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## Positive Youth Development and Life Satisfaction among Youths

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**Abstract:** The main aim of this study was to examine the effects of the different aspects of positive youth development on life satisfaction among Malay youths. In addition, the study was undertaken to identify the differences in the different aspects of positive youth development and life satisfaction between male and female youths. In Malaysia, the link between positive youth development and life satisfaction has been inadequately explored. This study adopted a cross-sectional research design involving a total of 246 male and 226 female youths. The respondents were selected using a two-step sampling technique that started with an area sampling and followed by a systematic sampling. The data was collected using self-administered questionnaires comprising items to measure the two major constructs in the study, positive youth development and life satisfaction. Structural Equation Modelling was used to test the proposed model's goodness of fit and hypotheses. An independent t-test was performed to identify differences in life satisfaction between the male and female groups. The findings of the study revealed that different aspects of positive youth behaviour had different influence on youths' life satisfaction. The study also indicated that female youths had higher pro-social norm and life satisfaction compared to their male counterpart.

**Key words:** Youth, positive development, life satisfaction, structural equation modelling

### INTRODUCTION

The Statistics Yearbook Malaysia (Department of Statistics, 2011) indicated that, in 2010, 42% (10.95 million) of the 26 million Malaysian citizens were youth. Youth population was described as individuals in the age group of 15-40 years and they were the potential productive source of resources for the nation's development (Asnarulkhadi, 2009). Youth were the important resources to ensure the nation's continuous growth and prosperity. Thus, youth should be developed and guided to enable them to become productive resources through programmes that would increase their knowledge, skills and engagement, find a place in the community and learn how to contribute to a community (Brennan *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, it was clearly stated in the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015 (Economic Planning Unit, 2010) that youths were perceived as an important source of human capital essential for enhancing and enabling the nation's growth. Hence, the Malaysia government has increased stepped up efforts and increased investments to nurture and build up the positive aspects of youth potentials to prepare them for future undertakings in developing the country. Unproductive youth were described as those who were involved in problem behaviour and perceived as a liability

to the nation. Not only did they not contribute positively to the nation's economic development but also the government has to spend a large sum of money treating them from drugs dependency and set up drugs rehabilitation centres and programmes. Otherwise, they would affect the quality of life of others within the same community, including themselves, by involving in other related problem behaviours as a result of their drugs addiction such as stealing, cheating, damaging properties, gang fighting, sexual relationship with others and breaking into residences.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) was a strengths-based approach to optimise development in youth leading to healthy, satisfying and productive lives for youths as they progressed towards adulthood (Roth *et al.*, 1998). It was noted that positive youth development and life satisfaction had a positive relationship as suggested by Sun and Shek (2010). The increase in positive youth development would enhance life satisfaction. Moreover, some studies (Valois *et al.*, 2001; Zullig *et al.*, 2001; Blood *et al.*, 2011; Brantley *et al.*, 2002) revealed that a high level of life satisfaction was related to positive outcomes in intrapersonal, interpersonal, vocational, health and educational fields. It was noted that youths with high life satisfaction were less

likely to be involved in problem behaviour (Zullig *et al.*, 2001). This implies that achieving satisfaction in life among youths was crucial to any programmes related to youth development. Acknowledging the negative consequences of unproductive youths, youth development programmes should be organised to provide services for youths that could enhance the development of their positive potentials. On the other side of the token, it is equally important to organised youths programmes that would improve youth's life satisfaction. Life satisfaction had an adaptive effect and contributed to positive outcomes (Park and Huebner, 2005). However, in Malaysia it was reported by Diyanah (2010) that 77% of youth were not happy with life. Based on this background, this study seeks to ascertain the effects of positive youth development on youths' life satisfaction. Specifically, the study was undertaken to examine which aspects of positive youth development have more effects on youths' life satisfaction. This is to ensure that adequate attention would be given to these aspects of positive youth development when designing youth-development programmes. Moreover, the effectiveness of positive youth development programmes could be ascertained based on the extent they can promote life satisfaction among youths.

Gilligan and Huebner (2002) revealed that previous studies carried out by most researchers on life satisfaction were limited to studies on adults. Proctor *et al.* (2009) reviewed 141 articles on youth life satisfaction, dated from 1972 and 2006, from countries such as North America, South America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia and Australia. None of these reviewed studies linked positive youth development and life satisfaction. However, the study of Sun and Shek (2010) that examined positive youth development, youth life satisfaction and problem behaviour among Chinese adolescents indicated the recent trends of interest among researchers to examine positive youth development in the study of youth life satisfaction. In Malaysia, youth studies that especially linked positive youth development and life satisfaction did not get adequate attention from researchers. Although, there were several studies that investigated life satisfaction in Malaysia (Achour and Nor, 2014; Ismail *et al.*, 2014; Kooshiar *et al.*, 2012; Yaacob *et al.*, 2012; Achour *et al.*, 2013; Rahim, 2013; Rashid *et al.*, 2011; Siang and Talib, 2011; Yusof *et al.*, 2009), studies linking positive youth development with life satisfaction were still lacking. Moreover, the incidents of youth experiencing life dissatisfaction were rising in Malaysia (Siang and Talib, 2011). Against this background, this study attempts to examine the effects of positive youth development and life satisfaction among Malay youth

since they were reported to be the group that was highly involved in problem behaviour (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2013).

The main aims of the study are to: (a) Ascertain the different aspects of positive youth development that have influence on youth life satisfaction and (b) Determine whether there are significant differences between male and female youth in terms of aspects of positive youth development and life satisfaction. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed to be tested:

- **H1:** Different aspects of positive youth development have positive effects on life satisfaction
- **H2:** There are significant differences in the different aspects of positive youth development between male and female youths
- **H3:** There is a significant difference of life satisfaction between male and female youths

#### **POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)**

Generally, there are two approaches of designing development programme services to youth, namely; "Deficit based" and "Positive youth development" approach (Shek *et al.*, 2007). The authors suggested that the "deficit based" approach focussed on fixing the troubled youth or youths that were having problems by engaging medical professionals, clinical psychologists and clinical social workers. On the other hand, Positive Youth Development approach can be viewed as an effort undertaken to improve, cultivate and nurture the developmental capacities, abilities and positive potential of youth. The argument behind endorsing the positive youth development approach was based on the beliefs that sufficient efforts should be given to address aspects related to nurturing and building youth's capacities, strengths, interests and future prospective by understanding, educating and engaging youth in productive activities (Damon, 2004). In short, positive youth development is an approach that provides opportunities for youth to develop future potentials through cultivating, developing and harnessing the underlying good assets, abilities and potentials already existing among youths to the possible highest potential level through proper guidance from the adults and/or organised youth programmes. Catalano *et al.* (2002) pointed out that there were several characteristics associated with positive youth development, including emphasis on integrated youth development, emphasis of person-in-environment perspective and focus on developmental model about how young people grow, learn and change. In addition, the authors suggested

Table 1: Definitions of positive youth development constructs

Construct	Definition	Source
Bonding	Emotional attachment and commitment an individual makes to social relationships with parents, caregivers, siblings, peers, schoolmates, teachers, romantic partners and other members of the community throughout the whole life cycle	Lee and Lok (2012)
Social competence	Refers to the ability to build positive and healthy interpersonal relationships and to resolve inter-personal conflicts, the development of clear self-identity in general and a group or collective identity in particular and the orientation to be a responsible citizen in one's society and a caring citizen in the world	Ma (2012a)
Emotional competence	Demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation	Boyatzis <i>et al.</i> (2000)
Cognitive competence	Refers to reasoning and making inferences and creative thinking means stretching ones spectacles, evaluating multiple ideas and alternatives and generating novel and practical ideas	Sun and Hui (2012)
Behavioural competency	Refers to moral and social knowledge, social skill, positive character and positive attitudes, behavioural decision process and action taking	Ma (2012a)
Moral competency	The effective orientation to perform altruistic behaviours towards others and the ability to judge moral issues logically, consistently and an advanced level of development	Ma (2012b)
Self-efficacy	One's belief in ones capability to organise and execute the courses of action required to achieve given results	Bandura (1997)
Pro-social norms	Rules and expectation with which a society guides the behaviour of its member	Macionis (2004)
Resilience	The process of capacity for or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Self-determination	The ability to think for oneself and to take actions consistent with that thought	Catalano <i>et al.</i> (2004)
Spirituality	Sense of purpose and meaning in life, hope or belief in a higher power	Sun and Shek (2010)
Clear and positive identity	Distinctive combination of personality, characteristics and social style by which one defines oneself and by which one is recognised by others	Grotevant (1998)
Beliefs in the future	Ability to develop future potential goals, choices or options	Sun and Shek (2010)
Pro-social involvement	Voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or groups of individuals	Lam (2012)
Recognition of positive behaviour	The observable skills that increase the likelihood of success and personal satisfaction in normative academic, work, social, recreational, community and family setting	Law <i>et al.</i> (2012)

that positive youth development was manifested by 15 constructs, bonding, social competency, emotional competency, cognitive competency, behavioural competency, moral competency, self-efficacy, pro-social norms, resilience, self-determination, spirituality, clear and positive identity, beliefs in the future, pro-social involvement and recognition of positive behaviour. The definitions of these constructs are illustrated in Table 1.

### LIFE SATISFACTION (LS)

Life satisfaction is an individuals' cognitive evaluation on their overall quality of life based on the individuals' set criteria and standards of life (Diener and Diener, 1995) and it is not subjected to the short-term emotional reactions to life events (Proctor *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, individuals also evaluate their satisfaction with life based on the different aspects of life such as economy, family and social relations, job and health (Rojas, 2004). However, it is more meaningful to assess global judgements of life satisfaction rather than satisfaction with specific life domains (Proctor *et al.*, 2009) because it is a more stable (Eid and Diener, 2004) component of subjective well-being (Diener and Diener, 1995). Understanding life satisfaction among youths has important implications for the Malaysia youth council

(MBM) in designing programmes and/or setting resolutions related to youth development policy. Park (2004) reported that life satisfaction played different important roles in positive development, as an indicator, a predictor, a mediator/moderator and outcome.

Numerous studies suggested that positive youth development is an antecedent to life satisfaction both in Western and Chinese contexts (Sun and Shek, 2013). However, studies by Paxton *et al.* (2006), Ciarrochi *et al.* (2003) and Gebauer *et al.* (2008) suggested that although not all of these constructs were proved to have associations with life satisfaction but many proved to be linked with life satisfaction. The findings of these studies also suggest that different constructs of positive youth development had impact on life satisfaction in different research settings and backgrounds. Based on the findings of these studies, it is important to ascertain the aspects of positive youth development that have influenced on Malay youths' life satisfaction. Thereby, the main aims of this study are firstly, to test the structural model of the predictive relationships between positive youth development and life satisfaction. Second, is to ascertain the effect of the different aspects of positive youth development on life satisfaction. Third, is to examine the difference of life satisfaction between male and female youths.

Sun and Shek (2013) suggested substance abuse and delinquency were the major concerns among all problem behaviours. The incidents of problem behaviour, (involving in substance and drug misuse) were reported to be higher among male youth (Mahmood *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, based on the percentages of higher learning institutions' student enrolment, the majority are female. Against this background, there are evidences illustrating that achieving knowledgeable male youths with high personality that would progress in life and contribute to the nation's development would be challenging. Adequate efforts should be undertaken to understand them so that proper proactive and reactive activities can be designed toward meeting their needs and focussing on highlighting their good potentials.

## METHODOLOGY

**Participants and procedures:** The population of the study was Malay youth who participated in the youth programmes organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sport, Malaysia in 2012, in the selected areas. The Malays youths were selected to be the respondents of this study because they were reported to be the group that was mostly involved in problem behaviour (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2013)). The youth programme was organised to provide job, studying, developing skill and entrepreneurship opportunities for youths and would attract youths that were looking for opportunities to develop their future potentials. Thereby, this approach was believed to be meeting the positive youth development's requirement. The sample of the study representing the entire youth population was selected using a two-step approach. An area sampling technique was used at the first step where five states were identified to represent north, south, east, west and central region of Peninsular Malaysia. The selected states were Kedah, Johor, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan and Putrajaya, respectively. Finally, sample units for each location were selected using a systematic sampling technique. In this case, every 10th intercepted respondent was selected after an initial random starting point. The 150 questionnaires were distributed for each location and the total number of questionnaire distributed was 750.

The selected respondents were informed of the purpose of the study. In addition, they were assured that their responses would be treated as strictly confidential where only aggregate data would be reported and presented for academic discussions. This study used a self-administered questionnaire containing items measuring positive youth development, life satisfaction and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Instructions pertaining to giving responses to the statements in the questionnaire were clearly stated on the research instrument. The intercepted respondents were

given ample time to provide their responses at their convenience and return them back to the enumerator, after 30-45 min, to a booth allocated by the programme organiser.

**Instrument:** The questionnaire contains 90 items measuring positive youth development developed by Shek *et al.* (2007). These items measures 15 domains of positive youth development namely bonding, social competence, emotional competency, cognitive competency, behavioural competency, moral competency, self-efficacy, pro-social norms, resilience, self-determination, spirituality, clear and positive identity, beliefs in the future, pro-social involvement and recognition of positive behaviour included in this measurement. The definitions of these domains are illustrated in Table 1. Nonetheless, after conducting a pilot study, only 31 items measuring 7 domains (Bonding, social competence, self-determination, self-efficacy, spirituality, clear and positive identity and pro-social norms) were used for the actual survey. Each item used a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as highly disagree to 10 as highly agree for respondents to rate their agreement and disagreement toward every statement.

Moreover, life satisfaction was measured using five items adopted from Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener *et al.* (1985). This scale was developed to examine respondent's judgement towards quality of life in general. It is to assess an individual's conscious evaluative judgement of his or her life using the Person's own criteria (Pavot and Diener, 1993). After conducting a pilot test, four items were retained in the final survey. The LS was measured using a 10-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreements or disagreements for each life satisfaction item on a scale of 1 as strongly disagree to 10 as strongly agree. Higher score indicates greater sense of satisfaction with life in general. The last section of the instruments contains items pertaining to respondents' demographic data.

**Statistical analysis:** A total of 750 youth were involved in this study, representing 150 returned questionnaires for each location. Using the approach used by Hair *et al.* (2010) to calculate the sample size, the required sample size for this study is between 305 and 610. After a data-cleaning process, a total of 484 useable data sets, representing a response rate of 64% were subjected for further analysis. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS 16 was used to test the goodness-of-fit of the proposed structural model and hypotheses postulated in the study. An independent t-test was performed to identify differences in life satisfaction between male and female group. Descriptive analysis was also performed to describe the sample data.

Table 2: Reliability of positive youth development and life satisfaction

Construct	Items	Factor loading	$\alpha$ ( $\geq 0.7$ )	CR ( $\geq 0.6$ )	AVE ( $\geq 0.5$ )
Positive Youth Development (PYD)	<b>Self-Determination (SD)</b>		0.85	0.86	0.67
	I am able to make wise choices (SD44)	0.85			
	I am confident about my decision (SD45)	0.87			
	I will not change easily after making a decision (SD46)	0.73			
	<b>Pro-social Norms (PN)</b>		0.90	0.90	0.76
	I will try my best to contribute to the society (PI82)	0.86			
	I care about unfortunate people in the society (PN83)	0.93			
	If there are opportunities, i will take up voluntary work (PN84)	0.82			
	<b>Social Competence (SC)</b>		0.90	0.91	0.76
	I know how to communicate with others (SC14)	0.84			
Life Satisfaction (LS)	I understand the rules in interacting with others (SC15)	0.90			
	I can interact with others in a harmonious manner (SC16)	0.88			
	<b>Bonding (BO)</b>		0.834	0.86	0.75
	When I need help, I trust my teachers will help me (B3)	0.74			
	I love my teachers and classmates (B4)	0.98			
	In most ways my life is close to my ideal (ST1)	0.90	0.93	0.93	0.82
	The conditions of my life are excellent (ST2)	0.96			
	I am satisfied with my life (ST3)	0.86			

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Construct	SD	PN	SC	BO	LS
Self-Determination (SD)	<b>0.82</b>				
Pro-social Norms (PN)	0.58	<b>0.87</b>			
Social Competence (SC)	0.59	0.57	<b>0.87</b>		
Bonding (BO)	0.49	0.49	0.43	<b>0.87</b>	
Life Satisfaction (LS)	0.47	0.45	0.42	0.36	<b>0.90</b>

## RESULTS

**Profile of respondents:** The respondents involved in this study were equally represented by both genders, male (51%) and female (49%), coming from both rural and urban areas. Majority of the respondents (83%) were in the age group 15-25 years old and were unemployed (83%). The figure is parallel to the data reported in the Malaysia Statistic Year Book 2011 which illustrates that only 15% individuals within this age group are working. Majority of the respondent attended national secondary school (72%). Thus, it is concluded that the respondents who participated in the study represent the youth population within the age bracket of 15-25 years old.

**Assessment of data normality:** After the goodness-of-fit of measurement model was achieved, the data normality was ascertained. Criteria for normality assessment, namely skewness and kurtosis were used to examine the data normality. The measure of skewness should fall within the range of -3.0-3.0 (Kline, 2005) to indicate the data is normally distributed. In addition, the value of multivariate kurtosis should be lower than 50.0 to assume the multivariate normality is achieved (Zainuddin, 2012). Skewness value for all the variables are within the range of acceptable values and the multivariate kurtosis value is 42.65 less than 50. Therefore, the data normality is assumed.

**Reliability and validity:** The proposed model's dimensionality is assessed based on the factor loadings of the items measuring the constructs. The findings in

Table 2 suggested that the factor loadings values of all items meet the cut-of-point of 0.6. The dimensionality of the model is achieved. The reliability assessment of the instrument is assessed using Cronback's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The instrument's reliability is achieved since the values of  $\alpha$  ranged from 0.83-0.93 exceeding the acceptable cut-of-point of 0.70. The calculated CR values for the different domains of positive youth development ranged from 0.86-0.91 and life satisfaction is equal to 0.93, exceeding the required value of more than or equal to 0.6, indicating that the instrument meets the construct reliability requirement. The accepted cut-of-point for AVE is more than or equal to 0.5, suggesting that the instrument is reliable. In this case, the AVE values for positive youth development and life satisfaction are 0.67 and 0.82, respectively. Based on these criteria, the instrument is accepted as reliable.

The discriminant validity of the instrument is also assessed by examining the square root of AVE which is illustrated in bold in Table 3. The instrument achieves its validity when the square root of AVE is higher than the values of correlations between the constructs, indicated in the rows and columns of Table 3. The findings in Table 3 suggested that the discriminant validity requirements are met, thereby the instrument achieved its discriminant validity.

**Model's goodness-of-fit:** Several statistical indices are used to test the model's goodness-of-fit (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and these indices are categorised into absolute fit, incremental fit and Parsimonious fit. Absolute fit is

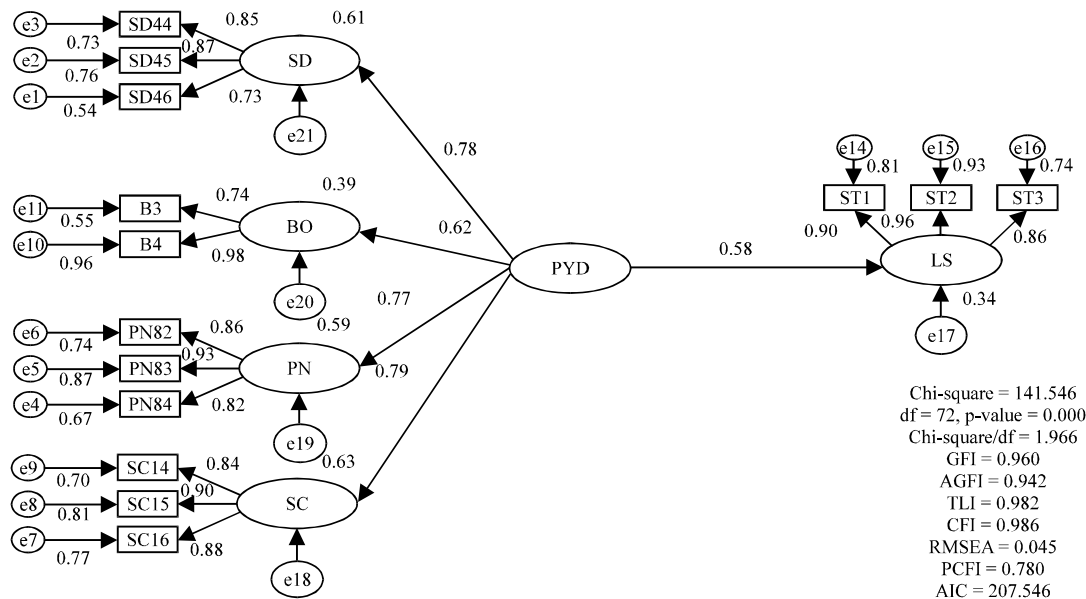


Fig. 1: Structural model of positive youth development and life satisfaction

Table 4: Regression weights

Construct	Path	Construct	Estimate	S.E	C.R	p
Bonding (BO)	<---	Positive youth development	1.006	0.095	10.613	***
Pro Social Norms (PN)	<---	Positive youth development	0.966	0.086	11.293	***
Social Competence (SC)	<---	Positive youth development	1.050	0.089	11.800	***
Self-Determination (SD)	<---	Positive youth development	1.000			
Life Satisfaction (LS)	<---	Positive youth development	1.030	0.105	9.822	***

assessed based on indexes such as Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the acceptable cut-off point is less than 0.08 and for Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), the values should be more than 0.9. Incremental fit measures are Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI). The values of these indexes should be more than 0.90. Parsimonious fit was determined using the normed Chi-square and the cut-off value should be less than 5.0. The results of fitness indices of the model as illustrated in Fig. 1 indicated that  $\chi^2 = 142$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.04. The model meets the requirement of goodness-of-fit, since values of these indices meet their respective cut-off point requirements. Thus, the proposed hypothesised model fits the sample data adequately well and further analysis can be carried out.

The model suggested that there are four underlying constructs to improve positive youth development, namely Social Competence (SC), Self-Determination (SD), Pro-social Norm (PN) and Bonding (BO). These constructs explain 34% variations in life satisfaction. In this case, social competence describes youths' ability to communicate with others harmoniously and have interpersonal skills. Self-determination refers to the ability

of youth to make confidently wise decisions and stick to the decision once they are made. Pro-social norm reflects youths' intention to contribute to the society whenever there are opportunities and care for unfortunate people in the society. Bonding signifies youths' trust and love, in this case teachers and classmates, whom they seek when in need. Life satisfaction is manifested by three items. In this case, life satisfaction is described as the cognitive assessment of one life where ones perceived the conditions of their life as excellent, mostly close to the ideal and as a whole they are satisfied with them.

**Relationships among constructs:** The results in Table 4 suggest that the path coefficients for the full model are significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The findings of the study suggest that there is positive significant relationship between positive youth development and life satisfaction ( $\beta = 1.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The result supports the hypothesis that positive youth development has significant effect on life satisfaction. Moreover, there is insufficient evidence to reject the proposed alternative hypothesis that different aspects of positive youth development have different effects on life satisfaction. Findings in Table 4 suggest that social norm, self-determination, pro-social norm

and bonding aspects of positive development have effects on life satisfaction. Social competence, self-determination and pro-social norm are measured by three items whilst bonding is measured by two items. These items explain 67, 61, 59 and 39% variations in social competence, self-determination, pro-social norm and bonding, respectively.

**Independent t-test analysis:** An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the level of life satisfaction between male and female youth. The findings of the t-test suggest that there is a significance difference ( $t = -2.45$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ) between male ( $M = 7.6$ ,  $S.D = 1.6$ ) and female ( $M = 8.0$ ,  $S.D = 1.5$ ) group in life satisfaction, indicating that females have higher life satisfaction than males. The null hypothesis that there is no difference of means between the two groups is rejected. Perhaps, this explains the incidents of more females (63%) compared to males (37%) enrolled in higher learning institutions (productive youth) in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2012). In 2013, youths who were involved in problem behaviour was reported to be 98% among male (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2013). Moreover, the independent t-test was also conducted to identify significant difference of social competence, self-determination, pro-social norm and bonding between male and female youth. The findings of the independent t-test also suggested there is insufficient evidence to reject the hypotheses that there is no significant difference in social competence, self-determination and bonding between male and female youths. However, the findings of the study suggested that there is sufficient evidence to accept the hypothesis that there is a significant difference of pro-social norm ( $t = -1.36$ ,  $p = 0.046$ ) between female and male youth. Female youth has higher level of pro-social norm ( $M = 9.0$ ,  $S.D = 1.08$ ) compared to the male group ( $M = 8.8$ ,  $S.D = 1.29$ ). The only aspect of positive youth development that is different between the two groups is pro-social norm.

## DISCUSSION

The results show that there exists a positive and significant relationship between positive youth development and life satisfaction. This indicates that having higher aspects of positive youth development will help youth in achieving higher satisfaction with life. Although, Sun and Shek (2010) suggested that there are 15 positive youth development domains, the findings of this study discovered that there are four aspects of positive youth development which influenced youth life satisfaction. The finding supported the argument put

forward by Gebauer *et al.* (2008) who suggested and that not all aspects of positive youth development were proved to have associations with life satisfaction. The findings of this study suggest that understanding youth development should be performed separately for different youth groups since different groups of youth may have different sets of needs requirements for developing their potentials leading to enhancing their life satisfaction. In addition, youth development is susceptible to changes within the environment in which they live. This supports the argument for different groups of youth in different locations have different sets of needs and these needs should be ascertained before designing any youth development programmes.

The findings of this study also provide insightful information to the Malaysia Youth Council pertaining to formulating policies in designing youth development programmes. The study suggested that the aspects of positive youth development that should be focussed on are social competence, self-determination, pro-social norm and bonding, arranged according to the order of their importance. The empirical findings of the study suggested that youth life satisfaction can be improved by equipping them with social competence, referring to: (a) Their ability to communicate with others harmoniously and (b) Have interpersonal skills of interacting with others in the appropriate manner. Achieving social competence would suggest that youth are able to build positive and healthy interpersonal relationships and avoid inter-personal conflicts.

The second important aspect of youth development is self-determination reflecting youths' ability to make confidently wise decisions and stick to the decisions once they made. The finding supported the work of Ma (2012a) who suggested that fostering self-determination in youth programmes is an important adaptation skill that youth should acquire in order to live happily in society. In addition, Hui and Tsang (2012) proposed that nurturing self-determination among youth is crucial to promoting self-sufficiency, independent thinking, self-advocacy, empowerment of young people and their ability to live according to values and standards or becoming good citizens.

Social norms describe the rules and expectation of the society that become the underlying principles guiding the behaviour of its members (Siu *et al.*, 2012). The study suggested that improving youth's pro-social norm would improve youths' live satisfaction which reflects youths' intention to contribute to the society whenever there are opportunities and care for unfortunate people in the society. The promotion of pro-social norm in the positive youth development programme is the common approach



(Catalano *et al.*, 2002) to promote good values including reciprocity, responsibility, volunteerism and altruism (Bierhoff, 2002). Promoting pro-social norms requires concerted efforts to make youths become responsible people. Being a responsible person, one would engage in moral and social responsibility by making pro-social norm decisions corresponding to the justice, rights and welfare of others. The cultivation of pro-social norms should be in the early stage of life through social learning and identification of the role model (Siu *et al.*, 2012).

Finally, youth satisfaction can be improved through bonding. Promotion bonding means to cultivate and nurture a strong affective relationship with parents, caregivers, siblings, peers, schoolmates, teachers, romantic partners and other members of the community throughout the whole life cycle (Lee and Lok, 2012). However, the findings of this study suggest that bonding refer to youths' trust and love to teachers and classmates, whom they seek when in need. The finding is supported by the work of Collins (1995) and Noller *et al.* (2001) who suggested that due to the changing environment and the development of youths' social and cognitive skills, bonding with peers and teachers may substitute for bonding with parents. The change in environment perhaps could refer to the amount of time spend by youths with their parents compared to teachers and peers. The present scenario in Malaysia whereby both parents are working and youth active time spent with their parents is less compared to the time they spend at school and with their friends. Perhaps this could be the underlying possible explanation to youths' trust and love to teachers and peers.

Moreover, the study revealed that female youths are more satisfied with life compared to male youths. It is supported by the universal finding showing that women are happier than men (Tiefenbach and Kohlbacher, 2013). Usually, satisfied youth would not involve in problem behaviour (Sun and Shek, 2010). The incidents of male youths involved in problem behaviour are more than female youths supported the claim that female youth have higher life satisfaction than male youth. Studies by Raman (1999) indicated that male youths are more highly involved in delinquent behaviour compared to females. Studies in western countries (Flannery *et al.*, 1994; Copeland and Hess, 1995) showed similar findings suggesting that those who were involved in problem behaviour such as drug addictions, murder, theft, aggravated assaults and robbery were male youths. The findings of the study suggest that more efforts are required by the authorised bodies to address the needs of the male youths. The findings of the study also suggested that the aspect of positive development that is required to address male life satisfaction compared to female is pro-social norm. The only aspect of positive youth development that is different between the male and

female groups is pro-social norm, where the male has lower pro-social norm compared to female youth. Efforts should be stepped up to examine aspects that could motivate male youth to engage in pro-social activities, feelings of moral obligations and awareness of consequences for getting involved pro-socially.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study should be read with cautions due to the limitations of the study. First, the present model is based on Malay youth. The generalisation of the study to other races should be done with caution. Future research should replicate similar study expanding to other main races in Malaysia. Second, the respondents were selected during the youth programme organised by the Malaysia Ministry of Youth and Sport, so the findings of the study only represent this group of youth. Future studies should utilise data from several types of youth to validate the predictive directionality of variables in the model. Third, the present study was conducted on a cross-sectional research design which has the limitation of causality. Future research should adopt a longitudinal research design to overcome the problem of causality. Notwithstanding its limitations, the present study is able to demonstrate that four aspects of positive youth development namely social competence, self-determination, pro-social norm and bonding have effect on youth life satisfaction. The study also demonstrates that females have higher life satisfaction than male youth. In addition, lower level of pro-social norm among male youth explained the aspect of positive youth development that should be addressed to improve life satisfaction in male youth.

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