

Filial Piety and Life Satisfaction Among Malaysian Adolescents in a Multi-Ethnic, Collectivist Society

Tan Soon Aun^a, Sarvarubini Nainee^b, and Tan Chee Seng^c

^aDepartment of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perak, Malaysia; ^bDepartment of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perak, Malaysia; ^cDepartment of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author:

Tan Soon Aun

Department of Social Work

School of Sciences

University of Science

Penang, Malaysia

Email address: tansa@utar.edu.my

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Abstract— Past studies have generated assorted results about the link between filial piety and psychological outcomes among adolescents in Asia. Reciprocal filial piety was associated with positive psychological adjustment while authoritarian filial piety was allied to negative developmental outcomes. Differences between ethnicity and gender in life satisfaction have been observed, in addition to the possibility of variations in the endorsement of filial piety values across ethnicity and gender in a multi-ethnic, collectivist society like Malaysia. Thus, we examined the unique associations between reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety with adolescents' life satisfaction, alongside the interaction of ethnicity and gender with these relationships in Malaysia. The sample comprised of 583 adolescents (Mage=15.07; 47.9% males; 52.1% females; 48.4% Malays, 27.1% Chinese, 24.5% Indians) located in three states of the Malaysian Peninsular. The respondents were selected using cluster sampling methods and were required to complete a self-report questionnaire. Pearson correlation analysis results indicated that a higher level of filial piety (both reciprocal and authoritarian) is linked with higher life satisfaction. Meanwhile, a three-way moderation analysis revealed that gender and ethnic groups were not significantly associated with filial piety and life satisfaction. However, ethnicity alone was significantly associated with reciprocal filial piety and life satisfaction. This study provides a foundation for understanding life satisfaction in relation to filial piety among adolescents in a multi-ethnic setting. The findings revealed that different facets of filial piety tend to have a distinct association with life satisfaction. Thus, there is a need to understand the different constructs of traditional family values, such as filial piety, in promoting positive life satisfaction among adolescents in a changing society like Malaysia.

Keywords: life satisfaction, reciprocal filial piety, authoritarian filial piety, multi-ethnic, adolescents

Introduction

Adolescence is an intermediate developmental phase between childhood and adulthood, where individuals encounter many challenges and opportunities. Adolescence is marked by a multitude of significant physical, psychological, and social changes, and was once described as a “storm and stress” phase of life. Although adolescence can be a time of perfect health and well-being, struggles with self-identity pose momentous risks to adolescents' health (Santrock, 2014). These challenges can affect well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction as a whole. A total of 16.81% of the Malaysian population are adolescents, which is a big group; therefore, any issues pertaining to this segment of the population should not be neglected (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016).

One of the major issues faced by adolescents is the deterioration of their satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is an indicator of overall wellness and positive functioning (Suldo, Huebner, Friedrich, & Gilman, 2009). Initially, life satisfaction was associated with a balanced

comparison of what people have with what they hope to have in life (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). Currently, life satisfaction is viewed as a cognitive, general appraisal of people's ease with their life as a whole, or in specific domains (e.g., social environment) (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). As life satisfaction includes information from important domains in an individual's life, it provides an assessment of how the individual's life as a whole is going. It denotes one's cognitive appraisal of their quality of life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

Earlier research specified that family values such as filial piety make a significant contribution to life satisfaction especially in adolescents. Filial piety is a traditional value which originates from Confucius' teachings that emphasized children's responsibility to respect, care, and support their parents, as well as fulfill their duties of ancestral worship (Chen, 2014). However, although filial piety was once a term coined by the Chinese community, it is now a family value accepted globally, and practiced in both Eastern and Western cultures (Miao, 2015). In Malaysia, it is evident that filial piety is widely practiced across other ethnic groups, as well as the Chinese community in Malaysia (Selin, 2014). Malays and Indians in Malaysia have adapted this practice as part of their lifestyle through common customs such as greeting, bowing, and kissing elderly hands and with both hands held together, as a gesture of being respectful toward the elderly. In Malaysia, filial piety is a fundamental element of the family system for Malaysians (Ismail, Tan, & Ibrahim, 2009).

A dual model of filial piety suggests that filial piety is a dual construct with two components; namely, reciprocal filial piety and authoritarian filial piety. Reciprocal filial piety describes children's willingness to preserve a good rapport with their parents as brought by love, gratitude, and indebtedness toward parents. Meanwhile, authoritarian filial piety is characterized by children's inclination to uphold a good bond with their elderly relatives to conform to social norms (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Past research revealed that both components of filial piety have diverse psychological effects on personal well-being. For instance, reciprocal filial piety endorses positive psychological adjustment and well-being (Wong, Leung, & McBride-Chang, 2010; Chen, 2014; Chen, Wu, & Yeh, 2015), whereas authoritarian filial piety stimulates negative developmental outcomes (Yeh & Bedford, 2003).

Existing research suggests that filial piety has a significant positive direct effect on life satisfaction. Recent studies have also recommended that disseminating filial values may be an effective method for maintaining life satisfaction (Sun, Liu, Jiang, & Qian, 2016). However, these studies were applied to a single ethnic group. Differences caused by ethnicity are still vague to date although filial piety is widely practiced by many regardless of their ethnicity. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the effect of filial piety (reciprocal and authoritarian) on adolescent's life satisfaction, in addition to the interaction of ethnicity with these relationships in a sample of Malaysian adolescents.

Methods

A. *Participants*

Study respondents consisted of 583 school-going adolescents recruited from twelve randomly selected schools from three states of the Malaysian Peninsular; Penang, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. Respondents were in the age range of 13 to 17 years old (Mean age= 15.07 years; Standard deviation = 1.03). More than 50% of the sample were females (52.1%). 48.4% of respondents were Malays, 27.1% Chinese and 24.5% Indian.

B. *Data Collection Procedures*

Respondents were selected using a cluster sampling method. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data in a classroom setting. Several approvals were attained from the authorities (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, and Department of Education for each state, and the school administrators). In addition to these, parental consent was obtained as the respondents were underage. Respondents were briefed about the objectives and purpose of the study, privacy and confidentiality issues, their rights as respondents, as well as the potential benefits and risks of participation. A small token of appreciation was presented after the respondents completed and returned the questionnaire. The research protocol was appraised and permitted by the institutional ethics committee.

C. *Measures*

Dual Filial Piety Scale (Yeh & Bedford, 2003): A 16-item scale with two dimensions of reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety was used to assess adolescents' filial piety. Each dimension was measured with eight items on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sum scores were computed for each dimension with higher scores indicating higher filial piety. The sample of items were "be frequently concerned about my parents' general well-being." for reciprocal filial piety and "give up my aspirations to meet my parents' expectations" for authoritarian filial piety. Each Cronbach alpha indicated acceptable reliability, with reciprocal filial piety at 0.79 and authoritarian filial piety at 0.70 respectively.

Satisfaction of Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985): An SWLS of 5 items was used to assess each participants' global cognitive appraisal of satisfaction with their life. This instrument used a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to indicate respondents' agreement with each statement. A total score was calculated, with a high score indicating high life satisfaction. The reliability value of the scale was 0.83.

D. *Data Analysis Plan*

Predictive Analytics Software (PASW version 22) was applied to tabulate the data collected during this study. Several stages of data processing were required to generate the outcomes of this study: 1) descriptive statistics to present the frequency distribution of the demographic variables and all other variables under investigation; 2) a Pearson correlation analysis to analyze the relationship between filial piety and life satisfaction; 3) a t-test analysis to analyse gender differences in the variables of the study; 4) a one-way ANOVA to determine ethnic

differences in reciprocal filial piety, authoritarian filial piety and life satisfaction; 5) a three-way moderation analysis using Hayes' SPSS Marco PROCESS (2013) to examine the interaction of gender and ethnicity with filial piety and life satisfaction.

Results

A. Relationship between Filial Piety and Life Satisfaction

In general, Malaysian adolescents tend to score more highly in reciprocal filial piety (Mean= 43.37; Standard deviation= 3.40) than in authoritarian filial piety (Mean= 35.87; Standard deviation= 5.01). The results of the correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive connection between both reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety and life satisfaction (see Table 1). The strength of these relationships was moderate.

Table I. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables (N = 583)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Reciprocal Filial Piety	43.37	3.40	1		
2. Authoritarian Filial Piety	35.87	5.01	.526***	1	
3. Life Satisfaction	24.92	5.40	.277***	.301***	1

*SD = standard deviation; *** $p < .001$

B. Gender and Ethnic Differences

The t -test analysis found no significant difference between males and females in all variables (see Table 2). The internalization of the dimensions of filial piety was almost equal for both genders. The life satisfaction score was also no different between males and females.

Table II. Differences in Filial Piety and Life Satisfaction by Gender (N = 583)

Variable	Male		Female		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Reciprocal Filial Piety	43.11	3.46	43.57	3.34	-1.636	.102
Authoritarian Filial Piety	35.66	5.11	36.03	4.96	-.888	.375
Life Satisfaction	25.17	5.22	24.51	5.71	1.457	.146

SD= Standard Deviation

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine levels of reciprocal filial piety, authoritarian filial piety, and life satisfaction by ethnic group (refer to Table 3). Findings indicated that there were significant ethnic differences in reciprocal filial piety, $F(2, 581) = 10.87$, $p < .001$, authoritarian filial piety, $F(2, 581) = 23.11$, $p < .001$ and life satisfaction $F(2, 581) = 7.34$, $p < .01$. Further analysis with a post-hoc Tukey HSC demonstrated Indian adolescents obtained the highest scores for both reciprocal (mean = 44.34) and authoritarian filial piety (mean = 37.93), followed by Malay and Chinese adolescents. In relation to life satisfaction, Chinese adolescents tended to score highest (mean = 25.75) and Malay adolescents scored the lowest (mean = 23.84) compared to other ethnicities.

Table III. Mean Differences in Filial Piety and Life Satisfaction According to Ethnic Group (N = 583)

Var	df	F		Mean	SD	Ethnic	
						Chi	Ind
Reci_FP	2, 581	10.87***	Mal	43.31	3.27	.812	-.986*
			Chi	42.54	3.62		-1.798***
			Ind	44.34	3.19		
Auth_FP	2, 581	23.11***	Mal	35.75	4.78	1.653**	-2.131***
			Chi	34.15	5.00		-3.785***
			Indi	37.93	4.83		
Life Satis	2, 581	7.34**	Mal	23.84	5.70	-1.704**	-1.685**
			Chi	25.75	4.78		.019
			Ind	24.82	5.49		

Reci_FP= Reciprocal filial piety; Auth_FP= Authoritarian Filial Piety; Life Satis= Life satisfaction;

Mal= Malays; Chi= Chinese, Ind= Indian;

SD = standard deviation; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

C. The Moderating Role of Sex and Ethnic Groups

Three-way interaction analyses were conducted using Hayes' SPSS Marco PROCESS (2013) to examine how the interaction of gender and ethnicity with both types of filial piety (reciprocal and authoritarian) might explain adolescents' life satisfaction (refer to Table 4).

Table 4 portrays the outcome of the regression test on authoritarian filial piety and the role of ethnicity in predicting adolescents' life satisfaction. Authoritarian filial piety, gender, and ethnicity were the interactive terms included in Model 1, which contributed 12.2% of variance in adolescents' life satisfaction. The results showed that authoritarian filial piety ($\beta = .322, p < .001$) and ethnicity ($\beta = .827, p < .01$) were significant explanatory factors of life satisfaction. An examination of Table 4 also showed that none of the interacting variables significantly predicted adolescents' life satisfaction. Hence, adolescents' gender and ethnicity may not interact or affect the linkage between authoritarian filial piety and life satisfaction.

In Model 2, the combination of reciprocal filial piety, gender, and ethnicity interactive effects contributed 12.3% of the variance in explaining adolescents' life satisfaction (Table 4). Findings indicated that reciprocal filial piety ($\beta = .444, p < .001$) and ethnicity ($\beta = 1.018, p < .001$) significantly predicted adolescents' life satisfaction. The present results confirmed that the interactive variables reciprocal filial piety \times ethnicity ($\beta = -.260, p = .002$) significantly predicted adolescents' life satisfaction. However, the interactive product (reciprocal filial piety \times gender & reciprocal filial piety \times gender \times ethnicity) could not explain adolescents'

life satisfaction. These findings emphasized that adolescents' ethnicity certainly interacted with the association between reciprocal filial piety and life satisfaction.

Table IV. Regression Analysis Predicting Adolescents' Life Satisfaction According to Ethnicity, Gender, and Filial Piety (N = 583)

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>df</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Life Satis	<i>Auth_FP</i>	11.555***	.122	7, 575	.322***	7.077	.000
	<i>Ethnic</i>				.827**	2.785	.006
	<i>Auth_FP</i> × <i>Ethnic</i>				-.047	-.791	.429
	<i>Sex</i>				-.645	-1.446	.149
	<i>Auth_FP</i> × <i>Sex</i>				.103	1.131	.258
	<i>Ethnic</i> × <i>Sex</i>				.935	1.586	.113
	<i>Auth_FP</i> × <i>Ethnic</i> × <i>Sex</i>				-.109	-.919	.359
Life Satis	<i>Reci_FP</i>	11.282***	.123	7, 575	.444***	7.063	.000
	<i>Ethnic</i>				1.018** *	3.561	.000
	<i>Reci_FP</i> × <i>Ethnic</i>				-.260**	-3.051	.002
	<i>Sex</i>				-.827	-1.904	.057
	<i>Reci_FP</i> × <i>Sex</i>				.007	.057	.954
	<i>Ethnic</i> × <i>Sex</i>				1.360*	2.397	.017
	<i>Reci_FP</i> × <i>Ethnic</i> × <i>Sex</i>				-.155	-.911	.362

Reci_FP= Reciprocal filial piety; Auth_FP= Authoritarian Filial Piety;

Life Satis= Life satisfaction; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The results of the interactive effects for Malay, Chinese, and Indian adolescents between reciprocal filial piety and life satisfaction were plotted respectively in Figure 1. The post hoc probing values were statistically significant for Malays ($b = .606, p < .001$) and Chinese ($b = .374, p < .001$) adolescents, but not Indian ($b = .142, p > .05$) adolescents. These results indicate that Malay adolescents tend to experience extremely low life satisfaction with low reciprocal filial piety compared to Indian and Chinese adolescents. However, when there was a higher level of reciprocal filial piety, all adolescents (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) scored almost the same level of life satisfaction. The nature of the moderating effect demonstrated that reciprocal filial piety has the strongest effect on Malay adolescents, followed by Chinese and Indian adolescents.

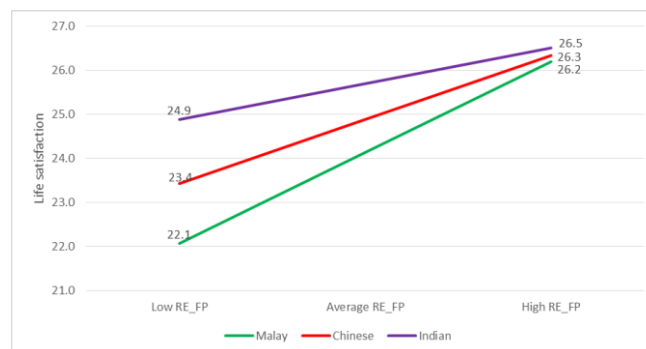


Fig. 1. Interaction between reciprocal filial piety and ethnic groups in predicting adolescents' life satisfaction

Discussion

The value of filial piety is recognized in Chinese society in China (Li, Zou, Liu, & Zhou, 2014), in Hong Kong (Leung, Wong, Wong, & McBride-Chang, 2010; Wong, Leung, & McBride-Chang, 2010; Chen, 2014), and in Taiwan (Yeh & Bedford, 2003; Chen, Wu, & Yeh, 2015). However, the value of filial piety is also prominent in multicultural societies where its effects on adolescents' life satisfaction are under investigated. This study served as a platform for examining adolescents' experience of reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety to determine their life satisfaction, as well as how ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian adolescents) and gender (males & females) moderate the relationship between components of filial piety and adolescents' life satisfaction. Overall, our findings enriched the literature in several ways. Firstly, we tested the link between filial piety and life satisfaction among multi-ethnic adolescents. Secondly, the effects of gender and ethnic differences on both dimensions of filial piety and life satisfaction were tested, to understand the differences across gender and ethnic groups. Thirdly, the interaction between filial piety, gender, and three major ethnic groups in its relation to life satisfaction was examined.

The study found that Malaysian adolescents tended to practice more reciprocal filial piety than authoritarian filial piety. This finding is in line with past studies which addressed the increasing trend in reciprocal filial piety rather than authoritarian filial piety in modern society (Yeh & Bedford, 2004). Although the practice of filial piety is changing, filial obligation, such as continuing family traditions, and ancestor worship, are still valued. Changing filial values are highly related to parenting practices with adolescents in a family context. An authoritative parenting style is beneficial for the development of reciprocal filial piety as it contributes to positive life experiences (i.e., life satisfaction). On the other hand, both authoritarian and authoritative parenting could stimulate the endorsement of authoritarian filial piety (Yeh & Cheng, 2005; Huang & Yeh, 2013; Chen, 2014). However, insignificant results have linked authoritarian filial piety and life satisfaction (Chen, 2014). Asian collectivist societies are known to endorse authoritarian parenting, which has been proven to have a positive effect in a collectivist society, due to its impact on children's development. It was noticed that mutual interaction and gratitude toward parents (reciprocal filial piety) are vital for the modern family (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; 2013). Conventional family values, such as family obligation

and responsibility as a child, are still crucial for promoting family functioning in a collectivist society, which may in turn promote higher life satisfaction.

Besides that, the study results suggest that components of both types of filial piety are statistically related to life satisfaction. This result was found in past studies (Leung, Wong, Wong, & McBride-Chang, 2010; Chen, Wu, & Yeh, 2015) which demonstrated the positive link between reciprocal filial piety and adolescents' life satisfaction. As denoted by Yeh & Bedford (2004), adolescents are better adjusted psychologically if they are filial with their parents. This point was further supported by the study by Chen & Wong (2014), which explained that reciprocal filial piety could facilitate the kind of intelligence that affects a students' academic performance. Thus, filial piety could be a determinant used to predict success and failure in life. People who are filial are prone to be more loving when showing gratitude toward elderly relatives, which promotes better well-being (Leung, Wong, Wong, & McBride-Chang, 2010). Besides, adolescents who practice authoritarian filial piety were found to have positive developmental outcomes in the family (Chen, Wu, & Yeh, 2015). This explains why an individual with high filial values emphasizes family connectedness, interdependence, and harmony. The mindset of family togetherness strengthens the tangible connection between the members to ensure the family functions successfully as a unit.

Meanwhile, these results showed that there were no significant differences between both genders in the endorsement of both filial piety and life satisfaction. This implies that the internalization of cultural values and life satisfaction is no longer sex specific, but rather the same. In contemporary society, the gender gap has diminished, and females can attain an equal education, equal power in an organization, and the same political office as males.

Meanwhile, the statistics revealed significant ethnic differences in terms of reciprocal filial piety, authoritarian filial piety, and life satisfaction. Indian adolescents reported the highest score in both reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety, followed by Malay and Chinese adolescents. A past study by Thilagha & Manjit (2003) found that Chinese students tend to comprise an equal distribution of individualists and collectivists, while there are more collectivists among Indian students. This finding was further supported by Chan, Edo, & Hussain (2016), which found that Chinese Malaysian undergraduates were open to both collectivist and individualistic values. This might explain why Indian adolescents still uphold collectivistic values which emphasize the interconnectedness of the community. However, future researchers may consider investigating the reason behind changes in cultural values in different cultural settings. Moreover, Malay adolescents tend to report a significantly lower level of life satisfaction than those from other ethnic groups. The results of this study were inconsistent with a previous study which found no significant differences between Malays and non-Malays in general life satisfaction (Yaacob, Tan, Tan, & Juhari, 2012).

The results of PROCESS moderation analysis demonstrated that ethnicity is a significant moderator of the link between reciprocal filial piety and life satisfaction, but not the association of authoritarian filial piety and life satisfaction. A low level of reciprocal filial piety that places less emphasis on mutual interaction between parents and children, besides

indebtedness toward parents, appeared to undermine the development of positive life satisfaction among Malaysian adolescents; specifically, Malay and Chinese adolescents. This may be a particularly poor fit for the Asian collectivistic culture with its high focus on interdependence and strong emotional ties between family members, in addition to children's respect for social hierarchy (Gill & Gopal, 2010). Through religious teachings, Malay children in particular emphasize being respectful to parents and the elderly.

This study was subject to some limitations when interpreting the data. First, the design of the study was cross-sectional which limits its ability to identify the causal relationships between variables. Future researchers may consider adopting a longitudinal design to further confirm the causal relationship between those variables. Furthermore, the information provided by a quantitative survey is limited, and unable to retrieve more in-depth information on the formation of filial piety and differences in cultural beliefs when interpreting the meaning of filial piety. Future studies might consider qualitative or mixed methods to provide a clearer picture of the similarities and differences in the practice of cultural values. A further limitation was the sample selection, which only focused on adolescents randomly selected from three states in the Malaysian Peninsular. Therefore, study generalizations may be limited to adolescents from the Malaysian Peninsular, and from one of the three major ethnicities. Future researchers may consider expanding the study to include a larger sample from both the Peninsular and West Malaysia, as well as ethnic minorities.

Overall, this study provides a foundation for understanding adolescents' life satisfaction in relation to filial piety in a multi-ethnic society. Ethnic and cultural identities serve a dynamic role in the development of parental beliefs, behavior, and the transmission of filial beliefs to the next generation. Therefore, parents tend to nurture their children's behavior to conform to cultural expectations and the goals of socialization. Although filial piety is rooted in the Chinese community, this study provided a new perspective on the concept and its link with life satisfaction in multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, that consists of Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities. These findings revealed that different facets of filial piety tend to have a distinct association with life satisfaction. Thus, a greater understanding is required of the different constructs of traditional family values, such as filial piety, in promoting positive life satisfaction among adolescents in a changing society like Malaysia.

Conclusion

Malaysians in a collectivist society tend to endorse both reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety, especially among adolescents. Reciprocal filial piety which supports mutual parent-child interaction, and gratitude for one's parental up-bringing, is still relevant within a modern family context. Likewise, traditional family values, social expectations, and societal norms in fulfilling familial obligations, and children's responsibilities to care for their parents during old age are still valued, and thus may lead to better life satisfaction. It has been proven that filial piety is vital for promoting better life satisfaction among Malaysian adolescents. Nonetheless, the relationship between reciprocal filial piety and adolescents' life satisfaction tends to interact differently across ethnic groups. Therefore, the qualitative meaning of filial

piety and its impact on adolescents' developmental outcomes require better comprehension within a Malaysian cultural context.

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