

CAREER SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AS THE LIFE SATISFACTION INDICATOR OF MIDDLE-AGED CAREER WOMEN IN KELANTAN

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Abstract: Middle-aged women play a significant role in the growth of the economy, educational development and social expansion in Kelantan. These women stand together with men in public and private fields, and some are even successful entrepreneurs. Life satisfaction is one of the prominent aspects of human well-being that need to be taken seriously, as women are considered the pillar of the family and society. Career satisfaction and social support are two important aspects in the life of a career woman in Kelantan. This study is conducted to identify the influence of career satisfaction and social support towards the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women in Kelantan. Life satisfaction depends on the women's evaluation of the life that they have been through as well as their current life situation. The quantitative method through the survey technique was applied in this study. A total number of 234 respondents consisting of women who fulfilled the criteria listed were involved in this study. The result of the study indicated that career satisfaction is the main indicator of life satisfaction; followed by social support. It was also found that some of the important aspects of career satisfaction are salary, relationship with colleagues, relationship with supervisor and appreciation shown by others. Based on the result of the study, a few recommendations have been made to improve the National Women Policy (*Dasar Wanita Negara*) and Kelantan Women Policy (*Dasar Wanita Negeri Kelantan*). The outcome of the study has contributed towards the development of programs that will help to increase the well-being of middle-aged career women. The Module of *Women's Well-being at the Workplace (Modul Wanita Sejahtera di Tempat Kerja)* will be developed to help career women in battling issues and challenges at their workplace. The module will be proposed to the Department of Women Development and Human Resource Department.

Keyword: Career satisfaction, social support, life satisfaction, career women, middle-aged.

INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is regarded as the main aspect of humans' state of welfare. It involves one's assessment of the life that he or she is leading. It encompasses the feelings of gratitude, comfort, approval, and appreciation towards one's own life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It is also one of the benchmarks in one's wellbeing. Life satisfaction is measured by economic position, education level, experience, accommodation, and others. In modern life, life challenges and pressures have led to the fact that life satisfaction becomes very significant to measure. Life satisfaction is an important variable that reflects on wellbeing, life quality, and happiness.

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Middle-aged women are reported as the unhappy people, with a low level of life satisfaction and a higher level of anxiety (Gayle, 2016). A study was done in the United Kingdom also exposes that life happiness and satisfaction decrease among respondents aged 35 years and above. Women aged 40-59 report the lowest level of life satisfaction. Meanwhile, respondents aged between 65 and 79 report the highest level of life satisfaction. Nevertheless, life satisfaction is found to have reduced after they have reached 79 years of age. (Gayle, 2016).

Among the main challenges that the middle-aged women have to face are the multiple responsibilities that they have to bear. Most of them are under pressure and confront the conflict in taking care of their young children and at the same time taking care of their ailing parents. Women at this age have to face high demands of time where they need to strike a balance between career and family commitments (Hamaideh, 2011). A study also finds that women have now decided to marry at a much older age. Thus, they still have to bear the responsibility of raising younger children although they are approaching middle age. Even worse, there are women at this age who have to face divorce, the death of their partners or close family members. (Siti Marziah et. al., 2015).

It is also in this phase of age that there is a mounting pressure on the financial and career aspects. They are usually in debt and have a great deal of financial commitment like the car loan, housing loan, personal loan and so on. In terms of career, middle-aged women are expected to have achieved high rank or position in their career. For those who are self-employed, they are also expected to have achieved stable financial status and well-expanded business. The high expectations towards middle-aged women can all create pressure, depression, conflict, and emotional burn out (Brough & Frame, 2004; Hamaideh, 2011). Many have reported anxiety and financial pressure. This is worsened by the possibility that they also face problems at the workplace and receive low social support (Adams, Lynda & King, 1996).

Past studies on life satisfaction reported that there are several indicators for the life satisfaction of middle-aged women. They include work status (Aquino et. al., 1996), organizational support (Bliese & Castro, 2000), career satisfaction (Brough & Frame, 2004), career-family conflict (Adams, Lynda & King, 1996) and self-appreciation (Siti Marziah et. al., 2015). Findings show the diverse regression values. Adams, Lynda & King (1996) for example, find that high level of life satisfaction is determined by the total number of working hours, low level of anxiety and strong social support.

Studies on career satisfaction also show mixed findings. Career satisfaction is defined as the gap between career expectations and the reality (James, 2001). Kousha and Mohseni (1996) have proven that occupation is an important factor in influencing the level of satisfaction among career women in Iran. Occupation is the second most important factor in marital satisfaction. This is because career

women have their own financial sources, autonomy and social relationships. Career satisfaction is definitely influenced by the level of education that they have. Mafini & Dlodlo (2014) study the relationship between career satisfaction and extrinsic motivation. Career satisfaction is found to correlate with salary, career life quality, supervision, and teamwork.

Meanwhile, Naz (2015) asserts that career satisfaction and life satisfaction are intertwined. However, it can also be determined by socio-demographic factors such as marital status, age, and salary. A study on Pakistani soldiers finds that the level of education has a negative correlation with life and career satisfaction. Brown et. al., (2007) conclude that salary only influences career satisfaction the least. However, the study finds that the position or rank in the organization increases the happiness and satisfaction at work. Rank increases employee's self-worth and sparks a sense of pride towards what they have achieved.

Life satisfaction is also found to have a weak correlation with three domains of career satisfaction, which are teamwork, flexibility at work and autonomy (Mafini, 2014). Life satisfaction can only have a positive link with salary and the use of skills (Mafini, 2014). This study has been done on the metal manufacturing industry in South Africa. Thus, these various findings demonstrate that the link between career and life satisfaction depend on the study sample and construct domain. This study will identify the influence of career satisfaction on the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women in Kelantan.

This study also identifies the influence of social support on the life satisfaction of middle-aged women. Social support refers to various types of assistance and support provided by members in one's social network. (Weiten & Lloyd, 2003). Past studies have shown that social support can be analyzed by looking into six criteria of social support. Among the criteria proposed are; the amount of intimacy offered by the partner, the level of social integration with individuals involved; assurance of appreciation from other individuals and the support anticipated from other individuals. When these criteria are fulfilled, the social support received would be at optimal level.

This is also supported by other studies which propose that the intimacy with peers, parents, and partners is the predictor of life satisfaction among adults (Guarnieri, Smorti, & Tani, 2014). 37% of the life satisfaction variance is contributed by the intimacy with parents and peers. However, Kelantanese women are acknowledged as strong, persistent women. As written by Raymond Firth (1975) in his book "Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy". Kelantanese women have long become the "bankers" or financial caretakers in their families. Career women like the entrepreneurs, for example, will manage their family's finance and expenses. Rudie (1994) in her book "Visible Women in East Coast Malay Society" concludes that Kelantanese women play an important role in the economy and affairs of the community. Women have long been successful in owning, purchasing and selling

lands, producing agricultural yield and dominating businesses. Kelantanese women have been characterized as very determined when it comes to playing their role as wife, mother and career woman.

Past studies have also shown many adverse impacts of social support, especially social support at work, among the employees. Among them are Winstead et. al., (1995) which report that social support at work predicts the work truancy culture, also emotional burnout (Myung Yong & Harrison, 1998) as well as depression (El Bassel et. al., 1994). In this context, social support sources are the supervisor, mentor, and colleagues. The forms of social support that can be obtained include the information, emotion, guidance and work assistance. Nevertheless, a certain form of support may influence the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women in Kelantan.

Thus, this current study goes deeper into the social support on the life satisfaction of career women in Kelantan. Is there a possibility that Kelantanese career women do not really need social support because they have already been known as strong, determined women? Social support may not be the predictor of their life satisfaction because they are able to be independent. Thus, this article will fulfill the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the acceptance of social support and career satisfaction among middle-aged career women in Kelantan.
2. To identify the life satisfaction indicator for middle-aged career women in Kelantan.

The Kelantan women policy has outlined several agendas of change for women to increase their role. Among them is the agenda of women and work. It seeks to create a suitable job environment by introducing good and safe practices at work by planning on the strategy and public rules and regulations that prioritize women safety and address the inequality and discrimination against them (Main Committee of Kelantan Main Policy, 2001). Therefore, this study will give an input and suggestion to Kelantan Women Policy to improve women's wellbeing both at work and at home. Women who are productive will give an input and contribute to a strong family and social system in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study has adopted the quantitative method in the process of collecting and analyzing the data. The technique used involves distributing the questionnaire that has been validated. The study questionnaire is distributed by the researcher and filled in by the respondents with the help from the researcher (if necessary). The scale used is *Life Satisfaction Index-Short Form* (Barrett & Murk, 2006),

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et. al., 1988), and *The Generic Job Satisfaction Scale* (MacDonald & MacIntyre, 1997). The scale has its validity proven and it has high-reliability value in previous studies. It has been translated and the content validity re-examined after the pilot study is carried out. The reliability value is found to be high and exceeds 0.70 alpha value.

Sample of the Study

The respondents involved are middle-aged career women in Kelantan. Kelantan is selected to represent the suburban areas. Purposive sampling is used in this study to identify the number of respondents who have the potential to contribute towards this study. This is because purposive sampling is able to help determine the unit or characteristics that have to be focused upon by researcher to identify the respondents deemed most appropriate and can contribute to the study objectives. The respondents selected must fulfill the criteria determined- they have to be Kelantanese, work and live in Kelantan, have the monthly income, aged between 40-59 years old and work in the public or private sector, or full-time entrepreneurs. A total of 234 respondents are involved in this study, and they represent four districts, namely Kota Bharu, Pasir Mas, Tumpat, and Machang.

Instrument

This study adopts a quantitative study method in the data collection process. The technique used is a questionnaire built on a certified instrument.

Socio-demography. The background measured in the questionnaire form concerns with age, marital status, ethnic group, district, state, the highest level of education, work, level of income and health status.

Social support. Social support is measured using *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (Zimet et. al., 1988). Respondents are asked to state their level of agreement with regard to the social support received from friends and family. For example, 'I have someone with me in my times of need' and 'I can talk about my problems with my family'. This scale has 10 items.

Career satisfaction. Respondents' satisfaction towards work is measured using *The Generic Job Satisfaction Scale* (MacDonald & MacIntyre, 1997) containing their perception of their current job. Among the items tested are 'I enjoy working in this company' and 'My salary is worth it'. The scale also has 10 items.

Life satisfaction. The perception of the respondents towards their lives is measured using *Life Satisfaction Index-Short Form* (Barrett & Murk, 2006). Respondents are asked to state their level of agreement about the items stated. Among the items stated are 'This is the happiest moment of my life' and 'I am satisfied when I look back into my life'. This scale has 9 items.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from this study is analyzed using the SPSS, or Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Data is first filtered and changed the code for the negative items. The normality test is also carried out to ensure that the regression statistics is appropriate to be done on the data. The regression statistics require a normal data with low extreme value and a distribution that takes the form of a 'bell'. Then, it undergoes the reliability test using the *Cronbach alpha* value. The test outcome shows that several items have the low value. These items have been removed from the scale set. After this phase, the data is analyzed descriptively and inferentially, which is by analyzing the mean and multiple regression.

FINDINGS

The mean analysis was done on the data to look into the aspects of social support that are less accepted by the respondents. The scale of social support contains 10 items that measure the acceptance of social support among middle-aged career women in Kelantan. There are 12 original items, whereby 2 items from them are removed after the reliability test is conducted. This scale comes from the *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (Zimet et. al., 1988). Items can be divided according to the factor of sources of social support, namely family, friends and other individuals. The analysis outcome shows that the respondents receive less social support, especially from friends, in terms of the emotion. (refer to Table 1). The following three items, item 5, item 7 and item 10 show that they can't really rely on their friends should they have any problems. Middle-aged career women in Kelantan also have few friends who they can share their happiness and sadness with. This analysis clearly shows that career women in Kelantan get more social support from family compared to friends. For instance, they admitted that they received emotional support and support from their families (items 2, 3.44). Their families are also ready to help them make decisions (item 9, 3.34).

TABLE 1: THE MEAN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1. I have someone with me in my times of need	3.44
2. I get emotional assistance and support from my family	3.44
3. I have someone who I am comfortable with	3.40
4. My friends really help me when I need them	3.11
5. I can rely on my friends should there be any problems	2.94
6. I can tell my family all my problems	3.27
7. I have a friend who I can share my happiness and sadness with	3.07
8. There is someone who takes care of my feelings	3.24
9. My family is willing to help me make decisions	3.34
10. I can talk about my problems with my friends.	2.88

Career satisfaction is measured using The *Generic Job Satisfaction Scale* (MacDonald & MacIntyre, 1997). The mean analysis on mean satisfaction gives several main indicators. Respondents are found to be less satisfied with the appreciation received by the employers. Item 1 shows low mean value (3.09). They also do not really believe that the management really takes care of their welfare (mean 3.03). This may be based on their past experiences at work. Respondents are also not happy with the salary they receive. (3.08). The salary scheme for private servants in Kelantan is lower than other states. The aspect of salary surely gives a large influence on their career satisfaction. Finally, they also report that they do not really find the compatibility working with the current supervisor. (Items 9, 3.09) (Table 2). Communication problems, work demands, and anticipation have a role in creating the communication between the supervisor and staff. This incompatibility can be resolved through two-way negotiation and discussion. The findings of career satisfaction will serve as the guideline to plan the programs for career development. This will also be an input to offer suggestions to relevant parties.

TABLE 2: MEAN ANALYSIS ON CAREER SATISFACTION

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1. I receive an acknowledgment for every task that has been executed well	3.09
2. I am close to my colleagues	3.20
3. I enjoy working with this company	3.23
4. I feel that my job is secure	3.21
5. I believe that the management really takes care of me	3.03
6. All in all, I believe that working is good for my physical health	3.31
7. My salary is worth it.	3.08
8. All my talents and skills are used when I am working	3.21
9. I can get along well with my supervisor	3.09
10. I enjoy my work.	3.33

Further analysis is done on the data to identify the main indicator for the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women in Kelantan. The indicator tested is social support and life satisfaction. The multiple regression analysis is done to identify a significant indicator also the variance value. The analysis outcome shows that career satisfaction clearly predicts life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45$). The same goes for the social support that has a beta value of 0.26. It is clear that career satisfaction is the stronger indicator than social support. Both these predictors contribute 37% to the variance of life satisfaction. The test on the model finds that the prediction model is compatible ($F = 64.53, p < 0.01$).

TABLE 3: MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

<i>Variables</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Social support	0.26	4.17**
Career satisfaction	0.45	7.28**

** $p < 0.01$, $F = 64.53$, $p < 0.01$, $R \text{ Square} = 0.37$.

DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis for social support shows a clear outcome. Respondents are found to have received low social support from friends, especially in terms of emotions. They cannot really depend on friends if they tend to face problems. They also do not really have friends whom they can share their sadness and happiness with. The family is a major source of social support to them. This situation has its own strengths and weaknesses. Having a family as a source of social support is a positive thing. However, this is not always the case—having a family that they can rely on in times of need and hardship. In certain circumstances, it is easier to contact and trust friends. For instance, when there is an emergency at work, there is a problem with work and so on. The study by Shu (2015) shows that social support from friends and colleagues is very much related to career satisfaction. Career satisfaction, in turn, is very much linked to life satisfaction and physical and mental health.

Thus, several strategies need to be formulated so that middle-aged career women in Kelantan also have strong social support from their friends. Friends need to be a trustworthy social support resource for women. In a lot of cases, friends can play an important role in giving emotional and moral strengths to women. Employers can take the initiatives by creating a support group at the workplace. This support group will handle the group or individual counseling periodically, give access to career women to get advice and consultation and prepare the platform for them to share their concerns and problems. This support group is very meaningful to women who face adversities in life, like having children of varying abilities, having unemployed husbands, having problematic children (health and academic wise), or the death of loved ones.

Counseling club like the Guidance and Counseling club at school has to be created at the workplace to create a club of counselors that can give advice and guidance to the group in need. An ethical code is needed to protect women who ask for guidance. The counselors need to be given a special course to expose and train them with guidance and advising skills. Past studies find that individuals who receive career guidance support report higher career satisfaction. (Kirchmeyer, 2005). They also find that they record higher success in career. (Kirchmeyer, 2005).

From the aspect of career satisfaction, the analysis done finds that the women studied have low satisfaction on the salary received, acknowledgment at work, and the relationship with the employer. The domains are main determinants of career satisfaction. Thus, employers need to be more sensitive to the issue and several strategies have to be done to address it. The issue of appreciation has to be revised and planning is done carefully. Employers can organize monthly and yearly activities to acknowledge long-standing and loyal employees to the company. A little incentive has to be given to this group. The same goes for the employees who have given a lot of contribution to the company, such as increasing company sales every month, working overtime, often working on weekends and so on. al., Zoubi (2012) reports that career satisfaction has a positive relationship with salary and working duration. Thus, to maintain career satisfaction, factors of salary and incentive always have to be given attention.

The relationship between the employer and employee also needs to be improved to increase career satisfaction. Two way and open communication may be able to be considered so that any dissatisfaction can be channeled maturely. The employer can also prepare other channels for ideas and suggestions like online channel so that the process is easier and faster. The dispute between the employer and employee must be resolved as fast as possible and must be done so properly. This will clear the air and open doors to better productivity. The study by Vecchio dan Boatwright (2002) also establishes that the positive relationship between employer and supervisor predicts the service tenure in a particular career.

Harris, Winskowski, and Engdahl (2007) disclose that career guidance and task support are types of social support that predict career satisfaction. Career guidance can be done by the supervisor or senior employees in a company or agency. Task support means sharing and exchanging tasks and ideas. Middle-aged career women really require support at the workplace. Supervisor support is found to be able to mitigate the negative impact of career pressure in various occupational contexts (Schirmer & Lopez, 2001; Bliese & Castro, 2000). Thus, programs that can give the exposure to supervisors with regard to their role towards employees, the form of support and the positive relationship between supervisor and employees need to be organized by all departments.

The analysis of life satisfaction factors finds that career satisfaction and social support clearly predict life satisfaction. Both these elements have a strong influence on the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women. Therefore, the effort towards increasing career satisfaction and social support needs to be exerted actively and continuously. This will also help enhance the emotional and psychological well-being of middle-aged career women. The study was done in Taiwan (Shu, 2014) also shows that career satisfaction mediates the relationship between social support and wellbeing. The study finds that social support also influences career satisfaction and life wellbeing among army trainers. Social support is also related

to emotional burnout and career satisfaction in a study done on nurses in Jordan (Hamaideh, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the life satisfaction of middle-aged career women in Kelantan is very much influenced by the factors of career satisfaction and social support. At middle age, they are highly reliant on the aspects in determining their life satisfaction, also emotional and psychological well-being. Thus, both these aspects have to be given attention by all parties involved. Families, partners, employers, heads of department and government agencies are among the agents that always interact with women of this age. Thus, the study findings need to be well manipulated in their own capacity. The descriptive findings of social support and career satisfaction can become the indicator of the gap or shortcoming that needs to be filled by relevant parties. The weakness in terms of the emotional support, for instance, gives an indication that this aspect must be given focus in the programs that are to be held for this group of women. Even more strategies and agendas need to be planned and updated to cater for the requirements of emotional support among the women in this group. The same goes with the elements in career satisfaction that reports low mean. This concern will help them enjoy better life satisfaction, better emotional wellbeing, and more assured life quality.

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