SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Bullying Experiences and Life Satisfaction Among Adolescents in Malaysia: The Moderating Effect of Teacher Social Support

Shue Ling Chong[1]*, Shamala Ramasamy[2] and Juanita Magen[2]

[1]*School of Psychology, University of Nottingham Malaysia, Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor, Malaysia*
[2]*Department of Psychology, International Medical University, 126, Jalan Jalil Perkasa 19, Bukit Jalil, 57000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Bullying among school-aged adolescents is a pervasive issue. This study aims to examine the predictive impacts of bullying experiences and teacher support on life satisfaction among adolescents, as well as the moderating role of teacher support on the relationship, in the Malaysian context. In Malaysia, 417 school-going adolescents aged 14 to 16 years (M_{age}=14.78) participated in this study. Participants were recruited using a two-stage cluster sampling method, followed by a purposive sampling method from Selangor, Malaysia. Utilising survey questionnaires, we collected data on bullying experiences via the Personal Experience Checklist, teacher social support using the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale, and life satisfaction via the Student's Life Satisfaction Scale in secondary schools. Findings suggested that both bullying experiences and teacher support contribute to life satisfaction. Teacher support moderates the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction. The relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction was significant when the teacher support level was low and average. This study expands the knowledge of developmental psychology in bullying issues in understanding the complex relationships among bullying experiences, teacher social support and life satisfaction among adolescents in Malaysia. Our findings hold substantial promise for various stakeholders, including educators, school administrators, parents, mental health practitioners, and policymakers, in fostering the development of more effective interventions, strategies, and policies aimed at supporting adolescents in confronting bullying issues while tackling the challenging issue of bullying from a holistic perspective.

Keywords: Adolescents, bullying, life satisfaction, Malaysia, moderating effect, teacher social support

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial stage in human development. This stage is characterised by physical development, which involves hormonal changes, as well as the development of psychological attributes such as personality development, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social development. However, this period is not without its challenges, with negative experiences, such as bullying, posing significant threats to adolescents' well-being. Studies have demonstrated that such adverse encounters can precipitate a cascade of detrimental outcomes, including mental health issues, maladjustment, academic underperformance, and even thoughts of suicide (Barcaccia et al., 2018; Sabramani et al., 2021; Shaheen et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, the prevalence of bullying among adolescents has reached alarming levels. Studies in Malaysia found that most secondary school students reported either experiencing bullying or engaging in bullying behaviour themselves. According to self-reported responses, a higher proportion of students identified as victims (78.8%) compared to those who identified as bullies (64.5%; Devi et al., 2020). A study in Malaysia found that 79.1% of their samples reported involvement in bullying, either as perpetrators (14.4%), victims (16.3%), or bully victims (48.4%; Sabramani et al., 2021). In response to this escalating concern, the Ministry launched the #StandTogether campaign, in line with the United Nations' call for youth-led initiatives to combat bullying. However,

despite the rapid occurrence and escalations of bullying incidents among young people, little is known about how we can protect the younger generations from the negative impacts of bullying.

Studies in Malaysia have sought to understand the multifaceted nature of bullying in Malaysian schools, with physical aggression, verbal assault, and relational bullying commonly happening in the local context. It is evident that physical aggression is a widespread issue, with instances ranging from punches and kicks to the alarming use of weapons like knives, particularly within boarding school environments (Hassan et al., 2016; Salleh & Zainal, 2014). Brawling is the predominant form of physical bullying in the Malaysian context (Tan et al., 2019). Verbal and relational bullying also frequently took place. Salleh and Zainal (2014) shed light on the prevalence of verbal assault, whereby verbal assaults are characterised using hurtful remarks containing racial remarks, which can detrimentally affect inter-ethnic unity and national stability if left unchecked.

Findings on bullying issues among adolescents underscore the severity and potential danger associated with bullying behaviours in Malaysian schools. There are considerable studies evidencing the negative impacts of bullying experiences on life satisfaction. In a study by Kokkinos and Kipritsi (2017), bullying was found to correlate with reduced life satisfaction and impeded socio-cognitive skill development. Similarly, Chai et al. (2020) found that bullying victimisation in school was

associated with poorer self-rated health and life satisfaction among adolescents. Liu et al. (2020) also support this notion, whereby they found that bullying victimisation contributed to lower life satisfaction among students.

Understanding the specific underlying dynamics of how bullying experiences impact adolescents in different contextual settings is crucial while identifying potential protective factors to reduce the negative impacts of bullying is vital. This understanding is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies, addressing the pervasive issue of bullying, and ensuring the safety and well-being of students.

A substantial portion of the adolescent stage is devoted to schooling and education. These educational institutions are pivotal platforms for adolescents to cultivate a robust sense of identity, profoundly influenced by their experiences within these academic environments, especially with peers and teachers (Lawler et al., 2017). When a school environment lacks support and fosters the presence of bullying, characterised by intentional and repetitive aggression with a power imbalance, these would have lasting impacts on life satisfaction (Varela et al., 2019). Conversely, a positive school climate and support from peers and teachers will potentially mitigate the impacts of negative experiences (Acosta et al., 2018; Chong & Baharudin, 2017), whereby in this context, bullying experiences will be the negative experiences in which the negative impacts need to be mitigated.

Teacher support emerges as a potentially crucial protective factor in buffering against the detrimental consequences of bullying experiences. Healthy student-teacher relationships and students' feeling of care by teachers have been found to positively impact life satisfaction, school engagement and self-esteem (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). Positive teacher management, marked by encouragement of supportive relationships and appreciation of effort, reduced victimisation, while negative teacher management, such as apathy and lack of positive values, increased the tendency of victimisation (Casas et al., 2015). The absence of positive student-teacher relationships affected adolescents who were involved in bullying, whether as victims or perpetrators, by increasing their risk of depression and loneliness (F. L. Huang et al., 2018; Morin, 2020). The study also found that peer victimisation and teacher unfairness have a negative impact on adolescents' life satisfaction (L. Huang, 2020).

Teacher support plays a pivotal role in curbing and preventing bullying incidents within school environments (Miranda et al., 2019). Positive student-teacher relationship was also associated with improved emotional regulation and reduced depressive symptoms among students (F. L. Huang et al., 2018). It is saddening that only a small percentage of bully victims report to their teachers and secondary school students, as found in a study in Malaysia on cyberbullying (Mat Azmi et al., 2021). With instances of non-intervention and normalisation of bullying, victims often conceal their experiences

due to fear of exclusion and repercussions (Holt et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2019). Despite adolescents' reluctance to disclose bullying incidents, teachers remain key figures for support, with their intervention significantly impacting the reduction of bullying occurrences (Wachs et al., 2019).

In many countries, school authorities hold a legal responsibility to intervene and provide support for adolescents going through bullying experiences; this further reaffirms the crucial role of teachers as agents of support, prevention, and recovery (Rigby, 2020). Gathering facts, speaking with both the victim and the bully, and providing emotional support are some of the effective teacher support strategies (Burger et al., 2015; Wachs et al., 2019). Other varying but equally effective teacher support approaches include disciplinary consequences, reprimanding of perpetrators, meeting with both victim and bully parents, classroom discussion, and other confrontational support measures (Bauman et al., 2008; Burger et al., 2015). Implementation of disciplinary measures by clearly communicating to the bully that their behaviour is unacceptable and reporting the incident to other responsible adults emerged as the most effective intervention strategy for directly addressing bullying and victimisation (Burger et al., 2022).

Teachers served as the school system's main point of reference and contact. Although the importance of teacher support in terms of its contribution to students' well-being is generally understood, the precise mechanisms underlying its impact on the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction remain unclear. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the moderating effect of teacher support on bullying experiences and life satisfaction among adolescents in Malaysia. By elucidating the complex dynamics of the relationship, the findings of this study could inform targeted interventions aimed at promoting adolescent life satisfaction and well-being while fostering safer school environments.

Additionally, this study focused on examining bullying experiences among the general adolescent population rather than limiting the scope to adolescents who have reported experiencing bullying. By including a broader adolescent population, this current study could gain a more comprehensive understanding of experiences of bullying incidents across the general adolescent population, the dynamics of bullying experiences and their associated well-being impacts, as well as the underlying mechanisms through which these negative experiences could impact the well-being of adolescents. It is also important to recognise that many adolescents may not fully report or recognise their associated bullying experiences. To enable a better understanding of the pervasiveness of bullying issues, we examined this issue by capturing the full spectrum and continuum of bullying experiences, whether it is from no encounter to frequent encounters, rather than focusing solely on populations of frequent bullying experiences or severe cases.

Specifically, in this study, we examined how varying levels of bullying experiences impact life satisfaction, as well as the moderating role of teacher support, among the general adolescent population.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Social Capital Theory, which conceptualises one's social system as a network of relationships and trust, fostering synchronisation and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putman, 2000). In the context of this research, teacher support serves as a form of social capital akin to social ties, facilitating access to information, power, influence, social credentials, reinforcement of identity, and support (Evans & Smokowski, 2015; Lin, 2001; Lin et al., 2001). Teacher support can serve as a protective factor which could potentially buffer the detrimental impact of negative life experiences, which is bullying experiences in this study, to prevent adolescents from spiralling downwards into developing adverse developmental outcomes. Access to sufficient teacher support would potentially enhance adolescents' access to resources such as advice, emotional support, school-based services, well-being services, and disciplinary measures to mitigate bullying incidents. These resources would potentially form a protective mechanism that would shield adolescents from the harmful effects incurred by bullying victimisation as well as halting the perpetuation of such incidents. Therefore, teacher support could be a strong form of social capital that would bridge adolescents' access to various supportive mechanisms within the schooling environment.

This study examines how teacher support, a form of social capital, contributes to adolescents' overall life satisfaction. This study will specifically examine the moderating role of teacher support in relation to personal experience of bullying and life satisfaction among adolescents in Malaysia. By elucidating the underlying mechanism of the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction and the examination the moderating role of teacher support in the said relationship, this study will enhance our current knowledge of the critical issue of bullying, as well as to what extent teacher support could play a role in the effect of bullying experiences on adolescents' well-being.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) Do bullying experiences and teacher support predict life satisfaction among adolescents? (2) Does teacher support moderate the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction?

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the present study, conceptualised through a review of existing research and theory. We hypothesised that both bullying experiences and teacher support will predict life satisfaction among adolescents, and teacher support will moderate the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction.
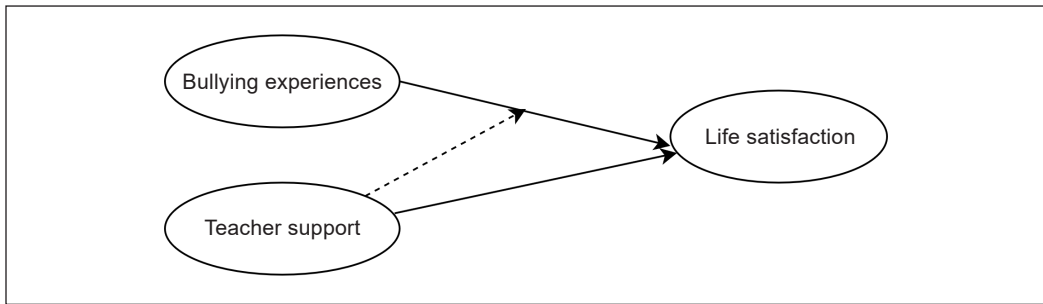
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the relationship of bullying experiences, teacher support, and life satisfaction
Note. The arrow (→) indicates the direct effect, pointing at the direction of the effect (i.e., Bullying Experiences→ Life Satisfaction, Teacher Support→ Life Satisfaction). The arrow (⇢) indicates the moderating effect (i.e., Teacher Support has a moderating effect on the relationship between Bullying Experiences and Life Satisfaction)

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a quantitative research design. The target population was the general adolescent population. With the current target sample of the general adolescent population, this study aimed to capture a continuum of bullying experiences and life satisfaction levels, from the lowest possible level to the highest possible level, which was analysed to answer the research questions. Participants with all bullying experiences and life satisfaction levels were included, which is also needed for a broader perspective on the issue of interest. Besides, no additional bullying screening was involved in the process of participant recruitment as we intend to capture the data of the general population to understand the pervasiveness and dynamic of the issue among the general adolescent population without solely focusing on adolescents with frequent bullying experiences. With this, the understanding of the complex relationships among bullying experiences, life satisfaction, and teacher support within

the general adolescent population will be enhanced.

The cluster sampling method was utilised in the selection of the participants' pool. The present study used a two-stage cluster sampling process to recruit participants from Selangor. First, two districts were randomly selected from the nine districts in the state of Selangor. Subsequently, three public secondary schools located in two districts were randomly selected. Following the selection of schools, participants who met the criteria were recruited via purposive sampling method in the selected schools.

The participants in this study were required to meet the following criteria: (1) Participants must be between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Due to major public examinations, students between the ages of 15 and 17 were excluded; (2) All participants must be students enrolled at Selangor public schools; (3) To participate in this study, all participants must acquire parental consent; (4) Participants must have a basic understanding of English or

Bahasa Malaysia. As of 2019, the Selangor Education Department reported that there were 278 public secondary schools in Selangor consisting of 361,483 students. According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, at least 384 samples need to be recruited. After receiving the questionnaires, all questionnaires were screened to eliminate invalid responses, such as blank responses or incomplete responses, with extremely missing values in all sub-sections of the questionnaire. A final total of 417 samples were included in the data analysis.

Permission to conduct the present study was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Ministry of Education, Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri (JPN) Selangor (Selangor State Education Department) and respective school administrations of the three chosen public secondary schools. Researchers made two visits to selected schools. The first visit was to obtain parental consent, whereby the schools facilitated the process. A second visit was made for data collection. All participants in the present study are considered minors under Malaysian law; therefore, written parental consent was obtained from all 417 participants prior to data collection. The current study and the tools employed were explained to the participants. A debriefing session was carried out at the end of data collection.

Instruments

The study instruments are the Personal Experience Checklist (PECK), Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS) and Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS). Professional translators translated all the instruments from English to Bahasa Malaysia.

Personal Experience Checklist (PECK)

The Personal Experience Checklist (PECK) was developed by Hunt and Rapee (2012) to provide a multidimensional evaluation of different types of bullying experiences among children and adolescents aged 8 to 15. The 32-item instrument highlights four distinct sub-scales of bullying, namely, physical bullying, relational-verbal bullying, cyberbullying, and bullying culture-based bullying. All items in this instrument are in the form of simple statements; for example, other kids tease me about things that are not true (relational-verbal), other kids harass me over the phone (cyberbullying), other kids trip me over (physical), other kids would not talk to me because of where I'm from (culture-based bully). Scoring follows a 5-point Likert scale measuring the frequency of bullying experience. Scores are summed to determine moderate to high correlations between the four variables (Hunt & Rapee, 2012). The PECK has been validated with a battery of scales measuring bullying experience, depression, anxiety, and emotional disorders among children and adolescents. This study's reliability analysis yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.92, which is good.

Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS)

The present study utilised the teacher support subscale of The Child and Adolescent Social

Support Scale developed by Malecki and Demaray (2002) for children and adolescents between 8 and 18 years old. The teacher support subscale contains 12 items, evaluating support behaviour shown by teachers, for example, "my teacher(s) shows me how to do the thing" and "my teacher(s) treats me fairly". The perceived teacher support behaviour frequency is measured using a 6-point Likert scale. Total scores range between 12 to 72. A higher score indicates higher levels of perceived teacher support. This instrument was validated with a battery of tests measuring perceived social support, self-concept and behavioural assessments for children and adolescents. The CASSS achieved a construct validity ranging from 0.71 to 0.78 and a 0.70 correlation with the Social Support Scale for Children (Harter, 1985). This study's reliability analysis yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.95 for the teacher support subscale, which is good.

Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS)

Student's Life Satisfaction Scale is a single-factor scale developed by Huebner (1991) to measure children and adolescents' life satisfaction (ALS) between ages 8 and 17 years old. Life satisfaction is measured based on respondents' self-rating of their general quality of life. This instrument consists of 7 items worded in the form of simple statements, for example, I have a good life, and I wish I had a different kind of life. The rating follows a 6-point Likert scale, indicating the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with the

items. The total sum of scores, including reverse coding of item 3 and item 4, would imply the extent to which respondents feel satisfied with their general quality of life. A higher sum of scores suggests higher life satisfaction. Construct validity was established through the correlation of the SLSS with a battery of tools measuring self-concept, happiness, anxiety, temperament and life satisfaction among children and adolescents. This study's reliability analysis yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.83, which is satisfactory.

Data Analysis

This study's data analysis used the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0 and Process Macro version 3.5 (Hayes, 2020). The decision criteria were set at the alpha 0.05 level.

RESULTS

A total number of 417 adolescents aged between 14 to 16 years old participated in this study (N=417, mean age= 14.78). Data is normally distributed with skewness values that fall within the threshold of ±2.58, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010), and kurtosis values of not greater than 10.0 (Kline, 2011) across study variables. The rate of missing data in the current study is relatively low at the univariate level (0%–7.94%). Hence, mean substitution was used to handle missing data. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample. Before proceeding to the main analysis using Process Macro, a correlational analysis was carried out to provide an overview of the relationships

among variables, which serves a descriptive purpose. Pearson correlation test (Table 2) found significant relationships at a bivariate level between age and teacher support (r=0.282, p<0.00), age and life satisfaction (r=-0.133, p=0.006), teacher support and life satisfaction (r=0.239, p<0.00), bullying experience and life satisfaction (r= -0.105, p=0.032).

Process Macro was used in the analysis to determine if bullying experiences predict life satisfaction among adolescents and the moderation effect of teacher support on this relationship. A moderation analysis was conducted using Process Macro Version 3 to test the hypothesis that teacher support moderated the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction among adolescents. In the analysis, age was used as the covariance.

Results are indicated in Table 3. Both bullying experiences and teacher support variables were included in the model. Results found that both variables accounted for 11.23% of the variance in life satisfaction, R^2= 0.1123, F(4,412)=13.0324, p<0.00. Study variables were centred to prevent potential problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term. At an individual predictor level, bullying experiences predict life satisfaction (p <0.001), while teacher support does not predict life satisfaction.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations on age, total score of personal experience, life satisfaction, and teacher support

Variable	Value
Age	
Mean (SD)	14.78 (1.33)
Min	13
Max	16
Frequency of Age	
13	114
14	83
16	220
Skewness	-0.29
Kurtosis	-1.74
Personal Experience	
Mean (SD)	50.70 (15.10)
Min	32.00
Max	141.00
Skewness	1.65
Kurtosis	4.13
Life Satisfaction	
Mean (SD)	26.53 (7.61)
Min	7.00
Max	42.00
Skewness	-0.15
Kurtosis	-0.31
Teacher Support	
Mean (SD)	43.58 (14.46)
Min	12.00
Max	72.00
Skewness	0.05
Kurtosis	-0.64

Table 2

Bivariate correlations of age, personal experience, teacher support and life satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Age	-			
2. Personal Experience	-0.012	-		
3. Teacher Support	0.282**	0.058	-	
4. Life Satisfaction	-0.133**	-0.105*	0.239**	-

Note. **p-value significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), *p-value significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The interaction term between bullying experience and teacher support was added to the regression model. The change of R² is observed as follows: $\Delta R^2= 0.0201$, $\Delta F(1,412)= 9.3336$, $p=0.0024$, in which the change was significant after entering the interaction term. A simple slope analysis further examined the interaction.

A simple slope analysis was further conducted to examine the relationships between bullying experiences and life satisfaction across three levels of teacher support. Levels of support were divided according to the possible range of scores from 6–72 within the subscale, namely low (6–28), average (29–50) and (51–72). The

result (Table 4) showed that the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction was significant when the teacher support level is low (b= -0.1149, SE= 0.0371, t=-3.9029, $p=0.0001$) and average (b= -0.0690, SE= 0.0238, t=-2.9038, $p=0.0039$), but not when the teacher support level is high. The results supported the hypothesis of teacher social support having a moderating effect on the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction.

Figure 2 shows the graphical representation of the moderating effect of teacher support on the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction. At the average or moderate level of reported

Table 3

Regression analysis and moderation effect of teacher support on the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction among adolescents

	R²	△R²	b	SE	95% CI		p
					LL	UL	
Regression and Moderation Analysis	0.112	0.020					<0.001**
Bullying → Life Satisfaction (A)			-0.312	0.087	-0.482	-0.142	<0.001**
Teacher Support→ Life Satisfaction (B)			-2.683	1.92	-6.456	1.089	0.163
Interaction of A X B			0.113	0.037	0.040	0.185	0.002**

Note. **p-value significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), R^2=squared multiple correlations, $\triangle R^2$= changes in squared multiple correlations, b=unstandardized estimate, SE= standard errors, CI= confidence interval, LL= lower bound, UL= upper bound

Table 4

Moderation effect of levels of teacher support on the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction

Level of teacher support	b	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Low (6–28)	-1.1449	0.0371	-0.2179	-0.0719	0.0001**
Average (29–50)	-0.0690	0.0238	0.1157	-0.0223	0.0039**
High (51–72)	0.0070	0.0314	-0.0547	0.0687	0.8243

Note. **p value significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), b=unstandardized estimate, SE= standard errors, CI= confidence interval, LL= lower bound, UL= upper bound

teacher support received, adolescents reported higher levels of life satisfaction at lower levels of bullying experiences. The level of satisfaction towards life declined as adolescents reported higher levels of bullying experience, while the graph shows a steep decline in life satisfaction when adolescents are facing higher bullying experiences at average or moderate levels of teacher support.

The impact of bullying experiences on life satisfaction is the greatest at low levels of teacher support. At a low level of teacher support, adolescents who reported lower levels of bullying experiences have higher levels of satisfaction. At a low level of teacher support, adolescents reported the lowest level of life satisfaction at high levels of bullying experience. Life satisfaction of adolescents shows a steepest decline from the average level of bullying experience compared to all other levels of teacher support. This indicates that the impact of bullying experience on life satisfaction is at its greatest at a low level of teacher support. At a high level of teacher support, adolescents reported higher levels of satisfaction towards life regardless of the level of bullying experiences as measured in the personal experiences scale. Therefore, no significant relation was found at a high level of teacher support.

DISCUSSION

Bullying is pervasive and a long-standing issue in school; this study showed that bullying indeed contributes to lower levels of life satisfaction. However, teacher support
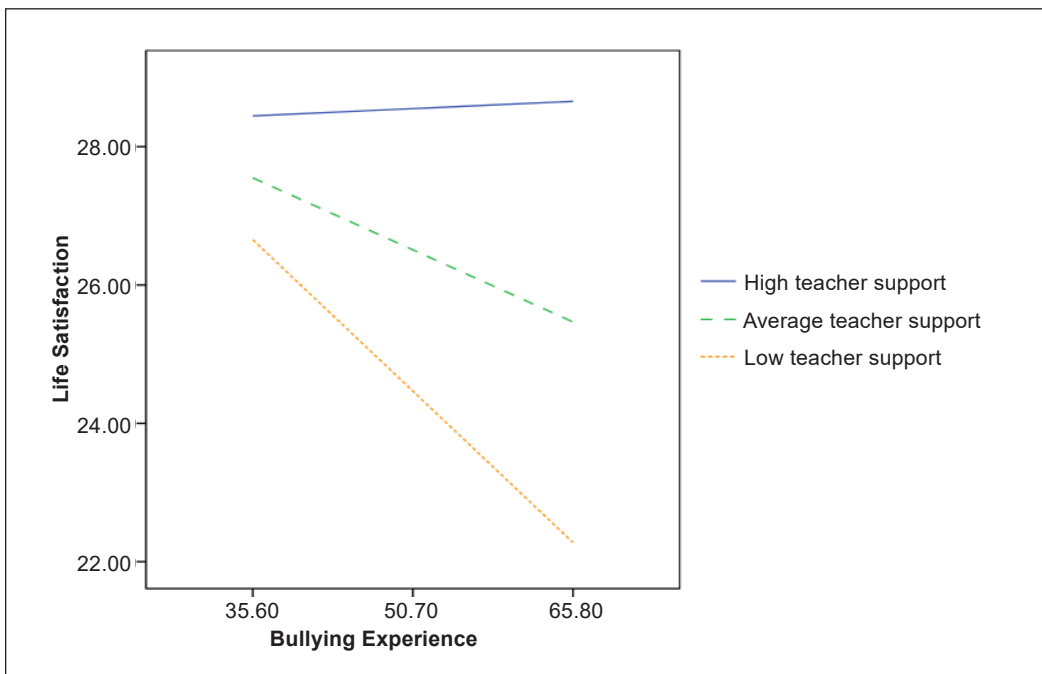

Figure 2. Interaction of bullying experience, teacher support and life satisfaction

could be the protective factor to decrease the impact of bullying on adolescents. The impact of bullying experiences on life satisfaction was established in this study. This study found that both bullying experiences and teacher support predicted life satisfaction. Simultaneously, teacher support moderates the relationship between bullying experiences and life satisfaction. This finding is aligned with previous studies in which bullying experiences contribute to decreased life satisfaction (Arnarsson et al., 2019; Blood et al., 2011). Adolescents predominantly centre their lives on their proximate social circles, encompassing parents, the school community, and peers. Given the substantial time spent at schools within the formal schooling system, adolescents primarily engage with their school environment, thereby indicating that the school community profoundly shapes their holistic assessment of quality of life, including satisfaction towards their life. The findings elucidated in this study emphasise the importance of teacher support within the school environment.

The findings suggested that with a higher level of teacher support received, adolescents tend to have higher satisfaction towards life despite having more experiences of bullying. This implies that adolescents consistently benefit from increased levels of teacher support, irrespective of any negative life events they may encounter. Simultaneously, the impact of bullying on adolescents' life satisfaction is greatest at low levels of teacher support. Given adequate levels of teacher support, adolescents may find it

more manageable to navigate challenging instances of bullying, as teachers serve as a pivotal source of support within the school environment.

Within the Malaysian context, teachers are commonly regarded as authoritative figures within schools, possessing a certain level of influence over student behaviour. This notion was reaffirmed by Halim et al. (2023), in which Malaysia, being a high power-distance society, tends to place great emphasis on respecting authority. Educational approaches in Malaysia generally can be teacher-centred, while students might expect teachers to initiate communication. In the context of the present study, while adolescents are dealing with circumstances that require help, such as experiencing bullying, teachers as the authority figure can play a crucial role in tackling and mitigating instances of ongoing victimisation, as well as offering support that aims at bullying prevention.

The support given by teachers as measured in this study encompasses emotional (e.g., trust, love, and empathy), instrumental (e.g., time), informational (e.g., advice) and/or appraisal (e.g., feedback; Malecki & Demaray, 2002). These various forms of teacher support might serve different purposes for adolescents in dealing with their bullying experience, for instance, emotional support given while hurt has been incurred, time given to resolve the bullying confrontation, as well as giving advice and feedback on ways to deal with bullying instances. Students tend to model their teachers whom they treat as role

models, which eases the process of instilling discipline; at the same time, children have a lesser tendency for misbehaviour if teachers demonstrate more support and empathy (Yaacob et al., 2023). In the context of bullying prevention, providing adolescents with sufficient support and guidance from teachers is considered essential to prevent them from becoming either perpetrators or victims of bullying. This proactive measure which teachers could take can be crucial in addressing bullying behaviours among adolescents.

Nevertheless, the extent of teacher support received might vary and depend significantly on individual perceptions. Adolescents' perceptions of the availability of teacher support might influence their decisions to seek help and support from teachers and school authorities while dealing with bullying experiences. This presents an additional challenge for educators and teachers to ensure that students are aware of available support resources and know how to access those resources when needed.

The findings of this study also confirm the role of teacher support as a form of social capital for adolescents since having teacher support will greatly elevate life satisfaction, which is a major indicator of well-being for adolescents. Social capital theory suggests that social ties are resources that would contribute to the development of human capital (Machalek & Martin, 2015). Cultivating supportive relationships between teachers and students facilitates coping with adverse life experiences, simultaneously fostering the development

of valuable capital within adolescents, such as the inculcation of positive values and effective coping strategies. Supportive social networks for adolescents should encompass teachers and other key figures within their ecological system, including parents. Indeed, past studies have found that parenting and parental support have a vital role in enhancing life satisfaction and resilience among young people in Malaysia (Chong & Baharudin, 2017; Low & Chong, 2024), which provides a good future direction in investigating the phenomenon of bullying in Malaysia.

This study enhances our understanding towards the support mechanisms of the younger population, in which teacher support might buffer the harmful effect of bullying. Implementing efforts to reduce the occurrence of bullying is essential; however, strengthening ways to support adolescents should be one of the focuses of its mitigation strategy. As teachers play a fundamental part in moderating the influence of bullying experiences on life satisfaction, evidenced by the present findings, this calls for school authorities to take on collaborative intervention programs to address and prevent bullying experiences (Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018). Schools could enhance teacher-student relationships and foster a stronger school community through teacher training, support, and formal mentoring programs. Furthermore, enhancing teacher collaboration and communication within schools could encourage proactive responses to bullying incidents (Kollerová et al., 2021).

Support to students could be extended beyond the confines of physical classrooms, but a virtual platform should be considered for students to seek assistance during their trying times. Concurrently, schools and teachers must enhance students' understanding of bullying, focusing on recognising instances of bullying and ways to access support within the school environment. While being involved in bullying, whether as a preparator or victim, could be a traumatic experience for adolescents, ensuring a safe space to build a safe teacher-student connection and supportive relationship would be important.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the findings of this study show that bullying experiences and teacher support have predictive effects on life satisfaction among adolescents in Malaysia. Simultaneously, teacher support moderates the relationship between bullying experiences and teacher support. Support provided by teachers seems to be a great assistance. It exerts great influence on the life satisfaction of adolescents, whereby it serves as a form of social capital, enhancing adolescents' overall life satisfaction. This study enhanced our understanding of the impact of bullying experience on life satisfaction amongst adolescents in Malaysia, suggesting the vital role of teacher support as the underlying mechanism that affects the relationship. The findings add to the knowledge field of developmental psychology in understanding adolescents' development in facing adverse life experiences (i.e., bullying), and these

findings have broad implications that can be used to improve interventions, strategies, and policy formulation aimed at improving the well-being of adolescents.

Limitations, Future Study, and Implications

This study used a cross-sectional approach to examine the study variables. If resources are available, future studies could strengthen their findings by implementing a longitudinal approach to examine changes and predictive relationships over time. Other methodologies, such as qualitative studies, could also be adapted to study this issue to allow for data triangulation for a better understanding.

Future studies could broaden their scope to include other populations, such as children, where bullying may also be prevalent. Adolescent samples in this present study reported mostly around the average scores in terms of life satisfaction. Future studies could examine the potential underlying reason contributing to the scores and replicate this current study in different geographical regions to ascertain the generalisability of current findings. Other potential support networks, such as parents, could be explored in future studies. Impacts of other demographic variables, such as gender and family background, could be examined, as socio-economic status might play a role in this current issue. Future studies could explore different aspects of bullying, such as physical bullying, relational-verbal bullying, and cyberbullying, to gain more insight into each aspect.

This study's findings would furnish practitioners, teachers, parents, and policymakers with valuable insights, particularly in reference to the data, facilitating the design of programs and strategies aimed at providing enhanced support to adolescents struggling with bullying. Parents may find this research helpful in understanding the role of teacher social support as a potential mitigating factor in their children's overall well-being, helping them in advocating for a more supportive educational environment. Mental health practitioners may refer to the findings to adapt therapeutic approaches for adolescents facing bullying challenges and incorporate teacher support. In addition, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into issues of bullying, which can inform the development of evidence-based anti-bullying interventions and support mechanisms within Malaysian schools, which would benefit adolescents in the long run. Schools could enhance their well-being services, such as counselling and mentoring programs while educating students about the support resources available. Policymakers and school administrators need to recognise the existence of this critical issue of bullying, which is rampant in schools while utilising the findings to guide the formulation and enhancement of policies. Meanwhile, the development of tailored training sessions and educational curricula is imperative to equip teachers and educators with comprehensive knowledge of bullying dynamics, along with effective strategies for addressing and mitigating such occurrences within the school environment.

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