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Psychological Predictors of Life Satisfaction Among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Informed by previous research finding which established evidence of low satisfaction among undergraduates in Nigeria, the purpose of this paper was to examine the psychological variables that would predict satisfaction with life among undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. A cross-sectional ex post facto survey design was adopted and convenient sampling method was used. Three hundred and twenty (118, i.e. 36.9%) male and 202 (63.1%) female students, ages ranging between 16 to 27 years ($M = 28.47$, $SD = 8.76$) participated in this study. Validated scale was used for data collection and the hypothesis stated was confirmed after testing with appropriate statistics. The result showed that NaCh and Hloc significantly predicted satisfaction with life among undergraduates, whereas, anxiety was not a significant predictor. Internals who were high on need achievement were low on satisfaction with life, while externals who were low on need achievement were high on satisfaction with life. Conclusion was reached that professional services would be required for undergraduates with low satisfaction with life in order to orientate them regarding adjustment and coping with reality of life in order to prevent psychological breakdown. A limitation to this study would be the small sample size and the limited psychological variables that were examined. However, further research may make these a focus.

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1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole and or of specific life domains (Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005; Myers & Diener, 1995). This cognitive assessment however is based on how people believe their life should be in relation to how it is (Paschali & Tsitsas, 2009). In a nut shell, life satisfaction refers to the acceptance of one's life circumstances, or the fulfilment of an individual's life's needs as

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a whole. In essence, life satisfaction is a subjective assessment of the quality of one's life (Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001).

The question of what determines or causes life satisfaction has been recurrent in literature and most of the research in this area can be categorized into two major divisions; namely, evidence implicating personality factors (i.e., genetics, inborn traits) and evidence implicating environment factors (i.e., life circumstances and life events).

Supporting the argument that personality plays a role in determining life satisfaction, personality variables such as psychological resilience, assertiveness, empathy, internal locus of control, extraversion, and openness to experience have been found to be related to life satisfaction (Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001). Currently, the literature suggests that personality plays a significant role in an individual's judgment of his satisfaction with life. However, proximal environmental factors (e.g., recent life events) can influence life satisfaction judgments in the short term.

Youth life satisfaction is more than just an outcome of various psychological states (e.g. positive affect, self-esteem), it is also an influential predictor of psychological states and psychosocial systems (e.g. depression, physical health) (Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004). Life satisfaction among youths functions as a mediator and moderator between the environment and behavior (Suldo & Huebner, 2004), between the social support-involvement dimension of authoritative parenting and adolescent problem behavior. Further, support has been provided for the potential mediating role of life satisfaction between stressful life events and internalizing behavior (McKnight, Huebner, & Suldo, 2002). In addition satisfaction with life has been reported to be a buffer against negative effects of stress and the development of psychopathological behavior (e.g. Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Such findings are highly significant to the promotion of positive development in any country or society (Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2008).

Research report has also shown that life satisfaction as a construct has been central within the positive psychology (Gilman & Huebner, 2003) (b) adolescents who have low life satisfaction are more prone to violence (Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2006), destructive and risky behaviors, stealing and robbery (Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2001) and (c) past research in the area of life satisfaction has occurred within America, with most assessment measures being created and validated among American samples (Proctor et al., 2008) hence the need for the assessment of life satisfaction across cultures and specific groups beyond America. In response to the above, Oladipo and Olapegba (2012) were able to establish that there is low satisfaction with life among adolescents in Southwestern Nigeria. However, a limitation to their work was that there was no specification of the factors that may predict satisfaction with life among this population. The focus of the present study therefore was to examine the psychological factors that would predict satisfaction with life among adolescents in Southwestern Nigeria.

That several benefits are associated with very high levels of life satisfaction has been recurrent in the literature, for example, Suldo and Huebner (2006) reported that students with high levels of life satisfaction benefited from many positive outcomes, including: the highest level of social support from all sources, the lowest levels of neuroticism, significantly higher levels of academic, emotional, and social self-efficacy, the lowest emotional and behavioural problems, and superior interpersonal and cognitive functioning, than those with average and low life satisfaction. Gilman and Huebner (2006) found high levels of adolescent life satisfaction to be positively related to grade point average (GPA), interpersonal relations, parental relations, self-esteem, and hope, and to be negatively related to poor attitude towards school, poor attitude towards teachers, social stress, anxiety, depression, and external locus of control.

Men and women have been found to be similar in their overall levels of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) although women have been noted to report more positive and negative affect. Married people are more satisfied with their lives and those with life-long marriages appear to be the most satisfied (Evans & Kelly, 2004). Life satisfaction tends to be stable over time (Cummins, 1998) suggesting a dispositional (Judge & Hulin, 1993), and perhaps, even a genetic component (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994). Fujita and Diener (2005) have examined the life satisfaction set-point (a relatively stable level that an individual will return to after facing

varying life circumstances) reporting that there are longitudinal changes in satisfaction levels for about one-quarter of their respondents.

With the trend in literature, a gap exists with respect to the variables that have been explored that can predict life satisfaction among adolescents and particularly in Nigeria as a nation. It is on this premise that this study embarked on finding out the psychological variables that may predict satisfaction with life among undergraduates. Thus the variables of need achievement motivation, health locus of control and anxiety were examined against life satisfaction and the following hypotheses were tested in line with the purpose of the study. In view of the above, the following hypothesis was tested in the study.

1. Need achievement, Anxiety and Health locus of control will significantly independently and jointly predict satisfaction with life among undergraduates.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

The study is a cross-cultural survey; hence the ex post facto survey research design was adopted. This was deemed fit because there was no conscious or deliberate manipulation of any of the variables of interest in the study, they were only measured as they had occurred.

2.1.1.1. Participants

A total of 320 final year undergraduates who were sampled from four Universities in Southwestern Nigeria participated in the study. 118 males (i.e. 36.9%) and 202 females (i.e. 63.1%), with ages ranging between 16 to 27 years ($M = 28.47$, $SD = 8.76$) participated in the study. The convenient sampling method was used to draw the participants that participated in the study and all participants consented verbally to participate in the research work voluntarily before the research instrument was administered to them.

2.1.1.2 Measures

To measure satisfaction with life, 5 items Likert format Satisfaction with Life Scale was used (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale has consistently shown good psychometric properties and has been used in a number of studies. For example, Abolghasemi and Varaniyab (2010) reported an alpha reliability coefficient of .82; Köker (1991) .80, and for this present study a reliability coefficient of .79 was established. Each item on the scale is scored from 1 to 7 in terms of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. A total score was calculated from the 5 items, the range being 5 to 35. A score of 20 is the middle point, so higher scores indicate high satisfaction with life.

To measure Need achievement, Mclelland’s 9-item nAch was used. It is in the Likert format and the responses ranged between strongly agreed – strongly disagree, some items are in the reversed order. For this study, an Alpha reliability of .70 was established. A score above the mean on the scale indicates a high need achievement, while a score below the mean indicates a low need achievement motivation.

The 18 items Likert format State Anxiety Inventory, which was developed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg and Jacobs (1983), was used to measure Anxiety. It has a 7 response format ranging from almost never, to almost always. A score above the mean is interpreted as high anxiety, while a score below the mean is interpreted as low anxiety. The Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale for the present study is .83.

To measure health Locus of control, the 11-item, 6-point Likert format scale, which was developed by Wallston, Wallston, Kaplan and Maides (1976), was used. A score above the mean is interpreted as being a health external while a score below the mean is interpreted as being a health internal. The Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale for the present study is .75.

2.1.1.2 Procedure

Samples were drawn from three universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The choice of these universities was based on proximity and easy accessibility to the researchers. Basically, therefore, the convenient sampling method was employed for data collection. Personal contact was established in each of the universities from where samples were drawn and assistance was sought for the administration of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were personally taken to the contact in each of the universities and were instructed to adhere strictly to the ethical principles in research (which includes voluntary participation, anonymity, etc.) while administering the questionnaires. Of the total questionnaires that were sent out for administration, only 320 were found good enough for inclusion in the analysis. Others were wrongly filled, partially filled or completely left blank without any response.

2.1.1.3 Data analysis

The linear regression analysis was carried out to test the hypothesis that was stated and the result is presented in the following table.

3. Tables

Table 1. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis showing the joint prediction of psychological factors satisfaction with life

	Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	f	Sig
1.	Regression	268.631	1	268.631	22.562	.000 ^a
	residual	3786.169	318	11.906		
2.	Regression	445.814	2	222.907	19.579	.000 ^b
	residual	3608.986	317	11.385		

a. Predictors: (Constant), needach1

b. Predictors: (Constant), needach1, hloco1

c. Dependent Variable: satwfl

Result in table 1 showed that there is a significant joint prediction of the psychological variables on satisfaction with life. Need achievement motivation and health locus of control significantly jointly predicted satisfaction with life among undergraduates. However, anxiety was excluded as seen in the table because it was not a significant predictor of satisfaction with life.

Table 2. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis showing the independent prediction of psychological factors satisfaction with life

Independent variables	β	Std. Error	t	Remark
Need achievement	.168	.035	4.75	Sig.
Health Locus of control	.127	.032	3.945	Sig.
Anxiety	-.005	.023	-.086	Ns

The result in table 2 shows the independent prediction of each of the variables of interest in the study. The result shows that need achievement motivation and health locus of control significantly independently predicted satisfaction with life, while anxiety was not a significant predictor. Further analysis done revealed that respondents who have Internal locus of control and who are high on need achievement had low satisfaction with life, while respondents who have external locus of control and who are low on need achievement had high satisfaction with life.

4. Discussion

There has not been so much focus on the study of life satisfaction among undergraduates in Nigeria and the few that have been done have not examined such psychological variables that may predict life satisfaction particularly among undergraduates. Oladipo and Olapegba (2012) found that there was an evidence of low satisfaction with life among undergraduates, Oladipo, Olapegba and Ogunronbo (2012) also examined the influence of social support and family status on life satisfaction among undergraduates. A few foreign studies have examined demographic variables and their impact on life satisfaction among adolescents. The purpose of this study as it were was to examine some psychological variables that may predict life satisfaction among undergraduates in southwestern Nigeria. To start with, the result shows that need achievement motivation significantly independently predicted life satisfaction and that those who are high on need achievement motivation and are internals had low satisfaction with life. A possible explanation for this could be that, since human needs are insatiable, and if the Maslow's hierarchy of needs is anything to go by, those who have high need achievement would always aspire to achieve more feat after accomplishing one. Since they are internals, they always take responsibility for their actions and would most likely believe that they could be better off by putting in more efforts into whatever they are doing. They set standards for themselves and they strive towards achieving such standards irrespective of what happens around them. Because of this high need achievement motivation and being internals, what satisfies others may not satisfy them; hence their not being satisfied with their lives. It needs be mentioned however that, these sets of people may be more prone to high anxiety because of their high need for achievement and desire to meet higher goals set for themselves and this may make them feel less satisfied with their lives. On the other hand, those who have low need achievement motivation and are externals seem to be more satisfied with their lives. They are like the exact opposite of the other set. The reason for this could not be farfetched. They are not motivated to achieve (for whatever reasons that may be well known to them), they seem to be 'contented' with their state so much that they do not seem to strive for a higher level compared to others. A possible explanation for this report may be the fact that they are externals. They ascribe the responsibility of anything that happens to them to others and they do not see themselves as active participants and or determinants of their experiences rather, they assume a passive position and usually complain about their experiences with a feeling that they cannot influence whatever happens to them. They are leave things to fate and believe that they cannot change whatever has been destined to them. Anxiety was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction and this thus implies that whether an individual is anxious or not does not actually have any significant impact on whether he is satisfied with his life or not. In other words an anxious person may get over his anxiety and still make something meaningful and satisfying out of his life while someone who is not anxious also may be satisfied with his life.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the psychological predictors of satisfaction with life among undergraduates, the results showed that need achievement motivation and health locus of control significantly independently and jointly predicted life satisfaction among undergraduates, but anxiety was not a significant independent predictor. It was therefore concluded that professional services would be required for undergraduates with low satisfaction with life in order to orientate them regarding adjustment and coping with reality of life in order to prevent psychological breakdown. A limitation to this is study however would be the small sample size and the limited psychological variables that were examined. It is recommended that further research can expand the scope and focus of the study.

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