

## Personality and Social Support as Predictors of Life Satisfaction of Nigerian Prisons Officers

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**Abstract:** The study examined the relationship among personality, social support and life satisfaction among 601 employees of the Nigerian Prisons Service in a Southeastern State in Nigeria. Data were collected using Life Satisfaction Index Short Form, the Big Five Inventory and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The result of the multiple regression analyses showed that personality is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Specifically, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism were found to predict life satisfaction. The results also showed that social support is positively related to life satisfaction. Friends support, significant others support and family support were significant predictors of life satisfaction among the participants. The implications of these results to research and clinical practice were discussed.

**Key words:** Personality, social support, life satisfaction, prison officers, family, Nigeria

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### INTRODUCTION

It seems that all human activities are geared toward making life more meaningful and the desire for happiness has been viewed as a basic and universal human drive (Ho *et al.*, 2008). Recently, social scientists and other researchers in related fields have focused attention on satisfaction with life across different categories of people including the young and the old (Ho *et al.*, 2008; Joshanloo and Afshari, 2011; Seitz *et al.*, 2011; Wong *et al.*, 2007). Life satisfaction has been identified as one of the three components of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). It is defined as one's overall assessment derivable from the comparison between one's aspiration and one's achievement (George and Bearon, 1980). Life satisfaction connotes the outcome of self assessment depending on one's expectation. It is determined by one's perception of how things are and how they should be. The smaller the gap, the more satisfied the person becomes.

Generally, most of the studies on life satisfaction have been done in cultures outside Africa. For example, studies on life satisfactions involved samples from many countries including the United States (Schimmack *et al.*, 2004), Europe (Halvorsen and Heyerdahl, 2006), China (Ho *et al.*, 2008), Australia (Hong and Giannakopoulos, 1994) and Iran (Joshanloo and Afshari, 2011). Although, Nigerians have been described as one of the happiest people on earth, still there are limited studies on correlates of happiness and life satisfaction of Nigerians (Agbo *et al.*, 2012).

In an attempt to understand life satisfaction, a number of models have been advanced. For instance, top-down approach model advocate for dispositional such as personality characteristic in understanding life satisfaction (Ho *et al.*, 2008). In line with this, researchers have reported that genetic component account for about 80% variations in well-being (Lykken and Tellegen, 1996; Tellegen *et al.*, 1988). These findings indicated that the differences in peoples' life satisfaction are due in part to their biological differences. If this argument is dragged to the extreme, it appears there is little we could do to change peoples feeling of satisfaction as it is pre-dominantly genetic. Thus, some individuals have predisposition to be satisfied or unsatisfied with life.

Another explanation is bottom-up model which advocates that the objective life conditions and situation determine one's level of life satisfaction (Ho *et al.*, 2008). Satisfactions here are derived from the major domains of life, such as; job, health, marriage, education and income. The average satisfaction one derives from these domain sums up to determine the overall life satisfaction. This, seems to support our generally held belief that satisfaction with domain factors like job, income and health determine our overall life satisfaction. It is clear that some events or situations could make one to be satisfied with life. So, in addition to personality variables, situations such as available social support and the environment an individual finds him or herself may also be important determinants of life satisfaction. This study, therefore, investigates personality and social support as predictors of life satisfaction of prison officers in Nigeria.

Prisons work is characterized by stress (Cheek and Miller, 1983; Finn, 2000). Prisons officers report increased substance abuse (Svenson *et al.*, 1995), high absenteeism (Brodsky, 1982; Cheek and Miller, 1982) and low job satisfaction (Cullen *et al.*, 1990). Since, job satisfaction has been associated with general life satisfaction (Robbins and Kliewer, 2000; Judge and Watanebe, 1993), it is therefore necessary to investigate life satisfaction of employees, especially group of workers such as prison officers that have been found to have low satisfaction in their jobs. The benefits of satisfaction with life in work setting can never be over-emphasized. Life satisfaction has been linked to longevity and performance, reduced absenteeism and increase in work motivation (Rode, 2004). This is evident as employees puts in their best when they are satisfied. Happy workers are productive workers, not necessarily because of job satisfaction (Judge *et al.*, 2001) but because they are satisfied with life in general (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Prisons officers will be more productive when they are satisfied with their life. Thus, it is important to explore correlates of life satisfaction among workers in the Nigerian Prison Service.

**Personality traits:** The characteristics reaction of an individual under different situation that is enduring and consistent is called personality traits (Costa and McCrae, 1989). Individual behavior reflects the person's personality. Evidences have pointed to the robustness of personality traits in explanation of subjective well-being (Costa and McCrae, 1998; David and Suls, 1999). This has been admitted and applied in psychology, sociology and management (Clayson and Sheffet, 2006). The Five Factor Model (Costa and McCrae, 1989) has been widely used in investigating the role of personality on life satisfaction. These factors of personality traits are extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness. Extroversion focuses mainly on quantity and intensity of relationship (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998). Extraverted individuals tend to be sociable, gregarious and assertive (Costa and McCrae, 1992). They are prone to reward in interpersonal relationship (Watson and Clark, 1997) and are predisposed to experience positive emotion (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Agreeable individuals are friendly and cooperative. Related behaviors includes being flexible, trusting, forgiving and tolerant (McCrae and Costa, 1986). Associated behaviors of conscientious individual includes being careful, thorough, responsible, organized and achievement-oriented (McCrae and Costa, 1986). Openness to experience describes imaginative and carouse tendencies. Highly open people are original, cultured, broadminded and intelligent (McCrae and Costa,

1986). Individuals high in neuroticism experience more negative life event than others (Magnus *et al.*, 1993). Related behaviors are being anxious, depressed, emotional, worries and insecure.

A number of studies have pointed to the importance of personality traits in understanding life satisfaction (Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 2008; DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Lykken and Tellegen, 1996; Joshanloo and Afshari, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2008) and few studies have investigated the Big Five factor of personality (Schimmack *et al.*, 2004). In Schimmack *et al.* (2004)'s study, extraversion and neuroticism were found to be the strongest predictors of life satisfaction. Other studies have also linked extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness with life satisfaction (Joshanloo and Afshari, 2011; Bratko and Sabol, 2006; Vitterso, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2008).

The relationship between personality and life satisfaction can best be explained by dynamic equilibrium model. This model posits that the daily hassles of life could temporarily change individual satisfaction set point but that the individual will return to their differing baseline of satisfaction depending on their personality (Heady and Wearing, 1989; Larsen, 2000). According to these researchers, some individuals have high satisfaction set point while other have lower set point, meaning that people can experience the same situation but differ in their feeling of satisfaction. Another explanation of personality and life satisfaction relationship was advanced by some researchers such as Sheldon and Elliot (1998) and Elliot *et al.* (1997) who advocated that people who pursue self-concordant goals are happy because they have positive self-regard. People who are positive minded puts more effort in goal attainment and subsequent goal achievement makes them happy. This is in line with top-down approach that recognizes the role of personality in life satisfaction of people. Given this background, it is therefore hypothesized that personality will significantly predict workers' life satisfaction.

**Social support:** Social support is the comfort given to us by the family, friends, coworkers and others. This comfort can be in the form of resources provided by others to assist us. Social support can be instrumental, tangible, informational and emotional. Social support for adults such as workers is conceptualized as coming from three sources including family, friends and significant others (Edwards, 2004; Zimet *et al.*, 1988). These sources of support could help an individual cope with varying life challenges. Krause (2004) noted that most people turn to social resources in an effort to contain stressful events in life. In this case, support network is an indication of social

integration and the more one is integrated, the more one can cope with the effects of stressful life event. Social support has been linked with overall well being (Heady and Wearing, 1992; Young, 2004). Increase in social support has been associated with increase in subjective overall life satisfaction (Young, 2006; Malinauskas, 2010), while lower social support leads to decrease in life satisfaction (Newsom and Schulz, 1996). Studies have shown that friends and family support significantly predicted life satisfaction (Au *et al.*, 2009; Yeung and Fung, 2007).

Stress buffering model (Cohen and Willis, 1985) posits that social support have an effect upon the individual psychological well-being during stressful life events (McCormick, 1999). McCormick posits that the effect of social support is more effective in stressful condition. Prison work environment has been shown to be stressful for officers (Finn, 2000) probably the provision of social support to officers may be necessary in reducing impact of stress on the officers thereby leading to improved life satisfaction. In this study, it is hypothesized that social support will significantly predict prisons workers' life satisfaction.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants and procedure:** About 601 officers of the Nigerian Prisons Service in a Southeastern State in Nigeria participated in this study. About 80.03% of the participants were men. Their ages ranged from 18-60 years with mean age of 38.8 years. Out of the 601 participants surveyed, 68.05% were married while 31.95% were single. The average job tenure of the participants was 18 years while the minimum educational qualification was first school leaving certificate (6 years of formal education). The researchers administered the questionnaire to 641 officers of the Nigeria prisons, in 3 prisons formation in a Southeastern State. Out of the 641 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 619 were returned, representing a return rate of 96.57%. Out of the 619 returned questionnaire, 18 copies were discarded due to improper completion, leaving a total of 601 copies that were used for the data analyses.

**Instruments:** Three sets of instruments were used in this study, the Life Satisfaction Index-Short Form (Barrett and Murk, 2009), The Big Five Inventory (John *et al.*, 1991) and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet *et al.*, 1988).

**The Life Satisfaction Index-Short Form (LIS-SF):** The Life Satisfaction Index-Short Form (LIS-SF) was

developed by Barrett and Murk (2009) to measure overall construct of life satisfaction. The original version of the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI) is a 35 items questionnaire that measures the construct of life satisfaction. The instrument development process using 654 adult participants yielded a Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.95 (Barrett and Murk, 2009) and high correlation with the satisfaction with life scale ( $r = 0.70$ ) (Diener *et al.*, 1985).

The short version LSI-SF has 12 items and is scored on 6-point Likert-type structure (1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree for item 2, 4, 5 and 6 while 1 = Strongly agree, 6 = Strongly disagree for item 1, 3, 7-12). Barrett and Murk (2009) reported Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.90 and very high correlation with the original version. For the present study, the item total correlation ranged from 0.27-0.77. The LSI-SF had Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.82 and concurrent validity co-efficient of 0.66 with the Life Satisfaction Index-Z (Neugarten *et al.*, 1961).

**The Big Five Inventory (BFI):** This is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by John *et al.* (1991) validated for use with Nigeria sample by Umeh (2004). The instrument contains 44 items designed to measure personality from a five dimension perspective (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience). Direct scoring is used for all the items. It is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1-5, 1 (Disagree strongly), 2 (Disagree a little), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Agree a little) and 5 (Agree strongly). Values of the numbers shaded are added to obtain the clients scores in each of the subscales. Separate norms have been reported by Umeh (2004) for male and female Nigerian sample.

The coefficients of reliability provided by John *et al.* (1991) are Cronbach alpha 0.80 and 3 months test-retest of 0.85. Big Five Inventory has mean convergent validity coefficient of 0.75 and 0.85 with the big five instrument authored by Costa and McCrae (1992) and Goldberg (1992), respectively. The divergent validity coefficient obtained by Umeh (2004) with University Maladjusted Scale (Kleinmuntz, 1961) are extraversion (0.05), agreeableness (0.13), conscientiousness (0.11), neuroticism (0.39) and openness (0.24). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 was obtained.

**Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** This scale was developed by Zimet *et al.* (1988) using adult samples. It has been used to measure perceived social support across cultures (Canty-Mitchell and Zimet, 2000; Chou, 2000). The MSPSS has been shown to be relatively free of social desirability bias (Dahlem *et al.*, 1991). The 12 item MSPSS provides

assessment of three sources of support; family, friends and significant others support. It is scored on a 5-point Likert-type structure from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items 3, 4, 8 and 11 measure family supports; items 6, 7, 9 and 12 measures friend support while items 1, 2, 5 and 10 measures significant other support. Sample items on the scale includes, I get the emotional help and support I need from my family; I can count on my friends when things go wrong; there is a special person who is around when am in need. The factor loading of the items were relatively high. The internal consistencies of the subscale are  $\alpha = 0.78, 0.76$  and  $0.69$  for family, friends and significant other support, respectively.

For the purposes of this study, the item total correlation ranged from 0.38-0.68. The MSPSS had Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.82 and a concurrent validity coefficient of 0.73 with the family support inventory for workers (King *et al.*, 1995)

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Result of the correlational analyses showed that the relationship of personality and social support to life satisfaction were statistically significant. Among the personality traits, neuroticism ( $r = -0.55, p < 0.01$ ) was the strongest negative correlate of life satisfaction while extraversion ( $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ) emerged as the strongest positive correlates of life satisfaction. Friends support ( $r = 0.31, p < 0.01$ ) was the strongest correlate of life satisfaction among the social support dimensions (Table 1 and 2).

Table 2 showed that the first null hypothesis was not supported as predictor variables of extraversion ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$ ), agreeableness ( $\beta = .07, p < 0.05$ ) and conscientiousness ( $\beta = 0.08, p < 0.05$ ) positively predicted life satisfaction while neuroticism ( $\beta = -0.35, p < 0.01$ ) negatively predicted life satisfaction of participants. Openness was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction. However, this result indicated that apart from openness, other personality traits significantly predicted life satisfaction.

The second hypothesis was also supported as the result showed that friends support ( $\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$ ), significant others support ( $\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05$ ) and family support ( $\beta = 0.12, p < 0.01$ ) positively predicted life satisfaction. This result indicated that social support was a significant predictor of life satisfaction among the participants.

The results demonstrated that personality was a significant predictor of workers' life satisfaction. The result showed that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness had positive and significant relationship with life satisfaction while neuroticism had negative and significant relationship with life satisfaction. Openness had positive but non-significant relationship with life satisfaction.

The emergence of neuroticism as the strongest predictor of life satisfaction among the participants was not surprising as neurotic individual are characterized by a tendency to select themselves into situation that foster negative affect (Emmons *et al.*, 1985) tend to experience negative events (Heady and Wearing, 1989) and show preferential attention to negative stimuli (Rusting and Larsen, 1998). Officers who have dominant traits of neuroticism are very much incapable of facing frustration when under pressure hence leading to greatest level of life dissatisfaction. On the contrary, adaptive coping style, characteristics of emotional stable individual was associated with higher level of life satisfaction. Also, extraversion emerged as the strongest positive predictor of life satisfaction. Extroverts is associated with positive reappraisal coping style (Watson and Hubbard, 1996). These findings are in line with studies in other countries and settings (Schimmack *et al.*, 2004; Joshanloo and Afshari, 2011; Bratko and Sabol, 2006; Vitterso, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2008) that found that extraversion and neuroticism were strong predictors of life satisfaction.

Agreeableness predicted life satisfaction among the prison officers. The reason for this result may be due to the observation of McCrae and Costa (1991) that agreeable individual have greater motivation to achieve interpersonal intimacy. These intimacies in the form of friendship serve as a stress booster hence bolstering life

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and correlations among variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Extraversion	25.0	7.2	1								
Agreeableness	22.6	6.5	0.21**	1							
Conscientiousnes	22.5	6.1	0.17**	0.17**	1						
Neuroticism	21.7	6.4	-0.37**	-0.28**	-0.21**	1					
Openness	28.4	9.1	0.17**	0.02	-0.06	-0.20**	1				
Friends	15.0	4.5	0.23**	0.12**	0.17**	-0.18**	0.14**	1			
Sig. others	11.5	4.4	0.04	0.13*	0.05	-0.09*	-0.05	0.06	1		
Family	12.9	4.7	0.13**	0.07	0.15**	-0.15**	0.02	0.08*	0.09*	1	
Life satisfaction	36.4	12.9	0.50**	0.27**	0.26**	-0.55**	0.16**	0.31**	0.15**	0.25*	1

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

Table 2: Regression analysis on personality and social support as predictors of life satisfaction among prisons' workers

Parameters	SE	$\beta$	t-values
Extraversion	0.063	0.280	7.950**
Agreeableness	0.067	0.067	1.970*
Conscientiousness	0.071	0.081	2.400*
Neuroticism	0.073	-0.350	-9.270**
Openness	0.047	0.024	0.722
Friend	0.090	0.140	4.270**
Sig. others	0.090	0.070	2.160*
Family	0.089	0.125	3.820**

\*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05

satisfaction in a positive and significant way. Individuals who have dominant traits of conscientiousness are careful, thorough and disciplined with a strong sense of responsibility, thus contributing to life satisfaction in a significant and positive way. Openness to experience did not significantly predict life satisfaction, probably because openness to experience is a double-edge sword that predispose individual to feel both the good and the bad more deeply (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998).

Also, the results support the hypothesis that social support will significantly predict workers life satisfaction. This result corroborates earlier research findings (Au *et al.*, 2009; Young, 2006; Yeung and Fung, 2007) that support of friends and family significantly predicted life satisfaction. Stress buffering model posit that when faced with troubling situation and stress, individual with greatest support from family and friends are less likely to become depressed than individual with lower level of support. Since, the prisons work environment have been found to be stressful (Finn, 2000), the presence of perceived social support, may have contributed to differences in life satisfaction of the workers.

The results highlight the importance of social support for the Nigerian worker. Nigerian social environment is characterized by community network and people tend to extend their pattern of living in the community to work environment. People therefore value co-worker support. It is also interesting to note that friends support seems to be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction of the workers. This is understandable, for majority of the prison officers spend the better part of their day in the workplace. Many of them also live in quarters that are restricted to prison officers only. This means that support from friends means a lot to them and may be very significant in their general satisfaction with life. Also, the result may be explained from the point of view of the nature of work in the prisons. Most of the work in the prisons is team-oriented. Working in team creates opportunity for officers to seek support from among themselves hence bolstering workers life satisfaction level.

Finally, this study shows that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, friend support, significant others and family support as a model jointly accounted for 45% of the variations in life satisfaction scores among prison officers. This result advocates for interactive model of personality traits and social support as a sure way of achieving life satisfaction. The result of this study is therefore meaningful and in line with the findings reported in other parts of the world. This demonstrates the applicability of life satisfaction construct in Nigeria and the study provides opportunity for further studies of life satisfaction in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The study expands the knowledge in many ways. Although, earlier studies have linked personality and social support with life satisfaction, this study was one of the first attempts to empirically investigate correlates of life satisfaction in Nigeria. Also, the study extended life satisfaction study to neglected occupational group such as employees in the prisons services. The present findings also demonstrate that life satisfaction may also mean the same thing in Nigeria as obtainable in other developed Western countries. The study therefore opens opportunity for further research in other parts of Africa and across different occupational groups.

## IMPLICATIONS

One important implication of this study is on the area of personnel development. This also suggests that prisons officers' personality traits should be considered when deciding on the training and motivational system that would be most satisfying to an officer. The results have also implications for clinical practices especially as it relates to counseling. There is need to encourage interpersonal relationship and support groups within workplace for these have implications for general well being and life satisfaction.

## LIMITATIONS

Although, this study contributes significantly to the understanding of the contributions of personality and social support to life satisfaction among prisons officers in Nigeria, there are some factors that limits the generalization of the results. One limitation of this study is that it focused on just one occupational group, prisons officers. The replication of the current study in other

occupational areas may be important in generalizing the results. Another limitation of the study is on the number of the variables studied. Other variables such as family background including number of dependants and other perceptual factors could also contribute to life satisfaction of prison personnel beyond the effect of personality and social support. The exclusive reliance on self-report measure may have led to common method bias associated to such research. Finally, all measures in the present study were collected on a single questionnaire at one time. A longitudinal study may help us to establish cause and effect relationship.

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