



## EVIDENCE OF LOW LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper examined satisfaction with life among 1429 undergraduates from Southwestern Nigeria. Ex post facto survey design was adopted and convenient sampling method was used. Four hundred and seventy five (475, i.e. 33.2%) males and 953 (66.8%) females, ages ranging between 16 to 27 years ( $M=28.47$ ,  $SD = 8.76$ ). Validated scale was used for data collection and the two hypotheses stated were confirmed after testing with appropriate statistics. A total of 837 undergraduates (58.57%) had scores less than the midpoint of 20; their mean was 14.03 ( $SD = 2.42$ ). 88 (6.2%) scored exactly 20, while 504 (35.33%) scores were higher than 20. Conclusion was reached that undergraduates have low satisfaction with life and there is no significant difference between males and females regarding satisfaction with life. There is need for further research to find out the factors that account for low satisfaction with life among this sample.*

**Key Words:** Life Satisfaction, Undergraduates, Adolescents, Youths, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

All over the world, Life Satisfaction has been a concern to researchers and this most probably has been necessitated primarily because of the dramatic increase in the occurrence of several life threatening mishaps in different parts of the world, cutting across America, Europe and even Africa. For instance, the memory of the kamikazes' crash into the world trade center in September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 is still fresh in the minds of Americans; the February 2010 Chile tsunami; the earthquake and leakages in nuclear weapons in Japan (Wikipedia, 2011) cannot be forgotten in haste by those who were victims and their relatives.

The African continent is having her own share of these mishaps, with several civil wars and military violence in most African nations, such as Uganda, Libya, Zimbabwe; just to mention a few. Of course Nigeria is not left out too; with the most recent Boko-haram upheaval in the Northern states, religious riots and post election violence in some of the states; the militants of the Niger-Delta region with their abduction of expatriates and citizens, vandalisation of petroleum

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pipelines and similar evils. In the Southwest, there has been violence, killings and maiming as a result of the clash between the different factions of National Union of Road Transport workers. All of these have produced same results (deaths, maiming, displacements, chaos, and unbearable life situations for people), wherever such a thing has taken place.

Observations have shown that the people at the fore of these vices have mainly been youths/adolescents (mostly undergraduates) who are supposed to be meaningful contributors to the development of the nation. What could have been responsible for this? An attempt to answer this question has led to the conduct of this research.

Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole and or of specific life domains (Huebner et al., 2005; Myers and Diener, 1995). Literature has revealed that life satisfaction as a construct has been central within the positive psychology (Gilman and Huebner, 2003). Whereas adult life satisfaction has been studied extensively, the life satisfaction of children and adolescents has only received attention more recently (Proctor, Linley and Maltby, 2008), and it is not known how much attention has been given to the study of this construct in Nigeria despite research findings that life satisfaction can serve as a buffer against the negative effects of stress, psychological problems, and disorders (Proctor, et al, 2008). Research report has also shown that adolescents who have low life satisfaction are more prone to violence (Valois et al. 2006), destructive and risky behaviors (Mac-Donald et al. 2005), stealing and robbery (Valois et al. 2001). Researchers like Proctor, et al (2008) have noted that majority of past research in the area of life satisfaction has occurred within America, with most assessment measures being created and validated among American samples and they recommended that future research should look beyond America and assess life satisfaction across cultures and specific groups.

It is on the premise of the aforementioned problems that this study set out to examine the level of life satisfaction among adolescents in Nigeria. This is deemed necessary because of the upsurge in youth violence, militancy, religious riots, cultism, economic hardship, joblessness and such vices that seem to have characterized the Nigerian society. The purpose of this study therefore, is to examine the level of life satisfaction of adolescents within the Nigeria society, with the view to proposing a workable recommendation based on the research findings.

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 et al. 2004a). Life satisfaction among youths functions as a mediator and moderator between the environment and behaviour (Suldo and Huebner, 2004b), between the social support-involvement dimension of authoritative parenting and adolescent problem behaviour. Further, support has been provided for the potential mediating role of life satisfaction between stressful life events and internalizing behaviour (McKnight et al. 2002). In addition satisfaction with life has been reported to be a buffer against negative effects of stress and the development of psychopathological behaviour (e.g. Suldo and Huebner 2004a). Such findings are highly significant to the promotion of positive development in any country or society (Proctor et al. 2008)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature suggests that most youth report a positive level of life satisfaction, for example, a survey of 5,544 American students found that 11% of those sampled fell below the neutral point with 7% indicating a 'terrible' or 'unhappy existence' (Huebner, Drane, and Valois, 2000). Recent studies have suggested that there are numerous personal benefits associated with very high levels of life satisfaction. For example, Suldo and Huebner (2006) examined whether extremely high life satisfaction was associated with adaptive functioning or maladaptive functioning among American high school students, and found that students who reported very high levels of life satisfaction

benefited from many positive outcomes, including: the highest level of social support from all sources, the least number of internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems, 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.

In a similar study, 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. Further, adolescents reporting high life satisfaction had higher scores on all measures than those reporting low life satisfaction, and reported significantly higher scores on measures of hope, self-esteem, and (internal) locus of control, but lower scores on measures of social stress, anxiety, depression, and (negative) attitudes towards teachers, than those reporting average life satisfaction (Gilman and Huebner, 2006). Moreover, none of the adolescents in the high LS group demonstrated clinical levels of psychological symptoms compared to 42% of the low LS group and 7% of the average LS group. These findings contrast with those found among gifted students for whom it has been suggested that superior intellectual ability leads to increased well-being, however, findings have failed to support this hypothesis (Ash and Huebner, 1998).

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, Locke, 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, it will not be out of place to explore what the situation is in the Nigeria context, so as to be able to empirically establish how adolescents in Nigeria fare with regards to life satisfaction. Two hypotheses are tested in the study. (1) Undergraduates in Nigeria will be less satisfied with life. (2) Gender will not be a significant predictor of life satisfaction among undergraduates.

## **METHOD**

### **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.

### **Participants**

A total of 1429 final year undergraduates, drawn from four Universities in Southwestern Nigeria participated in the study. Gender distribution of participants revealed 475 (33.2%) males and 953 (66.8%) females, with their ages ranging between 16 to 27 years ( $M=28.47$ ,  $SD = 8.76$ ). 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.

### **Measure**

The five item-likert format Satisfaction with Life Scale, which was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, (1985) was used for data collection. 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 co-efficient of .82; Köker (1991), .80 and for this present study a reliability co-efficient 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.

### Procedure

Samples were drawn from two federal and two state universities in southwestern Nigeria. The choice of these universities was based on proximity and easy accessibility to the researcher. 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. Four hundred (400) questionnaires were sent to each of the universities, all were returned back after a period of four (4) weeks. However, only 1429 of the total questionnaires were found good enough for inclusion in the analysis. Others were wrongly filled, partially filled or completely left blank without any response.

### Data Analysis

The SPSS 17.0 was used for data analysis. 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. It was found that a total of 837 undergraduates (58.57%) had scores less than the mid point of 20. The mean for this group was 14.03 ( $SD = 2.42$ ). 88 (6.2%) scored exactly 20, while 504 (35.33%) scores were higher than 20. The mean for the group was 22.84 ( $SD = 4.74$ ). This result indicates that the majority of the undergraduates have low satisfaction with life.

## RESULTS

Statistical analysis revealed that; 308 (21.5%) of the male respondents have low satisfaction with life (Mean =13.79;  $SD=2.42$ ). 837 (58.5%) of the female respondents have low satisfaction with life (Mean =14.03;  $SD=2.40$ ); 167 (11.6%) of male respondents have high satisfaction with life (Mean = 22.66,  $SD=4.57$ ); 425 (29.7%) of female respondents have high satisfaction with life (Mean = 22.84,  $SD = 4.74$ ). The result as presented thus shows that the hypothesis that undergraduates in Nigeria have low satisfaction with life is accepted.

The independent sample t-test was conducted to test the second hypothesis which stated that gender will not be a significant predictor of life satisfaction among undergraduates in Nigeria. The result also confirmed the hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates regarding their satisfaction with life.

Table-1. Summary of independent sample t-test showing gender difference in satisfaction with life of university undergraduate

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	Significance	Remarks
Satisfaction with life	male	475	16.91	5.396	1427	.107	P > .05
	female	954	17.99	5.747			Not significant

## DISCUSSION

Life satisfaction has been described as an overall cognitive assessment of one's quality of life. This assessment is based on how people believe their life should be in relation to how it is. This present study examined life satisfaction among undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. Result showed that undergraduates in southwestern Nigeria have low satisfaction with life and that there is no significant difference between male and female students in the level of satisfaction with their lives.

The finding of this study is at variance with the reports of Huebner, Drane, and Valois, (2000) who worked on 5544 American students' samples and reported that most American youths reported positive level of life satisfaction. In other words, they are more satisfied with their lives. It is also at variance with the findings of Mousavi, Shiani, Mohammadi, Sadjadi, and Tabatabaei (2011) who reported that most Iranian adolescents have high life satisfaction. It needs be mentioned however, that, the findings of this study corroborates an earlier finding reported by Paschali and Tsitsas (2009) who worked on Athenian students and found that most of them have low satisfaction with life. Result of the second hypothesis that gender is not a significant predictor of life satisfaction among undergraduates ( $p > .05$ ) seems to be in line with previous findings by researchers like Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, (1999) who reported that men and women have been found to be similar in their overall levels of life satisfaction, although with women noted to report more positive and negative affect. Paschali and Tsitsas (2009) also reported a similar finding that gender was not a significant discriminate of satisfaction with life among university students.

A lot of things could be responsible for the findings of this research; most youths have differently expressed their dissatisfaction with the social situation in the country, with emphasis on the fact that they feel neglected and unplanned for. This has variously shown in the lack of adequate plans for undergraduates as well as school leavers. The matter has worsen with the recent killings of youth corps members who were on youth service in some parts of Nigeria. There seems to be no social, job, and future security for the youngsters, therefore, it is not surprising that they have low satisfaction with life. A casual interview with an average undergraduate will reveal that there is bitterness against the government of the nation, they seems embittered because they feel there is no hope for their future. The basic structural plans that are expected to be in place for young graduate seems to be lacking and everyone really does not look hopefully and joyfully towards completion of their university education. Instead of being gainfully employed to practice the profession they have learnt in school, a large percentage of the graduates have had to fall back on petty trading and vocational jobs. All of these could have affected the life satisfaction of undergraduates negatively.

It is not uprising that there was no difference between males and females with respect to satisfaction with life; of course, what is good for the geese should be good for the gander. Since both male and female undergraduates are exposed to the same situation, they are more likely to react in the same way, particularly as it relates to satisfaction with life. More so, with the clamor for gender equality and women empowerment that has been on the increase and which has also brought positive changes in the perception of most young ladies now, majority of them are not seeing marriage as a way out of joblessness and social disadvantage, hence the change in their focus and motivation to achievement.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study therefore, is to examine the level of life satisfaction of adolescents within the Nigeria society, with the view to proposing a workable recommendation based on the research findings. It was discovered that there is low life satisfaction among adolescents in Nigeria and that gender is not a significant determinant of satisfaction with life among this population. It therefore means that there is the need for policy makers to pay attention to these set of population since they

are usually referred to as the future of any nation. An adolescent who has low satisfaction with life is more prone to violence (Valois et al. 2006) and destructive & risky behaviors (Mac-Donald et al. 2005), hence, he is a potential danger to himself and others in the society. Conclusion is reached that undergraduates have low satisfaction with life and there is no significant difference between males and females regarding satisfaction with life. There is need for further research to find out the factors that account for low satisfaction with life among this sample.

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