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The Role of Age in Life Satisfaction Judgements among Educated Adults in Ado-Ekiti (Pp. 304-313)

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of age in life satisfaction judgements among educated adults in Ado – Ekiti. Employing a sample of 544 participants of educated adults in the age cohorts of 20 – 39 years (276), 40 – 59 years (179), and 60+ years (89), selected through a multi-stage sampling, and administering on them Life Satisfaction Index Satisfaction Index, and a Personal Data Inventory, analyses of data using One-way ANOVA with Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis revealed that there is a developmental trend as life satisfaction decreases among educated adults as age increases 20 – 39 years (mean value = 38.48), 40 – 59 years (mean value = 35.85), 60+ years (mean value = 31.57). Based on the finding, recommendations were made to relevant agencies, governments and policy makers, in the lives of Nigerian

adults to use the opportunity of the knowledge of findings to create avenues that will enhance satisfaction with life among Nigerian adults.

Introduction

The concept of a division of human life span into periods is a social construction. None the less, developmental psychologists (Havighurst, 1953, Papalia et al, 2004; Sandrock, 2006) agree to three subdivisions of adulthood, each with marked predictive variations in physical and psychological characteristics, distinct adjustment problems that usually derive from either of environmental and cultural expectations and, or the physical and psychological characteristics of individuals. Developmental psychologists also agree that during each of these periods (early adulthood, 20–39 years; middle adulthood, 40–59 years; late adulthood, 60+ years), certain developmental needs must be met, and certain developmental tasks must be mastered. For example, the developmental tasks of early adulthood include establishment of independent lifestyles, occupations and, usually, families. Within the middle adulthood years, people are expected to learn to cope with some decline in physical capabilities, even as they also need to learn to cope with challenges in life changes. In late adulthood, one is faced with the problems of loss of faculties, loss of loved ones and exposure to reality of mortality.

Considering the many developmental tasks and the experiences which individuals within age-group 20 – 30 years have to cope with, Bee (1996) concluded that the period is the most stressful of adult life. She argued that being confronted with the tasks of learning to live with marriage partners, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, getting started in an occupation, taking on civic responsibility, finding a congenial social group, are all stress-provoking, and therefore pose excruciating adjustment problems for young adults.

Cumming and Henry's (1961) description of late adulthood years as a period of moving away from some previous, more desirable periods, a period when individuals move away from their years of usefulness, clearly denotes that the period is filled with stress-provoking events and happenings. Holiday (1991) was very succinct with it, that the physical and mental physiological changes that occur in form of deterioration of structures and functions in a wide variety of organs and tissues, during this period, usually cause the adults to be less efficient in perceiving, processing and responding to external

stimuli and in effect, create widespread major effects on their concept of self and psychosocial adjustments.

Though some researchers (e.g Chiriboga, 1997) argued that middle adulthood is less stressful than early and late adulthood, Ryff and Singer (1998) and Kayes and Ryff (1999) in their separate studies noted that the stress of life in middle adulthood could as well be equally overwhelming, or even more, especially in situations where the socio-economic condition is poor, and there are no economic opportunities or conducive environment that are necessary for successfully accomplishing tasks. But Nigeria is a poor socio-economic environment with poor unhealthy economy (World Bank Report, 1999; 2000/2001), high poverty level (Sala-I-Martins, 2002b), high inflationary rate and the consequent erosion of the purchasing power of the naira (Ajakaiye, 2003; Tomori, et al, 2005), widespread unemployment among Nigerians, and an abysmally low, average real take-home wages for the few that are employed (National Planning Commission, 2004), problems of insecurity and high rate ethno-religious upheavals.

Satisfying needs and successfully achieving developmental tasks is desirable because it generates feelings of happiness (Havighurst, 1953), and satisfaction with one's life (Oishi 2000; Oishi, et al, 1999).

Notwithstanding the poor and pathetic socio-economic status of Nigeria, a survey (World Values Study Group, 2004) reported a high level life satisfaction among Nigerians. Incidentally, the report of the survey did not specify which categories of Nigerian adults express higher level satisfaction with their lives than the other.

Sonza and Lymbormirsky (2001) explained that satisfaction with one's life implies contentment with, or acceptance of one's life circumstances, or the fulfillment of one's wants and needs for one's life as a whole. In essence, it is a subjective assessment of the quality of one's life that may not be perceptible to the senses of other persons. Perhaps at this stage, it may be apt to ask the following questions:

- (i) Do Nigerian adults irrespective of age categories feel the same level of contentment with their lives, and so, are equally as satisfied with their lives?
- (ii) Is there a developmental trend in life satisfaction among the Nigerian adults?

- (iii) Which category of Nigerian adults, express more contentment with their life circumstances and so, derive more satisfaction with their lives?

This study is interested in providing answers to the above questions.

Objective of the study:

To determine whether there is a significant developmental trend in life satisfaction among educated adults in age categories 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+ years.

Hypothesis:

There will be significant difference in life satisfaction among educated adults in age categories 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+ years.

Method

This study adopts the survey research method. Questionnaires were used to generate data. The design is developmental and cross sectional. One way ANOVA with Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis were used to determine the influence of age on life satisfaction of adults in different age categories.

The population of Ado – Ekiti (capital of Ekiti State) by the 1991 census is 156, 122 consisting of 78,590 males and 77,582 females, 82% of which are made up of adults over 20 years and above. It is however speculated that the population would have increased considerably since then. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 750 participants comprising of adults aged 20 years and above for the study, 554 questionnaires that were found usable, generated that data used for this study. The distribution is as follow:

Age Category	Male	Female
20 – 39 yrs	75	201
40 – 59 yrs	63	116
60+ yrs	49	40
TOTAL	187	357

The research instrument consisted of two parts viz:

- (a) Part ‘A’ that required demographic information relating to age, educational qualifications, sex, etc

- (b) Part 'B' that consisted of Life Satisfaction Index (Neugarten et al, 1961).

The Life Satisfaction Index, developed by Neugarten, et al (1961) has 18 items which are statements about life in general that people feel differently about. A respondent is expected to rate each item 1, 2, 3, depending on how the item describes how she/he feels. The number stand for 1 = Disagree, 2 = Unsure, 3 = Agree. All the 18 items are scored directly and the value of the numbers shaded in all the items is the total score of the participant on Life Satisfaction Index. Erinoso (1996) recorded high concurrent validity coefficients when correlated with Death Anxiety (Templar, 1970) and Religious Affiliation Scale (Omoluabi, 1995). A Pilot study by the researcher, using test-retest method at interval of 40 days for a sample of 45 educated adults yielded a reliability coefficient of .94. Scores on Life Satisfaction Index (Neugarten, 1961) when correlated with scores on Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot and Diener, 1993) for 40 participants gave a validity coefficient of .72.

Prior to administration of questionnaires, visits were made to the randomly selected ministries, schools, hospitals, industries, offices of National Directorate of Employment, state legions, trade unions, hotels and workshops in Ado Ekiti for consultations and choice of dates for, and venues for administration of questionnaires. Questionnaires were later administered on each group of participants on choice dates, in their respective departments and locations, availing all participants enough time to respond to the items. The questionnaires were collected back immediately in all instances. Scoring was done manually and responses were coded according to scoring schedule for the instruments. Data collected was subjected to One way ANOVA, with Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis, to determine the influence of age on life satisfaction of adults in different age categories.

Results

Table 1a shows that $F(2,544) = 54.35$, therefore $p < .05$. This means that there is significant difference in life satisfaction scores of educated adults along age categories 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+ years. Scheffe's Post Hoc Analysis was used to determine the direction of the difference.

Table 1b reveals that each group is significantly different from one another. The mean scores on life satisfaction also decrease along the age categories 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+ years, indicating that there is reduction in life satisfaction as the group progresses in age. Hypothesis 1 which states that there is no

significant difference in life satisfaction among adults in age categories 20-39, 40-59, 60+ years is therefore rejected.

Discussion

The hypothesis stating that there will be significant difference in life satisfaction among educated adults of different age categories was accepted. Table 1a shows that there is significant difference between life satisfaction scores of adults in the different age categories. Also table 1b shows that the mean values also decrease along the age categories $X = 38.48$ (20 – 39 years), $X = 35.85$ (40 – 59 years), $X = 31.57$ (60+ years), indicating that life satisfaction decreases as age increases. The finding is consistent with Neugarten et al's (1965) finding that life satisfaction decreases with age. They explained the trend in terms of disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry 1961), that as adults age, they simultaneously are released from social roles and also, withdraw psychological energy from social ties, which cause their morale to suffer. Another plausible reason could be found in activity theory (Cumming and Henry 1961), that individuals feel as much satisfied with their lives as they are active. The effects of physiological decrements, as a result of aging in adulthood becomes more manifest in middle adulthood than in early adulthood, and in late adulthood than in middle adulthood.

The explanations given by Diener, et al (1998) and Neugarten (1965) for decreased life satisfaction as age increases are potent for explaining similar findings among adults in Nigeria. They argued that the burden of life commitments and the demands of responsibility are much greater in middle adulthood than in early adulthood. Societal expectations for Nigerian adults within age category 20-39 years apparently look more relaxed than that for adults within age category 40-59 year. For example, the commitments in terms of marriage and responsibilities to family members, achievements (like owning houses, cars etc) can be very stressful for the middle-aged adult. People conceive of the period as a period within which many things have to be accomplished. The realization of the need to satisfy the expectations especially at a period when one starts to experience some decrements in physiological characteristics is capable of reducing one's level of satisfaction with life. Lower level of life satisfaction among adults of age group 60+ years should not be considered strange, considering the near zero-point social support available to majority of them in Nigeria (Unanka, 2002; Uguru – Okorie, 1991; Togonu – Bikerstath, 1988)

Conclusion

Life satisfaction issue should be considered very germane because of the benefits that are derivable from the state of feeling contented and satisfied with one's life. This study has been able to establish that Nigerian adults in middle and late adulthood categories as not as equally contented and satisfied with their lives as the young adults. Every adult, irrespective of age has roles to play and contribute to the growth of the nation. It therefore behoves on relevant agencies, governments and policy makers, in the lives of Nigerian adults to use the opportunity of the knowledge of this finding to create opportunities that will enhance satisfaction with life among Nigerian adults.

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Table 1a: One way ANOVA examining significant difference in life satisfaction among educated adults in age categories 20 – 39, 40 – 59, 60+ years

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F cal	F table	P
Between Groups	3315.04	2	1657.51	54.35	3.00	<.05
Within Groups	16498.87	541	30.50			
Total	19813.88	544				

Table 1b: Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis showing the direction of observed significant different among educated adults among the three age categories.

Age categories	20-39 yrs	40-59 yrs	60+ yrs	Mean value
20-30 yrs		2.62*	6.91*	38.48
40 – 59 yrs	-2.62*		4.28*	35.85
60+ years	-6.91*	-4.28*		31.57

- The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.