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Correlates of Subjective Well-Being Among Middle Aged Female Teachers in Public Secondary Schools of Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study sought to determine the extent to which social relationships and work environment influence the subjective well-being of middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The ex-post facto design was utilized with a sample size of 240, drawn from all female teachers from age 40-60 in the state public secondary schools, through stratified random sampling combined with accidental sampling and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Questionnaire formed the instrument for data collection which was analyzed using Independent t-test. The result indicated that social relationships and work environment make significant differences in sense of subjective well-being among middle aged female teachers in the states' public schools. Hence it was recommended that guidance counsellors work with women on the need to reassess their relationships, counting their losses and gains (if any) and to decide to move on, if necessary; and also to embark on advocacy for improved work environmental circumstances, good governance, justice and fair play.

Keywords: Subjective Well-Being, Relationships, Work Environment, Mental Health and Life Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Subjective wellbeing refers to individuals' feelings about themselves, their general happiness and their overall satisfaction with life. According to Diener (2004), individuals' experiences of happiness, fulfilment of human potential, satisfaction with particular domains of life such as work and relationships frequency of positive mood and overall life satisfaction, constitute well-lived lives. During middle adulthood, people see themselves as having "grown up" and their lives tend to have all the trappings of adulthood in that particular culture. In the African culture for instance, this is likely to mean that they are married, have grown children, have substantial commitment to their work, friends, family, place of worship and other community organizations (Broderick, & Blewitt, 2006). These life events and situations tend to form the trajectory for the pursuit of happiness and feeling of well-being in middle adulthood.

Certain variables have been pointed out as being crucial to the pursuit of happiness and the sustenance of a sense of well-being as people negotiate the complex and frequently stressful and conflicting realities of adulthood (Diener &

Seligman, 2004). These include, personality, relationships, work, achievement, material possessions, universal needs and values, among others. According to (Broderick, & Blewitt, 2006), material success to meet basic needs, personality characteristics, good social relationships and opportunities for productive work are the ingredients that constitute the good life for adults which ultimately promotes happiness and well-being. Furthermore, intimate relationships, socializing and relaxing have been identified as some of the activities closely associated with positive affect (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwartz & Stone, 2004).

Personality traits, such as extroversion and neuroticism are strongly correlated with subjective well-being: extroverts, who tend to focus interest on things outside are usually happier than introverts, who focus more attention on their own interior experiences (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002). They further stated that neuroticism, which includes tendencies to be self-conscious, anxious, hostile and impulsive is negatively correlated with happiness. Thus, people who approach situations differently may construe the same life events in different ways (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

Quality and quantity of social relationship have been

strongly linked to well-being and satisfaction in adulthood, regardless of personality characteristics. The study of Diener & Seligman (2002), titled "very happy people", revealed that their happiest respondents had "excellent" social relationships. People who are in close, happy marriages and those who value tight-knit friendships are more likely to describe themselves as happy compared to those who only valued material possessions (Perkins, 1991). People with more friends also experiences greater happiness than people with fewer friends (Hintikka, Koskela, Kontula, Koskela & Viinamaeki, 2000). Women with at least, one confidant are less susceptible to depression than those without confidants (Antonucci, Lansford & Akinyama, 2001). Parents with children (especially adult children) who are socially well adjusted and successful tend to have higher quality relationship with their children and feelings of well-being (Uche, 2008). When adult children are seen as personally and social well adjusted, they relate better with their parents and such parents are likely to experiences greater self-acceptance, purpose in life and feelings of mastery (Fingerman, 2003). Receiving socials support and having the opportunity to be a source of support to others in need is an essential ingredient of wellbeing in adulthood (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur & Smith, 2003).

Experiences at work, achievement of goals, conducive working environment, opportunities to contribute and appreciation of such contributions have been found to be important predictors of happiness. Feeling that one is making competent progress in the work setting is correlated with well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Scores on measures of generativity, that is, the sense that one's skills and efforts are productively contributing to family, co-workers, community and future generation, are predictors of well-being (Ackerman, Zuroff & Moskowitz, 2000). Other workplace characteristics that contribute to happiness, according to Kahneman et al (2004) and Warr (1999) include, opportunities for personal control and growth, the variety of tasks, support from the supervisor, interpersonal contact, conducive working environment, appreciation of one's contributions, good regular pay and fringe benefits, respect and status.

Subjective wellness have often been linked to the career in which individuals are engaged. Most theories of career choice share the notion that, satisfaction depend heavily on matching the characteristics of an individual and demands of the job. Holland's (1999) theory of Personality – Environment Types typifies this notion and according him, when individuals' personality types are congruent with their job environments, they are most likely to experience success and ultimately sense of well-being. Other studies have further corroborated the personal style-jobs characteristics fit to be correlated with job status factor, performance, stability as well as feeling of well being (Kieffer, Schinka & Curtiss, 2004; Spokane, Meir & Catalano, 2000).

According to Erikson's (1963) theory, in middle adulthood, generativity (versus stagnation) becomes most important, giving one's own life purpose by creating, giving, producing and building for the next generation. Furthermore, in his view, adults still have the need to establish and maintain intimate connections with people who will provide them with love care and support, thus boosting their sense of well-being.

The attachment theory of Bowlby (1980), reiterated that despite diminishing demands for physical caretaking, as individuals age, they continue to need the emotional and practical support of significant others. Vaillant (1977), adding to Erikson's theory, reflected that forming deep bonds, becoming productive and finding meaning in one's life are recurring themes for personal sense of wellness, through adulthood and all through life.

Maslow's (1970) theory of motivation suggested that human needs exist in a hierarchy. The most basic are the physiological ones followed by those of safety and then the social needs – need for friends need to be loved and appreciated, need to belong, that is, to fit into network of social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Next on the hierarchy, Maslow proposed the esteem needs-need to develop self respect, gain the approval of others and achieve success. Finally, at the top of the hierarchy are self actualization needs, which involve the need for self-fulfillment, that is, the desire to become all that one is capable of being. Needs, therefore, motivate behavior, hence, where these need are not adequately met, individuals experience frustration and wellness or feeling of wellbeing become elusive.

It is no longer news that corruption and bad governance in Nigeria have reeked havoc on the economy. Resources are therefore scarce and people resort to all kinds tactics (albeit evil) to access and to control the available resources. Nepotism, discrimination, ethnicity, backstabbing and mediocrity, among others are fast becoming the rule rather than the exception, at work places. Trust and loyalty have become big issues and people have become wary of each of each. In Bayelsa, the area of study, the problem has been further compounded by insecurity – political assassinations, kidnapping and oil pipeline vandalisation and destruction. In addition, as at the time of this research, salaries and benefit of teachers and other civil servant have remained unpaid for over six months. Besides, the work environment is in-conducive, infrastructures are lacking and the salaries and benefits (when they come) are below living cost. Such a scenario has the potential to drive individuals into poor mental hygiene and low sense of wellbeing and women tend to be most susceptible since they form a large proportion of the teachers and work force, some of whom are single parents and financial pillars of their families and homes. At the home front, a lot of marriages seem more like facade as couples seem to be emotionally detached from each other. It is the observation that some men, often times, fail to provide the necessary financial support for their wives to meet the needs of the family even though they earn far more than the women, in most cases. Consequently, many of these women are unable to meet the myriads of need of both their immediate and extended families, which are constantly

staring them in the face.

Oftentimes, grown children return home after graduation, unemployed, frustrated and sometimes, lashing out on family members, which makes healthy relationship rather elusive. Many women seem to be saddled with disrespectful and troublesome children. It does seem that in the face of hardship and scarce resources, many seem to have lost their humanity and would rather resort to all kinds of tactics to get a head, including betraying their own friends. Good, trustworthy friendships seem to be sacrificed at the altar of greed. The feeling of loneliness and isolation seem to be pervasive among many, be it at home, at work or even in the church.

Many women, therefore have poor mental health as they carry around emotional and financial burdens (some heavily indebted). Some are easily agitated, suffer from anxiety, moodiness, insomnia and depression. Feeling of subjective wellbeing is hardly achievable by a lot of women. The problem of the study can therefore be summarized thus: do social relationships and job environment make significant differences in the experience of subject well-being among middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa State.

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which social relationships and job environment influence the subjective well-being of middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa State. Two hypotheses were formulated:

1. Level of social relationships does not make any significant difference in the experiences of subjective wellbeing among middle aged female teacher in Bayelsa State.

2. Job environment does not make any significant differences in the experience of subjective wellbeing among middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa State.

Methodology

The ex-post facto design was used and the population consisted of all middle aged female teachers (age 40-60) in Bayelsa state public schools. Using stratified random sampling, six (6) out of the twelve (12) Education zones of the state were picked, then, from each of the 6 zones, 2 schools (1 UBE and 1 Upper basic School were selected, totaling twelve (12) schools; and then through accidental sampling, (20 teachers from each of the 12 schools were selected, yielding a total sample of two hundred and forty (240). Out of this number, 61 were married, 38 had live -in partners 81 were single, 28 were divorced while 32 were widowed and their ages ranged from 42 to 58.

A four – part questionnaire was used for data collection. Part 1 sought biographical information such as age, marital status, no of children, age of children and others. Part 2, a 10 - item Social Relationships Scale (SRS), consisted of measures of socials relationships and networks, which included statements such as *I have a partner to share and care; I have very reliable friends; My children are very comforting;* Part 3, a 10 – item Work I Environment Scale WES, comprised measures of work environment such as*, I look forward to going to work, salaries are paid as and when due, physical facilities are good, hard work is often appreciated.* While part 4, Subjective Well-being Scale

(SWBS) of 10 items, consisted of statements reflecting feelings of well-being, such as, *I am getting what I want out of life*; *I feel good about myself, my marital status notwithstanding, I feel very accomplish*, among others.

Responses to parts 2, 3 and 4 were on a 3 points scale; Very True (Vt 3points), True (T-2 points) and Not at All (NA -1point). The instrument was duly validated and through the Split-half Procedure, reliability estimates of 0.72, 0.68 and 0.65 were obtained for the part 2, 3 and 4 respectively. It was then administered on the respondents in the selected schools by the researcher and three assistants through the cooperation of the school principals / head teachers. The accruing data were analyzed and the results are presented on the following tables.

2. Results

Hypothesis1: Level of social relationship does not make any significant difference in the experiences of subjective wellbeing among middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa state. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data and the result is presented on Table 1.

Table 1. *Independent t-test comparisons of middle aged female teachers' sense of subjective well-being based on their socials relationships.*

Social Relationship	N	X	SD	tobs
Strong (15-30)	126	23.17	5.32	14.27
Weak (10-14)	114	12.52	6.16	

$P < 0.05$; df=238; tcrit=1.96

Results on Table 1 shows a statistically significant difference in levels of subjective well-being between middle aged female teachers who have strong social relationships and those with weak social relationships. The observed t-value (14.27) is higher than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and 238 degree of freedom. This implies that middle aged female teacher with strong social relationships have corresponding higher levels of subjective well- being than their counterparts with weak social relationships. The hypothesis is therefore, rejected.

Hypothesis 2

Work environment does not make any significant difference in the experience of subjective well- being among middle aged female teachers in Bayelsa State. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data and the result is presented on Table.

Table 2. *Independent t-test comparisons of middle aged female teachers' sense of subjective well-being based on their work environment.*

Work Environment	N	X	SD	tobs
Good (15-30)	129	19.38	5.85	12.98
Poor (10-14)	111	11.85	5.92	

$P < 0.05$; df=238; tcrit=1.96

Results on Table 2 indicate a statistically significant difference in middle aged female teachers' levels of subjective well-being based on their work environment. The

observed t-value (12.98) is higher than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and 238 degrees of freedom. This implies that middle aged female who experience good working environment have corresponding higher levels of subjective well-being than their counterparts who experience poor working environment. The hypothesis is therefore, rejected.

3. Discussion

The result of hypothesis 1 revealed that middle aged female teachers with strong family relationships have a corresponding higher sense of subjective well-being than their counterparts with weak family relationships. This points to the fact that quantity and quality of social relationship are strongly linked to well-being and satisfaction in adulthood. The study of Diener and Seligman (2002) corroborated that the happiest respondents had excellent social relationships. Perhaps these respondents with strong family relationship are in solid marriages or partnerships where their physical and emotional needs are sufficiently met and they are therefore happy and fulfilled, despite the challenges of the times. According to Perkins (1991), people who are in close, happy marriage and those who value tight knit relationships are more likely to describe themselves as happy compared to those who value material possessions.

It is also possible that some of these respondents have trustworthy friends as well as socially well-adjusted supportive and comforting children. Antonucci et al (2001) pointed out that, women with at least, one confidant are least susceptible to depression. Also, Fingerman (2003) found that adult children who are socially well-adjusted and successful tend to have higher quality relationship with their parents, who consequently tend to have greater self-acceptance, purpose in life and feeling of mastery. Furthermore, Erikson (1963) corroborated that even in adulthood, humans still have the need to maintain intimate connections with people who will provide them with love care and support, thus boosting their sense of well-being.

Results of hypothesis 2 indicate that middle aged female teachers who are in good work-environment have higher sense of well-being than their counterparts in poor work-environment. This does not come as a surprise because studies have found experiences at work, conducive working environment, achievement of goals, opportunities to contribute and the appreciation of such contributions to be important predictors of happiness. For instance, the study of Ryan & Deci (2003), found a correlation between progress in work setting and feeling of well-being. Kahnman at al (2004) also found conducive working environment, appreciation of one's contributions, respect and status as some working place characteristics that contribute to happiness.

It may also well be that some of these respondents have indicated their work environment as good because there is a match between their own personal characteristics and the demands of the job. According to Holland's theory (1999) when individuals' personality types are congruent with their job environments, they are most likely to experience success and ultimately sense of well-being. Furthermore, studies of Spokane, Meir and Catalano (2000) corroborated personal style –job characteristics fit to be correlated with performance, job satisfaction, stability and sense of well-being.

4. Conclusion

It has been pointed out that the pursuit of happiness and sustenance of sense of well-being in the face of complex, frequently stressful and conflicting realities of middle adulthood, are often predicated upon variables such as personality, relationships, work achievement and material possessions, among others. This study has revealed that middle aged female teachers who have strong social relationships and networks have higher sense of subjective well-being while those with weak social relationships had low sense of subjective well-being. It also showed that, inspite of the challenges experienced in most work places in the area of study, those female teachers who saw their work environment as a good one had a higher sense of well-being than those who considered theirs as being poor.

Clearly, good social relationships and opportunities for productive work are particularly important for life satisfaction. However, individuals learning to live with what they have and accepting that the current positions they hold are the best they are likely to get, engenders sense of subjective well-being.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendation are proffered, especially for counsellors. They need to do the following:

1. Take advantage of different platforms or fora of women groups to chime in the need for women to recognize their generativity needs. Not only do women need to reassess their needs, in middle age, but also a time when they should be open to trying new ways of meeting their needs.

2. Advocacy for improved work environmental circumstances.

3. Advocacy for good governance, equity, justice and fair play.

4. Counsel women to accept their present realities, grim as they may be while remaining optimistic.

5. Counseling women on the need to reassess their relationship, counting their losses and gains (if any) and then to move on, if necessary.

6. Teaching middle aged women mastery, optimism, effective problem solving and decision making.

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