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# The Adults and Aged in Nigeria

Issues and Researches

Edited by  
**Helen O. Osinowo**  
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# **The Adults and Aged in Nigeria: Issues and Researches**

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# Age, Marital Status, Gender and Job Status as Determinants of Life Satisfaction among the Elderly in Nigeria

## 30 Adejumo Gbadebo Olubunmi

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the determinants of life satisfaction among the elderly in Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for this study. A total of 194 participants were randomly selected. These participants were made up of 77 males and 117 females. Their ages ranged from 60-88 years. Four hypotheses were raised and tested. The findings revealed that the sample mean for all the participants was 19 which represents slightly dissatisfied with life. However, no significant differences were found in life satisfaction on the bases of gender, age, marital status and job status. It was concluded that the reason for the low level of life satisfaction among the elders was due to the weak nature of the care and support available to the elderly due to changes in the family system in Nigeria. It was recommended that the elderly must be provided financial support both by the government and family members. They must be helped to realize that their waning years are not meant to be frustrating and fruitless. Age-adjusted policies and programmes that encourage workplace flexibility, lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles, especially during transitional periods should be put in place.*

## Introduction

Globally, the proportion of the aged population has been on the increase. Indeed, according to United Nations Population Division (2002) projections, the average annual growth rate of persons aged 80 years or over (3.8 percent) is currently twice as high as the growth rate of the population over 60 years of age. Moreover, the proportion of those older than 80 is projected to increase almost fourfold over the next 50 years to 4.1 percent in 2050. In Nigeria, before the independence in 1960, the total number of persons aged 50 years and above was 2,448,000. In 1963 and 1991 population census, the total number of persons aged 50 years and above rose to 3,617,000 and 8,227,782 respectively (Kinsella and Velkoff 2001).

A growth in the numbers of older people inevitably has brought an increase in the range and intensity of their problems and needs. Older Persons in Nigeria suffer a lot of hardship in an increasingly hostile, competitive and intolerant society. Older people constitute the poorest group in Nigerian society. The inability of government to cope with the regular payment of pensions to the retired workforce, the inadequate social services and health facilities to cater for the needs of an ageing population, as well as a predominantly rural agrarian population all pose new threats to food security, social security and national security of Nigeria. Older people's lives are characterized by growing inadequacies in customary family supports, social exclusion and non-existent social security targeted at them, thus being very vulnerable to poverty and diseases. Well-dressed old people, mostly women are commonly seen at bus stops operating side-by-side with women, who move about with twins to beg. Some of them hide under poor medical conditions and are always move about with supposed medical reports to convince the people that they are in dire need of help. However, with these situations the question that rightly comes to mind is. What is the level of life satisfaction of these old people? What are the factors that determine their level of life satisfaction?

Life satisfaction is defined as an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time, ranging from negative to positive. It is one of three major indicators of well-being: life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (Diener, 1984). Chen's (2001) study of the aging process and life satisfaction concludes that not only the age effect but also cohort experiences have an impact on life satisfaction. This finding is to a certain extent, supported by Mroczek and Spiro's (2005) analysis of age and cohort effects among male war veterans, which shows not only that life satisfaction peaks at around 65 years but also that impending death is associated with a decline in life satisfaction that is not attributable to (self-rated) physical health. This study however examined some social factors that determine the level of social factors among old people in Lagos and Ogun States.

### **Review of Related literature**

Family income has been found to have a strong positive correlation with life satisfaction in the general population (Bradburn and Caplovitz, 1965; Wilson, 1967; Wessman, 1956; and Gurin *et al.*, 1960). Studies concerning the influence of sex on life satisfaction have reported inconsistent findings (Clemente and Sauer, 1976). In a study of 388 graduate students averaging thirty years of age, Watson (1930) reported that men perceived themselves to be happier than women. However, Spreitzer and Snyder (1974) found only a slight correlation between sex and life satisfaction, but with an interesting interaction between age, sex, and life satisfaction. Women up to age 65 tended to report higher rates of life satisfaction than men; however after age 65 men were more likely than women to report higher levels of life satisfaction. Bradburn (1969), Palmore and Luikart (1972), and Clemente and Sauer (1976) have found no difference in satisfaction by sex. Studies using marital status as a variable have also been inconsistent in their findings. Watson (1930), Gurin and

colleagues (1960), and Glenn (1975) report married persons to be happier than unmarried persons, while Spreitzer and Snyder (1974), Palmore and Luikart (1972), and Clemente and Sauer (1976) found little or no relationship between marital status and life satisfaction.

The decline in the economy, gradual disintegration of the extended family system, unemployment, lack of state provision of eldercare in Nigeria, as well as rural-urban migration all contribute to the noticeable decline in the level of care provided by the family in recent times. A crucial problem is the general assumption in Nigerian society that care for older people has always been provided by the extended social/family system, and that this provision of care services has always been adequate. This assumption is wrong, as recent research has shown (Apt 1995; Aboderin 2006). However, there is a need to know if Nigerian elders are satisfied with their lives and the factors that influence this. This is the crux of this study.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A random sampling technique was used to select 194 participants from elders assembled together by a religious group to feed and clothe them during Easter celebration. These participants were made up of 77 males and 117 females. Their ages ranged from 60 – 88 years with standard deviation 65.4 years.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was adopted for this study. SWLS is a measure of life satisfaction developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). Life satisfaction is one factor in the more general construct of subjective well being. Theory and research from fields outside of rehabilitation have suggested that subjective well being has at least three components, positive affective appraisal, negative affective appraisal, and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is distinguished from affective appraisal in that it is more cognitively than

emotionally driven. Life satisfaction can be assessed specific to a particular domain of life (e.g work, family) or globally. The SWLS is a global measure of life satisfaction.

The descriptive statistics was used to describe the participants' bio-data. However, the hypotheses stated for this study were tested using independent t-test and analysis of variance.

## Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis (N = 198)

Variation		N	%	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	77	39.69	18.45	2.29
	Female	117	60.31	18.13	2.08
Age	60 – 64 years	72	37.11	14.65	2.12
	65 – 69 years	64	32.99	12.24	2.10
	70 years and above	58	29.90	10.18	2.14
Job Status	Self Employed	24	12.37	16.10	2.16
	Pensioner	100	51.55	14.26	2.12
	Unemployed	70	36.08	12.46	2.18
Marital Status	Married	88	45.36	16.42	2.00
	Widow	100	51.55	14.26	2.08
	Single	6	3.09	12.24	2.04

Scores on SWLS can be interpreted in terms of absolute as well as relative life satisfaction. A score of 20 represents the neutral point on the scale, the point at which the respondent is about equally satisfied and dissatisfied. For example, scores between 21–25 represent slightly satisfied, and score between 15–19 represents slightly dissatisfied, and score 5 – 9 are indicative of being extremely dissatisfied with life.

Table 1 presented the bio-data information, mean and standard deviation of life satisfaction level as reported by the participants. Male had higher level of life satisfaction (18.45) than their female counterparts (18.13). The level of life satisfaction of 60 – 64 years age was the highest (14.56) compared to 65-69 age group (12.24) and 70 years and above (10.18). As expected the level of life satisfaction of the self employed (16.10) was the highest compared to pensioner (14.26) and unemployed (12.46). Never married aged reported the lowest life satisfaction of 12.24 while widowed had 14.26

and married 16.42. Summarily the sample mean for all the participants revealed 19 which represents slightly dissatisfied with life. The hypotheses tested are presented below.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of male and female elderly.

Table 2: Summary of independent sample t-test

Variations	N	df	Mean	SD	t-observed	Significant level
Male	77	192	18.45	2.29	0.42**	>0.05
Female	117		18.13	2.08		

\*\*not significant

The independent t-test was used to test the first hypothesis the two groups identified were male and female elderly people. In this study, the means show that both male and female have very low life satisfaction but that of male is higher than female. The p-value obtained from an independent sample t-test indicated no significant difference between the groups identified at  $t_{\text{observed}} = 0.42$ , degree of freedom = 192 and  $p > 0.05$ . The first hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly based on their age group.

Table 3: Summary of Analysis of Variance

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between	96.0384	2	48.0192	0.41	0.05
Within	22369.92	191	117.12		
Total	22465.9584	193			

\*\*not significant

The results of the ANOVA are presented in table 2. This table revealed that there is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly based on age group at  $f_{(2,193)} = 0.41$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the satisfaction of the elderly based on their job status.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Variance

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between	29.99744	2	14.99872	0.32**	0.05
Within	8952.361	191	46.871		
Total	8982.35844	193			

\*\*not significant

The results of the ANOVA are presented in table 3. This table revealed that there is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly based on their job status at  $f_{(2,193)} 0.32, p > 0.05$ .

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly based on their marital status.

Table 5: Summary of Analysis of variance

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between	41.32493	2	20.662465	0.37**	0.05
Within	10666.2995	191	55.8445		
Total	10707.62443	193			

\*\*not significant

The results of the ANOVA are presented in table 3. This table revealed that there is no significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly based on their marital status at  $f_{(2,193)} 0.37, p > 0.05$ .

## Discussion and Recommendations

The life satisfaction of the elderly has been widely researched and discussed. The construct is particularly important for professionals, such as social workers, whose work aims to enhance the quality of life of the elderly. Much research in this area has analyzed how life satisfaction is influenced by factors such as social support, financial status, physical health and locus of control. No studies to date in Nigeria have considered the life satisfaction of elders based on age, job status. The purpose of the current study is to expand on prior studies by analyzing factors that may influence

life satisfaction among elders in Nigeria. This sample of elders reported levels of life satisfaction that were somewhat lower than those observed in studies of elders in other countries (Judge, 1990 and Blais, Vallerand, Peletier and Brier, 1989).

The reason for this is not farfetched. In traditional society, family has been the most natural and conducive social organization for the care and support of the old aged person. The care and support to old aged person was provided by the family members especially the wife, sons, daughters, son-in-law. This care giving was backed not simply by the emotional bonds of relationship emerging out of blood relationship or marital relationship but by the force of pervasive influence of traditional values, norms and behaviour which were not simply practiced as a matter of routine but also deified. The care of the elders was the moral imperative which was considered not only material bliss but also spiritual salvation (Gore, 1992). However, this traditional bond between the elders and the younger members of the family is gradually becoming weak in Nigeria.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of earlier study. Studies have indicated neglect by the caregivers of the elderly (Montgoman & Kosloski, 2000): loneliness (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2007) and the poor quality of food being consumed by the aged (Onu, 2005). Some of these factors may lead to low level of life satisfaction. Most elders in Nigeria are saddled with the responsibilities of caring for themselves. The unemployed among them will prefer to work as gardener, gateman and watchnight while female elders often beg on the street or work as baby sitter.

The basic deprivation gradually crops up initially in the form of reduction in the physical strength and energy previously enjoyed by the aged in the youth and adult age (Russel, 2003; Thurston, 2001). The aged is, therefore, deprived of smartness, promptness, dynamism and confidence, which were basic personality features of youth and adulthood. Further, the optimistic outlook of the aged gradually turns to pessimism.



Extrinsic change among the aged are the effects of disorganized social institutions, values and norms arising out of surrounding social force of urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and globalization (Ushasnee, 2004). Hence, the disorganized society, family and personality produce deprivations to the aged in the contemporary society.

After having realized the low level of life satisfaction among the elderly, there is a need to project some recommendations for the betterment of the perceived status of the. The elderly should be made to realize that they are very much needed in the society. The general attitude is that as soon as the elderly persons lose their earning status, they are no more needed. Such negative attitude leads to dissatisfaction with life and other disastrous consequences. Old aged persons may lose their earning status, they may also become physically frail, yet they are a great source of knowledge, experience and skills. Throughout their life, they have witnessed many trials and turbulences, rise and fall and thus the old aged persons become a great reservoir of skills and knowledge.

The elderly must be provided financial support both by the government and family members. They must be helped to realize that their waning years are not meant to be frustrating and fruitless. Age-adjusted policies and programmes that encourage workplace flexibility, lifelong, learning and healthy lifestyles, especially during transitional periods, should be put in place.

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