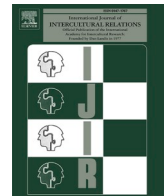




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Relationship between compassionate love and satisfaction with life in Angolan college students: The mediating roles of satisfaction with love life and commitment

Joana Neto^{a,1}, Félix Neto^{b,2,*}^a REMIT – Research on Economics, Management and Information Technologies, Universidade Portucalense, Porto, Portugal^b Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the relations between compassionate love (CL) for a partner, love satisfaction, commitment, and life satisfaction, and further aimed to scrutinize whether the relation between CL for a romantic partner and satisfaction with life was mediated by satisfaction with love life and commitment. The participants were 191 Angolan college students (50 % women; aged 18–34 years, $M = 24.94$; $SD = 3.88$). They answered scales to measure compassionate love, love satisfaction, commitment, and life satisfaction. Correlation, regression, and mediation analyses were performed to test the hypotheses. As expected, findings showed that CL for a partner and satisfaction with life were significantly and positively correlated. Furthermore, the results also indicated that love satisfaction and commitment fully mediated the relation between CL for a partner and satisfaction with life. The results afford insight into the relationships of compassionate love on satisfaction with life. Suggestions for future research are highlighted.

Introduction

Positive psychology focuses on factors that stimulate persons, groups, and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Waters et al., 2022). This new direction in psychology has led to a growing body of research in connection with well-being (Diener et al., 2018b). People's well-being differs around the world (Diener & Diener, 1995; Galbraith et al., 2024). Less-developed economies, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Angola, have the lowest rates of subjective well-being (Amoros & Bosma, 2014).

Cultural factors are likely to be involved in understanding the experience of love by people of different cultural contexts (Feybesse et al., 2025; Gareis & Wilkins, 2011). A cultural dimension that has been frequently used to explain the differences has to do with individualism/collectivism (Hofstede 2001; Triandis, 1995). A study that examined the triangular theory of love across 45 countries (Sorokowski et al., 2023) found that whereas country-level collectivism did not predict passion, it did predict higher intimacy and commitment. Angola is perceived of as a collectivistic society.

Most studies about well-being and love have been conducted with WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) populations (Hatfield et al., 2012; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021). Hence, the generalization of results to people from other cultural

* Correspondence to: Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação Universidade do Porto, Rua Alfredo: Allen, Porto 4200-135, Portugal.
E-mail address: fneto@fpce.up.pt (F. Neto).

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0837-7630>

² <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0112-880X>

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contexts remains to a large extent undetermined. The current work seeks to overcome this issue being conducted in an African country, Angola. This research aimed to scrutinize the relationships and mechanisms among compassionate love for a partner, satisfaction with life, love satisfaction, and commitment. These psychosocial constructs were selected given their importance to well-being. This can give new insights into the available investigation and empirical support to improve the relationships quality.

Literature review

Underwood (2002) suggested the conceptualization of compassionate love (CL) as a form of love focused on another's well-being. This conceptualization contributed to inspiring diverse experts. For example, Sprecher and Fehr (2005, p. 630) defined CL as an "attitude toward other(s), either close others or strangers or all of humanity; containing feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding the other(s), particularly when the other(s) is (are) perceived to be suffering or in need". CL contains several feelings, cognitions, and behaviors and concerns a variety of relations (e.g., partners, close others, and strangers). People experience CL to the greatest degree with a romantic partner (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). CL for a partner was positively correlated with sexual desire, satisfaction with sex life, and negatively related to sociosexuality (Neto & Neto, 2024b). Furthermore, previous research indicated that great compassion for others is related to greater happiness (Demorest, 2020) and psychological well-being (Kahana et al., 2021).

Subjective well-being (SWB) concerns "the extent to which a person believes or feels that his or her life is going well" (Diener et al., 2018a, p. 1). This definition calls our attention to two main aspects of SWB: affective (positive and negative affects) and cognitive (satisfaction with life, SWL). SWL is a cognitive assessment of one's life satisfaction either generally or with regard to domain-specific satisfactions, such as migration, work, sex, and love (Diener et al., 1985; Neto & Fonseca, 2016; Ruiz et al., 2009).

SWL is "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to chosen criteria" (Shin & Johnson, 1978, p. 478). In that sense, Pavot and Diener (2008, p. 140) noted that "measures of life satisfaction are advantageous because they allow respondents to determine their own criteria for inclusion in the judgment process, and to weight them in the manner they choose". Research found that high SWL improves life in several areas, such as health, job, and social relationships (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Hence, it is important to explore factors that influence SWL. There is literature indicating that SWL was positively related to CL (Chiesi et al., 2020; Fehr et al., 2014; Sánchez Aragón, 2021). Satisfaction with life has been largely used in international surveys (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Berry et al., 2022; Diener, 2009; Oishi, 2012), but few studies were specifically conducted in Africa (Sovet et al., 2016).

Satisfaction with love life (SWLL) is a relevant domain-specific satisfaction of SWL specifically, and of SWB more generally. SWLL concerns all people (Hatfield et al., 2020; Karandashev, 2017) and represents a prominent ingredient of SWB for people (Salvatore & Munoz Sastre, 2001). SWLL concerns "a judgmental process in which individuals assess the quality of their love lives on the basis of their own set of criteria" (Neto, 2005, p. 4). SWLL constitutes a relevant aspect of SWB for emerging adults and is related to several health and educational outcomes (Graham, 2010; Neto et al., 2023). SWLL is also positively related to SWL, such that higher level of SWLL is associated with higher SWL (Nazzal et al., 2019; Neto & Wilks, 2017). Research found that SWLL was positively connected with CL (Neto & Neto, 2022).

Commitment is a pillar of love of adult persons being in a partner relation (Frank, 1988). Commitment includes "feelings of attachment to a partner and desire to maintain a relationship, for better and worse" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 180). Partnership commitment represents a key element of relations quality (Flechter et al., 2000). It is associated with partner's well-being (Hendrick et al., 1988). Underwood (2002) indicates that CL inspires behaviors related to commitment, tolerance and trust. There is research pointing out a relationship of CL with commitment (Fehr et al., 2014). CL for a partner predicted positively commitment (Neto & Neto, 2022). Commitment has an important effect on SWL. For example, a longitudinal study found that shifting into more committed relationships was followed by enhancements in SWB (Dush & Amato, 2005). Bucher et al. (2019) in a longitudinal analysis, found also that enhancements in commitment within a 1-year interval were linked to greater SWL. In another research it was evidenced that participants who indicated greater commitment also indicated higher SWL (Tan et al., 2020).

The present study

Although prior research has pointed to the relationship of SWL, SWLL, and commitment with compassionate love, as far as we know, no research has simultaneously explored possible associations with CL. Furthermore, there is a gap in the CL area given that research has mostly tested direct relationships of several predictors and neglected indirect associations between factors (Neto & Neto, 2024a; Sabey et al., 2014; Sinclair et al., 2016). This research intends to elucidate the relationship between CL and SWL by considering the possible mediating roles of SWLL and commitment.

Prior investigation confirmed the assumption that the CL determines SWL (Chiesi et al., 2020; Fehr et al., 2014; Sánchez Aragón, 2021). The idea of SWLL and commitment as mediators is grounded on 3 lines of reasoning: (1) CL predicted positively SWLL and commitment (Neto & Neto, 2022). Higher CL predicted higher SWLL and commitment. (2) Higher levels of SWLL (Nazzal et al., 2019; Neto & Pinto, 2015) and commitment (Bucher et al., 2019; Dush & Amato, 2005; Tan et al., 2020) were related to higher satisfaction with life. (3) SWLL and commitment were previously used as mediators. For instance, SWLL mediated the relationship between CL for a partner and romantic loneliness (Neto & Neto, 2024a). Commitment was also found as mediating a relationship (Lawrence et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2015; Neto & Neto, 2024b). For example, Neto and Pinto (2025) showed that individuals experiencing higher agapic love felt more commitment and in turn tended to feel lower romantic loneliness.

Based on the aforementioned research, we advance three hypotheses:

H₁. : We hypothesized CL for a romantic partner would be positively associated with SWL.

H₂. : We expected that SWLL would mediate the relationship of CL for a romantic partner with satisfaction with life.

H₃. : We expected that commitment would mediate the relationship of CL for a romantic partner with satisfaction with life.

Method

Participants

Sample size was established in accordance with Muthen and Muthen (2002) suggestions, in which at least one hundred and fifty respondents are needed per group for unidimensional models. Hence, our sample consisted of 191 Angolan college students, 50 % females. The average age was 25 years ($SD = 3.88$, minimum 18, maximum 34). All college students were involved in a romantic relationship.

Materials

The survey included tools depicted below, along with socio-demographic information about age, gender, love status, and nationality.

- (a) *Short Form Compassionate Love for Partner (CLS-P-SF; Neto & Neto, 2022)*. This tool consists of five items (e. g., “I spent a lot of time concerned about the well-being of __ [the partner]”). Ratings ranged from 1 (“*not at all true*”) to 7 (“*very true*”). Greater values denote greater CL. The CLS-P-SF evidenced one dimensional structure and satisfactory reliability (Neto & Neto, 2022).
- (b) *The Satisfaction with Love Life Scale (SWLLS; Neto, 2005)*. This tool consists of five statements (e. g., “I am satisfied with my love life”). Response options ranged from 1 (“*strongly disagree*”) to 7 (“*strongly agree*”). Higher scores mean higher SWLL. Multigroup confirmatory factor analysis presented good fit of the SWLLS unidimensional model for emerging adults from Angola, Brazil, East Timor, Macao, and Portugal, and acceptable reliability (Neto & Dimitrova, 2017).
- (c) *Commitment (COS; Neto & Pinto, 2015; Sprecher & Regan, 1998)*. This tool consists of four items (e. g., “How committed are you to your partner?”). Ratings ranged from 1 (“*extremely uncommitted*”) to 9 (“*extremely committed*”). Greater scores denote greater commitment.
- (d) *Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985)*. This tool includes five items (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”); Ratings ranged from 1 (“*totally disagree*”) to 7 (“*totally agree*”). Greater scores denote greater SWL. The Portuguese version of this scale presented adequate psychometric features (Jovanović et al., 2022; Neto, 1993).

Procedure

The design of the work was a cross-sectional survey of Angolan college students residing in Luanda. The survey was administered during class time to social sciences students by means of a standard paper and pencil format. Respondents completed the questionnaire in the Portuguese language (the official language of Angola). The research was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki, and with legal and ethical norms in this cultural context. Informed consent was given, and anonymity was guaranteed. Respondents were not remunerated for their participation.

Data analysis

First, we tested the single factor models of the scales found in previous studies by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Second, we carried out descriptive statistics to obtain skewness and kurtosis to scrutinize whether the data met criteria for normality. Third, the reliability of the multi-item scales was calculated utilizing Cronbach’s α , and McDonald’s ω . Fourth, Pearson product-moment correlations were performed to test whether CL for a partner was related to the mediators and the outcome variable in the expected directions. Finally, mediation models were examined in which the antecedent variable (CL for a partner) was associated with the intervening variables (SWLL and commitment), which in turn was associated with the outcome (SWL) through path analysis. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS statistical software and IBM SPSS Amos (Version 29). Significance level was set at 0.05.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, we assessed the validity and reliability of the multi-item scales. The structure and validity of each construct were tested with CFA. CFA was carried out on the raw data of the CLS-P-SF, SWLLS, COS, and SWLS (correlation matrix, maximum likelihood estimation). The models considered were the single factor models supported previously (Neto, 1993, 2005; Neto & Dimitrova, 2017; Neto & Neto, 2022). No correlation between error terms was permitted.

For the CLS-P-SF, the analysis evidenced that $\chi^2 = 6.53$, $df = 5$, $\chi^2/df = 1.31$, $CFI = 0.99$, $GFI = 0.99$, $SRMR = 0.03$, $RMSEA = 0.04$ [%90 CI: 0.01 – 0.11], demonstrating acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, all standardized factor loadings (λ) in this

model were significant at $p < .001$, ranging from .51 to .70.

For the SWLLS, the analysis evidenced that $\chi^2 = 14.12$, $df = 5$, $\chi^2/df = 2.83$, CFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.03, RMSEA = 0.08 [%90 CI: 0.03 – 0.13], demonstrating acceptable fit. Furthermore, all standardized factor loadings (λ) in this model were significant at $p < .001$, ranging from .66 to .92.

For the COS, the analysis evidenced that $\chi^2 = 2.01$, $df = 2$, $\chi^2/df = 1.01$, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.02, RMSEA = 0.01 [%90 CI: 0.01 – 0.14], demonstrating acceptable fit. Furthermore, all standardized factor loadings (λ) in this model were significant at $p < .001$, ranging from .63 to .94.

For the SWLS, the analysis evidenced that $\chi^2 = 20.62$, $df = 5$, $\chi^2/df = 4.12$, CFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.08 [%90 CI: 0.04 – 0.14], demonstrating acceptable fit. Furthermore, all standardized factor loadings (λ) in this model were significant at $p < .001$, ranging from .47 to .80.

Hence, these results suggest that the data fit the single factor structures of each scale, supporting the construct validity of the CLS-P-SF, SWLLS, COS, and SWLS in this sample.

Table 1 presents the descriptives statistics, internal consistencies, and intercorrelations among the measures of interest. The internal consistencies of all measures were satisfactory.

Testing hypotheses

After determining that the measurement tools were valid and reliable, the hypotheses of the study were tested. Path analyses were used for testing the mediating roles of SWLL and commitment on the relation of CL for a partner with SWL. Skewness and kurtosis values of CL for a partner, SWLL, commitment, and satisfaction with life were within adequate limits for a normal distribution (Field, 2017) (see Table 1). The data checks supported the use of path analyses. All pairwise relationships among these variables were significant. Namely, CL for a partner was positively associated with SWL ($r = .25$, $p < .001$, 95 % [CI] = [.11,.38]). This result supports the first hypothesis.

The results of regression analysis testing the mediating role of love satisfaction on the relationship between CL for a partner and satisfaction with life are presented in Fig. 1. Findings indicated that CL for a partner was indirectly linked to SWL through its SWLL. CL for a partner was significantly linked to SWLL, $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$, and SWLL was significantly linked to SWL, $\beta = .38$, $p < .001$. The results provide confirmation of the mediational hypothesis. CL for a partner was no longer significantly associated with SWL after the control of the mediator, SWLL, $\beta = .08$, $p = .27$, in line with total mediation. About 19 % of the variance in SWL was accounted for by the independent variables. The indirect effect was analyzed via a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 1000 samples, calculated with IBM SPSS Amos. These results evidenced the statistical significance of the indirect coefficient, ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$, 90 % [CI] = [.11,.23]).

The results of regression analysis analyzing the mediating role of commitment on the relationship between CL for a partner and satisfaction with life can be seen in Fig. 2. Findings indicated that CL for a partner was indirectly linked to SWL by means of its commitment. CL for a partner was significantly linked to commitment, $\beta = .60$, $p < .001$, and commitment was significantly linked to SWL, $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$. The results provide confirmation of the mediational hypothesis. CL for a partner was no longer significantly associated with SWL after the control of the mediator, commitment, $\beta = .04$, $p = .61$, in line with total mediation. About 13 % of the variance in SWL was accounted for by the independent variables. The indirect effect was also analyzed via a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 1000 samples. These findings evidenced the statistical significance of the indirect coefficient, ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$, 90 % [CI] = [.12,.30]).

Discussion

In the current research, we considered the relation between CL for a romantic partner and SWL, and, besides that, the mediation roles of satisfaction with love life and commitment. Before examining this, the findings pointed out that each one of the four measures used showed that the unidimensional models tested evidenced acceptable fits. These findings are in consonance with previous research

Table 1
Descriptives statistics, Cronbach's alpha and intercorrelations among measures.

	1	2	3	4
1. Compassionate love for a partner	—			
2. Satisfaction with love life	.42 * [.30,.53]	—		
3. Commitment	.64 * [.54,.71]	.44 * [.32,.55]	—	
4. Satisfaction with life	.25 * [.11,.38]	.43 * [.30,.54]	.35 * [.22,.48]	—
<i>M</i>	5.82	4.71	6.36	4.07
<i>SD</i>	.99	1.54	2.37	1.46
Skewness	-.86	-.50	-.68	.23
Kurtosis	.44	-.61	-.72	-.68
Cronbach's α	.75	.89	.85	.75
McDonald's ω	.74	.89	.89	.75

Notes: Values in square brackets indicate 95 % confidence interval for each correlation.

* $p < .001$.

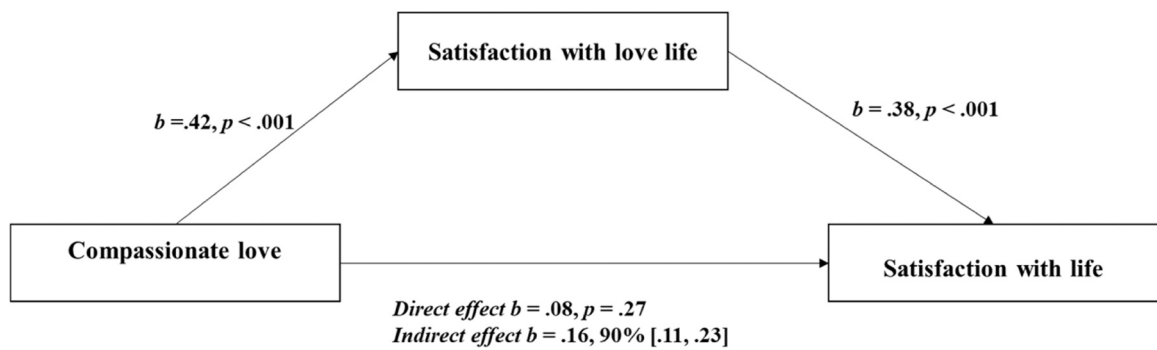


Fig. 1. Model of the mediating role of satisfaction with love life in the relationship between compassionate love for a partner and satisfaction with life.

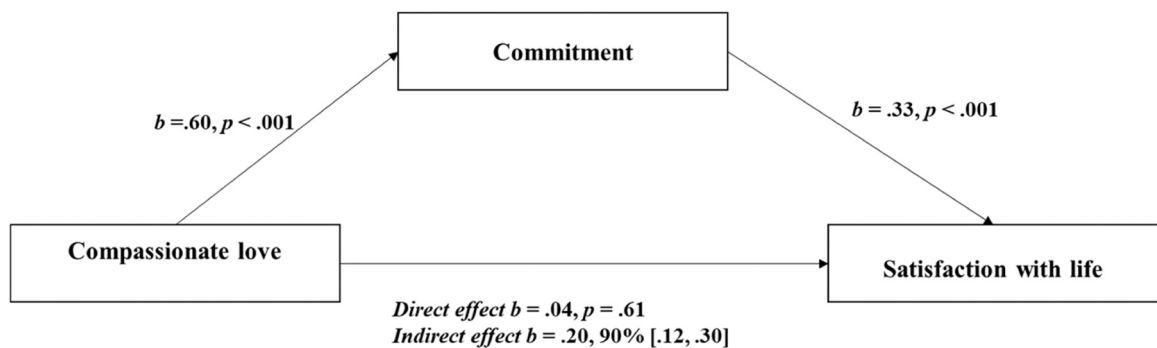


Fig. 2. Model of the mediating role of commitment in the relationship between compassionate love for a partner and satisfaction with life.

(Caycho-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Neto, 1993; Neto & Dimitrova, 2017; Neto & Neto, 2022).

CL, SWLL, commitment, and SWL were all significantly correlated in the expected directions. In particular, CL was associated positively with SWL, indicating that greater CL was linked to greater SWL. This finding agrees with past research showing that great compassion for others was related to higher well-being (Demorest, 2020; Fehr et al., 2014; Neto, 2012). This supports our first hypothesis.

Additionally, the results of path analysis pointed out that CL was related to SWL indirectly via satisfaction with love life. There is research demonstrating that specific life satisfaction domains and SWL are related (Ruiz et al., 2009). The findings of the present research support this demonstration as SWL and SWLL were significantly related. Both variables correlated in similar way with previous research (Nazzari et al., 2019; Neto & Pinto, 2015; Neto & Wilks, 2017). It can be assumed that CL for a partner, as a positive well-being construct, enhances life satisfaction by the mediating effect of SWLL. This result supported our second hypothesis. The results of path analysis also pointed out that CL was linked to SWL indirectly through commitment. CL for a partner enhances life satisfaction by the mediating role of commitment. This result supported our third hypothesis. These results are consistent with those indicating that higher partnership commitment and love satisfaction are beneficial for people's well-being (Bucher et al., 2019; Dush & Amato, 2005; Neto & Wilks, 2017).

The investment model can help us to interpret these findings. For the investment model, there are two relevant features of a relationship: the satisfaction level and the degree of dependence (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). The satisfaction level refers to the favorable evaluation of a relationship, while "the dependence level concerns the degree to which an individual relies on a relationship for obtaining good outcomes and depends primarily on the partner for the fulfillment of important needs" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 179). For the investment model, commitment constitutes the experienced dependence on a relationship. These scholars propose that dependence-enhancing variables, such as high investments, encourage feelings of satisfaction in the relationship and commitment. Compassionate love for a romantic partner may be experienced as an investment, which in turn should enhance satisfaction with love and commitment. Furthermore, "empirical tests of the investment model have consistently revealed that commitment level is positively correlated with satisfaction" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 187).

Taken as a whole, current findings give a novel understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the relation of CL with satisfaction with life. Angolan college students feeling more CL for a romantic partner experienced more SWLL and more commitment and in turn experienced higher satisfaction with life. Moreover, current research adds to close relationships literature by specifying the nuclear role of SWLL and commitment in the explanation of the relation between CL for a partner and life satisfaction. This can suggest that targeting programs to enhance SWLL as well as commitment helps to increase the life satisfaction of lovers.

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, this study was based on self-report measures that can lead to socially desirable

responses. Secondly, the present study used a convenience sample of undergraduate students which might limit the generalizability of the current findings. As such, the next research should be conducted with individuals of diverse socio-demographic variables (e.g., age, education, financial security). Thirdly, we have not controlled the relationship length as it can affect the intensity of the love components (Sorokowski et al., 2023). Future research is needed for controlling possible confounding variables. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of this research prevents causal inferences. For example, while compassionate love may lead to greater SWL, compassionate love may also result from greater SWL. Future studies employing longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to explore the direction of the links.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, as far as we know, this work is the first to consider the relationships and mechanisms relating to CL for a partner, love satisfaction, commitment, and satisfaction with life. The construct validity of the measures used (CLS-P-SF, SWLLS, COS, and SWLS) was supported, and their internal consistencies were adequate. The brevity of the four measures makes them useful tools for cross-cultural comparisons. They can be utilized for both investigation and clinical aims in future work. Abbreviated measures are suitable for “large-scale surveys, pre-screening packets, longitudinal studies, and experience-sampling studies” (Gosling et al., 2003, p. 505). The findings evidenced that love satisfaction and commitment fully mediated the relation between CL for a romantic partner and satisfaction with life. Our results provide important insights to run next research about programs to increase life satisfaction for Angolans.

Abbreviations

AMOS = Analysis of moment structures,
 CFA = Confirmatory factor analysis
 CFI = Comparative fit index
 CI = Confidence interval
 CL = Compassionate love
 CLS = Compassionate Love Scale
 CLS-P-SF = Short Form Compassionate Love for Partner
 COS = Commitment Scale
 GFI = Goodness of fit index
 RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation
 SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual
 SWB = Subjective well-being
 SWL = Satisfaction with life
 SWLL = Satisfaction with love life
 SWLLS = Satisfaction With Love Life Scale
 SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale
 VIF = Variance Inflation Factor

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Neto Félix: Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Neto Joana:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization.

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