



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER RELATIONS, GENERAL  
SELF-CONCEPT AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS  
IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL IN SELANGOR, MALAYSIA***

**CHONG LING LI**

**FEM 2018 19**



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By

**CHONG LING LI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,  
University Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

**October 2017**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for degree of Master of Science

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**CHONG LING LI**

**October 2017**

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The present study aimed to examine the relationships between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction among adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. This study also examined the mediating effect of general self-concept in relationships between peer relations and life satisfaction. The present study applied multi-stage cluster sampling and a total of 153 respondents aged between 14- to 17-year old were included for final data analyses. Empirical data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire that constituted by three instruments (i.e., Positive Relations with Other Scale, general items from Self-Description Questionnaire II, and Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale). The results of the study showed that adolescents were moderately satisfied with their life. Findings from Pearson Correlation revealed that peer relations, and general self-concept were positively related with life satisfaction. Furthermore, the results of the multiple regression demonstrated that peer relations emerged as the strongest unique predictor of life satisfaction, followed by general self-concept, and age. A total of 43.7% of the variability in life satisfaction could be predicted by peer relations, general self-concept, and age. The results also showed that general self-concept significantly mediated the effects of peer relations on life satisfaction. Overall, study contributes to the fundamental understanding of Selangor adolescents' development, specifically on life satisfaction. The findings from this study may provide useful information regarding adolescents' life satisfaction to educators, policy makers, parents and caregivers, counsellors and professionals who work closely with adolescents.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**HUBUNGAN RAKAN SEBAYA, KONSEP KENDIRI UMUM DAN  
KEPUASAN HIDUP DALAM KALANGAN REMAJA DI SEBUAH SEKOLAH  
ANTARABANGSA DI SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

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Kajian ini bertujuan menentukan perkaitan antara hubungan rakan sebaya, konsep kendirian umum dan kepuasan hidup dalam kalangan remaja di Selangor, Malaysia. Kajian ini juga mengkaji peranan konsep diri umum sebagai mediator dalam perkaitan antara hubungan rakan sebaya dan kepuasan hidup remaja. Kajian tersebut mengaplikasikan kaedah pensampelan kluster pelbagai peringkat serta melibatkan responden yang seramai 153 responden berumur di antara 14- hingga 17- dalam analisis data akhir. Data empirikal dikumpul melalui borang soal selidik tadbir-kendiri yang terdiri daripada empat instrumen (iaitu, *Positive Relations with Other Scale*, *general items from Self-Description Questionnaire II*, dan *Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale*). Remaja dalam kajian ini menunjukkan kepuasan hidup yang sederhana. Keputusan analisis *Pearson* korelasi menunjukkan bahawa rakan sebaya dan konsep kendiri umum adalah berkait secara positif dengan kepuasan hidup. Di samping itu, hasil daripada analisis regresi pelbagai pula menunjukkan hubungan rakan sebaya adalah peramal unik yang terbagus bagi kepuasan hidup remaja diikuti oleh konsep kendiri umum dan umur. Sejumlah 43.7% kebolehubahan dalam kepuasan hidup boleh diramalkan oleh hubungan rakan sebaya, konsep kendiri umum dan umur. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan konsep kendiri umum secara signifikkannya memperantarakan hubungan rakan sebaya ke atas kepuasan hidup. Secara keseluruhan, kajian ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman asas tentang perkembangan remaja Selangor, khususnya tentang kepuasan hidup. Di samping itu, kajian ini boleh memberikan maklumat berguna yang tentang kepuasan hidup remaja kepada para pendidik, penggubal polisi, ibubapa dan penjaga, kaunselor dan professional yang bekerja rapat dengan remaja.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AV    | Antecedent Variables                               |
| CI    | Confidence Intervals                               |
| DV    | Dependent Variables                                |
| EDA   | Exploratory Data Analysis                          |
| GSC   | General Self-Concept                               |
| IV    | Independent Variables                              |
| KPM   | Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia                    |
| LS    | Life Satisfaction                                  |
| MCPF  | Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation              |
| ML    | Maximum Likelihood                                 |
| MV    | Mediator Variables                                 |
| MSLSS | Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction       |
| MSPSS | Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support |
| P-P   | Probability-Probability/Percent-Percent            |
| PR    | Peer Relations                                     |
| SDT   | Self-Determination Theory                          |
| SDQII | Self-Description Questionnaire II                  |
| SPSS  | Statistical Package for Social Sciences            |
| SWB   | Subjective Well-Being                              |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Traditionally, research has focused on the problems that Malaysia adolescents face, whilst little has spent on exploring how adolescents evaluate their life satisfaction which subsequently navigates their development into adulthood. After years of focusing on pathology, the field of positive psychology has awakened again empirical investigations into understanding how adolescents achieved satisfaction in life, contentment, and happiness (Proctor, Linley & Maltby, 2008). This phenomenon shifts away an almost exclusive emphasis on psychopathology among adolescents to an increased emphasis on the positive end in terms of what makes life worth living (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Nickerson & Nagle, 2004; Proctor et al., 2008). The study of life satisfaction is one domain of positive psychology research, which comprised under Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (Diener & Diener, 1995; Proctor et al., 2008).

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is viewed as central to a person's experience containing cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction (LS), as well as emotional reactions or positive aspects to life events (Diener, 1984; Diener & Diener, 1995). Among all, LS from cognitive component received the most research attention (e.g., Bradley, Cunningham, & Gilman, 2014; Diener, 2013; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2012; Leung & Zhang, 2000; Pavot & Diener, 1993) since LS is less ephemeral than affect components, more stable in terms of time frame, and higher degree of sensitivity in capturing the changes in life circumstances (Diener & Diener, 1995; Gilman, 2001; Park, 2004; Piko, 2006). Accordingly, LS has been treated as a salient concept (Camfield & Skevington, 2008) and considered as the ultimate goals of human development (Chang, McBride-Chang, Stewart & Au, 2003). Regarding to this, studying adolescents' life satisfaction is valuable and crucial especially in Selangor, Malaysia.

Selangor is one of the states in Malaysia, located on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, with Shah Alam as its capital city. Selangor has the largest population in Malaysia, and has the largest economy in Malaysia. As adolescents in other countries, adolescents in Selangor are at risk of being involved in negative behaviour. "Teenage crime on the rise" (2014) contends that teenage crime in Selangor has increased tremendously. There are about 165 teenagers aged from 12 to 17 years old, had been arrested between January and March, which reported a 10% increase from the corresponding period in year 2013. Specifically, of those arrested, 52% were from violent crimes including blackmail, snatch thefts, and being a part of gangs and drug distribution syndicates. Moreover, 48% were from minor offences, mostly motorcycle thefts. Meanwhile, Hamudin (2015) reported Anti-Drug Agency Malaysia found Selangor has the highest number of drug abuse cases among youths. All these are reflected in adolescents' lives. This statistic gave an overview of the possibility of



dissatisfaction in life among adolescents in Selangor, as life dissatisfaction often linked to youths with problem behaviors. As a result, more academic attention should be paid to the life satisfaction of adolescents in Selangor. Indeed, the situation is seen as a greatest concern of the country since adolescents are seen as the valuable assets of the country. In many ways, adolescents were perceived as an important resource to ensure the nation is continuous growth, especially in a developing country (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011).

Malaysia society has increasingly become aware of the importance of adolescents' life satisfaction. The issue of life satisfaction among adolescents is considered as one of the important research topics in this rapidly change interconnected world. To date, a growing number of researchers have been interested in understanding life satisfaction and many studies have been conducted to find out factors leading to or preventing, especially individual-level, in the attainment of life satisfaction among adolescents (Ang & Mansor, 2011; Chang et al., 2003; Salleh & Zuria, 2009). The emerging strength of goals pertaining that involved friends and self during adolescence were likely to imbue life satisfaction with considerable psychological meaning (Nishikawa, 2009).

Peer relations is one of the key of socialization for adolescents (Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014). High-quality interactions with peers are believed to contribute to the development of adolescents' life satisfaction (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004; Park, 2004). Moreover, Terry and Huebner (1995) found peer relations correlated with adolescents' life satisfaction. Peer relations have also been acknowledged as among the most influential factors during adolescence as peers are the one they begin to spend increasingly more time with (Park, 2004; Schwarz, Mayer, Trommsdorff, Ben-Arieh, Friedlmeier, Lubiewska, Mishra & Peltzer, 2012).

General self-concept represents a summary of an individual's behaviors and personal characteristics, act as an important factor that facilitates the attainment of other desirable outcomes (Delany, 2015). If individuals feel competent, confident, and positively about themselves, the more likely to accomplish more and perform well in various domains of life. For this reason, general self-concept has been treat as an indicator of life satisfaction. It is well established that peer relations and supportive parenting lead to greater general self-concept. Furthermore, Delany (2015) indicated having a favorable self-evaluation is essential to healthy development and eventually greater level of life satisfaction.

In summary, the importance of the construct of life satisfaction among adolescents needs to be revealed since the nature and determinants of life satisfaction may not be equivalent for every adolescent given the differential stressors inherent in each population (Collins & Laursen, 2004). To our knowledge, reviewing the literature has shown that substantial empirical studies explore satisfaction with life from the Western adolescents' perspective. Yet, there is a little attention has been given to investigation on adolescents' life satisfaction in the context of peer relations and general self-concept within one framework. Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to

examine the relationship between peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction among adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia empirically rather than assumed.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

From ancient times, Confucian quote “cultivating the self, raising a family, governing the country, and pacifying the world” meaning to conquer the world, one should first know how to manage oneself. There is a reason believed that life satisfaction became a significant psychological variable prior to any individual variables, most specifically during adolescence (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004). Generally, adolescence has been characterized as a period with significant and considerable biological, psychological, developmental, emotional and social change (Goldbeck, Schmitz, Besier, Herschbach & Henrich, 2007; Hay & Ashman, 2003). Adolescence reflects the developmental period of an active interplay between a person context in terms of individual, family, friends, and self (Nishikawa, 2009). It is known as a time of heightened sensitivity; adolescents’ goals are reformed and ideas regarding the pursuit of goals are reevaluating. The emotional instability resulting from the transition of adolescence into adulthood often causes mental health problems. Frequently, adolescents are reported at risk for violence, academic failure, peer pressure, family dysfunction, and drug problems. All these negative behaviors seem to indicate a decline in sense of life satisfaction among adolescents.

Being an ongoing developing country, adolescents in Malaysia faced challenges from day to day. According to Malaysia Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai in year 2013, the Health Ministry viewed seriously the deteriorating trend on mental health of adolescents and children. He further pointed out statistics showed mental health problems involving the group rose to 13 percent in year 1996, 19.4 percent in year 2006 and 20 percent in year 2011. Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (MCPF) stated the increasing prevalence of crime commitment, violent crimes, gangs, depression and suicidal ideation during adolescence were associated with life satisfaction. After all, the recent tragedies involving adolescent expressions of anger at school serve to accelerate a focus on improving the well-being of adolescents in Malaysia.

An online poll conducted by YouthSays reported that 77% of Malaysian adolescents were not happy and satisfied with life (Diyanah, 2010). Also, the statistics from Department of Social Welfare (2016) stated that the number of children involved in crime rose from 4669 cases (Year 2015) to 4886 cases (Year 2016). Nevertheless, number of youth offender cases marked the highest in Selangor with 455 cases in 2016. The increasing number of cases involved youths gave an overview of the possibility of dissatisfaction in life among adolescents in Selangor, as life dissatisfaction often linked to children with problem behaviors.

In recent years, Malaysia Millennium Development Goals Report showed the country’s net secondary school enrolment ratio has decrease compared to the net

primary school enrolment ratio for year 2005-2009. The lower rates in secondary school enrolment has raise for a concern as government suggest that adolescents who are left behind unable to profit from and contribute to the country's development (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011). The drop in secondary school enrolment can be linked to adolescents' well-being, a variety of psychological and social problems. Malaysia government has viewed seriously into this issue. In order enhance adolescents' well-being, Malaysia government has designed the Pelan Strategik Interim KPM 2011-2020 to achieve a holistic education system, progressive and moral for adolescents. The main objective of this project is to maximize adolescents' potential, and thus the overall balance of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual met. Besides, government also proposed human capital development based on the strength of well-being, as well as applying a positive attitude and build discipline among adolescents, which later promote adolescents' life satisfaction. Thus, efforts need to be made in promoting life satisfaction, which enable to refrain adolescents from becoming involved in problem behavior activities.

Numerous literature (Casas, Figuer, Gonzalez, Malo, Alsinet & Subbaroca, 2007; Lavasani, Borhanzadeh, Afzali & Hejazi, 2011; Ma and Huebner, 2008; Schwarz, Mayer, Trommsdorff, Ben-Aireh, Lubiewska, Mishra, & Peltzer, 2012) have identified that peer relations predict adolescents' life satisfaction. Schwarz and his colleagues (2012) revealed that successful peer relations support adolescent in detaching from parents and developing an independent identity, which facilitates life satisfaction among adolescents unintentionally. Moreover, past studies (Sternke, 2010; Leung & Zhang, 2000) revealed that general self-concept is viewed as a criterion for adolescents' life satisfaction. In other words, general self-concept plays the role as an independent variable in the current study. It is evident adolescents continue to develop a positive general self-concept to secure a more satisfying life satisfaction (Sternke, 2010). However, most of the studies were based in Western context. Research indicated that literature and the understanding of adolescents' life satisfaction in Malaysia remain unclear. Although studies have been conducted using Malaysia samples (Chiong, Siti Nor, Rozumah, & Tan, 2016; Siti Nor, Tan, Tan, Rumaya, 2012), they are mainly focused the general overview of Malaysian adolescents' life satisfaction and the demographic differences in adolescents' life satisfaction. There is a knowledge gap on the role of peer relations and general self-concept in an Asian context such as Malaysia (based on past research using Google Scholar and UPM library databases on the latest ten years online published research). Hence, the knowledge gap generated the second research question, which is "Is there any relationship between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents?" and the third research question, which is "What factors predict life satisfaction of adolescents?"

Besides, general self-concept is also viewed as a mediator between peer relations and adolescents' life satisfaction. It is evident that general self-concept acts as a mediator in the relations between peer relations and life satisfaction (Zora, Andreja & Marija, 2009). However, the study was based on Western country such as the Croatia. There is a knowledge gap on the role of general self-concept as a mediator between peer relations and adolescents' life satisfaction in an Asian context such as Malaysia (based on past research using Google Scholar and UPM library databases on the latest ten

years online published research). Hence, the knowledge gap generated the fourth research question, which is “Is there any mediating effect of general self-concept between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents?”

Against this background, the present study seeks to ascertain the relationships between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents. The present study also examines the mediating role of general self-concept on the relationship between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. With these knowledges, it would be a great help for those working with adolescents and engage in planning, designing or implementing preventive programs for enhancing positive development for adolescents who are at risk.

The following research questions are proposed in the study:

1. What are the personal characteristics, family characteristics, peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction among adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia?
2. Is there any relationship between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents?
3. To what extent do respondents' personal characteristics (age, gender, family structure, number of siblings) and family characteristics (monthly income, father's education level, mother's education level), peer relations, and general self-concept contribute to life satisfaction of adolescents?
4. Does general self-concept mediate the relationship between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents?

### **1.3 Significance of Study**

Some might ask, why study adolescents' life satisfaction in Malaysia? It has been suggested that an understanding of the manner adolescents take account of their lives could provide useful information regarding their psychological functioning (Leung & Zhang, 2000). As individuals moved from one developmental stage to the next, the understanding of life satisfaction of adolescents during this transitional phase may provide awareness and insight on future psychological outcomes. Although past research has revealed peer relations and general self-concept promote adolescents' life satisfaction in western countries, while little is known how these variables acts in life satisfaction among Malaysia adolescents. As researcher tried to increase the understanding of what factors contributing to adolescents' life satisfaction in Selangor Malaysia, it was hard for researcher to used generalized information from different



other cultures to suit the concepts in Malaysia multicultural samples. This study leads to the identification and the understanding of the relationships between peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction in Malaysia, particularly state of Selangor. The study among Selangor adolescents adds knowledge to the body of literature for Asia adolescents' peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction that would address the literature and knowledge gap in the related field. Moreover, this study would also contribute to the research literature in assess the mediating role of general self-concept between peer relations and adolescents' life satisfaction. Since there is an existing gap on the role of general self-concept as a mediator between peer relations and life satisfaction, especially in Asian context, results from the multivariate analysis would narrow this literature gap.

At the same time, this study will help to clarify the network of constructs related to adolescents' life satisfaction. This study will shed light on the pattern of peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction of adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia. It would give a picture about the quality of peer relations, the level of general self-concept and adolescents' life satisfaction in Selangor. The information depicted from the descriptive findings is beneficial to the relevant government authorities such as the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Department of Social Welfare. Subsequently, these authorities can take initiatives in providing necessary assistance in response to the construction of intervention strategies that promote life satisfaction among adolescents especially those who were unhappy with their lives.

Finally, it is also believed that the results of the study add to the body of literature and supports the additional, presumed benefits, such as positive and good peer relations and beliefs of general self-concept in multiple domains, associated with higher life satisfaction. In keeping with the idea of positive development, understanding what led to life satisfaction will allowed psychologists, counselors and educators to aid in design of interventions and support services that serve to enhance and promote adolescents' life satisfaction. Also, results from this study able to provide additional support to social scientists and policy makers who could utilize the findings from the study for legislation of nation social policies and development of family and community policies.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

There are two types of objectives for the present study, namely general objective and specific objectives.

### **1.4.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to determine the relationship between peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction among adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia.

### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

Based on the general objective, the following specific objectives are formulated:

1. To describe the personal characteristics (age, gender, ethnic, religion), family characteristics (family structure, number of siblings, parents' monthly income, parents' education level) and all the key variables (peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction) of the study.
2. To determine the relationship between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents.
3. To determine the predictors of life satisfaction of adolescents.
4. To determine the mediating effect of general self-concept between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents.

### **1.5 Hypotheses**

In line with Objectives 2, 3 and 4, the following research hypotheses were proposed in this study:

Objective II: To determine the relationship between peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents.

H<sub>A1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents.

H<sub>A2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between general self-concept and life satisfaction of adolescents.

H<sub>A3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between peer relations and general self-concept of adolescents.

Objective III: To determine the predictors of life satisfaction of adolescents.

H<sub>A4</sub>: The regression coefficient for age, father's education level, peer relations and general self-concept entered into the regression model significantly predict life satisfaction of adolescents.

Objective IV: To determine the mediating effect of general self-concept between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents.

H<sub>A5</sub>: General self-concept mediates the relationship between peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between peer relations, general self-concept, and adolescents' life satisfaction. The present study also examined the mediating role of general self-concept in peer relations and life satisfaction of adolescents. This study postulates that adolescents' life satisfaction is understood as a developmental outcome that emerge as a result of interactions among subsystems such as peer and self-belief in a complex social system. In this study, the Self-Determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2008) is adopted in developing the conceptual framework. Also, it has identified Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model by Huebner (2004) supporting the theoretical framework.

### **1.6.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008) is a motivational theory suggests that being self-determined means that one's actions are relatively autonomous, freely chosen, and fully endorsed by the person rather than coerced or pressured by external forces or internal expectations. In Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Deci and Ryan (2008) postulated an adolescent must fulfill two basic needs, that is, the needs for autonomy (i.e., volitional functioning), relatedness (i.e., feeling loved and cared for) across the life span in order experiencing an ongoing sense of integrity and to promote optimal life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waterman, 1993). These basic needs are assumed to represent the underlying motivational mechanism that energize and direct people's behaviour and thus enhancing wellness and development (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Subsequent research in many countries have confirmed that satisfaction of the needs for relatedness and autonomy do indeed predicted life satisfaction regardless of collectivist, individualist, traditional values, or equalitarian values adopted.

This theory concerned not only with the specific nature of positive developmental tendencies, but it also examined social environments that were combative toward these tendencies. It emphasizes the right to make own choices and behaviours that are congruent with one's needs, and the capacity of one's social environment to support them (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As defined by self-determination theory, if the social contexts in which responsiveness to basic psychological needs were embedded in such individuals, they provides the appropriate developmental lattice upon which an active, assimilative, and integrated nature can ascend. In contrary, low life satisfaction, lack of initiative and responsibility occurred if the inherent actualizing and organizational tendencies endowed by nature are disrupted in the way of excessive control, non-optimal challenges, as well as lack of connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

General self-concept lies within the need for autonomy. The need for autonomy represents individuals' inherent desire to feel volitional in acting and to experience a sense of choice and authorship over their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan (1985) referred the need for autonomy as individual's striving to feel that his or her activities were self-chosen which in line with intrinsic interests, and to have a voice or input in determining one's own behavior. In year 2008, Deci and Ryan did another research and claimed that self-concept was developed on the basis of the needs for autonomy. The need for autonomy reflects an adolescent's desire to be a causal agent in their world, and if the selected behavior satisfied the need for autonomy, the adolescent felt a sense of personal choice and 'ownership' over their actions. As such, satisfying need for autonomy facilitates life satisfaction.

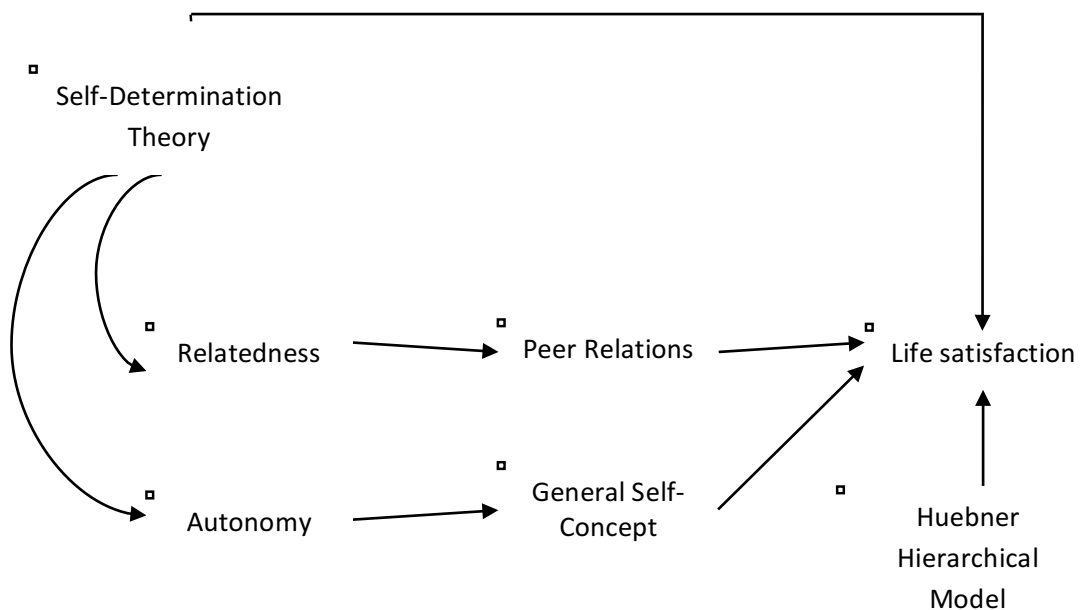
Peer relations lie within the need for relatedness. The need for relatedness, is defined as individuals' inherent propensity to feel connected to others, that is, to be members of a group, to love and care and be loved and cared for (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This need allows adolescents to feel securely connected to the social surround and experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect (Ryan & Ladd, 2012). The need for relatedness will be satisfied if individual experience a sense of communion and develop close relationships with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for relatedness was met through social interactions between people and within contexts that provided structure, autonomy support, and involvement. Generally, it includes the relating to and caring for peers, feeling care for by peers, and feeling involved with the social world (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Importantly, peers claimed to be the person adolescents meet daily within contexts that provided structure, autonomy support, and involvement (Ryan & Ladd, 2012). Peer relations were multidimensional, including dyadic friendships, experiences of loneliness, peer acceptance, and peer exclusion (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). Positive correlations have been observed between social contact and life satisfaction; more friends, better quality relationships and more frequent social interactions reported are associated with higher scores in measures of life satisfaction (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Importantly, peer relations can provide ongoing support for these needs to varying degrees.



### 1.6.2 Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model

Based on a model proposed by Huebner (2004), an adolescent's life satisfaction is determined by five unique yet relevant second-order life domains, there are, Family, Friends, School, Self, and Living Environment all included under a general life satisfaction. In accordance with this model, the underlying factor structure of the life satisfaction model is considered as hierarchical in nature. The sum of satisfaction judgments across different life domains is the total result within general model since life satisfaction is the outcome of daily life events. In this study, the researcher is going to focus on two main domains (i.e., Friends, and Self) from Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model.

Figure 1.1 below demonstrates the overall theoretical framework of peer relations, general self-concept, and life satisfaction among adolescents in Selangor Malaysia.



**Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework of Peer Relations, General Self-Concept, and Life Satisfaction Among Adolescents in Selangor Malaysia.**

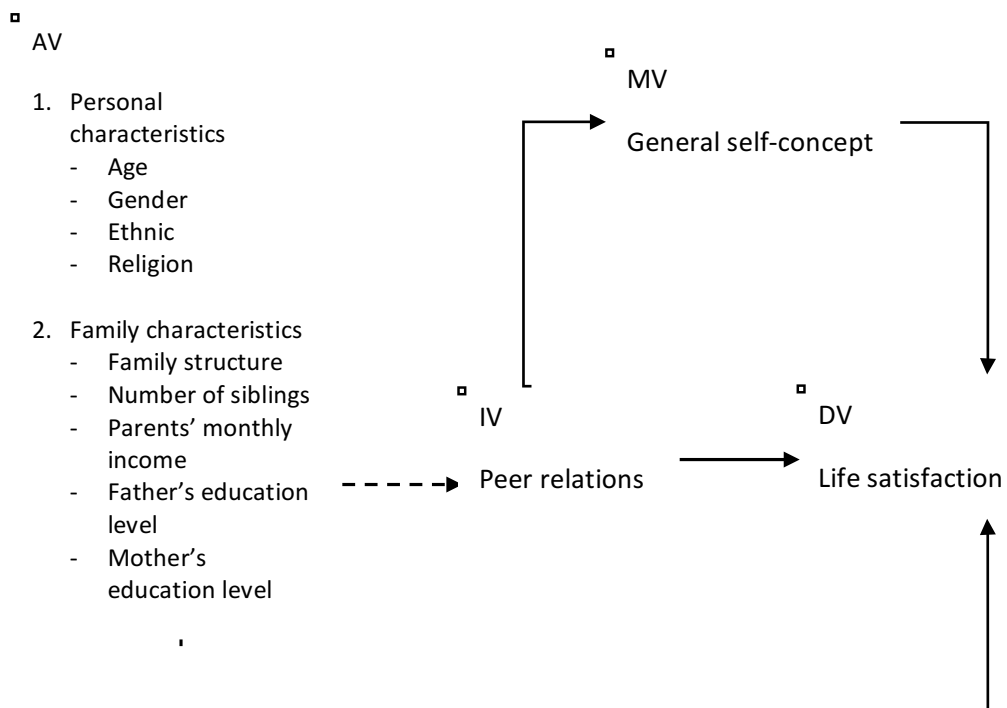
### 1.7 Conceptual Framework

During the transition period of childhood to adulthood, adolescents begin to involve in different roles, activities and behaviors as they move to this transition. By now, they attempt to find their own identity and to build a sense of self. Accordingly, adolescents start to value peer relations as an affective essentiality, while developing self-concept. Yet, some might have started to have confusion and insecure feeling about themselves,

struggle with social interactions and worry they could not fit into the society. Thus, it is important to examine adolescents' life satisfaction from the perspective of peer relations and general self-concept.

Despite the existence of an extensive body of empirical literature on life satisfaction among adolescents, there was no one well-developed theory that attempts to account for the development of life satisfaction throughout adolescence taking into consideration of peer relations and general self-concept. Hence, the conceptual framework of this study was primarily guided by past empirical findings that have been observed for adolescents. The construct pertains to: (1) the role of peer relations; (2) the roles of general self-concept; (3) observed mediating role of general self-concept on relationship of peer relations and life satisfaction; (4) demographic factors (i.e., adolescents' personal characteristics and family characteristics).

Figure 1.2 demonstrates the overall conceptual framework of relationships among independent variables of peer relations, general self-concept, personal and family characteristics to adolescents' life satisfaction.



**Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework of Peer Relations, General Self-Concept, and Life Satisfaction Among Adolescents in Selangor Malaysia.**

Since Deci and Ryan (2008) viewed interaction of peer relations, and general self-concept were highly important in order fulfill the needs of an individuals that helped

to facilitate life satisfaction, therefore the researcher incorporated the Self-Determination Theory, and Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model into one conceptual model on this study. According to the Self-Determination Theory, the needs for relatedness predispose adolescents' life satisfaction. For the needs for relatedness, the present study has focused on peer relations. Besides, for the needs for autonomy, general self-concept is focused. Particularly, the researcher imparted two out of five second-order life domains from Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model, that were Friends and Self for study purposes. The Friends second-order domain referred as peer relations, and Self second-order domain referred as general self-concept for current study.

As life satisfaction is relating by a multitude of variables, hence it was not expected that any single variable would be sufficient for reporting high or low in measures of adolescents' life satisfaction. The present study proposed a model that drawn on the finding from previous research done on adolescents' life satisfaction. During adolescence, the peer systems exert a great deal of influence on the life satisfaction of a child (Wong, Chang, He & Wu, 2010). Beyond that, general self-concept in this study referred to an adolescent's perception of self-image and his/her sense of overall self-esteem (Leung & Zhang, 2000). It also served as an indicative of the strength of a student's sense of self-worth (Lee, Daniels & Kissinger, 2006; Leung & Zhang, 2000). Due to peer relations and general self-concept were closely connected with the life satisfaction in adolescents, the present model hypothesis that Peer Relations (PR) and General Self-Concept (GSC) had direct influences on the Life Satisfaction (LS) of adolescents. The present study also hypothesized general self-concept as mediator to the relationships between peer relations and life satisfaction. The present study postulated that general self-concept exerted influence indirectly to peer relations on adolescents' life satisfaction. The proposed model suggested that adolescents with high general self-concept, and reported high peer relations had greater likelihood to report high life satisfaction. Taken together with previous findings, this study aimed to examine the relationships between peer relations and life satisfaction; general self-concept and life satisfaction, as well as the extent of general self-concept as a mediator on the between peer relations and life satisfaction. In addition, the relationships between personal and family characteristics with life satisfaction were also explored.

## **1.8 Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

### **1.8.1 Adolescent**

#### Conceptual definition:

Adolescence categories into three developmental periods, that is early adolescence (ages 10-13), middle adolescence (ages 14-17), and late adolescence (18 until the early twenties) (Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006).

Operational definition:

In this study, adolescent girls and boys aged range from fourteen to seventeen were selected as respondents.

### **1.8.2 Personal Characteristics**

Conceptual definition:

Personal characteristics referred to some distinct self-qualities of the respondents (Santrock, 2010).

Operational definition:

In this study, personal characteristics comprised adolescents' age, gender, ethnic and religion.

### **1.8.3 Family Characteristics**

Conceptual definition:

Family characteristics referred to some distinct family qualities of the respondents (Santrock, 2010).

Operational definition:

Family structure, number of siblings, parents' monthly income, and parents' education level were comprised in the family characteristics of this study.

### **1.8.4 Peer Relations**

Conceptual definition:

Whilst "peers" referred to classmates who were also good friends of an individual (Peter Man, 1991), peer relations were conceptualized as social associations, connections, or affiliations between two or more people (Ryff, 1989).

Operational definition:

In this study, peer relations refer to respondents' scores on Positive Relations with Other Scale developed by Ryff (1989), which was rated on a 6-point scale with 1 being the lowest score and 6 the highest. Higher scores indicate higher level of peer relations. The domains in this scale including how respondents rate themselves in terms of interaction with peers, friendships, how people would describe them, and how they feel in peer relations.

### **1.8.6 General Self-Concept**

#### Conceptual definition:

General self-concept is conceptualized as the perception of self-image (Leung & Zhang, 2000).

#### Operational definition:

In this study, general self-concept refers to respondents' scores on general items from Self-Description Questionnaire II developed by Marsh (1992), which consist of 6-point scale with 1 being the lowest score and 6 the highest. Higher scores on the scale indicate high level of general self-concept among adolescents. The domains in this scale including what respondents think they are good at and proud of in daily tasks.

### **1.8.6 Life Satisfaction**

#### Conceptual definition:

Life satisfaction is conceptualized as the cognitive, global evaluation of the quality of an individual's overall life (Huebner, 2004; Kwan, 2008; Suldo & Huebner, 2006).

#### Operational definition:

In this study, life satisfaction refers to respondents' scores on Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) by Huebner (1994). The domains in this scale including judgement of life satisfaction in family, friends, school, self and living environment. It comprised judgements ranging from very negative to neutral to very positive. Higher scores thus indicate higher levels of life satisfaction throughout the scale.

## **1.9 Organization of the Thesis**

The introduction thus far has presented the importance of peer relations, self-concept, and adolescents' life satisfaction. The overview was followed by the purpose of the study and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presented a review of the related previous findings and literature from others. It addressed the influence and predictive value of the peer relations and general self-concept upon adolescents' life satisfaction.

Chapter 3 presented the methodology employed in the study, including research design, population and sample, instrumentation and its' reliability and validity each of them, demographic and background information, the procedure and data collection and last but not least data analysis.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the study. Chapter 5 presented the discussion of the results, provided recommendations and a final conclusion.

## **1.9 Summary**

This entire chapter has provided an introductory background of the study. It was organized into nine sections. At the foremost, first section presented the background of this study, followed by statement of problem and research objectives. In significance of study, it discussed theoretical framework, practical, and policy significances. Self-Determination Theory and Huebner Hierarchical Life Satisfaction Model served as the theoretical framework (Figure 1.1) in current study. A set of relationships (i.e., peer relations, general self-concept and life satisfaction) were illustrated in conceptual framework (Figure 1.2). There were total five hypotheses listed to be tested. At last, definitions of operational key terms and organizations of this study were clearly presented.

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