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UNDERSTANDING LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS INMATES: THE IMPACT OF PRISON CLIMATE AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's increasing emphasis on community-based correctional strategies reflects a national commitment to lowering recidivism rates. This approach forms a key component of ongoing prison reform efforts, with the aim that by 2030, approximately two-thirds of the incarcerated population will participate in community correctional programs. Previous research has linked social support to prison climate and life satisfaction, making it essential for implementation. Thus, this study seeks to examine whether social support affects the prison climate and life satisfaction. Cross-sectional surveys were used in this quantitative study. The study sampled 380 incarcerated individuals, selected through a structured sampling framework employing simple random sampling techniques. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS AMOS version 25, with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) applied to test the proposed theoretical model and associated research hypotheses. The results demonstrate that social support fully mediates the association between the prison climate and life satisfaction. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that the Malaysian Prisons Department formulate targeted policies and strategic initiatives aimed at improving the prison climate and strengthening social support systems, thereby enhancing inmates' overall life satisfaction. The described situation is consistent with the Malaysian government's goal of Malaysia Madani, which seeks to tackle the difficulties faced by the population and promote national progress.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, social support, prison climate, community corrections, Malaysian inmates.

INTRODUCTION

As a key pillar of the criminal justice system, the Malaysian Prison Department is tasked with implementing custodial sentences issued by the nation's judicial institutions (The agency implements rules and regulations to ensure the proper and equal enforcement of punishments, while prison institutions are responsible for upholding these standards by maintaining security, ensuring safe custody, and providing humane treatment to all inmates serving their sentences (Penjara Malaysia, 2021). In addition, the department plays a critical role in providing effective rehabilitation and recovery programmes to inmates during their incarceration and while undergoing community corrections (Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, 2021). Like practices in many other countries, the recidivism rate serves as a key indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of the Malaysian Prison Department's operations and initiatives. Notably, the recidivism rate stands at 15% among prison inmates, whereas it is significantly lower at 0.38% among those participating in community correction programmes (Bernama, 2022).

Malaysia's emphasis on expanding community correctional initiatives reflects its broader objective of reducing national recidivism rates. By 2030, the country aspires for two-thirds of eligible inmates to participate in community-based rehabilitation programs as part of this ongoing reform effort are under the Community Rehabilitation Programme initiative for eligible inmates, which aims to expand the concept of restorative justice compared to punitive justice in the Malaysian prison system (Penjara Malaysia, 2021). It is more recognised as being essential for providing inmates a second chance and assisting them in their process of reintegrating into society, both of which improve life satisfaction. Besides, the life satisfaction of inmates appears to be a vital part of achieving the government's aspiration for Malaysia Madani, as they are Malaysian citizens. Given the current prison situation, which involves overcrowding of inmates to the point where the facility's capacity is exceeded, a focus on community correction is essential (Legodi & Dube, 2023). Therefore, it is possible to resolve the situation in prisons and fulfil the needs of inmates through the implementation of methods that enhance the efficacy of community corrections. Therefore, it is possible to resolve the situation in prisons and fulfil the needs of inmates through the implementation of methods that enhance the efficacy of community corrections.

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Prior research involving South Korean inmates has demonstrated that a positive prison climate, particularly through horticultural therapy, can enhance life satisfaction (A. Y. Lee et al., 2021). In contrast, elements such as adherence to institutional rules and the quality of interactions with correctional officers have been linked to life satisfaction among inmates with a history of drug abuse (Baharudin et al., 2021a, 2021b). Additionally, a study conducted among Chinese individuals with drug use backgrounds found that social support from family, friends, and significant others was strongly associated with increased life satisfaction (Cao & Liang, 2020). In alignment with these findings, recent studies have also highlighted that engagement in structured activities during incarceration is positively correlated with inmates perceived social support (Baharudin et al., 2019, 2020, 2021b; Lavery, 2022; Simonds et al., 2021). Despite these insights, the relationship between prison climate, social support, and life satisfaction remains insufficiently explored in the context of incarcerated populations (Baharudin et al., 2021b). Therefore, the present study aims to examine the potential influence of prison

climate and social support on enhancing life satisfaction among inmates participating in community corrections programs.

This study is grounded in several foundational theoretical frameworks. The literature highlights a connection between prison climate and Dynamic Security Theory, particularly in areas concerning relationships among inmates, participation in institutional activities, and interactions between inmates and correctional staff (Bryans, 2015). Additionally, Social Convoy Theory conceptualizes social support through three concentric layers which are inner, middle, and outer circles, each representing varying degrees of closeness and influence in an individual's social network (Antonucci, 1986; Fuller et al., 2020). Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory is relevant in understanding life satisfaction, as individuals assess their well-being through comparisons with others either through upward comparisons with those perceived as better off or downward comparisons with those viewed as worse off (Deaux et al., 1993; J. K. Lee, 2020).

In recent years, the Malaysian Prisons Department has taken significant steps to strengthen community-based rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. This progressive approach is expected to remain a central focus moving forward. Beginning with the introduction of the parole system in 2008, the Department has steadily expanded its initiatives, including the Halfway House programme (2009), the Compulsory Attendance Order (2010), the Community Reintegration Programme (2011), the Early Release 14 Days scheme (2012), the Corporate Smart Internship Programme (2016), the Industrial Community Reintegration Programme (2019), Release on Licence (2020), and most recently, the Release on Licence for Henry Gurney School in 2021 (Malaysian Prison Department, 2023). This study focused on the inmates that participated in the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP), where rehabilitation activities are carried out. There are six CRP's all over Malaysia, consisting of CRP Kuala Muda, Kedah, CRP Sepang, Selangor, CRP Mantin, Negeri Sembilan, CRP Kuala Kerai, Kelantan, CRP Kluang, Johor, and CRP Tuaran, Sabah. CRP covers rehabilitation activities and the integration process of inmates in the community outside the prison walls, such as involvement in community service, working in factories, working in the sectors of plantation and agriculture, and working in the livestock sector, where it is a joint venture between the Malaysian Prison Department and the industry company

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prison Climate

The term prison climate refers to a set of stable characteristics that distinguish one correctional facility from another and significantly influence the behavior of both inmates and staff (Wright, 1993). Within academic literature, this concept is frequently discussed under various labels, including institutional environment (Day et al., 2011), prison environment (Ross et al., 2008), secure environment (Schalast et al., 2008), climate perception (Parker et al., 2003), and social environment (Smith et al., 1997). Other related terms such as prison social capital (Lafferty et al., 2016), social climate (Day et al., 2011), and safety climate (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) further reflect the multifaceted nature of this construct. The connection between prison climate and Dynamic Security Theory is particularly significant. Neubacher (2023), referencing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, explains that dynamic security involves the continuous interaction among incarcerated individuals, between inmates and correctional staff, and within the institutional systems that govern the prison environment. Worthington (2012) further emphasizes that effective correctional practice requires staff to exercise authority while maintaining professional boundaries, thereby promoting constructive engagement and reducing social alienation among inmates.

Social Support

Social support is generally understood as the presence of accessible and reliable individuals who provide meaningful care, recognition, and emotional warmth (Sarason et al., 1983). Blagden et al. (2017) further emphasize that this support manifests through interpersonal exchanges offering emotional comfort, practical assistance, and informational aid. One of the most comprehensive frameworks for understanding social support is the Social Convoy Theory. As outlined by Fuller et al. (2020), this theory offers a heuristic model for conceptualizing social relationships and has been widely applied in diverse populations, including older adults (Fuller et al., 2020), children and adolescents (Levitt, 2005), and individuals across various living environments (Perkins et al., 2013). Within the correctional context, the social convoy model explains how incarcerated individuals receive support through a network of close social ties, typically characterized by consistent and intimate interactions (Baharudin et al., 2020). According to Fuller et al. (2020), the social convoy structure comprises three concentric circles that represent varying levels of relational closeness. The innermost circle consists of individuals with whom the recipient has the strongest emotional bonds. The middle circle includes those who are still important but not as intimately involved. The outermost circle comprises individuals who are meaningful yet more peripheral. Inmates often draw on support from this network, which includes family members, friends, or others with significant roles in their lives. As participants in this convoy, incarcerated individuals experience relational dynamics that can influence their interpretation of life events, whether positively or negatively.

An increasing body of research highlights the interaction between prison climate and the availability of social support. Scholars have investigated this relationship extensively, recognizing its significance in the correctional setting (Andersen, 2018; Bares & Mowen, 2020; Lambert et al., 2016). For instance, Andersen (2018) found that among female inmates with drug-abuse histories, engagement in positive prison climate activities was strongly associated with enhanced perceptions of social support, which plays a vital role in post-release outcomes. Drawing from this body of work, the present study posits the following hypothesis:

H1: Prison climate has a direct influence on social support.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction, a central dimension of subjective well-being, refers to an individual's cognitive appraisal of their overall quality of life (Diener et al., 1985). It encompasses the enduring influence of emotional states, mood patterns, and behavioral tendencies across various life domains such as marital relationships, employment satisfaction, and financial stability (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Although life satisfaction may fluctuate during transitional periods, individuals often re-establish equilibrium as they adapt to new circumstances (Diener et al., 2013). This construct is shaped by personal evaluative processes (Dunn et al., 2013) and guided by everyone's unique internal benchmarks (Diener et al., 1999). As a stable element of psychological well-being, life satisfaction reflects one's subjective perception of life (Kevin, 2006; Kaku, 2010). In correctional settings, life satisfaction serves as a crucial psychological indicator that reflects how inmates perceive their incarceration experience. Achieving a satisfactory level of well-being is essential not only for inmates' optimal functioning during incarceration but also for their successful reintegration into society upon release (Ali et al., 2016; Kashy & Morash, 2021). Furthermore, life satisfaction can provide a meaningful foundation for correctional institutions and policymakers to design and implement more targeted rehabilitation initiatives aimed at reducing recidivism (Leidenfrost et al., 2016).

The Social Comparison Theory, originally introduced by Festinger in 1954, provides a psychological lens to understand life satisfaction by examining how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others (Ruggieri et al., 2020). The theory posits that people are naturally inclined to assess their self-worth and capabilities by comparing themselves to others (Myers, 2010). Within the prison context, such comparisons can either diminish or bolster an inmate's well-being. For instance, upward comparisons—where inmates compare themselves to others perceived as better off may provoke feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, downward comparisons toward those in perceived worse situations—can temporarily elevate self-perception (Olivos et al., 2020). The connection between prison climate and life satisfaction has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years (Ali et al., 2016; A. Y. Lee et al., 2021; Van Ginneken et al., 2019). Research conducted in Dutch correctional institutions found a positive association between supportive prison climates and enhanced life satisfaction, particularly among inmates experiencing lower levels of psychological distress (Van Ginneken et al., 2019). Similarly, Ali et al. (2016) emphasized the role of a conducive prison climate in shaping the life satisfaction of inmates with drug abuse histories. Building on this empirical foundation, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Prison climate has a direct impact on life satisfaction.

Numerous studies have also explored the influence of social support on life satisfaction, consistently demonstrating a positive and significant relationship between the two constructs (Cao & Liang, 2020; Heng et al., 2020; Ma, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). For instance, research among secondary school students in Hong Kong indicated that social support from family and peers strongly predicted life satisfaction across both local Chinese and ethnic minority groups (Ma, 2020). Drawing from this body of evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social support has a direct impact on life satisfaction.

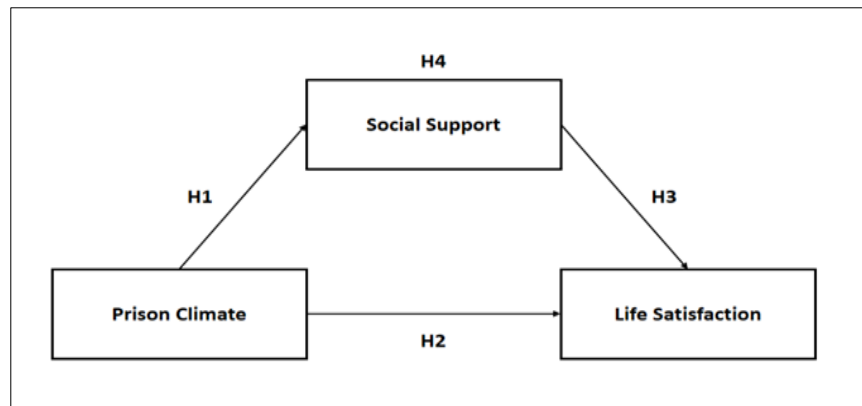
Recently, increasing attention has been given to the mediating role of social support in various theoretical models (Li et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Rahmat et al., 2019; Skowronski & Talik, 2020). Findings from these studies highlight the critical intermediary function of social support in linking independent variables to life satisfaction, particularly in complex psychosocial environments. Based on this perspective, the following mediation hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Social support mediates the relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction.

These hypothesized relationships are integrated into a broader conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 1, which serves as the foundation for the empirical investigation undertaken in this study.

Figure 1

Framework of the Study



METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a cross-sectional design to explore the experiences of Malaysian inmates participating in the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP). The target population was carefully selected based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and reliability of the findings. The sampling frame was provided by the Malaysian Prison Department (PRIDE) and comprised a list of 886 inmates located in the central region, specifically those housed at CRP Sepang, Selangor, and CRP Mantin, Negeri Sembilan. To ensure randomness and eliminate selection bias, a simple random sampling technique was employed. The required sample size was determined using the guidelines established by Cohen et al. (2007), as well as an online sample size calculator available at <https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>. With a confidence level of 99% and a margin of error of 5%, the appropriate sample size was calculated to be 380 inmates.

The sample distribution across the two CRP institutions was proportionally determined. Specifically, 42.9% of the population was targeted for sampling ($380 \div 886 \times 100 = 42.9\%$). Table 1 presents the distribution of the calculated sample size for each correctional institution based on this proportional allocation.

Table 1

Population and Sampling Size of Prisons

Institution	Population	Sampling calculation	Sampling size
CRP Sepang, Selangor	488	$42.9\% \times 488$	209
CRP Mantin, Negeri Sembilan	398	$42.9\% \times 398$	171
Total	886		380

Statistical analyses for this study were carried out using structural equation modelling (SEM) with IBM SPSS AMOS version 24. This approach was employed to validate the proposed model and assess the underlying structure of social support among inmates. The development of the measurement instruments for this quantitative study was grounded in previous empirical research. The prison climate construct was measured using an inmate survey developed by Molleman and van der Broek (2014), while life satisfaction and social support were assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener

et al., 1985) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Dahlem et al., 1991), respectively. In defining the key constructs, this study adopts the conceptualisation of prison climate proposed by Ross et al. (2008), which characterises it as the collective perceptions of inmates and correctional staff regarding the institutional setting, spanning organisational, physical, social, and emotional dimensions. For life satisfaction, the definition by Oishi et al. (2018) is employed, describing it as an individual's overall evaluation of life based on self-identified criteria and personal values. Meanwhile, social support is interpreted through the lens of Feldman (2019), who views it as the reciprocal exchange of care, concern, and assistance between individuals.

Respondent Profiles

In this study, information on inmates' demographic profiles ($n = 380$) is classified using frequency distribution. The profile of respondents consists of the respondents' race, religion, current age, education level, previous occupation, monthly average income, marital status, the number of imprisonments, and cases. This study only involved male and Malaysian inmates that have been allowed by the prison authority. A profile of the respondents derived from an analysis of frequencies and percentages is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Profile Summary of Respondents

Respondent Profile	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Race		
Malay	252	66.3
Chinese	59	15.5
Indian	62	16.3
Sikh	3	0.8
Others	4	1.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Religion		
Islam	241	63.5
Buddhism	47	12.3
Hinduism	23	6.1
Christianity	35	9.1
Others	34	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Current Age		
21 - 29	105	27.6
30 - 39	151	39.6
40 - 49	77	20.4
50 - 59	44	11.7
60 and above	3	0.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Education Level		
No Formal Education	8	2.0
Primary School	66	17.7
PMR / PT3	137	35.9

Respondent Profile	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
SPM	116	30.2
STPM	12	3.3
Certificate	22	5.9
Diploma	17	4.6
First Degree	2	0.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Previous Occupation		
Government	19	4.9
Private	104	27.5
Self-employed	232	61.1
Not Working	25	6.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Previous Income		
None	34	8.9
RM1000 and below	92	24.2
RM 1001 – RM 2000	165	43.5
RM 2001 – RM 3000	56	14.7
RM 3001 – RM 4000	23	6.1
RM 4001 – RM 5000	5	1.3
RM 5000 and above	5	1.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Marital Status		
Single	160	42.0
Married	116	30.6
Divorce	89	23.4
Spouse Died	15	4.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Number of Imprisonment		
1 time	61	16.0
2 times	113	29.9
3 times	84	22.3
4 times	40	10.5
5 times	33	8.7
6 times	24	6.3
7 times	16	4.2
8 times	5	1.1
9 times	2	0.5
10 times and above	2	0.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Programs		
Community Service	118	31.1
Working in Factories	138	36.3
Working in sectors of agriculture	55	14.4
Working in sectors of plantation	58	15.3
Working in sector of reflexology	11	2.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100.0</i>

The demographic analysis offers a foundational overview of the backgrounds of inmates participating in the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP), which is essential for contextualising the study findings. The majority of participants identified as Malay (66.3%) and reported Islam (63.5%) as their religion. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 30–39 age range (39.6%), followed by those aged 21–29 (27.6%) and 40–49 (20.4%). Only a small percentage were aged 50–59 (11.7%), with the 60 and above group comprising 0.7%, indicating that the sample was largely composed of younger inmates. Educational attainment varied, with most respondents having completed lower secondary (PMR/PT3 – 35.9%) or upper secondary education (SPM – 30.2%), and a notable portion having only primary schooling (17.7%). Smaller percentages held STPM (3.3%), certificates (5.9%), diplomas (4.6%), or a first degree (0.4%), while 2% had no formal education. These figures suggest that most inmates had access to at least basic education prior to incarceration. Regarding employment status before imprisonment, a significant number were self-employed (61.1%), followed by those employed in the private sector (27.5%), and a smaller fraction in the public sector (4.9%). The bulk of respondents reported a monthly income between RM 1001 and RM 2000 (43.5%), placing them within Malaysia's Bottom 40% (B40) income bracket, defined as households earning less than RM 3000 per month. In terms of marital status and incarceration history, the data revealed that a plurality were single (42.0%), and nearly one-third (29.9%) had experienced imprisonment more than once. Employment within the CRP primarily included factory work (36.3%), followed by community services (31.1%), agriculture and plantation sectors (29.7%), and reflexology (2.9%), illustrating inmate participation in structured prison climate activities.

Validation Procedures

The structural framework of this study comprises exogenous, endogenous, and mediating constructs, each representing distinct latent variables. The core constructs investigated include prison climate, social support, and life satisfaction. Among these, prison climate and social support are conceptualised as second-order constructs, whereas life satisfaction is treated as a first-order construct. Specifically, the exogenous variable—prison climate—is delineated through three dimensions: expectations for the future, reintegration, and activity involvement. In contrast, the mediating construct, social support, is structured around support sources from friends, family, and others, which includes prison staff. The outcome variable, life satisfaction, is operationalised using four observed indicators.

Prior to the structural model estimation, the measurement model underwent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate its convergent validity, construct validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability, as recommended by Awang et al. (2018). The use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) allowed for the rigorous testing of hypotheses, exploration of inter-variable relationships, and an in-depth examination of social support as a potential mediator between prison climate and life satisfaction. The model demonstrated acceptable fit across all key indices: Chi-square/df = 2.195, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.959, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.965, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.056, thereby confirming the model's adequacy and construct validity, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Awang, 2015; Awang et al., 2018).

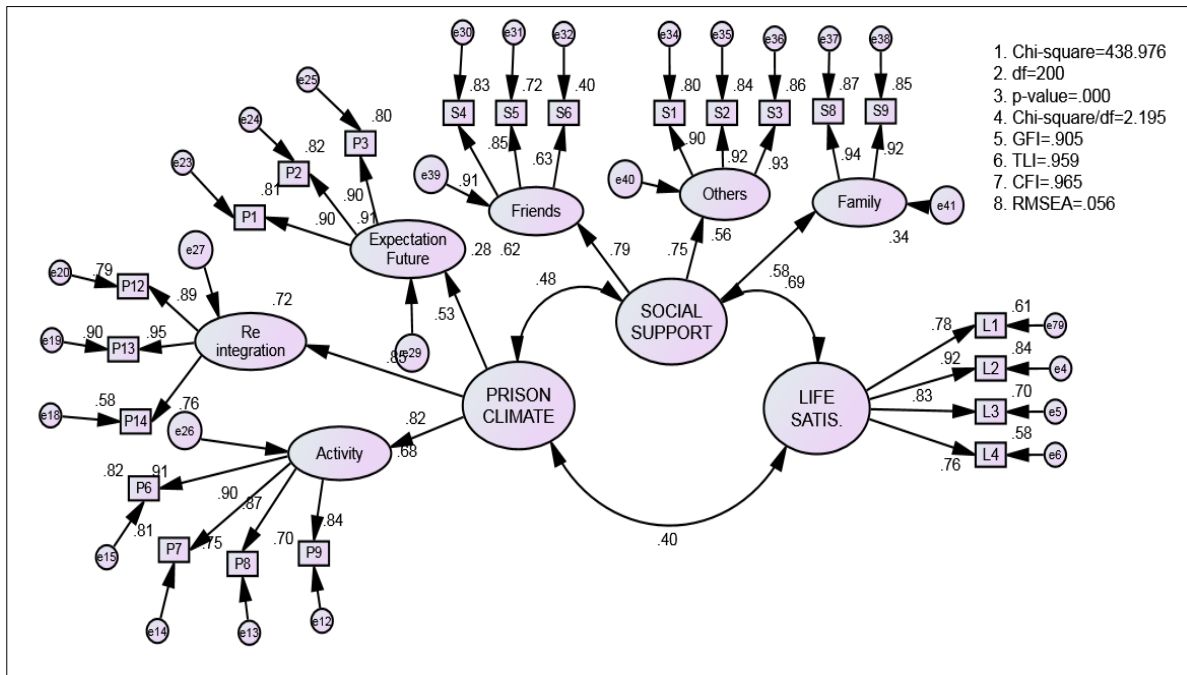
Figure 2*Pooled CFA Result*

Table 3 presents the values for factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the constructs of life satisfaction, social support, and prison climate. The data indicate that all three dimensions within the prison climate construct—expectation for the future, reintegration, and activity—demonstrated satisfactory levels of both CR and convergent validity (CV). Likewise, the social support construct, comprising the domains of friends, family, and others (e.g., prison staff), and the life satisfaction construct, represented by four indicators (L1 to L4), also met the acceptable thresholds for CR and CV. Importantly, the factor loadings across all observed variables under life satisfaction, social support, and prison climate were above 0.60, fulfilling the standard criteria for construct validity and supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 3*The CR and AVE Values of Prison Climate, Social Support, and Life Satisfaction*

Construct	Component	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Prison Climate	Expectation for future	0.636	0.796	0.574
	Reintegration	0.830		
	Activity	0.864		
Social Support	Friends	0.820	0.760	0.518
	Family	0.605		
	Others	0.724		
Life Satisfaction	L1	0.786	0.896	0.683
	L2	0.897		
	L3	0.845		
	L4	0.773		

As outlined by Awang et al. (2018), discriminant validity for a given construct can be established by comparing the square root of the construct's average variance extracted (AVE) with its correlations with other constructs in the model. This is demonstrated in Table 4. When the diagonal values (presented in bold) are higher than all other values within their respective rows and columns, discriminant validity is satisfied. In this study, Table 3 also reflects values that meet the established criteria, confirming that discriminant validity has been achieved across all constructs. Furthermore, a normality assessment was conducted by evaluating skewness and kurtosis values for each measurement item. According to Hair et al. (2014), data are assumed to be normally distributed when skewness and kurtosis values fall within the acceptable range of -2.58 to 2.58. In this study, the skewness values ranged from -1.29 to 0.475, while kurtosis values were between -1.12 and 1.136. These findings support the conclusion that the data conform to the assumptions of normal distribution.

Table 4

Summary of the Discriminant Validity Index for All Construct

Constructs	Prison Climate	Social Support	Life Satisfaction
Prison Climate	0.76		
Social Support	0.52	0.72	
Life Satisfaction	0.42	0.68	0.83

RESULT

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis was conducted using AMOS version 24 to test the study's hypotheses. The SEM framework is particularly useful for examining the relationships among latent constructs as represented by observed indicator variables. Additionally, it facilitates the estimation of recursive paths between constructs and allows for the consideration of correlations among measurement errors. Table 5 outlines the empirical results obtained through this analytical approach. The analysis revealed that prison climate exerts a significant direct influence on social support, thereby confirming Hypothesis 1 (H1). Conversely, the direct relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction was found to be statistically insignificant, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2 (H2). Meanwhile, the findings demonstrated a significant direct effect of social support on life satisfaction, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3).

Table 5

Regression Path Coefficient and Its Significance

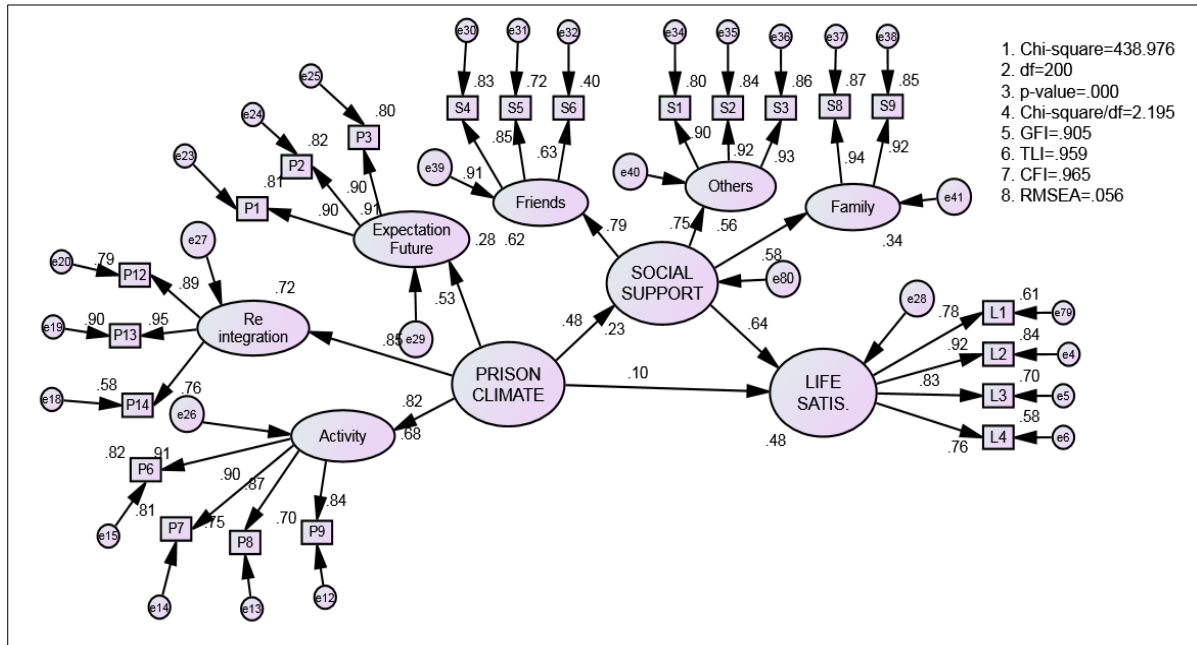
Construct	Path	Construct	Beta Estimate	Standard Error	Critical Region	P-Value	Result
Social Support	<---	Prison climate	0.48	0.06	8.018	***	Significant
Life satisfaction	<---	Prison climate	0.087	0.052	1.497	0.135	Not Significant
Life satisfaction	<---	Social Support	0.684	0.077	8.931	***	Significant

Notes. Significant level *** p<0.001

Figure 3 shows that the model's parts of prison climate and social support can predict the life satisfaction of 48% of inmates.

Figure 3

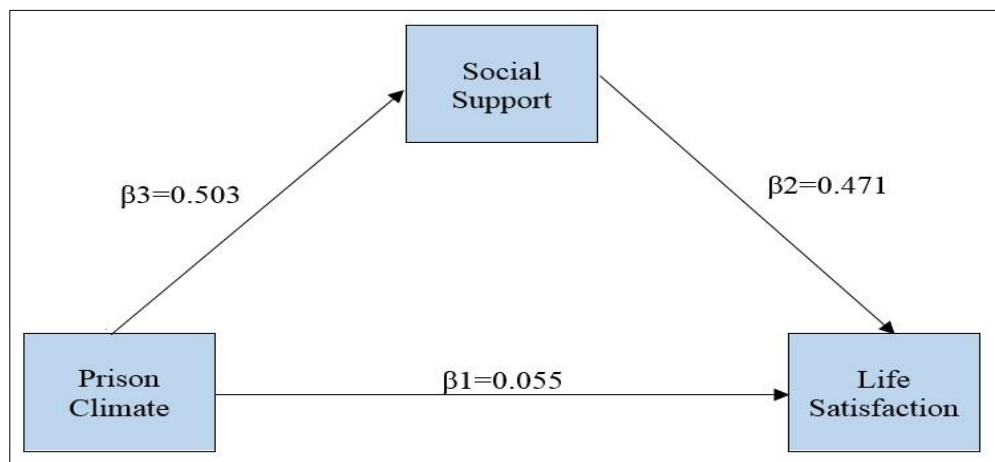
Standardised Regression Path Coefficient



The current study adopted a standard analytical approach to investigate the mediating effect of social support on the relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction. This analysis aimed to evaluate the influence of the proposed mediator, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Analyse the Mediating Effects of Social Support



The regression coefficient β_1 , which measures the direct relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction, was found to be statistically insignificant. In contrast, the regression paths represented by β_3 (linking prison climate to social support) and β_2 (linking social support to life satisfaction) showed statistically significant results. Based on the mediation criteria outlined by Awang et al. (2018), these findings indicate that social support fully mediates the relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction, as presented in Table 6. Hence, hypothesis H4 is supported by the data.

Table 6

The Full Mediator of Social Support Analysis

Construct	Path	Construct	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value	Result
Life Satisfaction	<---	Prison Climate	0.055	0.054	1.030	0.303	Not Significant
Life Satisfaction	<---	Social Support	0.471	0.090	5.255	***	Significant
Social Support	<---	Prison Climate	0.503	0.060	8.324	***	Significant
Conclusion	1. Both hypotheses testing for regression coefficient β_3 (Prison Climate to Social Support) and β_2 (Social Support to Life Satisfaction) are significant 2. Hypothesis testing for regression coefficient β_1 is not significant. Thus, the type of mediation is full mediation						

To validate the results presented in Table 6, the study employed a bootstrapping approach to assess the mediating role of social support in the association between prison climate and life satisfaction. Specifically, the analysis followed the bootstrapping procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). As reported in Table 7, the 95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval (CI) ranged from [LB = 0.283 to UB = 0.466], with both limits falling within the positive range and excluding zero. This provides strong empirical support for the presence of a significant indirect effect. Additionally, the absence of a significant direct effect ($p = 0.41$) suggests that social support fully mediates the relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction.

Table 7

The Full Mediator of Social Support Analysis by Bootstrapping

Mediator	Prison Climate $\rightarrow$ Social Support $\rightarrow$ Life Satisfaction		Two-tailed significant	Result
	Lower Bound (LB)	Upper Bound (UP)		
Direct effect on Life Satisfaction	-0.064	0.168	0.41	Not Significant
Indirect effect on Life Satisfaction	0.283	0.466	0.001	Significant
Type of mediation	Fully mediation occurred since the direct effect is not significant			

DISCUSSIONS

The effects of overcrowding in prisons make inmates less satisfied with their lives. As a result, prison climate has no relation to inmates' life satisfaction. The prison climate can directly influence life satisfaction, but it must be through social support. In other words, Community Reintegration Programme (CRP) inmates who have a positive perception of the prison climate (expectation for the future, prison activities, and reintegration) experience positive life satisfaction through social support (friends, family, and others). The respondents in this study were majority imprisonment more than twice (84.0%), represents they had experience living in prison. Living in prison requires social support from friends (Park & Sok, 2020). The study findings indicated that friends are one of the social supports perceived by inmates; most of the respondents in this study were youth in a similar age group, aged between 21 to 39 years old (67.2%), which represents individuals in similar age groups sharing similar values, beliefs, and attitudes for their social support (Boundless Communications, 2020). Prison officers (others) are also a crucial social support source among inmates. They provide emotional, informative, and evaluation support in sharing drug-abuse inmates' joys and sorrows. Social support from prison officers leads to positive contact, building confidence to achieve life satisfaction and well-being for inmates (Motte, 2015). One of the primary functions of the Malaysian Prison Department is to develop positive behaviour among inmates and prevent re-offending after discharge. The prison officer's task is to look after inmates' safety and security concerns and alter their negative behaviours by providing positive social support to achieve life satisfaction.

Hence, meaningful interactions between prison officers and inmates play a pivotal role in encouraging inmates to view incarceration as an opportunity for personal and social transformation. This dynamic is particularly significant in mediating the relationship between the prison environment and life satisfaction among inmates participating in the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP). The prison experience often imposes social isolation, distancing inmates from their families, peers, and broader social networks. Even after release, these social bonds may remain fractured (Balogun, 2014). The absence of support from one's immediate social circle contributes to a sense of loneliness during imprisonment (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2018). Therefore, familial support emerges as a critical resource for inmates during their sentence, offering emotional relief and a sense of connection. Engagement with family members during visits can offer inmates a temporary reprieve from the monotony and psychological stress of confinement. As such, social support—particularly from family—has been shown to play a crucial mediating role in the link between prison climate and life satisfaction.

The significance of social support has been well documented in a wide range of empirical studies (Li et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Rahmat et al., 2019; Skowronski & Talik, 2020). Recent findings further confirm that social support serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between the prison environment and the well-being of inmates involved in community corrections through CRP. Full mediation by social support exerts the most substantial influence on the connection between life satisfaction and prison climate. Moreover, this mediating role renders the relationship more meaningful. Inmates engaged in community reintegration efforts are particularly reliant on social support to enhance their sense of well-being. The findings indicate that when inmates perceive the prison climate negatively, they are more likely to report diminished life satisfaction. However, the availability of consistent and reliable social support helps to mitigate this outcome, offering emotional stability and sustaining motivation in adverse conditions. Despite the lack of direct association between prison climate and life satisfaction, the presence of social support appears to bridge this gap. Collectively, the results affirm that social support functions as a critical mediator in the relationship between inmates perceived prison climate and their overall satisfaction with life.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study proposed a model of life satisfaction in which prison climate and social support collectively accounted for 48% of the total variance. While this is a meaningful proportion, the remaining 52% suggests that additional relevant constructs were not included in the present analysis. Future research may benefit from incorporating variables such as self-esteem and loneliness (Cao & Liang, 2020), resilience and optimism (R. Zhang et al., 2019), and depression (Meule & Voderholzer, 2020), which could provide deeper insights into the determinants of life satisfaction among incarcerated individuals. The central aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of social support in the relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction among Malaysian inmates enrolled in the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP). The findings confirmed that social support is a key psychological resource in this context.

Specifically, inmates who experienced positive and consistent social support reported greater satisfaction with life. Interestingly, the direct relationship between prison climate and life satisfaction was found to be statistically insignificant; however, this pathway became meaningful when mediated by social support. Thus, social support plays a pivotal role in shaping inmates' well-being and serves as a crucial bridge between environmental conditions and personal outcomes. From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore the need for the Malaysian Prison Department to enhance the quality of both the prison environment and social support systems. Strengthening these elements not only improves inmates' quality of life during incarceration but also contributes to their cognitive development, decision-making capabilities, and readiness for reintegration. Such improvements are essential for sustaining a rehabilitative and humane correctional system.

This research further reinforces the role of social support as a critical psychological mechanism that connects prison climate and life satisfaction. It also highlights several actionable strategies for prison administrators, such as improving living conditions, encouraging community engagement, and offering activities that foster inmates' personal development. Additionally, prison authorities should work to strengthen inmates' relationships with family, friends, and correctional staff, as these support systems are integral to overall well-being during incarceration. Nevertheless, the study presents certain limitations. The scope was limited to Malaysian inmates, excluding other relevant populations such as prison staff and foreign inmates, who may experience different outcomes in relation to life satisfaction. The survey was also geographically confined to selected areas within Peninsular Malaysia, particularly the central region, and did not include participants from other zones or from East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak), thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, the research relied solely on quantitative methods, which, while informative, may not fully capture the complexities of inmates lived experiences.

Given these limitations, future studies are encouraged to adopt mixed-methods or qualitative approaches to offer more comprehensive and nuanced understandings of inmate well-being. Additionally, applying this model in diverse correctional settings—such as women's facilities, drug rehabilitation prisons, or juvenile detention centres—may yield distinct findings due to differences in institutional climate and inmate demographics. Exploring other psychological constructs such as motivation, personality traits, or resilience could also offer valuable extensions to the current model and enrich future investigations. Ultimately, the integration of these recommendations will contribute to more robust, inclusive, and actionable findings in the field of correctional psychology and inmate rehabilitation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study received ethical clearance from the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (Reference No: UM.TNC 2/UMREC). Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all individuals involved in the research.

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