

The Satisfaction With Life Scale

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Abstract: This article reports the development and validation of a scale to measure global life satisfaction, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). Among the various components of subjective well-being, the SWLS is narrowly focused to assess global life satisfaction and does not tap related constructs such as positive affect or loneliness. The SWLS is shown to have favorable psychometric properties, including high internal consistency and high temporal reliability. Scores on the SWLS correlate moderately to highly with other measures of subjective well-being, and correlate predictably with specific personality characteristics. It is noted that the SWLS is suited for use with different age groups, and other potential uses of the scale are discussed.

Recent years have seen an increase in research on subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). In this research, three separable components of subjective well-being have been identified: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976). The first two components refer to the affective, emotional aspects of the construct; the latter to the cognitive-judgmental aspects. Although several scales for the assessment of affect exist (Bradburn, 1969; Kammann & Flett, 1983; Kozma & Stones, 1980), the measurement of general life satisfaction has received less attention.

Life satisfaction refers to a cognitive, judgmental process. Shin and Johnson (1978) define life satisfaction as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria" (p. 478). Judgments of satisfaction are dependent upon a comparison of one's circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard. It is important to point out that the judgment of how satisfied people are with their present state of affairs is based on a comparison with a standard which each individual sets for him or herself; it is not externally imposed. It is a hallmark of the subjective well-being area that it centers on the person's own judgments, not upon some criterion which is judged to be important by the researcher (Diener, 1984). For example, although health, energy, and so forth may be desirable, particular individuals may place different values on them. It is for this reason that we

need to ask the person for their overall evaluation of their life, rather than summing across their satisfaction with specific domains, to obtain a measure of overall life satisfaction. As Tatarkiewicz (1976) wrote, "...happiness requires total satisfaction, that is *satisfaction with life as a whole*" (p. 8).

Scales of general life satisfaction have been developed. Unfortunately, many of these scales consist only of a single item. Such single item scales have a number of problems associated with them (see Diener, 1984, for a detailed discussion of these measures). Also, many of the existing scales have been designed and are appropriate only for geriatric populations, such as Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin's (1961) Life Satisfaction Index and Lawton's (1975) Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale. Furthermore, many of these scales do not appear to be tapping solely the judgmental quality of life satisfaction. For example, the Life Satisfaction Index, despite its name, includes a factor of zest vs. apathy (Neugarten et al., 1961). Thus, these scales are not, strictly speaking, measures only of life satisfaction.

Thus, there exists a need for a multi-item scale to measure life satisfaction as a cognitive-judgmental process. The purpose of the present studies is to design and partially validate such a measure, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The scale is designed around the idea that one must ask subjects for an overall

judgment of their life in order to measure the concept of life satisfaction.

Study 1

In the initial phase of scale construction, a list of 48 self-report items were generated. These consisted primarily of questions related to satisfaction with one's life; however, some positive and negative affect items were included. Initial factor analyses resulted in three factors: positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction. The affect items were eliminated, as were items from the satisfaction factor that had loadings less than .60, and 10 items were left. Because of the high semantic similarity of several of those items, five were dropped, resulting in a five-item scale, the SWLS. Study 1 was designed to test the psychometric properties of the scale.

Method

Subjects were 176 undergraduates at the University of Illinois who were enrolled in introductory psychology classes. Subjects were administered the SWLS in a group setting. Two months later, 76 of these students were readministered the scale.

Results

The mean score on the SWLS was 23.5, with a standard deviation of 6.43. Each item is scored from 1 to 7, so the possible range of scores on the questionnaire is from 5 (low satisfaction) to 35 (high satisfaction). The two-month test-retest correlation coefficient was .82, and coefficient alpha was .87. The interitem correlation matrix was factor analyzed, using principal axis factor analysis. The number of factors to be extracted was determined by an inspection of the scree plot of eigenvalues. Using this criterion, a single factor emerged, accounting for 66% of the variance. The SWLS items and their respective factor loadings are presented in Table 1, along with the item-total correlation for each item.

Having shown that the SWLS has desirable psychometric properties, the next step was to examine the relationship be-

Table 1
SWLS Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Correlations
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	.84	.75
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	.77	.69
3. I am satisfied with my life	.83	.75
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	.72	.67
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	.61	.57

Note: $n = 176$. SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale.

Instructions for administering the scale are: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding. The 7-point scale is: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

tween it and other measures of subjective well-being, and also with certain personality measures to which we might expect it to be related.

Method

Two different samples of undergraduates served as subjects. Sample 1 consisted of the 176 students used in Study 1. Sample 2 consisted of a different group of 163 undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology classes. In addition to the SWLS, subjects were also administered a battery of subjective well-being measures. These included: Cantril's (1965) Self-Anchoring Ladder, Gurin et al.'s (1960) widely used item, Andrews and Withey's (1976) D-T scale, and Fordyce's (1978) single item measure of happiness, Fordyce's (1978) percent of time happy question, Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers' (1976) semantic differential-like scale, Bradburn's (1969) Affect Balance Scale, Tellegen's (1979)

Table 2
Correlations Between the SWLS and
Other Measures of Subjective Well-Being

	Sample 1 (<i>n</i> = 176)	Sample 2 (<i>n</i> = 163)
Fordyce 1	.58	.57
Fordyce (percent)	.58	.62
DPQ	.68	—
Cantril	.62	.66
Gurin	.59	.47
Andrews and Withey	.68	.62
Campbell	.75	.59
Bradburn-PAS	.50	.51
Bradburn-NAS	-.37	-.32
Summed Domain Satisf.	—	.57
AIM	.09	—

Note: DPQ = Differential Personality Questionnaire. PAS = Positive Affect Scale. NAS = Negative Affect Scale. AIM = Affect Intensity Measure. Sample 2 was not administered the DPQ or the AIM, and Sample 1 did not complete the domain satisfaction items.

well-being subscale of his Differential Personality Questionnaire, and Larsen's (1983) Affect Intensity Measure (AIM). Sample 2 was also given Buss and Plomin's (1975) survey of the temperaments (EASI-III), the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, the Neuroticism scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964), a symptom checklist similar to the Hopkins inventory (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, & Plomin, 1974), ratings of life satisfaction in 10 key life domains (e.g., grades, health, love life, and friends), and the Marlowe-Crowne (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) scale of social desirability. The 10 life domain questions simply asked subjects to rate each of these areas of their life. These ratings were then summed in an unweighted way to yield a domain satisfaction composite score.

Results

Scores on the SWLS correlated .02 with the Marlowe-Crowne measure, indicating that the SWLS is not evoking a social desirability response set. The correlations between the SWLS and the other measures of subjective well-being

are shown in Table 2.

In both samples there are moderately strong correlations with all of the subjective well-being scales except the AIM, which is a measure of the intensity of emotional experience. The correlations for Sample 2 between scores on the SWLS and scores on the selected personality measures were self-esteem, .54; symptom checklist, -.41; neuroticism, -.48; emotionality, -.25; activity, .08; sociability, .20; and impulsivity, -.03. It appears that individuals who are satisfied with their lives are in general well adjusted and free from psychopathology.

Study 3

Both studies above were limited to college student populations. In the present study we assessed the psychometric properties of the SWLS on a geriatric population. In addition, we obtained a criterion validity coefficient for the SWLS in terms of a life satisfaction rating made by experimenters who interviewed each subject about their life.

Method

Fifty-three elderly persons living in the Urbana-Champaign area volunteered for the project. There were four major groups of subjects: those in a nursing home, shut-ins, a coffee-group of former businessmen, and a group of religiously oriented women who met together periodically. The average age was 75, and 32 were females. Each participant was interviewed about their life for about one hour by a pair of trained interviewers. Subjects received a structured set of questions which focused on the extent to which they remained active and were oriented toward self-directed learning. At the end of the session, subjects completed a large print version of the SWLS and a revision of the Life Satisfaction Index (Adams, 1969). The interviewers independently rated each subject in terms of global life satisfaction on a 7-point scale.

Results

The mean SWLS score for the sample was 25.8. The ratings of the two inter-

viewers correlated .73 and were summed to create a rater life satisfaction composite judgment. This value correlated .43 with the SWLS. The LSI and the SWLS correlated .46 and the LSI and interviewer composite correlated .68. The item-total correlations for the five SWLS items were: .81, .63, .61, .75, and .66, again showing a good level of internal consistency for the scale.

Discussion

The results indicated that the scale has favorable psychometric properties. The correlations with personality indicators of well-being discussed in Study 2 suggest that the scale might be useful in clinical settings. The correlation of .57 with summed domain satisfactions indicates that global satisfaction and domain satisfactions share a good deal of common variance, but certainly are not equivalent constructs. The SWLS correlated at an adequate level with interviewer estimates of life satisfaction. A question arises about why the interviewer ratings correlated more highly with the LSI than with the SWLS. The LSI is a broader band instrument that includes affective as well as life satisfaction content. It appears that the interviewer ratings were also influenced by such affective content and thus correlated more highly with the LSI. The narrow band character of the SWLS is supported by the findings of Larsen, Diener, and Emmons (1983) which showed that the SWLS showed weaker correlations with affect than did other measures of subjective well-being.

Future research needs to establish the discriminant validity of the scale, and should also explore in more depth the relationship between affect and life satisfaction, as well as the relationship between life satisfaction and domain satisfactions. Unlike other scales, the SWLS leaves the respondent free to weight various domains (e.g., health or material wealth) and various feeling states (e.g., loneliness) in whatever way he or she chooses.

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