



# Influence of socio-demographic factors, perceived happiness and psychological distress on life satisfaction among civil servants in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Civil servants' life satisfaction is increasingly relevant as a key factor in personal well-being and organizational productivity. This study investigated the influence of socio-demographic factors, perceived happiness and psychological distress on life satisfaction among civil servants in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. Using cross sectional research design and purposive sampling technique, three hundred and two participants were sampled (48.7% men and 51.3% women). Their age ranged from 22 to 59 years with mean age of 43 years ( $SD = 9.81$ ). Self-report questionnaires, namely, Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), General Happiness Scale (GHS) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (KPDS) were employed for data collection in this study. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, multiple correlation and hierarchical regression. Result showed that participant's age, job level, years of experience, perceived happiness had positive relationships with life satisfaction, while psychological distress significantly had a negative relationship with life satisfaction. In the regression, participant's age, job level, years of experience, perceived happiness significantly predicted life satisfaction. Psychological distress negatively predicted life satisfaction. Heads of government agencies and other agencies should make consider the roles of the predictor variables in this study in order to improve employees' happiness and minimize psychological distress in order to enhance their life satisfaction.

## Introduction

Life satisfaction is recognized as a key factor affecting individuals and organizational well-being in a modern place of work. Life satisfaction is the individual's cognitive judgment about comparisons based on the compatibility of their own living conditions with the standards (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985). It is a positive evaluation of the conditions of life, a judgment that balance favorably against your standards or expectations (Summer & Knight, 2001), and symbolizes an overarching criterion or ultimate outcome of human experience (Andrew & Withey, 1976). From organizational management approach, life satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of individual's level of contentment which forms one of the major factors in quality, performance, productivity, business effectiveness and profit (Ferguson, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2015; Szczygiel, & Mikolajczak, 2017).

Life satisfaction differs from life happiness as the latter is an emotional state that contributes to life satisfaction (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991). According to Szczygiel and Mikolajczak (2017) happiness is taken as a sense of subjective enjoyment of individual's life. However, subjective well-being encompasses occurrences of pleasant emotions, minimal levels of negative moods and high measures of life satisfaction, which positively affect the perceived quality of life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Huebner, Suldo, & Valois, 2005). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) stated that happiness being positive feeling of subjective well-being consistently elevates

satisfaction with life among employees, however, happiness serves as a protective factor that contradict psychopathology (Seligman, 2005). Happiness is a favorable cognitive and emotional evaluation of individuals regarding various areas of life such as marriage, professional life, health, etc. (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Civil servants who are happy appear to profit in multiple areas of life including social, work and family domains. They have greater self-control to cope with negative situations, and possibly more helpful, pro-social and satisfied (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

According to Peterson and Seligman's (2004) findings, employees' greater level of perceived happiness subsequently had greater level of life satisfaction and their extent of orientations to happiness afterward determines subject's level of life satisfaction. Other authors (e.g. Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White, & Lehman, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Haybron, 2006) have also reported that there exists a progressive relationship between happiness and life satisfaction, such that increase in happiness benefit individual's emotional level and results to more positive community behaviours. Thomas, Hudelson and Patrick (2004) discovered that happiness associated with mental and physical health status. Happiness is one of the concepts in positive psychology that has been noted to correlate with life satisfaction (Martin, 2007; Layard, 2005), and promotes personal growths, human strength, performance and productivity (Emmons & Shelton, 2005; Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006).

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Many studies have attempted to explore the role of perceived happiness in life satisfaction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Nemati, & Maralani, 2016; Okwaraji, Nduanya, Okorie, & Okechukwu, 2017; Naseem, 2018).

Life satisfaction can be potentially associated with psychological health (Koç, & Kiziltepe, 2017), as employees with better mental health or absence of psychological distress are more satisfied with life (Dessie, Ebrahim, & Awoke, 2013; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, Sinniah, Maniam, & Kannan, 2007). Psychological distress is the unique discomforting, emotional state such as anxiety, depression and stress experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person (Kessler, Barker, Colpe, Epstein, Gfroerer, Hiripi, et al., 2003). Samaranayake, Arroll and Fernando (2014) revealed that life satisfaction is negatively associated with depression, anxiety and loneliness while positively associated with health. Other researchers have found that there were negative relationships between physical and mental health and life satisfaction among employees who are faced with challenges in their respective job responsibilities, especially among those who encounters anxiety, depression, mental distress (Butterworth, Leach, Rodgers, Broom, Olesen, & Strazdins, 2011; Caruso, 2006; Tucker & Folkard, 2012; Drobnic, Benham, & Prag, 2010; Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003; Kumar, Shaheen, Rasool, & Shafi, 2016; Vasoontara, Matthew, & Strazdins, 2013). The appraisal model (Scherer, 1999) indicated that employees with a distorted perceived happiness and psychological wellbeing posited threat to life satisfaction. Many studies have attempted to explore the role of psychological distress in life satisfaction (Buchanan, Milroy, Baker, Thompson, & Levack, 2010; Sherlaw-Johnson, Datta, & McCarthy, 2008). However, none of these published studies has considered the collective roles played by perceived happiness and psychological distress in life satisfaction, especially among civil servants.

More so, socio-demographic factors have been confirmed to have relationships with life satisfaction (Moraitou, Kolovou, Papasozomenou, & Paschoula, 2006). Specifically, studies have revealed that age significant related with life satisfaction (Yiğit, Dilmaç, & Deniz, 2011; Blanchflower & Oswald 2008). Shilling (2006) found that one's life course has been established to correlate with life satisfaction, as young adults are likely to also have high life satisfaction than people in later in life. Likewise, evidence has shown that life satisfaction may fluctuate from age to age, at least in some countries (Mehlsen, Platz, & Fromholt, 2003). Karababa (2012) revealed that job levels of participants significantly serve as predictor of life satisfaction. Štreimikienė and Grundey (2009) observed that employees' levels of experiences at work and the quality of their working life is a very important factor in overall satisfaction. James and Spiro (2006) suggested that experience gained as a result of gainful employment on a job contributes life satisfaction.

The present study investigates the influence of socio-demographic factors, perceived happiness and psychological distress on life satisfaction among civil servants in Ibadan Metropolis; Nigeria. The finding of the study is potentially relevant in the management of employees of local, state and federal government ministries, as the assessment of life satisfaction among these employees will help in the effective harnessing of the resources in these employees. In view of this, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Socio-demographic factors (age year of experience and job level/position) will significantly predict life satisfaction.

2. Perceived happiness and psychological distress will significantly predict life satisfaction.
3. Psychological distress will significantly predict life satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

Three hundred and two (302) participants were sampled for the study, using purposive sampling technique. The sample size was derived using the Krejcie and Morgan's (1977) formula for sampling method. The sample was drawn from active civil servants working within Ibadan North Local Government Area. The setting has about 15 departments, with more than 2,000 personnel working at the secretariat. The location is situated at the centre of the city (metropolis) (Oyo State Government, 2004). Therefore, the participants in this study were easily reachable and purposively chosen. Gender distribution showed that 147 (48.7%) were men and 155 (51.3%) were women. Age of the participants ranged from 22 to 59 years with mean of 43 years ( $SD = 9.81$  years). Also, 167(58.3%) participants were Christians, 111(36.8%) were Muslims while 15(5.0%) of the respondents were from other traditional religion. Twenty-two (7.3%) of the respondents had primary/secondary school educational qualifications while 138(45.7%) respondents had NCE/OND educational qualification while 122(40.4%) were first degree/HND holders and 13(4.3%) respondents had Masters' degree and 7(2.3%) had Ph.D. Based on their marital status, 28 (9.3%) were single, 220(72.8%) were married, 39(12.9%) were divorced/separated, and 15 (5.0%) were widowed. By ethnicity, Majority of the respondents (191, 63.2%) were Yoruba, 34 (11.3%) were Hausa, 74 (24.5%) were Igbo, and 3 (1.0%) were from other ethnic groups. Average years of work experience was 15.72 ( $SD = 7.18$  years).

### Instruments

Three instruments were used in the study: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SwLS, Diener et al., 1985); General Happiness Scale (GHS, Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (KPS, Kessler et al., 2003).

#### *Satisfaction with Life Scale (SwLS)*

The SwLS is an assessment measure developed by Diener et al. (1985). It consists of 5 items designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction, as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life. Sample of item from the scale include: 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal', 'The conditions of my life are excellent', 'I am satisfied with my life' e.t.c. The response format of the scale is a 7-point Likert format, ranging from, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree. The maximum and minimum scores on the scale were 35 and 7 respectively. Diener et al. (1985) reported a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of .72. The scale has been used in Nigerian samples with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of .87 and 2-month test-retest correlation coefficient of .82 (Okwaraji et al., 2017). The present researchers in this study also obtained a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of .82. Higher score on the scale implies higher level of life satisfaction and low score indicates low level of life satisfaction

#### *General Happiness Scale (GHS)*

The GHS was developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). The 4-item scale was designed to measure subjective happiness. The items were completed using a 7-point response format, 1 = Not a very happy person, 2 = Not a happy person, 3 = Somewhat not a happy person, 4 = Undecided, 5 = Somewhat

happy person, 6 = A happy person, 7 = A very happy person. Sample of item of the scale includes: ‘In general, I consider myself’, ‘Some people are generally not very happy’, ‘Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be’, etc. The developers of the scale documented .79 to .94 Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient of internal consistency. The scale has been used in Nigeria by Okwaraji et al. (2017), who recorded .81 internal consistency and .72 test retest reliability coefficient. The minimum score was 4 and the maximum score was 28. In this study a Cronbach alpha of .88 was obtained. Higher score on this scale denotes higher level of happiness and vice versa.

*Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (KPDS)*

The 10-item KPDS was developed by Kessler et al. (2003). The scale described psychological distress as the unique discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person. Sample items of the scale include: “About how often did you feel tired out for no good reasons”, “About how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down”, etc. In addition, the items of the scale consist of a non-specific psychological distress and are about the level of anxiety and depressive symptoms a person may have experienced in the most past 30 days such item like: “About how often did you feel nervous”, “About how often did you feel depressed” etc. The scale was scored from 4 = All of the time, 3 = Most of the time, 2 = Some of the time, 1 = A little of the time, 0= None of the time. Adeniyi, Rahheem, and Olufemi-Adeniyi, (2018) reported .65 Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of internal consistency for KPDS in Nigerian sample. Scores rated between a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 40.

Low scores indicate low levels of psychological distress and high scores indicate high levels of psychological distress. In this study Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .56

**Procedure**

The researchers obtained permission from the head of each department to meet the participants for the purpose of the study. With the permission given, the researchers approached the participants in their departments to inform the participants on the purposes, objectives and importance of the study. Confidentiality of the participants was assured and all the queries for clarification were answered. Those who agreed to participate in the study received the questionnaire and completed it. The researcher expressed gratitude the participants, head of departments and the management after the administration of the questionnaires, for their cooperation throughout the process of the data collection. The collection of data lasted for two weeks excluding the weekends. Three hundred and ten (310) questionnaires were administered, but three hundred and two (302) questionnaires were returned, properly filled, and used for analyses.

**Design/Statistics**

This study employed cross sectional research design, correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were used for data analysis to test the hypotheses of the study. Correlations and regression were appropriate because the study aimed at determining the relationship that exist among interested variables and their predicting values and strengths on the dependent variable. Hypothesis one was tested using multiple correlation while hypothesis two was tested using hierarchical regression.

**Results**

**Table 1. Summary of Multiple Correlation Showing the association among demographic factors, perceived happiness, psychological distress and life satisfaction**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1. Age	-						42.62	9.81
2. Years of Experience	.77**	-					15.72	7.18
3. Job Levels	.63**	.80**	-				7.70	2.42
4. Perceived Happiness	.19**	.24**	.11	-			19.44	6.25
5. Psychological Distress	.02	-.01	.02	-.22**	-		23.21	6.52
6. Life Satisfaction	.27**	.32**	.18**	.64**	-.23**	-	23.06	7.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N=302

**Table 2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Coefficients for Socio-demographic factors (Age, Years of experience and Job Level), Perceived Happiness, Psychological Distress and Life Satisfaction**

Variables	B	beta	t	F-change	R <sup>2</sup> -change	R	Sig.
Age	.05	.06	.74**	23.27	.07	.07	.030
Years of experience	.43	.44	4.01***	34.19	.11	.18	.000
Job level	-.61	-.21	-2.30**	9.95	.03	.21	.020
Perceived happiness	.63	.56	12.30***	207.58	.41	.62	.000
Psychological distress	-.11	-.10	-2.40**	17.34	.05	.67	.019

Note. \*\*\*p< .001; \*\*p< .05; N=302

Table 1 revealed the that age, years of experience, job position of the participants, and perceived happiness significantly had positive relationships with life satisfaction. Psychological distress significantly shown negative relationship with life satisfaction. The results showed that the more age of participants, years of experience, job level and perceived happiness of the participants was associated with more life satisfaction. The more their psychological distress, the worse their satisfaction with life. There was a significant correlation between socio-demographic factors (age, years of experience

and job level/position) and life satisfaction of the civil servants in this study.

Results in Table 2 revealed that age was a significant predictor of life satisfaction (B = .05) signifying that for each unit rise in age, life satisfaction increases by .05 units. Age accounted for about 7% of the variance in life satisfaction. Years of experience significantly predicted of life satisfaction, with the B of .43 suggesting that for each unit rise in years of experience, life satisfaction increases by .43 units. Years of experience accounted for about 11% of the variance that occurred in life satisfaction. Job level was a significantly

predictor of life satisfaction, with the  $B$  of .61 indicating that for each unit rise in job level, life satisfaction reduces by .61 units. Job level accounted for 3% of the variance in life satisfaction. Perceived happiness significantly predicted life satisfaction. Each one unit change in the perceived happiness of the civil servants explained about .63 amount of change in life satisfaction. Perceived happiness accounted for 41% of the variance in life satisfaction. Psychological distress negatively predicted life satisfaction. Each unit change in the civil servants' psychological distress brings about -.11 amount of change in life satisfaction. Psychological distress accounted for 5% of the variance in life satisfaction.

### Discussion

This study investigated the contributions of socio-demographic profile, perceived happiness and psychological distress on life satisfaction among civil servants in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. All the hypotheses were confirmed. The first hypothesis stated that socio-demographic factors (age year of experience, and job level/position) will significantly predict life satisfaction which was supported by the result. Age of the participants positively predicted life satisfaction which reinforced the outcome of past research (e.g., Yiğit et al., 2011; Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). In their study, age significantly serves as the key factors among many other socio-demographic profiles of civil servants that associated with satisfaction with life of the government employees. As these employees increases in their age, the better their life satisfaction. Other researchers (e.g., Mehlsen et al., 2003; Shilling, 2006) also found out that age was related with life satisfaction.

Years of experience of employees in this study significantly predicted life satisfaction. The more their experiences about their job, the better their life satisfaction. The outcome supported the findings of Štreimikienė and Grundey, (2009) who discovered in their study, that employees' level of experiences at work was a very important contributing factor in overall satisfaction. The result of this study suggests that experience gained as a result of gainful employment on a particular job contributes to life satisfaction of employees, which aligned with James and Spiro (2006)'s finding. Similarly, job level was found to negatively predict life satisfaction of civil servants. As these employees increase in their level or position of their job the less their life satisfaction. The result aligned with the findings of the study by Karababa (2012) who revealed that job level of participants significantly serves as an important factor among other socio-demographic factors of employees that was associated with life satisfaction.

The second hypothesis which stated that perceived will significantly predict life satisfaction was also supported. The result revealed that perceived happiness had a positive relationship with life satisfaction, which indicated that the more civil servants' perceived happiness, the better their satisfaction with life. This result supported previous research (Martin, 2007; Layard, 2005; Linley et al., 2006) showing that happiness was associated with life satisfaction and hence promotes personal growths, human strength, performance and productivity. Likewise, the study's result also confirmed Lyubomirsky et al.'s (2005) finding that civil servants who were happy appear to gain so much from areas of life including social, work and family domains. These individuals are physically healthier and have greater self-control to cope with negative situations, and possibly were more helpful, pro-social and satisfied relationships. Lyubomirsky's (2008) findings that happiness elevates satisfaction with life among employees is also supported. Civil servants who are happy are satisfied with their life and fulfilled in their job-related duties. This result was supported by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as employees' level of happiness progressively predict their level of life satisfaction.

The third hypothesis which stated that psychological distress will significantly predict life satisfaction was also established. Psychological distress of the civil servants had a negative relationship with life satisfaction, which implies that, the more psychological distress, the poorer their satisfaction with life. As such, this outcome confirmed the finding of past studies (e.g., Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003; Drobic et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2016; Samaranayake et al., 2014; Vasoontara et al., 2013) who revealed that life satisfaction was negatively associated with depression, anxiety, loneliness and other components of psychological distress. Individuals who are experiencing any forms psychological distress tends to negatively view their life satisfaction. This outcome demonstrates that as employees encounter anxiety, stress, depression and other psychological distress related conditions, they feel less satisfy about their life.

### Limitation and suggestions for further studies

This study is not without limitation which should be acknowledged. First, the study recruited participants from the Ibadan North Secretariat (employees working in one of the secretariats situated at the centre of the metropolis) which could limited the generalization of the study to other employees in other secretariats of the state and other state employees outside the scope of study. Future research should try to cover other categories of state employees. Second, the purposive sampling method utilized in the study could additionally limit the generalization of the study, being a non-parametric sampling method has its deficiencies. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the research design could also limit the generalization of the study. Therefore, inferences regarding the causal nature of the research result cannot be made.

### Conclusion

The study showed that age, job level, years of experience, perceived happiness significantly revealed positive prediction and relationship with life satisfaction among civil servants. Psychological distress of the civil servants showed negative prediction and relationship with life satisfaction. This outcome highlighted the significance of employee's age, years of experience, job level, perceived happiness and psychological distress in the improvement of employee's life satisfaction. The outcome of this study has implications for civil servants' effective and productive living. This study therefore recommends that heads of organizations and government agencies generally should consider civil servant's socio-demographic characteristics, perceived happiness, and psychological distress in efforts to improve civil servant's life satisfaction

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