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The Search for Mediating and Moderating Effects in Psychological Research on Urban Society

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Researchers oftentimes work to discover, or test, conceptual models to help them understand complex phenomena. Conceptual models typically depict causal relationships among several variables for the purpose of explaining when, how, and why such phenomena occur.

The inclusion of several variables to explain psychological issues in the urban context is especially appropriate because rarely is one factor serves as the sole cause. Issues such as anxiety, addictions, ineffective coping, education as well as psychological well-being typically involve multiple contributing factors.

Causal relationships between variables can take different forms, such as direct effects, moderating effects, or mediating effects. A direct effect rarely is supported clearly by statistical analysis, and its interpretation is sometimes ambiguous. However, finding or failure in finding direct effects can be a starting point from which a series of non-direct causal relationships can be further examined.

Researchers are constantly challenged to discover and test their conceptual models that depict the relative importance of all contributing factors to the phenomenon of interest. For that reason, and especially in an effort to better explain complex phenomena where contributing factors are multidimensional, researchers often take on a more complex methodology and deep dive into discovering or testing moderating or mediating effects of different variables.

A moderator variable specifies when or under what conditions an independent variable

influences a dependent variable. It modifies the relationships between the independent and the dependent variable such that the relationships were either enhanced, diminished, or even changed directions from positive to negative or vice-versa. On the other hand, a mediator variable represents an intervening variable that explains the mechanism through which an independent variable affects a dependent variable.

In this edition, despite the variety of topics studied, authors recognized the multi-factor and complex nature of psychological issues of urban living and described the interrelationship of those factors using this methodological approach: finding relative contributions and roles of multiple factors at the same time. This approach highlights the different dimensions of the studied object and allows researchers to uncover significant factors in differing roles.

In the topic of educational issues, for example, Hafshoh & Saleh examined the role of family, specifically family functioning dimensions, on high school students' subjective well-being. The authors unwrapped the three dimensions of family functioning based on Olson's circumplex model of the family system (2000) and analyzed what role, if any, each of these dimensions has on student's subjective well-being in school.

In the unprecedented time that we are currently in, the COVID-19 pandemic, educational practices in an urban community is almost totally transformed. Schools, as well as informal educations, were leveraging technological capabilities resulting in broader and stronger reliance on online learning. Besides the effect of the pandemic itself, the new form of education (online learning) introduces more psychological issues that demand attention. Student's satisfaction with their education dropped and academic stress increased due to the pandemic and the

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reliance on online learning. Interestingly, this seemingly simple and direct relationship between academic stress and satisfaction of online education may not be so simple or direct after all. Kumalasari and Akmal investigated how students' academic resilience may play a moderation role in the relationships between academic stress and satisfaction with online learning.

When individuals reach adulthood, society expected them to start their journey of career explorations. They will invest in activities that will allow them to understand themselves, their interests, the job market, and job characteristics, etc. These activities, in turn, will enable them to make appropriate career-related progress. One of the many factors influencing a young adult's career exploration is positive parenting. However, it was not quite clear the mechanism by which positive parenting exerts its effect. Using similar methodological approach as other authors in this edition, Sawitri et.al. investigated the potential mediating role of career aspirations in the relationship between positive parenting and career explorations.

Some of the classic psychological issues of urban society such as insomnia, pain, and substance abuse are still popular subjects of research as well as inter group frictions and conflicts. Researchers are still trying to understand all the contributing factors affecting those issues. In this edition, for example, Shabrina and Asih investigated the mediating and moderating role of pain and anxiety trait on insomnia and health related quality of life. Whereas Nashria and Indirasari attempted to explain alcohol consumption using Zimbardo's theory of time perspective. The idea was that our perceptions of time, which are individual's tendency to focus on different aspects of the past, present, and future influence our emotions, perceptions, and actions. Shabrina and Asih investigated the role of perceived stress as a mediating factor to the relationships between time perspective and alcohol consumption. Still using the same methodological approach, Wenardjo and Panggabean investigated the interrelationships of multiple variables, including organizational core religious-oriented values and empathy on students' multiculturalism.

The complexity of urban life issues requires researchers to deep dive into multiple factors at the same time. The challenges for such practice

are paramount and experimentation as a standard way of determining causal relationships often times is not possible. Using appropriate methodological approaches, researchers have begun to unravel the many contributing factors and their specific roles in mediating or moderating the myriads of psychological issues of urban society.

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