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FINANCIAL WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM

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Abstract: *Single motherhood presents unique socio-economic challenges, often placing individuals at elevated risk of financial vulnerability and diminished overall quality of life. Understanding the psychological pathways through which economic stressors impact personal well-being is critical for developing targeted support systems and policy interventions. This study examines the relationships between financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life among single mothers in Maran District. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected via questionnaires from 125 single mothers using questionnaires comprising established measurement instruments on a five-point Likert scale. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to examine the direct and indirect pathways among variables. The findings indicate that financial well-being is positively associated with both self-esteem and quality of life. Self-esteem also demonstrates a positive relationship with quality of life. In addition, self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life, suggesting that better financial circumstances may contribute to improved quality of life both directly and indirectly by strengthening self-esteem. These results underscore that support for single mothers must extend beyond monetary aid. Beyond providing financial assistance, support initiatives should incorporate financial education, employment opportunities, community-based programmes, and interventions that promote self-esteem. By recognising the interconnected roles of financial well-being and self-esteem, this study provides useful insights for policymakers, community organisations, and practitioners seeking to*

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develop more comprehensive strategies to improve the quality of life of single mothers in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Financial Well-Being, Self-Esteem, Quality of Life and Single Mothers.*

Introduction

The family is a fundamental unit of society and plays an important role in shaping social and economic well-being. However, the growing number of single-mother households represents a significant change in family structure and challenges traditional ideas of family resilience. Single mothers often face a "double burden" as they must balance the financial responsibility of supporting their families with the demands of caring for their children. Currently, it has become an important social and economic issue as women increasingly assume primary responsibility for raising children without a co-parent. Single motherhood is resulted from divorce, widowhood, separation, or other circumstances in which women become the main caregivers and providers for their families (Dowd, 1997; Najwa et al., 2022).

In Malaysia, single mothers represent a group that requires particular attention because they often have to manage childcare, household responsibilities, and financial obligations simultaneously. The number of single mothers increased from 235,240 in 2010 to 940,735 in 2020, while Malaysia recorded 60,457 divorce cases in 2024 compared with 58,095 in 2023 (KPWKM, 2024). These figures highlight the continuing relevance of understanding the well-being and socioeconomic circumstances of single mothers in Malaysia. Being a single mother comes with a lot of responsibilities and hardships. As compared to households with two parents, single mothers with young children are the most impoverished in Malaysia (Mulia, 2017). The main concern is that single mothers may face considerable financial pressure while having limited resources and support. As primary caregivers and, in many cases, the main income earners, they are required to meet household expenses, provide for their children's needs, and manage other family responsibilities.

Financial difficulties may become particularly challenging when employment opportunities, income, and social support are insufficient. Consequently, financial problems may extend beyond the ability to meet immediate household needs and may affect how single mothers perceive their overall lives. Financial well-being is therefore an important issue in understanding the quality of life of single mothers. It reflects an individual's perceived ability to manage financial obligations, maintain financial security, and experience satisfaction with their financial circumstances (Joo & Grable, 2004). Previous Malaysian studies have indicated that financial literacy, financial attitudes, employment conditions, and other economic factors are associated with the financial well-being of single mothers (Joni et al., 2024; Ramli et al., 2023; Syed Muhsin et al., 2024). However, financial difficulties may have consequences that extend beyond economic outcomes. Persistent financial pressure may influence psychological perceptions, including how individuals evaluate their own worth and capabilities. Self-esteem may therefore represent an important psychological pathway linking financial well-being to quality of life.

Nevertheless, the extent to which self-esteem explains the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life among Malaysian single mothers remains insufficiently examined (Azer et al., 2022). Specifically, there is a limited understanding of whether self-esteem statistically accounts for part of the financial well-being-quality-of-life association.

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Furthermore, there is limited mediation evidence involving Malaysian single mothers. In addition, the distinctive empirical relevance of Maran District—a region characterized by specific Felda agricultural community dynamics—is insufficiently justified in prior literature, resulting in limited evidence from this particular socioeconomic setting. Quality of life is another important outcome because it reflects an individual's overall evaluation of satisfaction across different areas of life, including psychological, social, and everyday functioning (Katschnig, 2006; Lindner et al., 2016).

Although previous studies have examined financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life among single mothers, these factors are often considered separately. This creates a need to examine how financial circumstances and psychological resources are interconnected in explaining quality of life, particularly among single mothers in specific Malaysian communities. Therefore, this study examines the relationships between financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life among single mothers in Maran District, Pahang. Specifically, the study examines the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life, the relationship between financial well-being and self-esteem, and the relationship between self-esteem and quality of life. It further examines whether self-esteem mediates the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life. Using structural equation modelling, the study aims to provide a more integrated understanding of the financial and psychological factors associated with quality of life among single mothers. The findings may provide useful evidence for developing support initiatives that address both the financial and psychological dimensions of single mothers' well-being.

Literature Review

Financial Well-Being and Quality of Life

Financial well-being is conceptualised as a subjective state in which an individual perceives themselves to be financially stable, satisfied with their economic situation, and free from severe anxiety, depression, or distress caused by money (Joo & Grable, 2004). Economic difficulties encountered by single mothers are widely recognised as the predominant source of stress within this susceptible demographic, thereby intensifying the additional psychosocial adversities they encounter (Hamid & Salleh, 2013). Single mothers bear the responsibility of managing household duties, providing childcare, and functioning as the exclusive income earner to guarantee financial stability and security for their households. Stack and Meredith (2017) noted in their exploration of financial hardship that economic disruption leaves single parents navigating significant social distress before seeking formal support. Although social support networks help buffer daily hardship, systemic economic barriers frequently keep single mothers near or below the poverty line, directly impacting their quality of life. Kim and Kim (2020) identified key socio-demographic factors associated with quality of life, noting that higher educational attainment, steady employment, and higher household income are positively correlated with single mothers' quality of life, whereas financial crisis and housing insecurity significantly reduce it.

Financial Well-Being and Self-Esteem

The Model of Financial Wellness has direct applicability in the Malaysian context, positing that financial well-being incorporates financial satisfaction, healthy financial behaviours, positive attitudes, and financial knowledge. Empirical research indicates that single mothers overwhelmingly experience low levels of financial well-being. Studying Malay single mothers in Terengganu using the FinWell-SM instrument, Syed Muhsin et al. (2024) revealed that

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86.4% of single mothers operated at a low level of financial well-being. Financial strains often lead to diminished self-esteem. A historical review by Langlois et al. (1994) found that self-esteem among single-parent mothers was clearly affected by economic variables, with single-parent mothers demonstrating lower mental health indicators compared to mothers in two-parent families. More recent work in Malaysia highlights the role of stigmatisation and social inequality in shaping single mothers' self-perception. A qualitative study of Malay Muslim single mothers found that divorced single mothers were particularly vulnerable to negative labelling, which could erode self-worth (Jusoh & Latada, 2021). A study conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, examined the relationship between economic hardship, self-esteem, and parental behaviour among single mothers. While the relationship between economic hardship and self-esteem was not statistically significant in that specific cohort, the research underscores the continued scholarly interest in understanding how financial strain interacts with psychological outcomes (Sinon et al., 2023).

Self-Esteem and Quality of Life

Self-esteem is consistently recognised as an essential psychological asset for single mothers, serving both as a shield against hardship and as a predictor of general well-being. Studies show that self-esteem is strongly linked to life satisfaction, mental health, and the capacity to handle the particular stressors that come with single parenthood (Azer et al., 2022). A recent study by Ahmad and Maznan (2024) examined the relationship between self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction among 360 single mothers in Selangor. The findings revealed that self-esteem was the most important predictor of life satisfaction, surpassing social support in its predictive strength. Kim et al. (2020) conducted an integrated review that used Neuman's systems approach to examine stressors and stress responses among single mothers, concluding that self-esteem was essential in assisting single mothers in adjusting to their circumstances. Higher levels of optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among single moms are associated with higher levels of positive parenting behaviours and lower levels of internalising symptoms like depression and anxiety (Taylor & Conger, 2017). The results of previous studies indicate that significant attention should be paid to self-esteem as one of the most influential factors influencing the promotion of quality of life (Zeinab & Davood, 2013).

The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem

While financial status establishes the baseline for a single mother's living conditions, the psychological appraisal of her self-worth acts as a crucial intervening mechanism. Persistent financial pressure may influence psychological perceptions, leading to feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, or reduced self-worth. Conversely, the ability to manage financial obligations effectively fosters greater confidence. Therefore, self-esteem is positioned not just as an independent predictor of quality of life, but as a critical mediator that transmits the psychological impacts of financial well-being into overall life satisfaction.

Evidence-Synthesis

To contextualize the current research gap, Table 1 provides an evidence-synthesis comparing study populations, instruments, findings, and limitations from recent key literature.

Table 1: Evidence-Synthesis of Key Literature

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Table 1: Evidence-Synthesis of Key Literature

Author(s) & Year	Study Population	Methods & Instruments	Key Findings / Coefficients	Limitations
Joni et al. (2024)	34 single mothers, Selangor	Quantitative analysis	Positive financial attitude enhances financial satisfaction; education level negatively relates to financial satisfaction.	Small sample size; limited generalizability.
Syed Muhsin et al. (2024)	Malay single mothers, Terengganu	Quantitative, FinWell-SM instrument	86.4% operated at low financial well-being; only 4.6% achieved high financial well-being.	Descriptive focus; lacks structural mediation analysis.
Ahmad & Maznan (2024)	360 single mothers, Selangor	Quantitative regression	Self-esteem is the strongest predictor of life satisfaction, surpassing social support.	Does not isolate financial well-being as a precursor variable.
Sinon et al. (2023)	Single mothers, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	Quantitative survey	Relationship between economic hardship and self-esteem was not statistically significant in this sample.	Regional constraints; focuses on parental behavior rather than holistic quality of life.
Kim et al. (2020)	Unmarried mothers	Integrative review (Neuman's approach)	Self-esteem is an essential mechanism for adjusting to stressors like childcare and financial loss.	Theoretical review; lacks primary empirical data from the Southeast Asian context.

Theoretical Framework

To address the conceptual gaps in existing literature, this study establishes a theoretical mediation framework that integrates the Model of Financial Wellness (Joo & Grable, 2004) with Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem construct. The Model of Financial Wellness posits that an individual's financial reality directly influences their overall life satisfaction and psychological state. By incorporating Rosenberg's conceptualization of self-worth, the theoretical framework argues that financial well-being acts as a foundational precursor to psychological health. The theoretical model hypothesizes three direct pathways and one indirect mediating mechanism prior to data analysis:

1. Direct Effect 1: Financial well-being directly and positively impacts quality of life, as economic stability provides the tangible resources required for life satisfaction (Hypothesis 1).

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2. Direct Effect 2: Financial well-being directly influences self-esteem, because the capability to successfully navigate financial obligations fosters a sense of competence and personal worth (Hypothesis 2).
3. Direct Effect 3: Self-esteem directly affects quality of life, functioning as an internal psychological buffer against daily adversities (Hypothesis 3).
4. Mediation Mechanism: Self-esteem mediates the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life. Financial security enhances self-esteem, which in turn elevates the overall quality of life, thereby bridging the economic and psychological domains (Hypothesis 4).

This integrated theoretical framework forms the foundation for the structural equation modelling conducted in this study.

Methodology

Procedures and Participants

The research was undertaken in the Maran district area, one of the Felda palm plantation areas in Pahang. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who met the criteria of being single mothers residing in this specific socio-economic setting. The sampling frame utilized information from the Single Mother Association in Maran. The total eligible population identified from the registry was 180 single mothers. Questionnaires were distributed to these individuals, yielding 125 valid and complete responses, representing an acceptable recruitment response rate of 69.4%.

A statistical power analysis and SEM sample-size justification were conducted to ensure methodological robustness. According to established structural equation modelling guidelines (Hair et al., 2010), a minimum sample size of 100 to 150 is sufficient for models with three or fewer latent constructs. Therefore, the sample size of N = 125 provides adequate statistical power for the specified theoretical model. It is important to note that the sample is highly concentrated among older respondents (94.2% aged 40 and above), widows (74.4%), and low-income households (88% earning RM2,000 and below). While this accurately reflects the authentic demographic profile of single mothers in the Maran Felda settlements, this sample concentration should be acknowledged when generalizing the findings to broader urban populations.

Instruments

The constructs, including some reverse items, were measured using a five-point scale ranging from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (5) “Strongly Agree”.

1. Financial Wellbeing: The measurement of financial wellbeing used Prawitz et al. (2006). A total of 8 items were used. Sample of questions from this scale were “I do not feel financial distress at the moment” and "I am satisfied with my present financial situation”.
2. Self-Esteem: This research employed the Self-Esteem Scale used by Rosenberg (1965). This construct was assessed using 8 items measuring perception on their worth in relation to life experiences. Sample questions included “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”.
3. Quality of Life: Assessed by measuring 8 items from the Brunnsviken Brief Quality of Life Scale (BBQ) (Lindner et al. 2016). Some of the questions asked were “I am

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satisfied with my leisure time: I have the opportunity to do what I want in order to relax and enjoy myself" and "My leisure time is important for my quality of life

Analysis Techniques

This research followed a two-step modelling technique, which involved developing the measurement model before proceeding with the structural model, as recommended by Mulaik and Millsap (2000), to assess the relationships between conceptual constructs. The measurement properties of the constructs were assessed first, and then the structural model was analysed to test the hypotheses. This research adopted measures that are commonly used to evaluate models, namely the root-mean-square error (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), normed fit index (NFI) and, lastly, the parsimonious fit indices, which can be measured by the normed chi-square (χ^2/df).

Results

Profile Analysis

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the 125 single mothers who participated in this study from Maran District, Pahang. The majority of participants were aged 40 years and above (n = 118, 94.2%). Most participants were widows (n = 93, 74.4%), while 32 (25.6%) were divorced. Regarding employment status, 38.0% (n = 48) were employed part-time, whereas 33.9% (n = 42) were unemployed. Most participants had attained a diploma or lower level of education (n = 118, 94.2%), with only 3.3% (n = 4) holding a bachelor's degree and 2.5% (n = 3) possessing a master's or doctoral degree. In terms of household income, the majority (n = 110, 88%) reported a monthly household income of RM2,000 or below.

Table 2: Profile Analysis of the Participants (N = 125)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	20–39	7	5.8
	40 years and above	118	94.2
Marital Status	Divorced	32	25.6
	Widow	93	74.4
Employment Status	Part-time	48	38.0
	Not working	42	33.9
	Others*	35	28.1
Education Level	Diploma and below	118	94.2
	Bachelor's degree	4	3.3
	Master's/Doctoral degree	3	2.5
Monthly Household Income	RM2,000 and below	110	88
	Above RM2,000 to RM6,000	11	8.8
	Above RM6,000	4	3.2

Measurement Model

First Pool Measurement Model

Figure 1 illustrates the initial pooled measurement model comprising financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life, each originally measured by eight items. Initial confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that several goodness-of-fit indices—specifically the Normed Fit

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Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)—failed to meet the required threshold levels. To resolve these fit discrepancies, low-loading items were deleted in accordance with the methodological recommendations of Awang et al. (2018), who advise removing items with insufficient factor loadings due to their poor contribution to construct measurement. Consequently, ten items exhibiting factor loadings below the 0.60 cutoff were deleted from the model (Figure 2): four items from financial well-being (FW1 = 0.31, FW2 = 0.17, FW3 = 0.33, FW4 = 0.21), four from self-esteem (SE1 = 0.48, SE2 = 0.58, SE3 = 0.48, SE5 = 0.43), and two from quality of life (QOL6 = 0.59, QOL7 = 0.43).

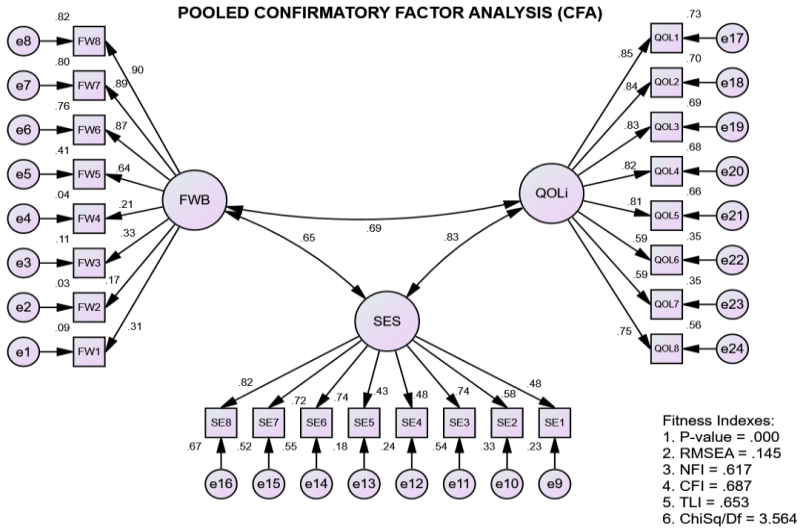


Figure 1: First Pool Measurement Model – Consists of 24 items

Figure 2 illustrates the specified pooled measurement model following the removal of items with low factor loadings. Upon re-estimation, all remaining items demonstrated acceptable factor loadings exceeding 0.60, resulting in improved goodness-of-fit indices that successfully met the required standard thresholds. Subsequently, construct validity and reliability assessments were conducted; the corresponding results are detailed in Table 3 below.

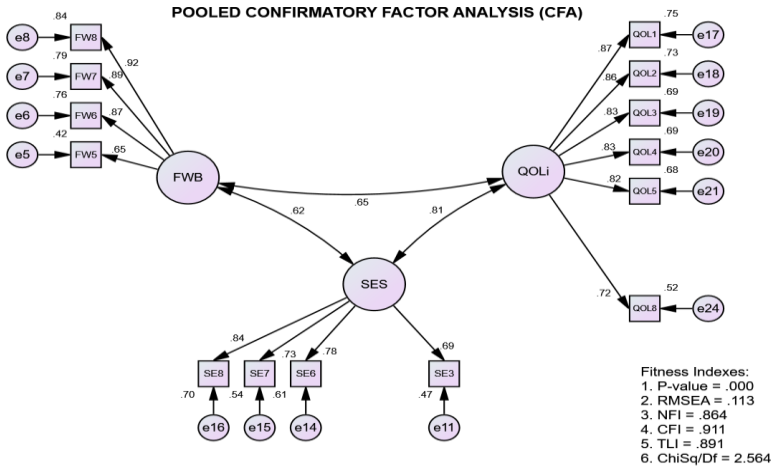


Figure 2: Second Pool Measurement Model – Consists of 14 items

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Table 3: Fitness Indexes for Final Pool Measurement Model

Index	Acceptance Level	Measurement Final Model	Remarks
Absolute fit:			
Chi-Square	< 0.05	0.000	Achieved
Incremental Fit:			
NFI	> 0.90 (> 0.85 still acceptable)	0.864	Achieved
CFI	> 0.90 (> 0.85 still acceptable) > 0.90 (> 0.85 still acceptable)	0.911	Achieved
TLI		0.891	Achieved
Parsimonious Fit:			
Chi-Square/df	< 5.00	2.564	Achieved

Since the second pool measurement model has achieved the acceptable goodness of fit, the measurement model needed to check the reliability and validity once again. Table 4 indicates that the calculated value of construct reliability (CR) ranges from 0.850 to 0.927 exceeding the critical value of 0.6. The validity is assessed through convergent validity and discriminant validity tests. Convergent validity is assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), and the scores are shown in Table 4, exhibiting values ranging from 0.587 to 0.705, which has surpassed the recommended level of 0.5. It is suggested that the convergent validity of these measurement models has been fulfilled.

Table 4: Validity and Reliability Test for Final Measurement Model

Construct	Factor Loading	CR (>0.6)	AVE (>0.5)
Financial Wellbeing			
FW5	0.651		
FW6	0.871	0.904	0.705
FW7	0.890		
FW8	0.920		
Self-Esteem			
SE3	0.700		
SE6	0.782	0.850	0.587
SE7	0.735		
SE8	0.840		
Quality of Life			
QOL1	0.870		
QOL2	0.860		
QOL3	0.830	0.927	0.680
QOL4	0.833		
QOL5	0.824		
QOL8	0.720		

The next process is the discriminant validity of the measurement model. Table 5 shows the relationships as well as the square root of the AVE for each latent component. According to Awang et al. (2018), to establish discriminant validity, the researcher must compare the square root of AVE for each construct with the correlation coefficient of other latent constructs. The square root of the construct's AVE score should be bigger than its correlation value with other constructs. In order to fulfil the requirement for discriminant validity, the values of the square

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root of the average variance extracted of each construct (diagonal values in bold) must be higher than the values of the correlations between each construct. The results indicate that Financial Wellbeing demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity, as its diagonal value (0.84) exceeds its correlations with Self-Esteem (0.62) and Quality of Life (0.65). Conversely, discriminant validity is not established between Self-Esteem and Quality of Life, as the correlation between these two constructs (0.81) surpasses the square root of the AVE for Self-Esteem (0.77). This finding suggests a high degree of conceptual overlap between the SES and QOL constructs, indicating potential item redundancy that may require further model refinement.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity

	FW	SES	QOL
Financial Wellbeing	**0.84**		
Self-Esteem	0.62	**0.77**	
Quality of Life	0.65	0.81	**0.82**

In order to solve this problem, the redundant items should be dropped from the model as suggested by Awang et al. (2018). Based on modification indices (MI), the pair items more than 15.00 should be dropped or correlated. There are two pairs of items that have an MI value of more than 15.00, which are e24 and FW (18.209) and e19 and QOL (29.298). Items QOL8 (e24) and QOL3 (e19) should be dropped from the model. Figure 3 shows the new result after removing two redundant items.

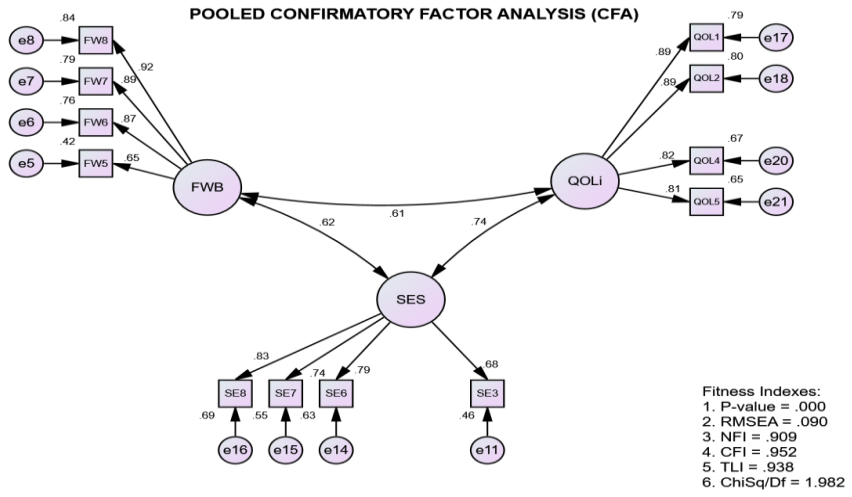


Figure 3: Final Pool Measurement Model – Consists of 12 items

The measurement model needed to check the reliability and validity once again. Table 6 indicates that the calculated value of construct reliability (CR) ranges from 0.850 to 0.914, exceeding the critical value of 0.6. The validity is assessed through convergent validity and discriminant validity tests. Convergent validity is assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), and the scores are shown in Table 6, exhibiting values ranging from 0.588 to 0.728, which has surpassed the recommended level of 0.5. It is suggested that the convergent validity of these measurement models has been fulfilled.

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Table 6: Validity and Reliability Test for Final Measurement Model

Construct	Factor Loading	CR (>0.6)	AVE (>0.5)
Financial Wellbeing			
FW5	0.651		
FW6	0.871	0.904	0.705
FW7	0.890		
FW8	0.920		
Self-Esteem			
SE3	0.700		
SE6	0.790	0.850	0.588
SE7	0.740		
SE8	0.830		
Quality of Life			
QOL1	0.890		
QOL2	0.890	0.914	0.728
QOL4	0.820		
QOL5	0.81		

In the case of discriminant validity, the construct correlation presented all correlation values lower than the threshold value of 0.85, indicating that all constructs being tested for this study are unique and relevant for structural relationships. Moreover, the diagonal values (bold) present the normalization of AVE values, indicating that all diagonal values are higher than all correlations. It is representing that all constructs are more well-defined than other relations.

Table 7: Discriminant Validity

	FW	SES	QOL
Financial Wellbeing	**0.84**		
Self-Esteem	0.62	**0.77**	
Quality of Life	0.61	0.74	**0.82**

Structural Model

After the final pool measurement model in the previous section achieved the fitness indices, unidimensionality, reliability and validity, the final stage is to model the pool measurement model into a structural model using SEM. A structural model involved in analysing the cause-and-effect relationship between a set of exogenous and endogenous variables developed based on the theory (Hair Jr et al., 2010). The three latent constructs involved in the structural model are financial wellbeing, self-esteem and quality of life.

Evaluation Model Fit

Figure 4 depicts the relationship between financial wellbeing, self-esteem and quality of life. Firstly, the overall fit of the model is assessed through three categories of model fit; (i) absolute fit (RMSEA), (ii) incremental fit (CFI / TLI) and (iii) parsimonious fit (Chi-square/df) to ensure that it is an adequate representation of the entire set of causal relationships. Based on the assessment of fit for the structural model shown in Figure 5, this study concludes that the proposed structural model met the required fitness level as shown in Table 8.

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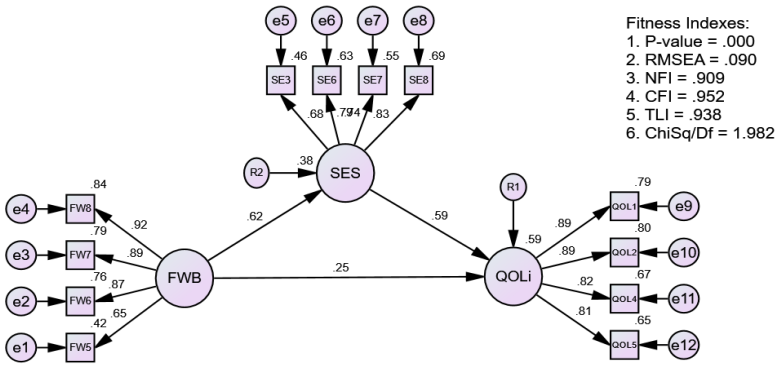


Figure 4: Standardised Path Coefficients of All Constructs

Table 8: Fitness Indexes for Structural Model

Index	Acceptance Level	Measurement Final Model	Remarks
Absolute fit:			
Chi-Square	p-value < 0.05	0.000	Achieved
RMSEA	< 0.1	0.090	Achieved
Incremental Fit:			
NFI	> 0.90	0.909	Achieved
CFI	> 0.90	0.952	Achieved
TLI	> 0.90	0.938	Achieved
Parsimonious Fit:			
Chi-Square/df	< 5.00	1.982	Achieved

Regression Analysis

Based on Figure 4 above, the $R^2 = 0.59$ indicates that 59.0% of the total variation in quality of life is explained by two main constructs, which are financial wellbeing and self-esteem. The other 41.0% of the total variation is explained by other potential factors in the future.

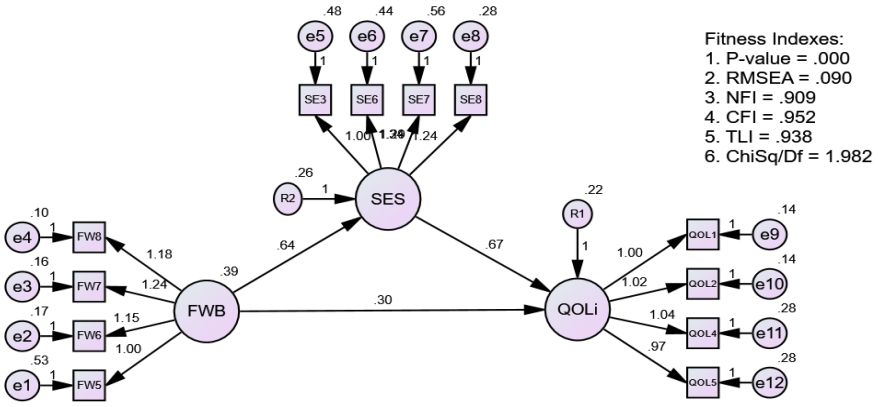


Figure 5: The Regression Path Coefficients for the Structural Model

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Figure 5 above presents the unstandardized model. Given the presented model, there are 4 hypotheses examined. The following table presents the structural estimates for hypothesis testing (Table 9). It revealed that the beta coefficient for the direct effect of financial wellbeing on quality of life is significant ($p<0.05$), which supports Hypothesis 1, while the beta coefficient for the direct effect between financial wellbeing and self-esteem and self-esteem and quality of life is significant ($p<0.001$), which supports Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3.

Table 9: The Regression Path Coefficients

Construct	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Results	Hypotheses
QOLi ← FWB	0.296	0.118	2.512	0.012	Significant	H1
QOLi ← SES	0.670	0134	4.991	***	Significant	H3
SES ← FWB	0.639	0.128	4.996	***	Significant	H2

***indicate a highly significant at <0.001

Figure 6 reveals that the beta coefficient for the direct effect of financial wellbeing and quality of life is significant, ($p=0.001$), while the beta coefficient for the indirect effect between financial wellbeing to self-esteem and self-esteem to quality of life is significant. ($p=0.001$). Based on the results, it is confirmed that the self-esteem construct partially mediates the relationship between financial wellbeing and quality of life constructs (Hypothesis 4 supported).

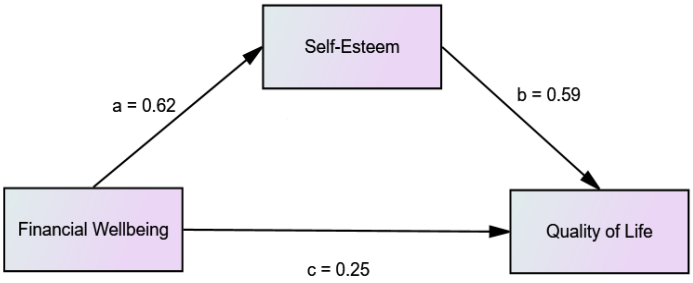


Figure 6: Testing Mediator Procedures

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate significant positive relationships among financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life among single mothers in Maran District, Pahang. Financial well-being had a significant positive effect on quality of life ($\beta = 0.296$, $p = 0.012$), supporting H1. This finding suggests that single mothers who perceive their financial situation more positively tend to report better quality of life. Financial security may help them manage household expenses, meet their children's needs, and cope with financial responsibilities. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that financial hardship and economic insecurity are important challenges affecting single-parent families (Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Stack & Meredith, 2017). Kim and Kim (2020) also reported that household income and stable employment were positively associated with quality of life among single mothers. Financial well-being also had a significant positive relationship with self-esteem ($\beta = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. The relatively strong coefficient suggests that financial circumstances are closely associated with how single mothers perceive their own worth and capabilities. Greater financial security may reduce concerns about meeting household needs and may strengthen confidence in managing family responsibilities. This finding is consistent with the literature

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suggesting that financial circumstances and financial satisfaction are important aspects of single mothers' overall well-being (Azer et al., 2022; Joni et al., 2024). However, the present study identifies an association rather than establishing that financial well-being directly causes higher self-esteem. Self-esteem had the strongest direct relationship with quality of life ($\beta = 0.670$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. This result indicates that single mothers with higher self-esteem tend to report better quality of life. A positive sense of self-worth may help individuals cope with daily challenges, recognise their capabilities, and maintain more positive perceptions of their lives. This finding is consistent with Ahmad and Maznan (2024), who found that self-esteem was an important predictor of life satisfaction among single mothers in Selangor. It is also consistent with Taylor and Conger (2017), who highlighted the importance of psychological strengths, including self-esteem and self-efficacy, in supporting positive functioning among single-mother families. The mediation analysis further showed that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between financial well-being and quality of life, supporting H4. This finding indicates that financial well-being is associated with quality of life both directly and indirectly through self-esteem. Therefore, the relationship between financial circumstances and quality of life is not purely economic; psychological factors also play an important role. However, because the mediation is partial, self-esteem does not fully explain the relationship. Financial well-being remains directly associated with quality of life even after self-esteem is considered. This finding supports the view that financial and psychological factors should be considered together when examining the well-being of single mothers (Azer et al., 2022).

The findings have several practical implications. Financial assistance, employment opportunities, financial literacy, and financial capability programmes may help strengthen financial well-being, while counselling, peer-support activities, and community-based programmes may help strengthen self-esteem and social support. An integrated approach may therefore be more appropriate than focusing on financial assistance or psychological support alone. Future research could use larger and more geographically diverse samples and longitudinal designs to examine changes in financial well-being, self-esteem, and quality of life over time. Future studies may also include additional social, employment, family, and financial variables. In conclusion, the study shows that financial well-being and self-esteem are significantly associated with quality of life among the single mothers surveyed. Financial well-being is related to quality of life directly and indirectly through self-esteem. These findings suggest that improving the well-being of single mothers requires an integrated approach that considers both financial security and psychological resources.

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