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Abstract
Life satisfaction, or the global evaluation of one's own life, is an essential component of subjective well-being. The increasing formation of wellness programs in higher education settings is evidence of institutional efforts to enhance the quality of life, psychological well-being, and holistic development of students.

Keywords
life satisfaction, wellness, undergraduates

Disciplines
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Comments
Using the Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale to examine the psychological wellness of today’s undergraduate students

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According to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2005 “Condition of Education” Report, total undergraduate enrollment in postsecondary institutions has increased over the past three and a half decades with enrollments projected to increase through 2015. Coupled with the rise in student numbers, the strengthening of students’ life satisfaction has been considered an important mission of education (Huebner & Gilman, 2002). Life satisfaction, or the global evaluation of ones’ own life, is an essential component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). The increasing formation of wellness programs in higher education settings is evidence of institutional efforts to enhance the quality of life, psychological well-being, and holistic development of students (Hermon & Hazler, 1999). The societal consequences for not advancing individual psychological wellness are substantial and are reflected in the escalating costs of healthcare, substance abuse centers, as well as the operation of criminal justice and legal systems (Cowen, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to examine the wellness of today’s undergraduate student population using the Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). Huebner and Gilman (2002) developed the MSLSS to promote and better understand the psychological wellness of children and young adults. Using a four-point ordered set of options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree), the scale included 40 separate items used to provide a profile of students’ life satisfaction within five specific domains: school, family, friends, living environment, and self. The internal reliabilities of items within each domain were acceptable (.82 - .90). Additional questions related to demographic characteristics, current living arrangements, and the frequency of contact students have with family members were also included in the research instrument.

Data were collected from 151 undergraduate students at two 4-year institutions located in the Midwest and Southern United States. Approximately one-third of participants were enrolled in either their first or second year of college with the remaining participants enrolled in their third, fourth or fifth year. The majority of students who participated in the study were female (89%). Over half of the sample (61%) included students from traditional Family and Consumer Science programs; the rest were enrolled in more traditional Business majors. Slightly more than half of students (51%) indicated declaring only one major since entering college. An additional 35 percent of participants reported changing their major twice since their freshman year; 14 percent reported changing their major three or more times since beginning college. A majority of students (67%) reported living with friends and/or dorm roommates. Twelve percent of participants reported living alone while another 10 percent indicated living with a spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend.
On average, the mean distance participants reported living from their immediate family was 1-2 hours. An examination of the frequency of contact students reported with family members revealed that on average, students visited with family members via the phone, e-mail, text/instant messaging, every day or almost every day, and reported seeing family members once every two weeks to once every month.

The mean MSLSS score ($M = 3.27$) showed that overall, participants were moderately satisfied with life. Among the specific domains, participants reported the most satisfaction with relationships with friends ($M = 3.61$), family ($M = 3.43$), and aspects of the self ($M = 3.40$). Participants reported the least satisfaction with their living environment ($M = 2.96$) and school ($M = 2.93$). Among the items included in the living environment domain, students indicated a desire to live in a different house, apartment, or dorm as well as a different city or town. Students also reported dissatisfaction with the lifestyle activities and opportunities available in their current place of residence. An examination of the individual items within the school domain further revealed that students perceived school as something they wish they didn’t have to do and reported that there are many things about school that they don’t find particularly enjoyable or worthwhile to their development.

Interestingly, the frequency of participants contact with family members seemed to be a critical aspect in overall life satisfaction scores. A correlation analysis among the variables showed a significant inverse relationship between students’ satisfaction with family members and the frequency with which they visit with family members ($p < .05, r = -.20$). This finding suggests that those students who reported visiting with family members via the phone, e-mail, and text/instant messaging less often were more dissatisfied with their family experiences than those students who reported more frequent contact with family members. Moreover, those students who reported more dissatisfaction with characteristics related to the individual self, including aspects of confidence and self-esteem, reported visiting with family members less often ($p < .05, r = -.18$) and lived further away from immediate family members ($p < .05, r = -.18$). A significant inverse relationship between visiting with family members and general life satisfaction was observed ($p < .05, r = -.20$).

According to Huebner and Gilman (2002), assessments among the life satisfaction domains are useful in implementing various prevention and intervention efforts. The findings of this study suggest that students’ life satisfaction is strongly tied to perceptions of relationships with family members. Recognizing this connection is important to educators concerned with the well-being and life satisfaction of students. University faculty and administrators should encourage students to maintain frequent contact with family members and resolve issues quickly when students experience dissatisfaction with family relationships. The findings of this study also provide support for the necessity of communicating the significance and importance of course curriculum to students’ development.

References


