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Personality traits, happiness and life satisfaction, in a sample of Nigerian adolescents

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Abstract

Happiness is said to be associated with the three basic elements of subjective well-being such as frequent and repeated positive affect, elevated life satisfaction and uncommon negative affect. The Big five personality inventory, the Subjective happiness scale (SHS) and the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) were used to assess personality traits, happiness and life satisfaction among 480 adolescents. Result revealed various personality traits, levels of life satisfaction and happiness among the respondents.

Keywords: Personality traits, Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Personality traits are enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to and thinking about the environment and about oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of personal and social context [1]. An individual's personality has been found to predict how that person reacts to other people, how he articulates and solves problems and how he is affected by stressful events in his environment [2, 3, 4]. Trait theorists in Psychology using factor analysis identified five personality traits they called the big five personality traits. These are: agreeableness, neuroticism, and extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness [5, 6]. These five traits have been linked to various characters of individuals and have been associated with mental health [7] as well as happiness and life satisfaction.

Kesebir and Diener [8] see happiness as a mental state of well-being characterized by positive emotions that ranged from contentment to profound delight. Happiness is said to be associated with the three basic elements of subjective well-being such as frequent and repeated positive affect, elevated life satisfaction and uncommon negative affect [9, 10]. Equally, Argyle *et al.* [11] argued that people usually define happiness as experiencing a positive affecting state such as pleasure, or contented with life as a whole or partially. Empirically happiness has been found to lead to a number of positive outcomes [12, 13]; and that adolescents who experience high levels of happiness show less emotional and behavioural problems [14].

Diener *et al.* [15] posited that life satisfaction refers to a person's subjective and global evaluations of the positivity of his or her life as a whole or with specific life dimensions such as family life or school experience. Indeed, it has variously been argued that life satisfaction tends to vary over time and that in the long run even painful or traumatic experiences do not change it significantly [10].

According to UNICEF [16] adolescence is the period of human development lasting between the ages of ten to nineteen years. It is seen as a stage in individual growth and development associated with wide fluctuations in behavior. Furthermore, Arnett [17] maintained that adolescence is a time of storm and stress characterized by heightened periods of turmoil where several types of problems are more likely to develop and occur. This had made many researches on adolescence to focus more on negative psychological constructs like depression and anxiety affecting adolescents [18, 19].

However, some studies have revealed high degrees of happiness and life satisfaction in most children and adolescents [20, 21, 22]. Other studies had equally revealed that regardless of culture or wealth, many

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children rate themselves as being at least moderately happy [23, 24]. In their study on Filipinos adolescents' conception of happiness, Tkach, and Lyubomirsky [25] posited that personality traits can mediate happiness, especially extraversion.

Furthermore, it has been reported that High extraversion and low neuroticism predict happiness in adults and adolescents [26, 27].

In their own finding, Holder and Klassen [28] opined that high sociability and low emotionality are predictors of children's happiness. With regards to character strengths, Peterson *et al.* [29] argued that zest; gratitude, hope, and love are the character strengths most often connected with high life satisfaction and happiness, both in adults and youths.

Happiness has been reported to positively correlate with life satisfaction in adolescents [30, 31]. Furthermore, in their study on momentary happiness and role of psychological need satisfaction, Howell *et al.* [32] posited that hour-by-hour ratings of psychological need satisfaction correlated with momentary happiness. Personality is seen as a key element in happiness due to its connection with people's reaction to emotional stimuli and duration of emotional reactions [33]. Arguing further, Caspi [34] said that certain types of genetically predisposed qualities such as temperament that are measured early in life usually predict whether a child will grow up to be happy or depressed during adulthood.

Since no known study had evaluated the relationship between personality traits, happiness and life satisfaction in a sample of Nigerian adolescents, the present study is an attempt to look at this concept and provide a baseline data for future studies in Nigeria on the relationship between these variables among adolescents.

It will also make recommendations on the need to screen and identify Nigerian adolescents who may have low happiness and life satisfaction indices, as well as their personality profiles, so that adequate positive psychological support will be provided for them to help them adjust normally and make meaningful contributions to national development.

The study hypotheses are

- (1) there will be varying degrees of personality traits, happiness and life satisfaction among Nigerian adolescents who took part in the study.
- (2) There will be gender differences in the levels of happiness and life satisfaction among adolescents.
- (3) Personality traits and life satisfaction will have significant relationship with happiness among adolescents.

METHOD

Design

This is a cross sectional descriptive study carried out between August and October 2017.

Subjects

Subjects for the study were male and female adolescents attending secondary schools in Owerre metropolis Imo state, south east Nigeria. The choice of schools reflects the type of secondary schools within the metropolis. These are public, mission and private secondary schools. There are two local government councils within the metropolis: Owerre south and Owerre north. From each local Government two each of public, mission and private secondary schools were selected

using simple random sampling procedure, making a total of 6 secondary schools per local government and 12 secondary schools from the two local governments. Then from each school 40 students made up of 20 males and 20 females who were within the adolescent age range of 10-19 years were again selected using the same sampling procedure. Using the formula for minimum sample size calculation for a prevalence study [35] a total of 480 students (240 males and 240 females) were sampled. This number therefore forms the population of the study. Inclusion criteria were students who fall within the adolescent age range of 10-19 years, those who reported not being sick as at the time of data collection and those who consented to participate. Exclusion criteria were students who were below the age of ten years, those who were above the age of 19 years, those who were sick and those who did not consent to participate. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the state schools management board and the school authorities concerned while ethical permit was obtained from Imo state university Ethics Committee. All the subjects gave their consent to participate in the study.

Measures

Data for the study was collected by the authors. The subjects were given self administered instrument that was made up of four parts. Part one contained basic socio-demographic information such as age, gender, religion and current class in school. Part two was the big five personality inventory [36]. This is a 44-item inventory that assesses personality from a five-dimensional perspective.

The five dimensions are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. The scale is rated based on a 5- point Likert format ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'. The higher the score in each subscale the more the respondent seems to consider the personality characteristics of him or herself. The average current reliability study for the Big five inventory was .75, while the current reliability of each of the subscales were Extraversion = .69; Agreeableness = .70; Conscientiousness = .72; Neuroticism = .75 and Openness = .74 [37]. Furthermore this scale has been used for studies in Nigeria [38]. This study was conducted at Owerre, South East Nigeria.

Part three was the subjective Happiness Scale [39].

This is a four item measure of global subjective happiness. Lyubomirsky and Lepper [39] opined that the SHS reflects a broader and more molar category of wellbeing and taps into more global psychological phenomena.

In completing the SHS, respondents rate the four items on different Likert scales, each ranging from 1 to 7. Participants are asked to circle the point on the scale that they feel is most appropriate in describing them. The first item asks respondents whether, in general, they consider themselves to be (1) 'not a very happy person' to (7) 'a very happy person'. The second item asks if, compared to their peers, they consider themselves to be (1) 'less happy' to (7) 'more happy'. Both the third and fourth items give descriptions and ask 'to what extent does this characterization describe you?' with responses ranging from 'not at all' to 'a great deal'. Scores are totaled for the four items, and range from 4 to 28. For ease of analysis, we dichotomized happiness into; "happy" and "not happy". Thus average scores ranging from 0-15 are classified as "not happy", while scores ranging from 16-24 are classified as "happy". For this study the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.81 and the two week test - retest reliability coefficient was 0.72. The SHS takes approximately two minutes to complete.

Part four was the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) [40]. The SWLS was used to measure life satisfaction among the respondents. This is a 5 item instrument that measures life satisfaction on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Sample items in the scale include: I am satisfied with my life and my life is close to my ideal. Scores on this scale ranged from 5-35. A total score for a respondent is obtained by adding his or her responses to the five items of the scale. Scores ranging from 5-9 = extremely dissatisfied; 10-14 = dissatisfied; 15-19 = slightly dissatisfied; 20= neutral; 21-25 = slightly satisfied; 26-30 = satisfied; 31-35= extremely satisfied [40].

However for ease of analysis, in the present study we dichotomized life satisfaction into satisfied and not satisfied. Thus scores ranging from 5-20 = not satisfied, while scores ranging from 21-35 = satisfied. The SWLS is the most widely used measure for assessing life satisfaction to date [41]. The SWLS items were said to be global rather than specific in nature thereby allowing respondents to weigh domains of their lives in terms of their own values [42]. The 2 month test-retest correlation coefficient of the scale was reported to be 0.82 and an alpha coefficient of 0.87 [40]. In a recent study among college students AL-Khatib [41] reported an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.85 and a two week test –retest reliability coefficient of 0.79. For this study the internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.83 and the two week test – retest reliability coefficient was 0.74.

Data Analysis

Data for the study was analyzed using the Statistical package for social science, SPSS version 20.0. Percentages and the Pearson’s chi squared test were performed to find relationships between variables. The level of significance chosen for this study was $p \leq 0.05$ at 95% confidence interval.

RESULTS

Age of respondents ranged from 10-19 years (mean age= 14.78; SD =1.91). There was equal representation of males and females (50% each), all were Christians. 33.75% were in the junior secondary (JSS), while 66.25% were in the senior secondary (SS). The following personality traits were manifested by the respondents: openness 13.5%, conscientiousness 20.6%, extraversion 24.6%, agreeableness 24.4% and neuroticism 16.9%. Furthermore, 82.5% of the respondents were happy as against 17.5% who said they were not happy. In the area of life satisfaction 83.5% were satisfied with life, while 16.5% were not satisfied as shown in table 1 below. Result further revealed significant association between personality traits and age group, $\chi^2 = 58.68$; $P \leq 0.01$, whereas the association between age group and happiness and age group and life satisfaction respectively were not significant as shown in table 2 below. Equally there was significant association between personality traits and gender $\chi^2 = 23.95$; $P \leq 0.01$. However no significant association was noticed between happiness and gender as well as life satisfaction and gender. This is shown in table 3 below. With regards to class in school, significant association was noticed between personality traits and class in school, $\chi^2 = 44.9$; $P \leq 0.00$. While relationship between happiness and class in school as well as life satisfaction and class in school were not significant, as shown in table 4 below. Interestingly, significant association was noticed between personality traits and happiness $\chi^2 = 18.79$; $P \leq 0.00$, as well as life satisfaction and happiness $\chi^2 = 214.17$; $P \leq 0.00$ as shown in table 5 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Socio Demographic Variables, Personality Traits, Happiness and Life Satisfaction among the Respondents

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
GENDER		
Male	240	50
Female	240	50
AGE (in years)		
10-14	224	46.7
15-19	256	53.3
RELIGION		
Christianity	480	100
CLASS IN SCHOOL		
Junior secondary	162	33.75
Senior secondary	318	66.25
PERSONALITY		
Openness	65	13.5
Conscientiousness	99	20.6
Extraversion	118	24.6
Agreeableness	117	24.4
Neuroticism	81	16.9
HAPPINESS		
Happy	396	82.5
Not happy	84	17.5
LIFE SATISFACTION		
Satisfied	401	83.5
Not satisfied	79	16.5

Table 2: Personality traits, Happiness and Life Satisfaction among the Age Groups

	AGE GROUP	
	10-14 YEARS	15-19 YEARS
PERSONALITY TRAITS		
Openness	28 (12.5)	37 (14.5)
Conscientiousness	43 (19.2)	56 (21.9)
Extraversion	76 (33.9)	42 (16.4)
Agreeableness	51 (22.8)	66 (25.8)
Neuroticism	26 (11.6)	55 (21.4)
	$\chi^2 = 58.68$; $P \leq 0.01^*$	
HAPPINESS		
Happy	183 (81.6)	213 (83.2)
Not Happy	41 (18.4)	43 (16.8)
	$\chi^2 = 4.924$; $P \text{ value} = 0.841^{NS}$	
LIFE SATISFACTION		
Satisfied	183 (81.6)	218(85.1)
Not Satisfied	41 (18.4)	38(14.9)
	$\chi^2 = 10.774$; $P \text{ value} = 0.292^{NS}$	

*= Significant NS= Not Significant

Table 3: Personality traits, Happiness and Life Satisfaction among Gender

	GENDER	
	MALE(N1=240)	FEMALE(N2=240)
PERSONALITY TRAITS		
Openness	30 (12.5)	35 (14.6)
Conscientiousness	45 (18.7)	54 (22.5)
Extraversion	81 (33.8)	37 (15.4)
Agreeableness	45 (18.7)	72 (30.0)
Neuroticism	39 (16.3)	42 (17.5)
	$\chi^2 = 23.95$; P value =0.00*	
HAPPINESS		
Happy	203 (84.5)	193 (80.4)
Not Happy	37 (15.5)	47 (19.6)
	$\chi^2 = 1.443$; P value=0.23 NS	
LIFE SATISFACTION		
Satisfied	206 (85.8)	195 (81.2)
Not Satisfied	34 (14.2)	45 (18.8)
	$\chi^2 =1.833$; P value=0.176 NS	

*= Significant NS = Not Significant

Table 4: Personality Traits, Happiness and Life Satisfaction among Class in School

	CLASS IN SCHOOL	
	JSS (N1=162)	SS (N2=318)
PERSONALITY TRAITS		
Openness	21(12.9)	45 (14.2)
Conscientiousness	20 (12.3)	79 (24.8)
Extraversion	67 (41.4)	51(16.0)
Agreeableness	32 (19.8)	85 (26.7)
Neuroticism	22 (13.6)	58 (18.3)
	$\chi^2 = 44.9$; P value=0.00*	
HAPPINESS		
Happy	133(82.0)	262(82.3)
Not Happy	29(18.0)	56 (17.7)
	$\chi^2 =0.216$; P value=0.898 NS	
LIFE SATISFACTION		
Satisfied	131(80.8)	269 (84.5)
Not Satisfied	31(19.2)	49 (15.5)
	$\chi^2 =1.006$; P value=0.605 NS	

*= Significant NS = Not Significant

TABLE 5: Personality Traits, Life Satisfaction and Happiness

	HAPPINESS	
	Happy (N=396)	Not Happy (N=84)
PERSONALITY		
Openness	47 (11.9)	18 (21.4)
Conscientiousness	79 (19.9)	20 (23.8)
Extraversion	112 (28.3)	6 (7.2)
Agreeableness	93 (23.5)	24 (28.6)
Neuroticism	65 (16.4)	16 (19.0)
	$\chi^2 = 18.79$; P value =0.001*	

LIFE SATISFACTION		
Satisfied	376 (99.9)	25 (29.8)
Not Satisfied	20 (0.1)	59 (70.2)
	$\chi^2 = 214.17$; P value =0.000*	

*= Significant

DISCUSSION

The result of this study had revealed various personality traits, levels of life satisfaction and happiness among the respondents. For instance, the following personality traits were manifested by the respondents: openness 13.5%, conscientiousness 20.6%, extraversion 24.6%, agreeableness 24.4% and neuroticism 16.9%. With regards to happiness and life satisfaction, majority of the respondents were happy and satisfied with their lives. For instance 82.5% of the respondents were happy and 83.5% were satisfied with life. This pattern of finding corroborates earlier reports which posited that Happiness was associated with the three basic elements of subjective well-being such as frequent and repeated positive affect, elevated life satisfaction and uncommon negative affect [9, 10]. Haslam *et al.* [43] equally reported that personality traits were significantly associated with subjective well-being. They further reported that, all the personality traits were positively correlated with subjective well-being except for neuroticism which showed a negative relationship to subjective well-being. In the present study, only 16.9% of the respondents exhibited the trait of neuroticism. This may further explain the high levels of happiness and life satisfaction noticed among the respondents. These findings corroborate previous reports that High extraversion and low neuroticism predict happiness in adults and adolescents, and that personality traits can mediate happiness, especially extraversion and openness to experience [25, 26, 27]. Furthermore, the high levels of happiness and life satisfaction noticed among the respondents may be associated with the assumption that Nigerians are generally happy people, and adolescents due to their age bracket, are still being catered for by their parents and caregivers. All of them are students and in Nigeria parents and caregivers see it as a task to ensure that their wards do not lack any necessity while in school. All their basic needs including tuition and money for daily upkeep are usually provided for them. Furthermore, Nigeria parents are usually very proud that their children go to school as they believe that children are old age insurance for couples. Since all their basic needs are usually provided while in school, the adolescents do not have much external distractions regarding their upkeep in school. Therefore, they appear not to have any external stressor to make them unhappy and not satisfied with life. In this regard, Suldo and Huebner [14] posited that adolescents who experience high levels of happiness show less emotional and behavioural problems; whereas Diener *et al.* [15] maintained that life satisfaction refers to a person's subjective and global evaluations of the positivity of his or her life as a whole or with specific life dimensions such as family life or school experience.

Result revealed significant association between personality traits and age group, personality traits and gender. This pattern of finding has been documented in an earlier study [38]. Equally, significant association was noticed between personality traits and happiness. This is not surprising because previous study has documented similar findings. For instance Kim-Prieto *et al.* [33] reported that personality is seen as a key element in happiness due to its connection with people's reaction to emotional stimuli and duration of emotional reactions. Furthermore, Happiness has been reported to positively correlate with life satisfaction in adolescents [30, 31].

CONCLUSION

Generally the study noticed high levels of life satisfaction and happiness among the adolescents who took part in the study. Notwithstanding about 17.5% and 16.5% still reported not being happy

and satisfied with life respectively. In this regard there is need to introduce positive psychology measures in schools that will impact positively in the happiness and life satisfaction profiles of adolescents. Government should also try to enhance the economic wellbeing of parents since it has been documented that adolescents' perception of their family's economic status had a modest positive correlation to life satisfaction [44].

Furthermore, there is need to introduce regular adolescent counseling and personality assessment for all adolescents with a view to identifying those with low levels of happiness and life satisfaction, so that adequate measures will be put in place to help uplift their positive self image and prevent them from becoming depressed.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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