

Is a good relationship enough for a good life?

Efendy Xu¹, Kususanto Ditto Prihadi², Primatia Yogi Wulandari³, Rosatyani Puspita Adiati³, Rudi Cahyono³, Iwan Wahyu Widayat³, Herdina Indrijati³, Berlian Gressy Septarini³, Valina Khairin Nisa³

¹Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, HELP University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

²Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Cyberjaya, Cyberjaya, Malaysia

³Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Satisfaction with life is an important element of mental health as its protective features against depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. The bottom-up theory of life satisfaction explained that satisfaction in specific domains tend to sum up to general life satisfaction. accordingly, studies reported that relationship satisfaction predicts general life satisfaction This cross-sectional study aims to investigate the role of two variables, namely perceived social support (PSS) and mattering. We hypothesized that PSS and mattering perform full serial mediation on the link relationship between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. 256 individuals who live in several urban areas in West Malaysia were recruited through purposive sampling to respond to online form consisted of scales of relationship satisfaction, satisfaction with life, general mattering scale and multidimensional scale of perceived social support. Bootstrap method with 95% confidence interval and 5,000 samples was conducted through PROCESS Macro model 6; the results suggested that a significant, full serial mediation occurred. Additionally, both PSS and mattering significantly predicted life satisfaction after controlling for each other.

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Corresponding Author:

Kususanto Ditto Prihadi

Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Cyberjaya

Persiaran Bestari, Cyber 11, 63000 Cyberjaya, Malaysia

Email: prihadi@cyberjaya.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of life satisfaction defined the satisfaction with life as a cognitive evaluation of one's life, that has been commonly regarded as a positive variable of individuals' life [1]. In other words, life satisfaction refers to a positive, personal evaluation of circumstances of an individual [2]; it reflects the judgment of an individual on how well they meet valuable expectations [3], [4]. In spite of the fact that it was considered as an integral part of subjective wellbeing [5] the development and validation of Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLWS) by Diener *et al.* [1] created opportunities to study life satisfaction independently rather than as a part of general subjective wellbeing.

The availability and validity of SLWS had caused life satisfaction to be studied in more specific various contexts. For instance, it is reported to be the predictor of occupational success at work [6], [7], better academic success [8], academic self-efficacy and positive academic experiences [9]–[11]. Some recent studies also reported it to be a significant protective factor of depression risk [12]–[14].

In a broader context, recent studies reported the significance of life satisfaction in determining better social relationship [15] even between people who are married to each [2]. The vast implication of life satisfaction as a predictor of a better social relationship also attract further question whether life satisfaction is

actually predicted by better social relationship. A recent study where the population has already suffered from COVID-19 pandemic indicated that the mattering, which generally refers to how much we consider ourselves matter to others is a robust predictor of life satisfaction [16], [17]. The fact that mattering is a socially reflective construct [18] suggested that a better satisfaction in social relationship led to a higher life satisfaction.

In line with that, some studies from the last decade had reported that relationship satisfaction is a predictor of life satisfaction [15], [19], [20]. Before we move further, it is important to note that relationship satisfaction refers to the individuals' global subjective assessment of one's relationship with their romantic partner [21] instead of the commitment and long-term stability [19]. The link between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction has been established [22], [23], and the link has been studied further in the field of romantic relationship, where it is confirmed that married individuals exhibit higher life satisfaction levels compared to unmarried and divorced individuals [24], [25].

However, it was argued that mediator variables are required to explain the link between general relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction, because different life events might have altered the link between the two variables; negative life experiences such as culture [26] unemployment [27] have been shown to change the way individuals evaluate their life satisfaction levels related to the romantic relationship satisfaction.

In the context of this study, we opted to study the possibility of the mediation of perceived social support (PSS) and mattering on the link between relationship satisfaction and satisfaction with life. Our rationale is while certain levels of intimacy, togetherness, expression of gratitude and strong commitment can only be discovered among married and cohabiting couples, PSS and mattering can be found among any couple at any relationship stage, including friendship and acquaintanceship [18]. Perceived social support is described as individuals' beliefs on how much their relationships and social contacts provide support to them and the support quality [26], and it was found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction [2], [24], [28].

Studies have reported that PSS significantly predicts life satisfaction even among at-risk or marginalized [29]. A study among drug addicts in China indicated that PSS is a robust variable of life satisfaction, because self-esteem and loneliness only partially mediated the link [30]. Studies in non-marginalized population also indicated that PSS explained the link between other factors and life satisfaction, such as social media usage [31], and subjective socioeconomic status [32]. The aforementioned studies indicated that PSS is a significant predictor of life satisfaction; therefore, we hypothesized that it will mediate the link between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Furthermore, it was also argued that although we feel supported, we would not likely to be satisfied with life if we did not consider ourselves matter much to others [4]. The sense of mattering refers to individuals' belief that they are an important component of their social [18]; it provides us with the sense of being significant, valued and cared about [33]. The foundation of our serial mediation hypothesis is that relationship satisfaction was reported to be the predictor of PSS [34] and PSS is the predictor of mattering [35]. In general, this study meant to test the directional hypothesis that the greater a person's relationship satisfaction, the more they believe they are socially supported, which then enhances their sense of mattering, which in turn, allows them to feel satisfied with their lives. Figure 1 illustrate our serial mediation hypothesis.

In other words, this cross-sectional study would like to offer another perspective on the relationship between the relationship satisfaction and the satisfaction of life in general. However, as a cross-sectional study, this work would not be capable to detect the causal relationship among the variables; therefore, we proposed the hypothetical model illustrated in Figure 1.

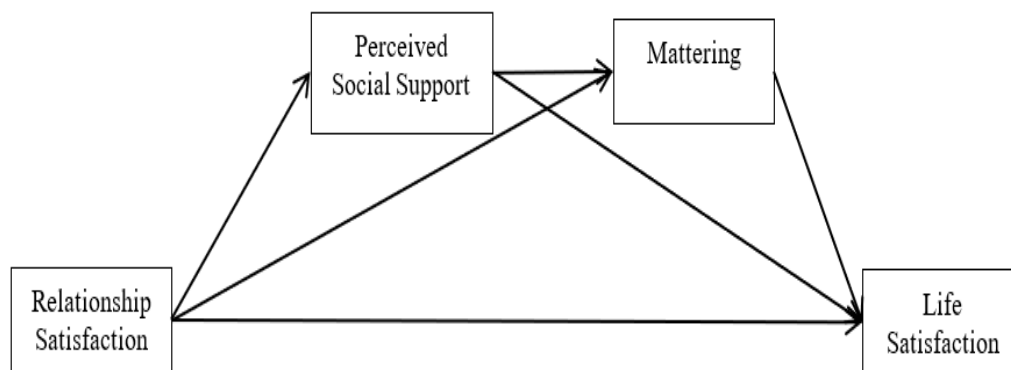


Figure 1. Serial mediation hypothesis

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Participants

Four hundred adults between 18-65 years old, who reside in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor states were randomly recruited by using social media. Based on the table of [21], a population as large as 1 million and above can be represented by 384 randomized participants. Nevertheless, the data was only taken from purposively selected 256 participants as we included the inclusion criteria of being in or having been in romantic relationship.

2.2. Scales

Relationship Satisfaction was measured by using participant's mean score on the Relationship Satisfaction Scale-short version (RS5), where a higher mean score indicates higher level of relationship satisfaction [36] and its internal reliability is $\alpha=.85$. Life satisfaction was assessed by using Life Satisfaction Inventory [1] the internal reliability is $\alpha=.87$. Perceived Social Support was measured by participant's mean score on the bilingual multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS), where a higher mean score indicates a higher level of perceived social support [37], the internal reliability is $\alpha=.92$. Mattering was measured using general mattering scale (GMS) [16], with the internal reliability of the scale ranges from .89. All scales were back translated between English and Malay, and the participants of this study were given the bilingual version.

2.3. Procedure

Each participant was compensated with e-wallet credit of five 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.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Path analysis was conducted with the help of PROCESS Macro Model 6 in SPSS. Table 1 summarize the multiple regression analysis of each path. As can be seen in Table 1, the model of RS significantly predicted PSS and Mattering. However, PSS fully mediated the link between RS to mattering; RS is no longer a significant predictor of mattering when controlling for PSS. Table 2 summarizes the confirmed that serial mediation occurred.

Table 1. Path analysis

Path	R-sq	β	p
a1 (X on M1)	.10	.73	<.000
a2 (X on M2, controlling for M1)	.20	.05	.23
d (M1 on M2 controlling for X)	.20	.13	<.000
c' (X on Y, controlling for other variables)	.35	.05	.52
b1 (M1 to Y, controlling for other variables)	.35	.18	<.000
b2 (M2 to Y, controlling for other variables)	.35	.70	<.000

Y: LifeSat. X: RelSat. M1: PSS. M2: Matt

Table 2. Summary of the mediation analysis in the form of direct and indirect effect of RS on LS

Effect	β	(Boot)SE	(Boot)LLCI	(Boot)ULCI
Direct X on Y	.05	.07	-1.0	.19
Total 0.24	.06	.13	.36	
Indirect 1	.13	.04	.06	.22
Indirect 2	.04	.03	-.03	.11
Indirect 3	.07	0.2	0.3	.12

Note Y: LifeSat. X: Relationship Satisfaction. M1: PSS. M2: Mattering.

Ind1: X→M1→Y. Ind2: X→M2→Y. Ind3: X→M1→M2→Y

Table 2 shows that the indirect effect 3 showed the significance, the absence of zero value between the range of lower limit confident interval (LLCI) and upper limit confident interval (ULCI) indicated that all the 5,000 sampling in the bootstrap analysis led to non-zero variance. The result in Table 2 also indicated that the serial mediation fully occurred, because the direct effect of relationship satisfaction does not significantly predict life satisfaction. Therefore, our serial mediation hypothesis was supported by our findings. The it can be summarized that individuals who are satisfied with their relationship tend to feel they are socially supported, and this feeling led them to sense that they matter more to others. In turn, individuals with higher sense of mattering tend to perceive their life as more satisfying.

Our findings were neither consistent with the reports which stated that individuals with satisfying romantic relationship tend to develop higher levels of satisfaction with life in general [15], [19], [20]. In other words, we managed to explain that their findings hold the truth, and it could be explained by perceived social support and mattering. It is acceptable that individuals with satisfying relationship might not be satisfied with life in general when they do not feel supported or matter to their significant others.

Additionally, our findings are in line with the reports that relationship satisfaction predicted perceived social support [24], [28], [38] and that perceived social support predicted mattering [35]. In other words, while relationship satisfaction might have increased individuals' life satisfaction, satisfaction with life will not be improved among people who do not believe that they are socially supported, mostly because they did not feel they matter enough to their significant others.

Apart from the exclusion of our mediators in the past studies, the other reasons for the inconsistency between the findings could have been due to the cultural background and sample population. Culture affects the definition of love and the way people think, feel, and act in close relationships [26]. Hence, cultural differences in the sample population may influence the findings in a way that Norwegian mother might think and express love as well as handle conflict in a relationship differently from Malaysian adults. Moreover, cultural differences influence individuals' behaviours on how they seek and provide support in a relationship [26]. Thus, it is suggested for the future research to be conducted in different cultural backgrounds.

4. CONCLUSION

Findings of our study indicated that despite individuals are satisfied with their relationship with their significant others, they might not consider their life as satisfying. The level of their relationship satisfaction should be enough to make them believe that they are supported by people around them. This belief should also lead them to believe that they matter to others. In turn, it is the sense that they matter that would predict their satisfaction with life.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Efendy Xu     is a psychology graduate from HELP University Subang 2, Malaysia. His studies were mostly related to mental health, interpersonal relationship, and clinical psychology. He can be contacted at email: efendyse024@gmail.com.






Kusunto Ditto Prihadi    is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Cyberjaya, Cyberjaya, Malaysia. Most of his studies are related to interpersonal relationship, social media, and mattering. He can be contacted at email: prihadi@cyberjaya.edu.my.






Primatia Yogi Wulandari    is a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia and the member of the Early Childhood Education and Development and the Family Care and Education Study Groups. Her research interests are mainly focused on the areas of Developmental Psychology: moral development, sibling and peer relationships, and the role of parenting. She has published several books, including “Sibling Conflict: Its effect on early childhood empathy”. She can be contacted at email: primatia.yogi@psikologi.unair.ac.id.






Rosatyani Puspita Adiati    is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga. Her research mainly focuses on decision making, consumer behavior, and psychological well-being. Additionally, she works for some projects focused on developing humans at organization, assessment centers and organizational development. She can be contacted at email: rosatyani.adiati@psikologi.unair.ac.id.






Rudi Cahyono    is a Lecturer of Developmental and Educational Psychology at Universitas Airlangga in Indonesia. His focus of study is on parenting and child education and the qualitative method. He also interested to some subject matters, such as: moral, spirituality, positive psychology, psycholinguistic, semiotic, and happiness. He can be contacted at email: rudi.cahyono@psikologi.unair.ac.id.






Iwan Wahyu Widayat    is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga in Surabaya, Indonesia. His research interests are primarily focused on the fields of History of Psychology, and Indigenous Psychology. In addition, he worked on several projects focused on Educational Psychology, particularly Inclusive Education and Gifted/Talented Education. He can be contacted at email: iwan.widayat@psikologi.unair.ac.id.






Herdina Indrijati    is a lecture of Developmental Psychology at Universitas Airlangga in Surabaya, Indonesia. She is a Developmental Psychologists. Her research is mainly in the areas of Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychology, family, and psychology of play. She can be contacted at email: herdina.indrijati@psikologi.unair.ac.id.



Berlian Gressy Septarini    is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga. Her research interests are particularly in the psychology of cultural change and its impact on different societies. She is recently finishing her PhD research in the cultural transmission of prosocial behaviour from the perspective of cultural dynamics. She can be contacted at email: gressy.septarini@psikologi.unair.ac.id.



Valina Khairin Nisa    is Junior Lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga. Her research mainly focuses on family mental health, emotion regulation and borderline personality disorder. She is currently working on project about resilience among women with various cases of infertility. She can be contacted at email: valinanisa@psikologi.unair.ac.id.