

# Relationship between Parental Attachment, Social Support and Life Satisfaction among Adolescents

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## Abstract

Both parental attachment and social support are essential factors in the formation of life satisfaction among adolescents. Adolescents with low levels of life satisfaction have been associated with potentially negative consequences, maladaptive behaviours, and school disengagement. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the relationship between parental attachment, social support (family and peers), and life satisfaction among adolescents. A total of 440 Form Six students between the ages of 18 and 19 years old were selected from one secondary school in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan by using a multi-stage cluster random sampling technique. Data was collected by using an online questionnaire (Google Form). The Domain of Adolescent Attachment Scale-Malay (DAAS-Malay) was used to measure parental attachment while The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to measure social support. Life satisfaction was measured using The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The results showed that there were significant positive relationships between maternal attachment, paternal attachment, family support, and peer support with adolescents' life satisfaction. Meanwhile, multiple regression analysis outcomes indicated that family social support yielded the strongest influence on life satisfaction. In conclusion, parental attachment, family social support, and peer social support are key determinants of adolescents' life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Life Satisfaction, Parental Attachment, Peer, Social Support

## Introduction

Life satisfaction is described by Lachman and colleagues (2018) as a cognitive and thorough appraisal of the overall quality of one's life. It also serves as a life quality indicator and a critical factor in determining how well people live (Liang et al., 2022). Positive things in adolescence contribute to a sense of fulfillment in life and vice versa. However, negative things that are felt by adolescents during this stage can cause life discontent. Therefore, the level of satisfaction among adolescents must be investigated due to bigger challenges areas in their real life. Adolescents who are happy with their lives have better health, and a lower risk of death (Antaramian, 2017). Research has shown that life satisfaction drops significantly

during adolescence (Daly, 2022; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Jebb et al., 2020). Low life satisfaction has been associated with potentially negative consequences, maladaptive behaviours, and school disengagement among adolescents (Huebner et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2011). Adolescents' life satisfaction is typically impacted by several factors, including parental attachment. Attachment has been defined as a strong emotional relationship that people have with an important person in their lives (Bowlby, 1969). It also refers to a deep as well as lasting emotional connection made by an individual in the relationship with significant others and expresses a person's desire for closeness or interaction with specific objects. According to the Attachment Theory developed by Bowlby (1969); Ainsworth (1973), there were two main types of attachment: secure and insecure (anxious, avoidant, and disorganised) which develop in childhood and carry on throughout adolescents. Attachment based on security has been defined as the confidence in the emotional availability and accessibility of primary figures perceived as a secure base for restoring emotional balance during distressed and needed situations (Bowlby, 1988). It is also a sense of comfort in the presence of closeness and interdependence, as well as the support search (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Meanwhile, avoidant attachment is the behavior of individuals who avoid the process of adapting to circumstances (Firestone, 2019), and anxious attachment is a lack of security and the person feels rejected (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Lastly, the disorganized attachment style is *characterized by demonstrating inconsistent behaviors and having a hard time trusting others.*

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction among adolescents. For example, Jiang and colleagues (2013) have conducted a study on the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction among adolescents. The results demonstrated that there was a significant positive relationship between parental attachment and adolescents' life satisfaction. The findings were consistent with the study by Natashya and Basaria (2021) who found a significant relationship between the role of parental attachment and life satisfaction among adolescents. Another study conducted by Komitaki and Homaei (2015) discovered a positive association between secure parental attachment and adolescents' life satisfaction. These findings explained that adolescents with high levels of secure parental attachment were more satisfied in their lives. The results are in line with research by Koohsar and Bonab (2011) who found that secure attachment will increase life satisfaction. Adolescents with secure attachments tend to have a more favorable appraisal and perception of different relationships in their learning and daily lives, leading to a larger experience of happiness and higher satisfaction with life and interpersonal interactions (Guo et al., 2017). According to Lubiewska and Derbis (2016), the strongest unique predictor of adolescents' life satisfaction is the quality of parental attachment. Along with that, adolescents who had an insecure attachment to their parents were more likely to engage in hazardous behaviors, exhibit behavioral issues, and struggle with emotional control, such as impulsivity (Holt et al., 2019; Kerestes et al., 2019 & Rawatlal et al., 2015). A study conducted by Monaco (2019) demonstrated that adolescents who have an insecure attachment to their parents are more likely to participate in dangerous behaviours, and develop behavioural issues and emotional control issues such as impulsivity.

Another factor that can influence adolescents' life satisfaction is social support. Social support refers to a process that improves individual health and well-being through social relationships which makes a person feel cared for and appreciated (Thompson, 2017). Coyle and Malecki (2018) defined social support as a behaviour or act regarded as helpful by a person from the social network that can improve the individual's overall functioning. Social support can be felt from a wide spectrum of one's substantial social network, including family

and friends (Alsubaie, et al., 2019). Social support is important since it acts as a protective element in conquering life's challenges (Coyle & Malecki, 2018). Adolescents with strong social support perform better in life by conquering problems and challenges than those with low perceived social support (Chin et al., 2019). Previous studies demonstrated that social support was positively associated with adolescents' life satisfaction (Khan, 2015; Shanshan et al., 2021). Specifically, the findings showed that family social support is more strongly associated with life satisfaction compared to other social support networks. The findings were in line with the study conducted by Sarriera and colleagues (2015) which examined the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among Brazilian adolescents. The results demonstrated that there was a high correlation between social support and adolescents' life satisfaction. Furthermore, adolescents who receive more parental support have higher life satisfaction than adolescents who receive less. According to Jimenez-Iglesias and colleagues (2017), social support from parents was more essential to adolescents' life satisfaction than social support from other sources. A previous study also found that adolescents who received more social support from their peers had a better degree of life satisfaction (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Adolescents require appropriate peer support in addition to family support to face various life difficulties. A prior study conducted by Hon and Chua (2015) showed that adolescents who lack social support from family or friends are more likely to be lonely in their lives. These adolescents tend to use online social networks to meet social needs that they cannot obtain in reality.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1994), a person's development is influenced by several interrelated environmental systems, ranging from their immediate surroundings (such as their family) to more general social structures (such as culture). These systems, which represent various degrees of external impacts on an individual's growth and behavior, include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Since the five systems are interconnected, interactions between personal characteristics and environmental ecological elements lead to human development. The present study will primarily focus on the microsystems level. Microsystems are described by Bronfenbrenner (1994) as "a pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that permit engagement in a sustained, progressively more complex interaction with the immediate environment. Examples of these environments include the home, classroom, peer group, and workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Within this system, the adolescent has direct interaction with these individuals. The relationships in the microsystem are bidirectional and people can both be impacted by and have an impact on one another. The microsystems in this study are conceptualised as parental attachment, family social support, and peer social support which might influence adolescents' life satisfaction.

The researchers found that most studies on this topic have been widely conducted in Western countries. Moreover, limited studies have been done regarding parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents. The vast majority of existing research on this topic was conducted among university students, and thus little is known about the relationship between parental attachment and social support with life satisfaction among adolescents. Hence, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by empirically evaluating the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents in the Malaysian context.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to determine the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents

1. To describe the respondent's background.
2. To determine the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents.
3. To determine the unique predictors of life satisfaction among adolescents.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative online survey methodology with a correlational design to gather information regarding the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents. The survey was carried out via an online survey disseminated in the Google Forms application.

#### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

The study population consists of 3,210 Form Six students ages between 18 and 19 years old in the state of Negeri Sembilan. The population size was obtained from the Negeri Sembilan Education Department. The sample size consisted of 440 Form Six students ages between 18 and 19 years old in one secondary school in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. In terms of age range, people from 10 to 22 are considered adolescents (Santrock, 2007). The sample size was determined based on the sample size formulation by (Cochran, 1963). Based on Cochran's (1963) formula, the sample size obtained for this study was 400 based on the population size which was 3,210. However, the sample size was increased by about 10 percent to reduce sampling error. Therefore, the actual sample size for this study was 440. The sample for this study was selected by using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. First, one district was randomly selected from seven districts in Negeri Sembilan. Then, only one secondary school was randomly selected in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. Next, two levels (upper and lower form six) were randomly selected from the school. Lastly, eight classes from each level were selected randomly.

#### **Procedure**

Permission for field data collection was obtained from the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan Education Department, and the school's principal. A link containing the Google Forms survey was sent to all respondents through the WhatsApp application, whereby they were provided with informed consent before online survey completion. The participants were informed that their consent was voluntary, that they had the option to refuse to participate, and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected.

#### **Variables and Measurements**

The parental attachment was measured by using The Domain of Adolescent Attachment Scale-Malay (DAAS-Malay) (Zulkefly & Wilkinson, 2013). This scale consisted of 43 items that were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The paternal attachment subscale comprised 23 items whereas the maternal attachment subscale had 20 items. Examples of the items for the DAAS-Malay were "My father protects me from danger and trouble (positive item)", "My father is never there when I need him (negative item)", "My mother pays attention to me (positive item)" and "My mother is never

there when I need her (negative item)". A high score for each subscale (paternal and maternal attachment) indicated high levels of attachment. According to the past research conducted by Zulkefly and Wilkinson (2013), Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale were 0.92 and 0.79. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were 0.96 (paternal attachment) and 0.95 (maternal attachment).

Social support was measured by using The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988). This scale consisted of 12 items that were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). There were three assessments of social support in MSPSS from three groups which were family, friends, and significant others. However, the items about significant others were not used in this research. The family subscale has comprised 4 items and the friends' subscale also has 4 items. Examples of the items for the MSPSS are "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family" and "I can talk about my problems with my friends". A high score indicated high levels of social support. According to the past research conducted by Basol (2008), Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.93. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was 0.88.

Life satisfaction was measured by using The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et., 1985). This scale consisted of 5 items that were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The score can be classified into extremely dissatisfied (5-9 points), dissatisfied (10-14 points), slightly dissatisfied (15-19 points), neutral (20 points), slightly satisfied (21-25 points), satisfied (26-30 points), and extremely satisfied (31-35 points). Examples of the items for the SWLS were "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal", "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "I am satisfied with my life". A high score indicates high levels of life satisfaction. According to the past research conducted by Pavot and Diener (2008), Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale were 0.79 and 0.89. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was 0.86.

## **Data Analysis**

The collected data were subjected to an analysis by using SPSS software, while descriptive statistics were performed to describe the respondent's background. Next, an analysis of Pearson's correlation was utilised to determine the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents. This was followed by a multiple regression analysis, which served to identify the unique predictors of life satisfaction among adolescents.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' backgrounds. According to the table, more than half (52.5%) of the adolescents were 19 years old, while the rest (47.5%) were 18 years old. Gender-wise, the majority (68.9%) of the adolescents were female, whereas the latter 31.1% were male. For family income, it has been categorised into three categories which were B40, M40, and T20. B40 is defined as a family with family monthly income below RM4,850. M40 is for families with a family monthly income between RM4,850 to RM10,960 while T20 is family with a family monthly income of more than RM10,960. From the results of descriptive analysis, it was found that more than half (67.7%) were in the B40 category, 115 families (26.1%) were in the M40 category, and 27 families (6.1%) were in the T20 category (Mean=RM4463.60).

Table 1

*Distribution of respondents' background (N = 440)*

Variables	N (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Age</b>		18.52	0.50
18	209 (47.5)		
19	231 (52.5)		
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	137 (13.1)		
Female	303 (69.9)		
<b>Family monthly income</b>		RM4463.60	3805.01
< RM4,850	298 (67.7)		
RM4,851 – RM10,960	115 (26.1)		
> RM10,960	27 (6.1)		

**Parental Attachment, Social Support, and Life Satisfaction**

The relationship between parental attachment and behavior problems was analysed in this study by using Pearson's correlation. The results showed significant positive relationships between maternal ( $r = 0.533$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and paternal ( $r = 0.501$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) attachment with life satisfaction (see Table 2). According to Table 2, there is a positive and significant relationship between family social support ( $r = 0.635$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and peer social support ( $r = 0.457$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) with adolescents' life satisfaction. These findings indicated that adolescents who receive high levels of social support from family and peers are more likely to experience high levels of life satisfaction.

Table 2

*Pearson's correlation between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction*

Variables	Life Satisfaction	
	r	p
<b>Parental Attachment</b>		
Maternal attachment	0.53	0.00
Paternal attachment	0.50	0.00
<b>Social Support</b>		
Family	0.63	0.00
Peer	0.45	0.00

Next, multiple regression was conducted to determine the unique predictors of adolescents' life satisfaction. Table 3 shows the results of multiple regression analyses of the four independent variables which are maternal attachment, parental attachment, family social support, and peer social support against the dependent variable which is life satisfaction. Based on the table, the overall model was significant with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.466. This model explains 47% of the variance towards adolescents' life satisfaction with  $F = 75.81$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The results showed that maternal attachment, parental attachment, family social support, and peer social support were found to be significant predictors of adolescents'

life satisfaction. The result revealed that family support ( $\beta = 0.369$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) was found to have the strongest influence on adolescents' life satisfaction. This was followed by peer social support ( $\beta = 0.211$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), paternal attachment ( $\beta = 0.128$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), and maternal attachment ( $\beta = 0.126$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ).

Table 3

*Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting life satisfaction*

Variables	Life Satisfaction	
	$\beta$	p
Maternal Attachment	0.126	0.016
Paternal Attachment	0.128	0.007
Family Support	0.369	0.001
Peer Support	0.211	0.001
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.466</b>		
<b>F = 75.81</b>		

### Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents. As a result, the outcomes yielded a significantly positive correlation between parental attachment and adolescents' life satisfaction. This result was consistent with previous studies which found that maternal attachment was positively correlated with life satisfaction (Shahyad et al., 2011). Adolescents who receive a sufficient attachment from their mother would develop a positive attitude towards self and future which causes them to be happier and more satisfied with their current lives (Chong & Baharudin, 2017). Maternal attachment would also predict better conflict resolution behavior and this can develop more emotional adjustment and relational competence among adolescents, thus increasing the level of life satisfaction (Ross & Fuertes, 2010). In addition, it can be considered that when adolescents established a basic bond with their mothers who were their first caregivers, they would more easily adapt to life and as a result have high life satisfaction (Oral & Kababa, 2020). These findings highlight the importance for parents to build secure relationships with their children to enhance positive outcomes.

Also, the results revealed a significant positive relationship between family social support and adolescents' life satisfaction. The result was in line with past studies which found that family social support was positively correlated with life satisfaction among adolescents (Bi et al., 2021). This can be shown that social support from family appeared to be a crucial dimension of life satisfaction among adolescents (Sarriera et al., 2015). When adolescents were supported by their family, they would have a greater cognitive mechanism, coping strategies, and individual behaviors which they are more likely to improve their level of life satisfaction (Tamannaefar & Behzadmoghaddam, 2016). Therefore, an increase in family social support would improve the life satisfaction of adolescents.

Furthermore, the study results depicted a significantly positive relationship between peer social support with adolescents' life satisfaction. This result was consistent with previous studies which found that peer social support has a positive significant relationship with life satisfaction (Tarkar, 2021). Peer social support becoming important in adolescents' lives and may serve as a source of support that contributes to adolescent life satisfaction (Albarello et al., 2020; Bokhorst et al., 2010; Chu et al., 2010). Along with that, adolescents would increase their level of life satisfaction as they spend a long time with their friends since they share

common interests. They could also express their feelings and problems with their peer group, and this indirectly leads to enhanced life satisfaction. Hence, social support from peers appeared to increase adolescents' life satisfaction. Moreover, the present findings also supported the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) which concluded that parents and peers at the microsystem level may influence adolescents' life satisfaction.

Next, the results showed that family social support was found to be the strongest predictor in explaining adolescents' life satisfaction. The finding was consistent with the study conducted by Shanshan and colleagues (2021) who found that family social support is more strongly associated with life satisfaction compared to other social support networks. The family was the closest social environment, especially for adolescents. During the adolescent stage, they rely on their parents for emotional and instrumental support (love and financial support). They will experience less pressure if they receive social support from their parents (Auerbach et al., 2011; Rueger et al., 2016). According to Jimenez and colleagues (2017), perceived support from family was more essential to adolescents' life satisfaction than perceived support from peers, teachers, or classmates. Adolescents who developed more favorable relationships with their families reported higher levels of life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2006).

The findings of the present study highlighted the importance of parental attachment, social support from family and peers in contributing to life satisfaction among adolescents. Practically, the findings encourage parents to foster a strong parent-adolescent attachment and provide the necessary support to increase adolescents' life satisfaction. To strengthen social support from family, relevant parties should develop programs that involve family members and adolescents. This provides an opportunity for all family members to come together and build their bonds via various activities. Additionally, schools or non-profit organisations can host more seminars geared toward parents and family members, covering topics like current communication challenges, conflict resolution techniques, and a discussion of the social issues that adolescents are currently facing. Besides that, peers can also provide a unique opportunity for mutually supportive connections, which can help adolescents increase their life satisfaction. Therefore, social and interactive programs including adolescent participation might be created to improve social support from peers. Sports Day and after-school events, for example, can be organised to help students feel more connected to their peers.

Some limitations should be highlighted here to ensure maximum benefits. First, this study only involved Form Six students between 18 to 19 years old in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. Therefore, these findings may not be generalisable to all Form Six students in other states in Malaysia. Future research might expand this study by using more diverse samples and different settings to provide greater generalisation. Moreover, the current study did not attempt to investigate other potential factors that may influence adolescents' life satisfaction such as parenting styles, social media usage, and self-esteem. Hence, future studies might explore the influence of these factors on adolescents' life satisfaction. Lastly, the present study implemented the correlational research design, which disallowed determining the direction of effects between the tested variables. Therefore, future studies might include other statistical analyses to find more interesting findings regarding this topic. Regardless of these limitations, this study contributes to the available body of knowledge by enhancing the current understanding of the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and life satisfaction among adolescents.



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