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LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN A CANADIAN PRAIRIE CITY: A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT. This article reports the findings from a questionnaire survey of university students' life satisfaction in Regina. The results demonstrated that a significant proportion of the 315 respondents were satisfied with their lives ($N = 240$, 76.2%). With regard to degree of satisfaction with different aspects of life, respondents expressed that they were most satisfied with relationship with mother, living environment, relationships with close friends, relationships with siblings, and living arrangement. Multiple ordinary least-squares regression analyses revealed that respondents who indicated a higher socio-economic status, achieved a higher grade point average, and were more satisfied with their academic experience, self-esteem, relationship with significant other, and living conditions, expressed a markedly higher level of satisfaction with life.

INTRODUCTION

The remarkable growth in the number of Canadians with a post-secondary education in the 1990s may be attributable to three major factors: the preference of the labour market for skilled workers to compete in a global and technologically advanced economy, the immigration policies aimed at attracting highly skilled immigrants, and the recession of the early 1990s that was especially difficult for Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2003a). The possession of post-secondary credentials has often been conceived as one of the crucial determinants of later-life economic success and status attainment (Anisef et al., 1992; Hunter and Leiper, 1993). The 2001 Canadian census provided strong evidence for the association between education and earnings. Specifically, in 2000, more than 60% of Canadians in the lowest earnings category had a high school education or less, whereas more than 60% of those in the top category possessed a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2003a). In 2000–2001, Canadian universities enrolled a total of 861 700

full-time and part-time undergraduate students (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Drawing on nationwide surveys of young people in Canada, Bibby (2001) points out that more than one in six of the teenagers today expect to graduate from university and another one in ten anticipate at least attending university.

The strengthening of students' life satisfaction has been considered an important mission of education (O'Neill, 1981). Life satisfaction, in addition to positive and negative affect, is an essential component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985). The increasing creation of wellness programs in higher education, as noted by Hermon and Hazler (1999), is evidence of institutional efforts to enhance the quality of life, psychological well-being, and holistic development of students.

A review of the literature reveals that age (Hong and Giannakopoulos, 1994), stress (Chang, 1998; Makinen and Pychyl, 2001; Simons et al., 2002), physical health (Pilcher, 1998), style of studying (Cheung, 2000), parenting style (Seibel and Johnson, 2001), life style (Bailey and Miller, 1998), and personality constructs (Cha, 2003; Yetim, 2003) are major determinants of life satisfaction among post-secondary students. Moreover, cross-national studies have suggested that university students in Western, economically affluent societies report higher level of life satisfaction (Dorahy et al., 2000; Schumaker et al., 1993; Simpson et al., 1996; Veenhoven, 1995). The primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the construct of life satisfaction among university students in a Canadian prairie city. An attempt was also made to disentangle the major factors affecting students' satisfaction with life.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

This analysis is based on data collected as part of a larger investigation into the general well-being, educational experiences, and academic performance of university students in Regina (Chow, 2002). Using a convenient sample,¹ a questionnaire was administered to 318 undergraduate students attending the University of Regina during the academic year 2001–2002. The sample comprised 115 (36.2%) male and 202 (63.7%) female students with a mean

age of 20.6 (SD = 4.29). Caucasian students (N = 273; 86.1%) and Canadian citizens (N = 308; 96.9%) constituted an overwhelming majority of the sample. A sizable proportion of the respondents were registered with the Faculties of Arts (N = 149; 47.2%), Administration (N = 49; 15.5%), and Science (N = 43; 13.6%). In terms of marital status, most were single or never married (N = 279; 89.1%). As well, slightly more than half of the sample (N = 157; 52.2%) indicated an annual family income of over \$60 000.

Measures

Life satisfaction. A 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985) was used to measure respondents' life satisfaction. As a scale developed for the overall assessment of life satisfaction as a cognitive-judgmental process, it was found to be highly reliable, with an alpha coefficient of 0.828. To examine the scale structure with this university student sample, a factor analysis was performed on the 5 items of the SWLS. All the items were loaded on one factor, accounting for 60.88% of the total variance.

Satisfaction with specific aspects of life. Respondents were presented with 21 items and asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with these various aspects of life, including relationships, friendships, educational experience, academic performance, employment, physical and psychological health, leisure, and living conditions, using a five-point scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Life satisfaction. Table I reveals that the mean values for the 5 items ranged between 3.21 and 3.42. The item *I am satisfied with my life* received the highest mean score (Mean = 3.81, SD = 0.85). In fact, over three-fifths of the respondents (N = 240, 76.2%) agreed or strongly agreed with this particular item. On the contrary, *If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing* is the item with the lowest mean score (Mean = 3.21, SD = 1.20). Less than one-third

of the sample (N = 95, 30.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Satisfaction with specific aspects of life. Table II presents the mean values and standard deviations of the responses. The five areas that received the highest ratings, in descending order, are as follows: relationship with mother (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.90), living environment (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.87), relationships with close friends (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.76), relationships with siblings (Mean = 4.07, SD = 0.93), and living arrangements (Mean = 4.03, SD = 0.98). On the other hand, the five areas that respondents were least satisfied with included financial security (Mean = 3.02, SD = 1.11), job situation (Mean = 3.39, SD = 1.05), school performance (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.97), leisure or recreational activities (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.97), and spiritual life (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.84).

Determinants of Life Satisfaction

Multiple ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression analysis was used to explore the determinants of respondents' life satisfaction. A composite score based on the 5-item SWLS was computed and used for the OLS regression model. A total of 9 predictor variables,² including sex, age, socio-economic status (SES), grade point average (GPA), educational experience, familial relationship, relationship with significant other, self-esteem, and living condition, were used in the model.

As shown in Table III, the overall OLS regression model was found to be significant ($F = 19.369, p < 0.001$), and 37.3% of the variance in life satisfaction was accounted for. Socio-economic status ($\beta = 0.188, p < 0.001$), grade point average ($\beta = 0.132, p < 0.001$), academic experience ($\beta = 0.167, p < 0.01$), self-esteem ($\beta = 0.707, p < 0.001$), relationship with one's significant other ($\beta = 0.221, p < 0.001$), and living conditions ($\beta = 0.112, p < 0.05$) were found to contribute positively and significantly to life satisfaction. Respondents who indicated a higher SES, obtained a higher GPA, and those who were more satisfied with their *academic experience, self-esteem, relationship with significant other, and living conditions* expressed a higher level of life satisfaction.

TABLE I
Frequencies, means and standard deviations for the SWLS items

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean (SD)	N
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)				
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal	7 (2.2)	56 (17.7)	74 (23.4)	154 (48.7)	25 (7.9)						3.42 (0.94)	316
2. The conditions of my life are excellent	5 (1.6)	47 (14.8)	61 (19.2)	164 (51.7)	40 (12.6)						3.59 (0.94)	317
3. I am satisfied with my life	5 (1.6)	25 (7.9)	45 (14.3)	191 (60.6)	49 (15.6)						3.81 (0.85)	315
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	7 (2.2)	55 (17.4)	68 (21.5)	132 (41.6)	55 (17.4)						3.55 (1.04)	317
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	32 (10.1)	63 (19.9)	69 (21.8)	111 (35.1)	41 (13.0)						3.21 (1.20)	316

TABLE II
Degree of satisfaction with various aspects of life

	Mean	SD	N
a. School performance	3.42	0.97	318
b. Courses I am taking this term	3.73	0.80	316
c. School facilities	3.75	0.71	316
d. Instructors' quality of teaching	3.70	0.79	317
e. Relationships with close friends	4.19	0.76	317
f. Relationship with father	3.94	1.19	315
g. Relationship with mother	4.31	0.90	313
h. Relationships with siblings	4.07	0.93	313
i. Relationship with spouse/partner/significant other	3.71	1.02	305
j. Physical appearance	3.71	0.83	316
k. Self image	3.76	0.82	316
l. Leisure or recreational activities	3.56	0.97	317
m. Financial security	3.02	1.11	315
n. Material possessions/comfort	3.86	0.84	316
o. Physical health	3.86	0.90	318
p. Living environment (i.e., physical condition of the place of residence)	4.23	0.87	318
q. Living arrangements (i.e., people with whom you live)	4.03	0.98	318
r. Job situation	3.39	1.05	316
s. Social life	3.88	0.87	317
t. School life	3.73	0.73	317
u. Spiritual life	3.56	0.84	318

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that university students in Regina were generally quite satisfied with their lives, especially in regards to familial relationships, living environment, relationships with close friends, and living arrangements. In addition, students who indicated a higher SES, obtained a higher GPA, and those who were more satisfied with their *academic experience, self-esteem, relationship with significant other, and living conditions* were more satis-

TABLE III

Unstandardized and standardized ordinary least-squares regression coefficients for effects of socio-demographic and background variables on life satisfaction

	b	β
Sex	-0.355	-0.044
Age	-0.005	0.044
Socio-economic status	0.879	0.188***
Grade point average	0.629	0.132**
Academic experience	0.256	0.167**
Self-esteem	0.707	0.286***
Familial relationship	0.149	0.090
Relationship with significant other	0.838	0.221***
Living conditions	0.269	0.112*
(Constant)	-5.830	
F	19.369***	
R ²	0.393	
Adjusted R ²	0.373	
N	318	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

fied with life. It is noticeable that self-esteem emerges as the strongest predictor. This finding is consistent with results from earlier research (e.g., Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Harter, 1999; Huebner and Alderman, 1993; Kosma and Stones, 1978; Lackovic-Grgin et al., 1996; Leung and Leung, 1992; Neto, 2001; Wilson and Peterson, 1988), suggesting that individuals who accept themselves in a positive manner and believe that a similar viewpoint is shared by others will develop a more positive evaluation of their overall life conditions. There is also evidence in the literature that SES significantly affects life satisfaction (Sam, 2000; Simons et al., 2002; Zumbo and Michalos, 2000). In light of the high costs associated with university education, it is not surprising that students from a higher SES background were more satisfied with life.

This research also corroborates findings from earlier studies (Bailey and Miller, 1998; Cheung, 2000; Gilman et al., 2000; Hong

and Giannakopoulos, 1995) that academic performance, educational experience, and life satisfaction are positively related. In addition, studies have ascertained that satisfaction with family life and friends are positively associated with life satisfaction (e.g., Dew and Huebner, 1994; Greenspoon and Saklofske, 2001; Maton, 1990; Seibel & Johnson, 2001; September et al., 2001). The present results extend previous findings to suggest that satisfaction with one's significant other is another crucial factor. Finally, better living conditions (i.e., physical condition of the place of residence and the people with whom the respondents live) are significantly and positively related to life satisfaction among these university students. As noted by Perez et al. (2001), the home is more than a symbol of quality of life. It can have various benefits for an individual's physical health and psychological welfare. As well, it is the focal point of intimate relationships, relationships with friends and relatives, and leisure relationships.

In summary, this study has identified a number of significant factors that affect life satisfaction among university students in Regina. These findings may be utilized by counselors and educational workers to aid in design of interventions and support services that might serve to enhance the quality of life for university students. As the present study was conducted on a limited group of undergraduate students at a mid-sized university in a Canadian prairie city, caution must be exercised in interpreting the results. Additional research is needed with university student populations in other geographical locations.

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NOTES

¹ This study was based on a sample of undergraduate students enrolled in various sociology classes during the fall session of the academic year 2001–2002. It should be noted that these 318 students were registered with various faculties, schools, or institutes, including Administration, Arts, Education, Fine Arts, Human Justice, Language, Kinesiology, Science, and Social Work.

² Age (Mean = 20.6, SD = 4.29) and grade point average (Mean = 3.96, SD = 0.836) were measured as continuous variables. Socio-economic status (Mean = 3.43, SD = 0.827) was measured on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Sex was a dichotomous variable (1 = male, 0 = female). Educational experience was a 5-item measure, including the respondents' degree of satisfaction with courses currently taking, instructors' quality of teaching, scholastic achievement, school facilities, and school life) on a 5-point scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied, with an alpha reliability value of 0.604. Familial relationship was based on respondents' degree of satisfaction with respect to their relationships with father, mother, and siblings on a 5-point scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied, with an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.675. Self-esteem was a 2-item measure, including the respondents' degree of satisfaction with physical appearance and self-image on a 5-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied), with an alpha reliability value of 0.864. Living conditions were assessed by the degree of satisfaction with living environment (i.e., physical condition of the place of residence) and living arrangements (i.e., the people with whom respondents live) on a 5-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied), with an alpha reliability value of 0.646.

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