. 53, pp. 88–90, Jul. 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.pedn.2020.04.013.
[60] K. Guo *et al.*, "Assessing social support impact on depression, anxiety, and stress among undergraduate students in Shaanxi province during the COVID-19 pandemic of China," *PLoS ONE*, vol. 16, no. 7, p. e0253891, Jul. 2021, doi:

10.1371/journal.pone.0253891.
[61] J. Lee, H. J. Jeong, and S. Kim, "Stress, anxiety, and depression among undergraduate students during the covid-19 pandemic and their use of mental health services," *Innovative Higher Education*, vol. 46, no. 5, pp. 519–538, Apr. 2021, doi: 10.1007/s10755-021-09552-y.
[62] C. A. Limbers, C. McCollum, and E. Greenwood, "Physical activity moderates the association between parenting stress and quality of life in working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic," *Mental Health and Physical Activity*, vol. 19, p. 100358, Oct. 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.mhpa.2020.100358.
[63] N. Bergen and R. Labonté, "Everything is perfect, and we have no problems: detecting and limiting social desirability bias in qualitative research," *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 783–792, Dec. 2019, doi: 10.1177/1049732319889354.
[64] R. B. Larson, "Controlling social desirability bias," *International Journal of Market Research*, vol. 61, no. 5, pp. 534–547, Oct. 2018, doi: 10.1177/1470785318805305.
[65] C. Quinones and N. K. Kakabadse, "Self-concept clarity, social support, and compulsive Internet use: A study of the US and the UAE," *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 44, pp. 347–356, Mar. 2015, doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.019.