

## **Factors Influencing Family Life Satisfaction among Parents in Malaysia: The Structural Equation Modeling Approach (SEM)**

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**Abstract:** *The study attempts to investigate the factors that influence family life satisfaction (FLS) among parents in Malaysia. The study modeled the variable of parental involvement, family functioning, family resilience and time with family as independent constructs. Data for the study was gathered from nationally representative survey of “Family Well-Being Index” study conducted by National Population and Family Development Board Malaysia. Response from 2808 sampled households which involved about 1484 (52.8%) fathers and 1324 (47.2%) mothers of having a child aged at least 13 years old were utilized for the purpose of the current study. A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed by using Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) software. The study found all the modeled independent constructs tested had a significant and direct influence on family life satisfaction among the respondents except for parental involvement construct. The findings of the study suggests that some improvement should be made for the parental involvement constructs which covers different aspects of family life satisfaction which will lead the measurement model be more heterogeneous.*

**Keywords:** *Family Life Satisfaction, Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience, Time with Family, Structural Equation Modeling*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

During these recent years, the family institutions are facing many problems due to the social and demographic changes and transition. The changes on social and demographic factors were an agent for the strength, stability and balance of the family functioning. All these aspects were seriously can affect the family organization as the result from individual satisfaction among the family members.

The family is a basic social unit that provides the human capital for development and ensures the continuity of mankind. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the family as the natural and fundamental group and is entitled to protection by society and the State. Therefore, the family institution must be strength with a new knowledge and skills to ensure stability. Family life satisfaction (FLS) is the one important aspect in family institution to be preserve. According to Zabriske & McCormick (2003), FLS is a key indicator of quality of family life. It's can be described as family satisfaction within the family members in all aspects of life (Carver & Jones, 1992). This argument also supported by Olsen et al. (2007) which they seem as satisfaction is defined as to which extent the family members are happy with each other and have confidence in their ability to function properly.

The main purpose of the implementation of this study is to examine how FLS among Malaysian parents is determined by the variable of Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family on FLS. Taking to consideration of family life scenario in Malaysia, a study on family life satisfaction is still new. Currently, report by National Population and Development Board (NPFDB) Malaysia indicate that the family wellbeing index (among parents) in Malaysia was 7.55. The index was calculated based on maximum score of 10 on seven identified domain which are family relationships, economic situation, health and safety, community relationship, religion/spirituality, and family safety. Using the same data, the study of Family Well-Being Indicators in Malaysia (Noraini et. al, 2012) has been carried out to develop a set of indicators for measuring the state of family well-being in Malaysia. Thus, taking into account the effect of adoption of family values in the family system, it may become necessary to examine the factors that affect FLS among parents in Malaysia.

The study was conducted in addition to the scientific study of psychology knowledge because it will specifically investigate the influence of four factors, namely Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family on FLS. Based on previous studies, several other factors have been studied by researchers in the field of FLS such as time factors (Zabriske & McCormick, 2003), religious practices (Abbott et. al, 1990), communication technology (Chesley, 2005) and the number of children (Hyken et. al, 2010). Based

on the proposed model for the study, it is expected that in various variables between content and process of families have experienced based on parents point of view, families have experienced low life satisfaction have lower quality level of family norms than normal families. Therefore, this research is relevant to the field of family psychology as it extends the concept of FLS. Through this study, psychologists will have a clear picture of how FLS is influenced by these factors

## **II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The main idea of family systems theory is the stability of the family based on the ability to adapt and react to other family members (Zabriske & McCormick, 2003). Family also relates to life satisfaction in a very different way: a woman's decision to have children or not. A study by Holahan (1983), reveals that childless women have much higher life satisfaction than women with children. She found that very high life satisfaction obtained among women who decided not to have children in their life and on the other hand, women that decided of having a child is tend to have high life satisfaction but it will be based on the reasons and decision making. Life satisfaction can come from many different sources which are different for every person and it can shift all the time.

Focus on the study of FLS not only to examine the variations in the values related to family according to differences in the population, but also to define the values that can affect FLS (Bowen, 1988). In terms of FLS among individuals in the family system, several factors interactions and reactions that ultimately have an impact on overall satisfaction should be considered.

The goal of this study was to investigate and ultimately understand the systematic relationship between the four factors in family life and family satisfaction itself. Behaviour and the impact of family values, marriage and family life have become an important focuses in the social science research. Most previous researchers have studied the relationship on spouse selection and multi-dimensional of well-being and family stability. Through this study, a detailed understanding of the factors that influence the level of FLS for the family institutions will be identified. Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family will be the variable under study suggested to have an influence on FLS. By understanding the relationship between the dependent variable (DV) and independent (IV) variables, skills to behaviour of family life among parents can be improved in future.

According to Bowen (1988), the core assumption of the FLS model was the level of FLS is enhanced by the ability of family members to jointly realize their family-related values in behaviour. The definition promoted only when each family member is able to move toward realizing their values for family life in behaviour. When family members cannot be able to understand and realizes their role in the family institutions or they hold a conflict across the other family members, the problems in family life will arise and it will definitely affect the overall FLS. In addition, among the family members should share similar positive values for family life domain in order to maintain their FLS. However, lack of family relational skills and other constraints on working load and financial restrictions can directly influence their ability to function well as good family members. Greater life satisfaction within a family increases through communication and understanding each member's attitudes and perceptions.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

The ultimate goal for the study was to identify the factors that give significant influence on FLS among parent in Malaysia. Therefore, several measures were taken from the questions asked to the respondents. Data for the study were drawn from national representative study of Indicators of Family Well-Being in Malaysia conducted by the National Population and Family Development Board of Malaysia. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in year of 2011 which involved about 2808 households in Malaysia. The selection criteria of households were parents that having child age at least 13 years old. The study used a stratified random sampling design where the sample selected throughout Malaysia according the locality (urban and rural) and three ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay and Bumiputera, Chinese and Indian), proportional to their ratio in the population. For the purpose of this study, the sample of either father or mother interviewed in each households were used with the fraction of 1,484 fathers (52.8%) and 1324 mothers (47.2%).

The dependent variable under study was FLS (Y). Respondents were asked on their overall satisfaction with family relationship. The question was measured by 11-point Likert scale from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (completely satisfied). There are four independent variable for the study that is Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family. Each item under each independent variable was measured using 5-point Likert scale. Choice of response were form 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher measures of agreement of each item. Based on the Likert scale, respondent are able to evaluate their perception towards the items being asked to them. Figure 1 represents the proposed model for the study.

According to the literature, there are many measurement of Likert scale has been used by researcher and it is depend on the purpose of the research conducted. The range of Likert scale used is wider in order to provide an opportunity and freedom to respondents to give their perception towards statement tested. According to Sekaran (2006) the variations in respondents' answer provide by Likert scale is very important. Byrne (2010) however stated that if the numbers of response categories are wider and close to a normal distribution of data, the question of whether the data types are ordinal or interval can be ignored.

The scale for the independent variables for the study were from 1 to 5 whereby in order to use the SEM analysis, the wider the scale the better (usually in the interval of 1 to 10) (Zainudin, 2012). However, the response scale of 1 to 5 is still reliable to use and can be considered as a Likert scale as it is widely use in social science research. Table 1 shows the independent variable for the study and each item asked to the respondents. Subjective indicators have been used for the study are regarded as more meaningful to the individual perception of each respondents (Diener et al. 2006).

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done in order to test or modify the model of relations between latent variables (factors) and observed variables. It is a special case of SEM that integrates multivariate techniques similar to regression and factor analysis. CFA allows the researcher to test the hypothesis that relationship between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs exists based on measurement model suggested. Model fit was not evaluated statistically with Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness of fit due to the results has showed to be poor fit when the sample size is large. However, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used to expresses the degree of fit of the model to data, taking model size and sample size into account. The value of RMSEA close to 0.05 would indicate a close fit of the model in relation to the degrees of freedom (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

#### IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Of the 1,484 fathers (52.8%) and 1324 mothers (47.2%) in the analysis, 62.0 percent were from urban area locality and another 38.0 percent were from rural area locality. The sample comprised 61.0 percent Malays, 28.3 percent Chinese, 9.8 percent Indian and 1.0 percent others. According to the religion, more than half of the respondents were Muslims (58.9%), followed by Buddhism (20.5%), Christianity (11.3%) and others (0.7%). The ethnic distribution of the respondents corresponded closely to the ethnic composition in Malaysia. Majority of the respondents were from nuclear family (81.2%), followed by extended family (14.8%), single parent (3.3%) and blended family (0.7%). About 65.5 percent of respondent's income below than RM 3000 and only 14.2 percent gain income more than RM 5000. The basic distribution of respondents is presented in Table 2.

The normality assessment was conducted for the data before proceeding to modeling the structural model in order to fulfil the assumption required for statistical distribution. The value of skewness for each item in latent construct fall between the ranges of -3.0 to 3.0 which indicate that the distribution of data obtained does not apart from normality. Hence, further analysis can be conducted.

The main purpose of the study was to examine the factors that affect the FLS among parents in Malaysia. Therefore, we test the specified measurement model that consists of five latent constructs with 36 items using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). At the first step, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed in order to measure the relation between latent constructs and to validating the measurement model. The item-deletion process and model re-specification were made. Two measuring items (*I know my children's friend*) from variable Parental Improvement ( $X_1$ ) and (*We seek help from relatives when needed*) from variable Family Resilience ( $X_3$ ) has been removed from the analysis due to having a factor loading of less than 0.6 and  $R^2$  less than 0.4. Thus, the measurements model was accepted and validated for each latent construct, hence we proceed to the analysis of the structural model. The analysis of structural model is based on the schematic diagram as represented in Figure 2.

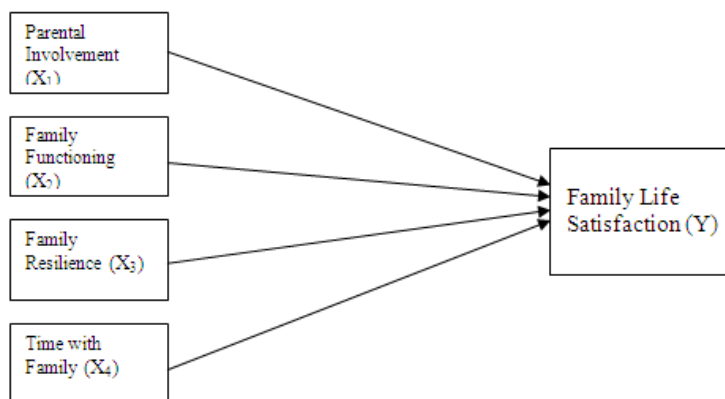
The standardized and unstandardized regression weight for the theoretical interrelationships among the constructs is presented in Figure 3 and 4 respectively. The standardized regression weight estimate beta values in standardized unit while unstandardized regression weight estimate beta values in its actual unit. The definition of standardized regression coefficient represents the amount of change in Y given a standard deviation of unit change in X (*e.g when X goes up by 1 standard deviation, Y goes up by 0.42 standard deviations*). The corresponding unstandardized regression coefficient represent the amount of change in Y given a single actual score unit change in X (*e.g when X goes up by 1 unit Y goes up by 0.35 unit*).

The fitness indexes assessment shows that the model was satisfactory good fit since value of TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index), NFI (Normed Fit Index) and CFI (Comparative Fit Index) were 0.86, 0.872, and 0.878 respectively. According to the literature, the value of TLI (Bentler and Bonett, 1980), NFI (Bollen, 1989b) and CFI (Bentler, 1990) approaches to 0.95 shows the model is satisfactory good fit. Therefore, the value obtained for those three indexes for the study supported by literature. In addition, the value of RMSEA is less than 0.05 also indicate that the model is acceptable fit. Finally, causal effects among the variables were examined in order

to find the effect of Parental Involvement, Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family towards FLS.

From the analysis, it was found that the variable of Parental Involvement do not contribute any significant and direct effect to FLS. Whereas, the other variables (i.e Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family) have significant and direct effect to FLS. Summary results regarding path analysis of causal relationships for independent constructs on FLS is shown in Table 3.

**V. FIGURES AND TABLES**



**Figure 1: Framework of the study**

**Table 1: List of independent and dependent variables and the items**

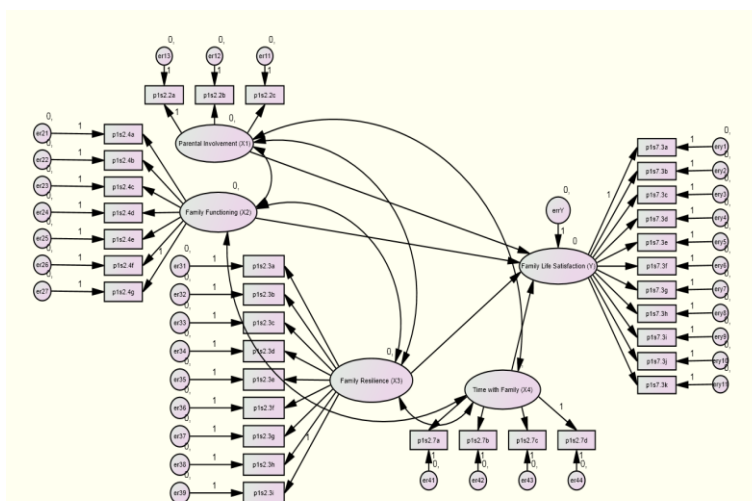
<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Parental Involvement (X<sub>1</sub>)</b> The variable developed to measure parent’s involvement in children’s lives.	I know what my children are doing I am always there for my children when they need me My children and I can discuss things as a family I know my children’s friends
<b>Family Functioning (X<sub>2</sub>)</b> The variable developed in purpose to measure the aspect of parents’ skills as guardian.	We do not understand each other There are many negative feelings in this family We always fight with each other There is confusion in the family because there is no leader Family members put each other down Our family members go their own way most of the time When things go wrong we blame each other
<b>Family Resilience (X<sub>3</sub>)</b> The variable developed in purpose to measure the family’s ability to cultivate strengths to positively meet the challenges of life.	No matter how difficult things get, our family sticks together In our family, we are always willing to help one another Even in our busy schedules, we find time to be together We can accept different opinions of family members We can adapt when there is a crisis in the family We can compromise when problems come up We try new ways of dealing with problems When in difficulty, we will find a way out We are strong in facing hardship We seek help from relatives when needed
<b>Time with Family (X<sub>4</sub>)</b> The variable developed in purpose to measure time parents have for themselves and the other family members.	We spend time together as a family for: Meals Watching TV Recreation Religious activities
<b>Family Life Satisfaction (Y)</b> The variable developed in purpose to measure parent’s satisfaction towards their family life in overall.	Overall, how satisfied are you with.... Your relationship with your husband and wife Your family relationships Your family functioning Your family’s achievements Your family’s economic situation Your family’s standard of living Your family’s health Your family’s safety Your family’s relationship within the community Your family’s spiritual practices The basic amenities in your housing area

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by selected variables**

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Total	2808	100.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male (Father)	1484	52.8
Female (Mother)	1324	47.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	1713	61.0
Chinese	794	28.3
Indian	274	9.8
Others	27	1.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslims	1653	58.9
Buddhism	241	8.6
Christianity	576	20.5
Hinduism	317	11.3
Others	21	0.7
<b>Type of Locality</b>		
Urban area	1742	62.0
Rural	1066	38.0
<b>Household Type</b>		
Nuclear family	2281	81.2
Extended family	415	14.8
Single parent	93	3.3
Blended family	19	0.7
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than RM 1000	692	24.6
RM 1001 – RM 2000	648	23.1
RM 2001 – RM 3000	500	17.8
RM 3001 – RM 4000	357	12.7
RM 4001 – RM 5000	214	7.6
More than RM 5000	397	14.2

**Table 3: Path analysis of causal relationships for independent**

Variables	Path	Variables	Estimate	Significant Value
Family Life Satisfaction	<----	Parental Involvement	0.134	0.058
Family Life Satisfaction	<----	Family Functioning	-0.188	0.0000
Family Life Satisfaction	<----	Family Resilience	0.635	0.0000
Family Life Satisfaction	<----	Time with Family	0.485	0.0000



**Figure 2: The representation of a schematic diagram of the model in AMOS graphic**

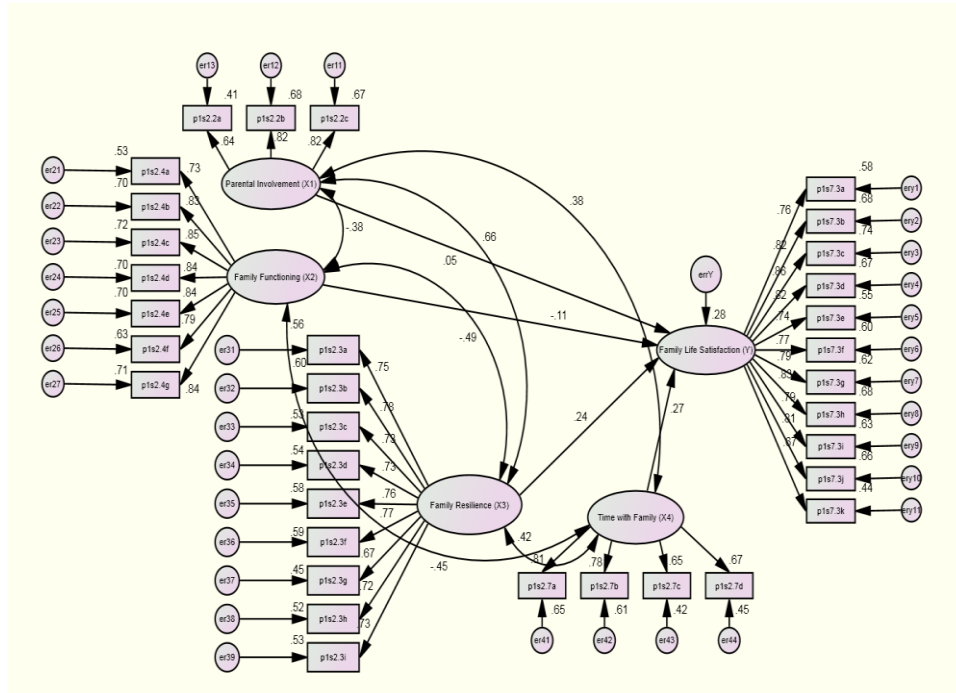


Figure 3: The standardized regression weight

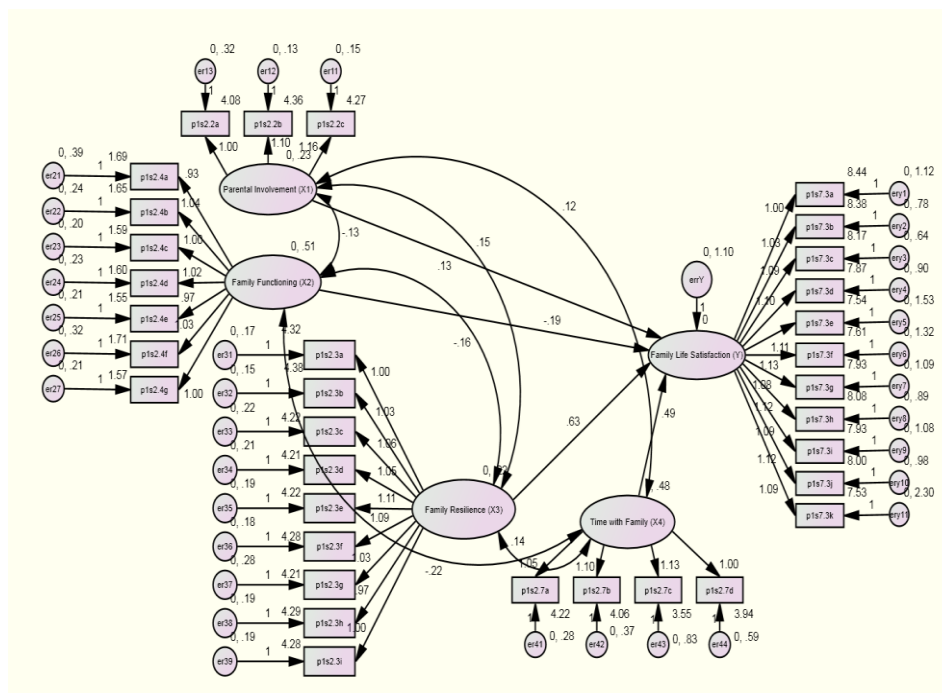


Figure 3: The unstandardized regression weight

## VI. CONCLUSION

Aim of this study was to investigate the influencing factors that affect the FLS among parents in Malaysia. According to the analysis of Structural Equation Modeling using AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structure), among the factors tested, it was found that the variable of Parental Involvement does not significantly contribute to the FLS. This result is due to the value of factor loadings were low in the confirmatory factor analysis conducted. One reason for the low value of factor loadings could be that the factor contained only a few items (Carlsson & Hamrin, 2002). According to Zainudin (2012), when analyzing the measurement model that only have less than four items, it will result in the model identification problem and SEM will not be able to compute the fitness indexes due to having zero degree of freedom. But a more

plausible explanation would be that the items in Parental Involvement factor should cover a different aspect of FLS and it would suggest that the measurement model be more heterogeneous.

Hence, the FLS is viewed as a multidimensional concept which consists of three measurement models (variables) that is Family Functioning, Family Resilience and Time with Family which contain of comprehensive approaches which reflect the actual state of FLS in Malaysia. The results reemphasized that the three measurements model were interconnected. As the family institution play a significant role in wider context of wider community and society, the changes of FLS among individual in family will affect the changes in other context. The measurement model of FLS for the study comprise of eleven items that gave direct contribution in predicting an individual satisfaction among parents in their family life in comprehensive and multiple context such as their relationship with spouse and family, the family functioning, basic amenities, and several aspect in family life (i.e family's achievement, economy, living standards, health, safety, community relationship and spiritual aspects). Without a stable satisfactory on those aspects, family would not be able to achieve the state of FLS.

The findings for the current study were supported by previous literature where the measurement of family functioning, communication and understanding among family members would give greater impact on FLS (Bowen, 1988). The communication and understanding among family members was measured by those three significant factors that are very important in examining the FLS from family members in a perceived and ideal perspective.

In addition, the key challenge in future research in focusing on FLS will be to identify the relationship patterns and other related family values among family members. As Malaysia is a multi racial country, it is very important to focus on family related values across different population groups and subgroups as different group of people will have different perception and living style. For example, the research should be able to explain why different parents (husband and wife) in different ethnic may find their family life is fairly satisfying.

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