



CARITAS UNIVERSITY AMORJI-NIKE, EMENE, ENUGU STATE

Caritas Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences

CJPBS, Volume 1, Issue 1 (2023)

Article History: Received: 13th September, 2023; Revised: 2nd November, 2023; Accepted: 15th November, 2023

The Moderating Role of Optimism in the Relationship between Empty Nest Syndrome and Life Satisfaction in Middle Age Adults

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Abstract

This study investigated the moderating role of optimism in the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction in middle age adults. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) middle aged adults in Enugu State participated in this study. These participants ninety (90) more males and sixty (60) were females. Their ages ranged from 40-60 years. Three instruments were used in this study. These include: empty Nest Syndrome Scale, Optimism scale and life satisfaction scale. Hayes process macro was used to analyse the data. Results showed that empty nest syndrome did not significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adults. Optimism did not moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adults. From the results, the implication of the study is that optimism is the key that drives middle aged adults to life satisfaction.

Keyword: adulthood, aging, empty nest syndrome, life satisfaction, optimism.

Introduction

It is evident that in the not-too-distant future, the social and medical issues of the elderly without dependents will become a pressing problem. The physical, mental, emotional, social, and economic aspects of one's life all have a bearing on their quality of life, which is just as crucial as longevity itself (Greendale et al., 2000; Osborne, Hawthorne, Lew, & Gray, 2003). The significant increase in the absolute and relative numbers of the elderly in both developed and developing countries has been one of the key characteristics of the global population in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The number of empty-nest families, in which there is only an elderly couple or one elderly person, is increasing, especially in some inland mountainous rural areas, as a result of the accelerated process of urbanization, the imbalance of economic development, and the flow of rural surplus labor to big cities (Liu, Sun, Zhang, & Guo, 2007; Liu & Guo, 2007).

The term "quality of life" describes an assessment of an individual's, communities, or nation's standard of living. A person's quality of life can be evaluated according to objective or normative criteria, which typically include their living conditions, physical and mental health level, and the resources at their disposal. Objective measures are helpful, but one's perspective on life, for example, can also be considered. Life satisfaction (LS), subjective well-being, and happiness are all ways to characterize an individual's personal quality of life (von Heideken Wa°gert et al., 2005; Fagerstro m, Holst, & Hallberg, 2007). Satisfaction with one's life is considered an assessment of one's life as a whole (Fagerstrom, Holst, & Hallberg, 2007).

Life satisfaction is an ability of an individual to develop a subjective point of view about his or her life quality under his or her own criterion. Hence, it has both an experiential and cognitive aspects (Rode, 2004; Tuzgöl-Dost, 2007). Life satisfaction is also defined as a process in which an individual tries to reach his or her own goals (Aysan and Bozkurt, 2004). According to Diener (1994), life satisfaction involves a satisfaction from the present life, a desire to change to their life, satisfaction from the past life, satisfaction from the future and the ideas of relatives about that person's life. Researchers (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959; Maslow, 1971; Freud, 1993; Judge and Larsen, 2001; Köroğlu, 2005) emphasize in general sense that satisfaction is an emotional and intrinsic recognition process in which a mental construction of an individual and its development are all involved. In this process, satisfaction is maintained by interaction of emotions and behaviors. Especially the thinking and feeling functions of an individual (Super, 1947; Yüksel 2003; Karahan and Sardoğan, 2004) play a crucial role to develop a cognitive point of view and to make a definition of satisfaction by reaching subjective experiences. Satisfaction is the provision of expectations, requirements, wishes and desires.

Life satisfaction is the situation obtained by the comparison of expectations of an individual (what he or she wants) and what he or she possesses (what he or she has got) (Özsoy-Karabulut, 2003). The perception of support is one of the aspects providing a life satisfaction for the individual (Strine, Chapman, Balluz, Moriarty and Mokdad, 2008). Life satisfaction can be defined as well being from such different points as happiness (Vara, 1999; Yee Ho, Cheung and Cheung, 2008) and the dominance of positive emotions over negative ones in daily relations (Aksaray et al, 1998).

According to Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005), an important concept that provides purpose in life is "satisfaction," which can be defined as the extent to which an individual's expectations, intentions, desires, and needs are met. Satisfaction with one's life is proportional to the extent to which one's expectations for that life are fulfilled (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Individual's expectations are either met or violated when compared to the circumstances of their daily lives (Veenhoven, 1996). Satisfaction with life results from met expectations, while discontent grows out of broken expectations (Diener et al., 1985). Happiness in life is more concerned with an individual's state of mind than with external factors like location, time, or opportunities. Put another way, it's impossible to say that a person's life is satisfying if he or she has reached saturation anywhere because there are always other things that might make them unhappy (Argyle, 2013). An individual's life, routines, and hopes for the future all influence how happy they are with their current situation. One's attempts to set apart his or her life from the experiences of others, as well as the thoughts and actions of those around him or her, also play a role in shaping the kinds of adjustments one wants to make (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). At this point, many factors contribute to one's level of life satisfaction, including one's work life, leisure time, environment with one's family and friends, financial situation, and health.

With increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates, the world is witnessing the process of population aging. Rapid increases in the absolute and relative numbers of older people in both developing and developed countries have been observed. In 2000, for the first time, there were more people aged 60 and over than children under 5 in a number of countries (Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, 2003) (Chen, Yang, & Aagard, 2012). Among those older adults, there are a special group called empty nest old people who live alone when one or all of their children leave home (some of them do not have children). The empty nest phenomenon has become more prevalent in our modern society as the traditional extended family is becoming less of a reality than that of the past; and today many old adults are left living by themselves while the children are working far away from home seeking their own future and dream. With too many adults having no family to care for them or about them when they are in sickness, in trouble, and in poverty, they have to go it alone, and their very aloneness makes their situation potentially more tragic (Chen, Yang, & Aagard, 2012; Silverstone & Hyman, 2008).

Empty nest syndrome occurs and threatens the life quality of older adults and the stability of the society as a whole. On the one hand, it impedes older adults' ability to increase their life quality because it reflects the negative relationships among the family members and shows that those older adults are living an unhappy life with depression. On the other hand, population aging and empty nest syndrome together could be compared to a silent revolution that will impact on all aspects of society such as relationship among family members, government policies, and organizations that provide service to the older adults (Chen, Yang, & Aagard, 2012).

The empty-nest syndrome is a transitional stage experienced by middle-aged parents (45–65 years old) when their children leave home (Mitchell & Gee, 1996). The percentage of empty-nest elderly (aged <60 years) ranged from 50–78% in different populations (Zhou et al., 2015; Gratton & Gutmann 2010). The empty nest syndrome is characterized by feelings of sadness, loss, fear or difficulty in redefining roles with negative effects such as depression, alcoholism, identity crisis, and marital conflict (Huerta, Mena, Malacara, & de León, 1995).

The term “empty-nest syndrome” owes its origin to the theory of role identity (Phillips, 1957). It describes the impact that the children’s departure from the parental nest has on the welfare of the parents. It is a term used to describe the long-lasting maladaptive responses exhibited by parents once their last child moves out of their household and thereby leaves the two middle aged / aging parents alone at home. According to this theory, which was most popular in the late 50s, the loss of a very important role brings alienation and loneliness and dissatisfaction in life (Phillips, 1957). The more roles one has, the less threatening the prospect of empty nest syndrome (Thoits, 1983). However, this approach is based on the questionable assumption that the departure of children from the parental home also implies the simultaneous loss of the parental role, an assumption which researchers have generally rejected. It is thought that the parental role can change, or adapt to the new situation, but by no means can it be lost (Thoits, 1983).

Empty nest during the early 70s affected mainly women and was a strong predictor of depression (Bougea, Despoti, & Vasilopoulos, 2019; Harkins, 1978). In contrast, other researchers found that the experience of empty nest had no effect on well-being. A study in the United States indicated that women emptynesters showed greater life satisfaction and happier marital relations, in comparison with age-matched women who have a child at home (Bougea, Despoti & Vasilopoulos, 2019; Glenn, 1975). Moreover, the departure of the youngest child, indeed, was generally anticipated with a sense of relief (Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1970).

The effect of empty nest on the relationship of the couple has long become the object of research. Deutscher (1969) found an improvement in the couple’s relationship following the departure of children from the parental home. In contrast, Glenn (1975) found no positive correlation with marital satisfaction of empty nest parents. The explanation given by the researcher was that the parental role is very stressful and most likely responsible for reduced marital satisfaction. The finding that the experience of the empty nest is not the same for all parents, given that for some it proved to be a highly stressful situation while for others it was anticipated with pleasure, was constituted the thread guide of research in the 80s and 90s. Research interest was focused on establishing the parameters which rendered the experience of the empty nest as a stressful event. Women have spent more time raising the children and as a result they have a stronger bond with them. Because of the salience of the mother role, women experience more stress in their parental role compared to men (Bougea, Despoti, & Vasilopoulos, 2019; McLanahan & Adams 1987), who tend to show competitiveness and more tension with sons rather than daughters, while stepchildren may cause greater family pressure compared to biological children (Suitor & Pillemer, 1988). This competitiveness is important because triggers more conflict in the family making the transition to empty nest more difficult. There is a lack of evidence between the relationship with stepchildren and empty nest because of the complexity of the subject. Stepchildren are most likely to leave from their home maybe because they have the option to live with an alternative parent (Bougea, Despoti, & Vasilopoulos, 2019).

Research in the new millennium dealt with the experience of the empty nest in older adults who live alone and had infrequent contact with their children. Older adults who are experiencing the situation of the empty nest suffer from loneliness, physical and mental decline, and less life satisfaction compared to those who have regular contact with their children (Wang, Hu, Xiao, & Zhou, 2017). Low social support, low socio-economic status, divorce and widowhood were found to be predictors of loneliness and decreased life satisfaction (Liu & Guo, 2008; Wu, 2010).

Life satisfaction is a judgmental process whereby individuals evaluate the quality of life based on sets of criteria (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Studies have proposed that life satisfaction is mutually influenced by personality traits and psychosocial variables of life events (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Diener, 1996; Lu, 1999). In daily life, perceptions of individuals about life events can be altered by the effect of various factors such as personality traits or experiences. While individuals who develop positive attitudes towards the events they encounter in life can deal with problems more easily, a negative perspective can lead to various psychological problems (Ayten, 2012). In this context, optimism has an important place in psychological coping mechanisms (Kayıklık, 2011). Research has shown that optimism could be one of the indicators for predicting life satisfaction (Scheier & Carver, 1992). They claim that an individual’s tendency to be

optimistic and pessimistic is a relatively stable characteristic across time and context. Optimism positively influences both physical (Brenes, Rapp, Rajeski, & Miller, 2002) and psychological well-being (Ferreira & Sherman, 2007; Scheier & Carver, 1992; Uskull & Greenglass, 2005). Optimism is also associated with level of activity (Peterson & Bossio, 1991).

Optimism can be expressed as a positive approach to all events and phenomena, a positive attitude, or waiting for the most positive among the options without selecting the specific events and phenomena that individual encounters in his/her life (Hökelekli, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Optimism is the result of one's rational expectations, self efficacy, and the meaning of life (Peterson, 2000). Optimists are active, dynamic, and action-oriented people. When faced with a problem, they prefer solving it rather than waiting for someone else or ignoring it (Scheier and Carver, 1985). Optimists who have developed problem-solving coping strategies can easily find alternative methods to solve problems (Peterson & Bossio, 1991). Also, optimists, who accept the existing reality more easily, avoid becoming part of the problems they cannot control (Seligman, 2002). Additionally, they do not have great expectations for life and have high self-confidence and can rationally criticize themselves (Snyder & Lopez, 2001). Optimistic individuals, whose communication skills are mostly developed, can establish healthy and long lasting social relationships. They do not focus on the negative side in their thoughts, usually do not engage in friction and do not become involved in conflicts, and lead a psychologically peaceful life (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Snyder & Lopez, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Mental health issues among middle aged in Nigeria is a major public health concern for the current time, which is directly and indirectly correlated with the living status of the adulthood. Life satisfaction is a positive evaluation index; it is a subjective well-being measure reflecting a person's cognitive judgment of life (Diener, 1984; Hong et al., 2019). Life satisfaction is an important goal for improving the quality of life of older adults (Chachamovich et al., 2007), and it is an indispensable cognitive or evaluative element of life quality and successful aging (Lawton et al., 2002). However, life satisfaction among middle-aged and older adults is related to many factors, including age. What is the relationship between age and life satisfaction? Some studies have shown a U-shaped relationship between age and life satisfaction (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2004; Graham and Pozuelo, 2017), meaning that life satisfaction declines in middle age and then increases with age. In other words, starting in middle age, people's life satisfaction increases with age.

According to socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST), future time perspective (FTP) is a key factor in explaining the persistent or even improved subjective well-being of elderly individuals compared with that of their younger counterparts (Carstensen et al., 1999; Carstensen, 2006). With limited FTP, older people tend to focus on the present rather than the future, which benefits their subjective well-being. However, contrary to the assertion of SST, many studies have found that persons with a limited FTP tend to report lower subjective well-being (Allemand et al., 2012; Kozik et al., 2015; Gruhn et al., 2016). According to life span theories of motivation (Heckhausen, 2000; Hong et al., 2019), young and middle-aged people focus on growth and self-development, while older people are increasingly aware of the decline in biological function and the limited resources and opportunities in the future (Cheng et al., 2009). Their motivation focuses on maintaining the current level of function and planning for future decline. Thus, the youngest adults show positive trajectories in terms of perceived past, present and future life satisfaction, while the trajectory is flat in late middle age and negative in older adults.

Kearney (2002) postulated that parents especially women become depressed when their children leave their homes forever. Empty nest syndrome is an unhappy sad feeling and negative emotional disturbance which parents experience when their children leave them. Mbaeze and Ukwandu (2011) asserts that people experienced empty-nest syndrome not only due to departure of children from home but their own physical health issues did not let them move on to new adjustment. Furthermore, their study indicated that empty nest syndrome was an outcome of death of spouse, retirement, children leaving their homes, and menopause. Though there are studies which established the issues of mental health problem as well as living arrangement among middle aged, there is a dearth of studies linking life satisfaction with the empty nest and non-empty nest elderly.

Furthermore, higher level of optimism has been related to several psychological and physical advantages. Optimism is a cognitive disposition that leads to more positive evaluations of past life events and more positive expectations of future life events. Optimist individuals behave in a healthy and positive manner, facing the future in a promising viewpoint. In such behaviour, they are more likely to have a higher

level of well-being and better-coping skills. Numerous studies have shown number advantages of optimism in academic, social and future career. In his research, Bernat (2009) reported that optimism predicts coping, objective health, and adaptation, assessed as absence of depressive symptoms and enhanced life satisfaction (Scheier & Carver, 1992). For these reasons, optimism is prominently suggested in mental health promotion in adulthood.

While research has suggested a positive association between optimism and life satisfaction among older adults (Mroczek et al., 1993; Scheier & Carver, 1987), previous studies have not examined the moderating role of optimism in the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adults. Thus this study intends to investigate the following questions:

1. Will empty nest syndrome significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adults?
2. Will optimism significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adults?
3. Will optimism moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adults?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine:

1. If empty nest syndrome will have a significant relationship with life satisfaction among middle aged adult.
2. If optimism will have a significant relationship with life satisfaction among middle aged adult.
3. If optimism will moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adult.

Empty-nest syndrome and Life satisfaction

Mansoor and Hasan (2019) carried out a study to investigate the empty nest syndrome and psychological wellbeing among middle aged adults. Empty nest syndrome (ENS) refers to clinical depression experienced by parents with the cessation of their child rearing roles when their children leave home (Kearney, 2002). Sample of study consisted of 40 fathers and 41 mothers with an age range of 40-55 years. Empty Nest Syndrome questionnaire developed by Mbaeze and Ukwandu (2011) and psychological wellbeing scale by Ryff (1989) were administered on middle aged parents who have experienced the departure of children. To measure the impact of type of departure and parent's education in terms of empty nest syndrome, a rating scale ranging from 1-10 was administered on middle aged parents. Findings of their study indicated that mothers and fathers did not differ in terms of empty nest syndrome and psychological well-being while less educated parents differed significantly in experiencing empty nest syndrome than more qualified parents. Furthermore, the departure of children due to marriage and pursuance of education of children did not affect their level of empty nest syndrome. The findings have wide implications for the parents, children and developmental psychologists.

Piper (2021) conducted a study in an empirical investigation of the empty nest syndrome, commonly understood as a situation where there are feelings of loss or loneliness for mothers and/or fathers following the departure of the last child from the family home. This investigation makes use of rich, longitudinal, nationally representative German data to assess whether there is evidence for such a syndrome. Furthermore, the analysis considers the role of two key economic variables: consumption and leisure via the standard economic concept of utility maximisation. The analysis highlights a conflict between what economic theory predicts - more disposable income and a gain of leisure time - and the psychological (and cultural) notion of the lonely, sad empty-nester. This conflict is an empirical question and here it is resolved via an assessment of the change in life satisfaction that is reported when parents become empty-nesters. Importantly, this investigation also tracks what the last child leaving the household goes on to do: Piper (2021) found reduced life satisfaction seems to be wholly moderated if the last child leaves the nest for the purposes of education, but not if for purposes of employment.

Chang, Zhou, and Wang, (2022) study aims to identify the status of successful aging and the factors influencing empty-nest elderly in China based on the social-ecological system theory. The data came from the follow-up survey (2018) of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study and 3074 empty-nesters aged 60 and over are included. Chi-squared tests and logistic regressions were used to identify factors associated with successful aging. The successful aging rate of empty-nesters in China was 5.9%. The results of the multifactor analysis showed that younger age, higher education level, good self-rated health, good hearing, high life satisfaction, availability of financial resources at the microsystem level, higher frequency of contact with children at the mesosystem level, and medical insurance at the macrosystem level were the contributing influencing factors for successful aging of empty-nesters in China. This study is an important attempt to explore the successful aging of empty-nesters in China. Because this study is based on social-ecological system theory, it confirms the important role of individual characteristics of older adults and their surrounding environment in achieving successful aging. Therefore, people should pay attention not only to the individual characteristics of the elderly, but also to the role of the surrounding environment on the health of the elderly, so that people can develop intervention measures to promote their successful aging.

Hagedorn, Chen, and Zhang, (2020) research examined the mental health and well-being of a sample of empty-nesters in Jinan City, Shandong Province. An in-depth individual interview approach, with document analysis and participant observation was performed on three types of interviewees (N = 33) recruited via purposive sampling. The empty-nesters faced many unique problems, especially a sense of being disjointed from the family, community and society. Influencing factors included Chinese traditional filial piety culture, lagging implementation of relevant policies and development of community ageing services, as well as the loss of productive roles for the empty nesters. Implications for social work services are identified.

Najib and Hamirudin (2020) in their study examined the prevalence of empty nest syndrome among middle aged women in Kuantan and its association with appetite and quality of life. Methods: Women aged 40 to 59 years old from Kuantan, Pahang, who have at least one child leaving the parental home, were recruited in this study (n= 242). Data were gathered through self administered questionnaires using a translated version of the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale, Council for Nutritional Appetite Questionnaires (CNAQ), and World Health Organization (WHOQOL) BREF Version. P-value was set at $p < 0.05$ as statistically significant to determine the association between empty nest syndrome with appetite and quality of life. Their finding reveals a high prevalence of empty nest syndrome among female adults (68.2%) and diverse variation in appetite and quality of life by socio-demographic characteristics. It has then been denoted that empty nest syndrome was negatively correlated with both appetite and quality of life. It indicated in general, mothers who suffer from empty nest syndrome are having poor appetite ($p < .001$) and low quality of life ($p < .001$). Conclusions: Understanding empty nest syndrome with its associated factors and consequences is essential to inculcate the adoption of a healthy lifestyle and coping mechanism behaviors. Thus, further research is needed to uncover empty nest syndrome determinants in a more comprehensive view.

Accordingly, the finding of the study by Osarenren and Udeaja (2018) showed that gender predictor of empty nest syndrome is unsurprising as previous studies like Whitbourne (2013) who indicated that empty-nest syndrome can have debilitating effects on parents especially women. Another finding of this study which reported that there is difference in the level of empty nest syndrome experienced based on marital maladjustment agrees with the earlier observations of researchers like Stoessel & Karam (2013); Tucker (2016) who showed that empty-nest syndrome is not unrelated to marital adjustment. The outcome of this study which reported that experience of empty-nest syndrome varies with stages in the family life cycle is also not without support from literature as the submission of Idumonyi (2017) that parents whose children leave home do not necessarily experience the grief of empty-nest syndrome presupposes that empty-nest syndrome is not necessarily experienced by all the people in the empty-nest stage. Each of the findings of these study which showed interactions of gender, family life adjustment and marital adjustment harmonizing to predict empty-nest syndrome is a clear indication that empty-nest is not a criterion of any single prediction variable. Idumonyi (2017) idea that parents whose children leave home do not necessarily experience the grief of empty-nest syndrome is though an eye opener to the fact that empty-nest syndrome is not peculiar to the empty-nest stage in the family life cycle. Finally, the findings of this study showing empty-nest syndrome as a significant negative predictor of social and emotional adjustment provide further

supports to several positions in the literature like Maktar (2015); Winch (2013) & Abate (2017) linking empty-nest syndrome to social and emotional adjustment.

Optimism and Life satisfaction

In recent years there are numerous institutions providing education in tourism sector which increase its importance, because of the need for qualified staff. School of Tourism and Hotel Managements are one of these institutions which provide the highest level of education. Due to the forefront of human element because of tourism sectors' structural characteristics Ünüvar, Avsaroglu and Uslu, (2012) conducted a study to evaluate optimism and life satisfaction of the undergraduate tourism and hotel management students. The sample involved the students who enrolled at School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Selcuk University in Turkey, during the spring semester of 2010-2011 academic year (n= 479). Results of the study showed that the students scored moderately on satisfaction and highly on optimism. Female students were more optimistic and satisfied than male students and the higher the level of income students had the more optimistic and satisfied they were. Another result showed that there was a positive correlation between students' optimism and life satisfaction.

Baltaci and Soykan (2020) research was conducted to determine the optimism, happiness, life meaning, and life satisfaction levels of the Faculty of Theology students. Also, within the scope of the research, it is aimed to determine the relations between these concepts. The research was designed as a correlational survey type that is one of the quantitative research methods. The multi-sample group consisted of 943 students studying in the faculties of theology at the universities of Ankara, Istanbul, Marmara, Ondokuz Mayıs, Ataturk, and Dokuz Eylul. The sample was determined by maximum diversity sampling. "Oxford Happiness Scale Short Form", "Life Orientation Test", "Life Meaning Scale" and "Life Satisfaction Scale" were used to collect data. In addition to descriptive statistics, correlation and hierarchical regression techniques were used to analyze the data. As a result of the research; It was determined that the level of optimism and happiness of the students was medium, whereas the perceptions of life meaning and life satisfaction were low. While women are more optimistic, happy and their life satisfaction is higher than men are, men have more perceptions about the meaning of life than women do. Besides, a significant and positive relationship between optimism, happiness, life meaning, and life satisfaction were determined.

Optimism is reflected in the extent to which people hold positive expectation for their future. It is related to the capacity to cope with life hardship and satisfaction. Optimism, coping skills, and life satisfaction are believed to be predictors of future success. The study by Wahyuni and Cahyawulan (2020) examined the relationship between optimism, coping skills and life satisfaction as a basis for web-based intervention. The participants totalled to 336 adolescents from 5 public high schools in Central Jakarta. The measure used is Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS), Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (ACOPE) and Domain-Specific Hope Scale (DSHC). The relationship between optimism, coping skills, and life satisfaction was analysed with gender consideration. Their result showed that there was a relationship between optimism, coping skills and life satisfaction. The implication for web-based intervention on optimism enhancement was also discussed.

According to Lin, Chiang, Li, and Liu, (2010) striving to achieve happiness is the fundamental goal of any person. Researchers of phenomenon of happiness operationalize this concept using the term of well-being. In the theoretical studies, the subjective state of well-being it is defined as having two dimensions - affective and cognitive. Affective dimension refers to the balance of positive emotions / negative emotions, and the cognitive one refers to life satisfaction (judgments on life satisfaction). Lin, Chiang, Li, and Liu, (2010) in a series of studies that focused on the affective dimension of well-being, it was pointed out that positive and negative emotions are relatively independent and that the lack of negative emotions does not attract a greater life satisfaction. The explanation has been identified in concepts such as optimism and pessimism. This means that when a person is optimistic is more likely to perceive life in a positive sense and to feel a higher satisfaction with life. This paper attempts to verify the correlations established previously by other empirical studies between the level of satisfaction with life and the optimism / pessimism of a person using two well-established instruments: Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Life Orientation Test. The research is conducted on 150 students from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies. We also propose practical recommendations for effective development of well-being, measures that can be implemented by the university in counseling programs.

Usán Supervía, Salavera Bordás, & Murillo Lorente, (2020) study focuses on analysing the relationship between academic goal orientation, optimism and life satisfaction in adolescent students, as well as the possible mediating role of the goal orientation (task and ego) in the relationship between optimism and life satisfaction in adolescents. Methods: The sample comprises 1602 students (male N = 871; 54.36% and female N = 731; 45.63%) from nine secondary schools. The instruments used were the Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R), the Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) questionnaire. The results of their study reveal significant correlations between optimism-related variables, goal orientation and life satisfaction. In addition, goal orientation was found to have a positive mediating role on optimism and life satisfaction. Their study shows the importance of promoting adaptive behaviours in goal orientation in adolescents, leading to optimal levels on variables such as optimism and life satisfaction, which in turn improve the individual's psychological development and academic performance.

Kour (2022) conducted a study to assess the life satisfaction and optimism among teachers of North India. 54 female teachers between the age group of 30 to 45 years residing in North India were the participants of this study. Snowball sampling technique was used for collecting the data through google forms. It was hypothesized that there will be significant difference between the life satisfaction of government and private school teachers of North India and there will be significant difference between optimism of government and private school teachers of North India. It was also hypothesized that there will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and optimism of school teachers of North India. The results of the study indicated that there is significant difference between the optimism of government and private school teachers of North India. The findings also show that there is significant correlation between life satisfaction and optimism of teachers of North India. The findings indicate that there is no significant difference between life satisfaction of government and private school teachers of North India.

Hypotheses

1. Empty nest syndrome will significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adult.
2. Optimism will significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adult.
3. Optimism will moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adult.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study comprised one hundred and fifty (150) middle-aged adults in Enugu State capital (Enugu) of the South-East in Nigeria. Participants were purposively selected based on their age from different work settings, and homes in Enugu State. I captured their age, gender, ethnic, educational qualification and socioeconomic status in the study. The demographic description showed that males were ninety (90) while female were sixty (60). Their ages range from 40-60 years.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in gathering information in this study. They include: Empty Nest Syndrome Scale, Optimism Scale and The Satisfaction with Life Scale.

Empty Nest Syndrome Scale

Empty Nest Syndrome Scale is a 12-item scale developed by Chen, Yang and Aagard, (2012) that measures signs of empty nest syndrome among mid to late adults. They assess the anxiety and challenges they face during this period. The response is a 5-point Likert options range from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. For example "I can take care of myself", "I would like to move near my children's home". The author reported a reliability index of .90.

Optimism Scale

The initial 10-item Optimism Scale was validated in a sample of 2,693 participants from Spain (Pedrosa et al., 2015). The sample was divided to assess the structure of the scale across methods, such as exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. One item was excluded from the analysis because it loaded too low on the main optimism factor, leaving nine items that formed a uni-dimensional structure with a good internal consistency ($\alpha=0.84$; Kline, 2013). This nine-item scale assesses dispositional optimism with items such as “When I think about the future, I am positive”. Responses were given on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Item Response Theory revealed that all items presented high to very high discrimination levels (Baker, 2001). To test its convergent validity, the scale was correlated with the Overall Personality Assessment Scale that measures the Big-5 (Vigil-Colet, Morales-Vives, Camps, Tous, & Lorenzo-Seva, 2013) and the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (emotional intelligence; Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, & Ramos, 2004). Results showed significant correlations of dispositional optimism with all five big factors: emotional stability (i.e., neuroticism [negative], $r=0.62$, $p < .001$), extroversion ($r=0.31$, $p < .001$), conscientiousness ($r=0.33$, $p < .001$), openness to change ($r=0.15$, $p < .001$), and agreeableness ($r=0.26$; $p < .001$). Also, the construct was positively correlated with both emotional intelligence dimensions: emotional clearness ($r=0.34$, $p < .001$) and emotional repair ($r=0.62$, $p < .001$). As the Optimism Scale was only published recently in Spanish, we found just one study that used this scale: Optimism was positively related with perception of health and positive affect (Vera-Villarreal et al., 2017).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale

The instrument to be used to study satisfaction with life was the Satisfaction with life scale proposed by Ed Diener in 1985. We used the 2006 form of the instrument. The instrument has 5 items with a 7 Likert scale. The scores range from 5 to 35. The 30 – 35 score is a very high score and means a highly satisfied individual, 25– 29 is a high score and means a satisfied individual, 20 – 24 is an average score, 15 – 19 is a slightly below average in life satisfaction, 10 – 14 dissatisfied and 5-9 Extremely Dissatisfied. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed to assess satisfaction with the respondent's life as a whole.

Procedure

The researcher recruited assistants who helped administer copies of the questionnaire in Enugu State. Research assistants were fellow students who are familiar with procedures of field data collection. The research assistants gained access to the various work setting and homes with the help of a staff. A convenient sampling technique was adopted as the preferred samples are adults who are from the age of 40 and above in the south eastern states of Nigeria. All participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and their data would remain confidential.

Design/Statistics

The study is a cross-sectional survey design and hierarchical multiple regression and Hayes PROCESS Macro was adopted. SPSS version 23 (statistical package for the social sciences) was used for the data analysis.

Results

This chapter captures the correlation table, the mean and standard deviation of the variables studied. The correlation analysis, the Hayes regression-based Macro Process for SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the hypothesis. Table 1; explains the correlation table. Table 2: explains the moderated analysis of the variables studied.

Table 1: Mean, Standard deviation, and Correlations among the study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	-----	-----	1						
2 Gender	-----	-----	.14	1					
3 MS	-----	-----	.22**	-.11	1				
4 EG	-----	-----	.15	-.07	.05	1			
5 ENS	56.68	7.73	-.30**	-.31**	.06	-.02	1		
6 OPTI	34.77	8.03	-.39**	-.35**	-.04	-.02	.49**	1	
7 LFSAT	26.28	6.52.	-.32**	-.38**	.01	-.01	.51**	.87**	1

Note: $N=150$, ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed). MS. = Marital Status, EG= Ethnic Group, ENS= Empty Nest Syndrome, OPTI= Optimism, LFSAT= Life Satisfaction

The result of the Pearson correlations in Table 1 indicates that age correlated with marital status ($r=.22$, $p<.01$), empty nest syndrome ($r=-.30$, $p<.01$), optimism ($r=-.39$, $p<.01$) and life satisfaction ($r=-.32$, $p<.01$). Gender correlated with empty nest syndrome ($r=-.31$, $p<.01$), optimism ($r=-.35$, $p<.01$) and life satisfaction ($r=-.38$, $p<.01$). ENS correlated with optimism ($r=.49$, $p<.01$) and life satisfaction ($r=.51$, $p<.01$). Optimism correlated with life satisfaction ($r=.87$, $p<.01$).

Table 2: Hayes Process Moderating Effect of optimism in the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction in middle age adults.

Variable	B	SE	T	P	95%CI	R ²	F
EMPTY	.05	.13	.37	.71	[-.21, .30]	.76	152.38*
OPTIMISM	.59	.22	2.72	.01	[.16, 1.03]		
EMPTY X OPTIMISM	.01	.01	.32	.75	[-.01, .01]		

B= Beta, SE= Standard Error, CI= Confidence Interval

The result of the analysis in Table 2 indicates that empty nest syndrome was not related to life satisfaction among middle aged adults ($\beta = .05$, 95% CI [-.21, .30], $P > .05$). The result showed that optimism positively related with life satisfaction among middle aged adults ($\beta = .59$, 95% CI [.16, 1.03], $P < .01$). The interaction effect of optimism on the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = .01$, 95% CI [-.01, .01], $P > .05$).

Summary of Findings

- (1) Empty nest syndrome did not significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adults.
- (2) Optimism had a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction among middle aged adults.

- (3) Optimism did not moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adults.

Discussion

The hypothesis which states that empty nest syndrome will significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adult was not accepted. The result of the study does not support the findings of Mansoor and Hasan (2019), Piper (2021), Najib and Hamirudin (2020) Osarenren and Udejaja (2018) which reported that empty nest syndrome significantly relates with life satisfaction among middle aged adults. This study showed no significant relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction. This result may be due to the fact that most middle-age adults in Nigeria may not have actually experienced empty nest syndrome.

The second hypothesis which states that Optimism will significantly relate with life satisfaction among middle aged adult was accepted. The present study has established a positive association between optimism and life satisfaction. The present study's results align with the findings of Ünüvar, Avsaroglu and Uslu, (2012), Wong and Lim (2009), which demonstrated a positive association between optimism and life satisfaction among individuals in Singapore. Moreover, the study conducted by Chang et al. (1997) elucidates the role of optimism in predicting variations in individuals' levels of life satisfaction. The study's findings indicate that middle-aged individuals who exhibited high levels of achievement striving and situational optimism reported higher levels of life satisfaction. The results of this study suggest a significant positive correlation between optimism and life satisfaction, highlighting the significance of optimism in individuals' overall well-being. An optimistic perspective is crucial in influencing life satisfaction and its correlation with one's perception of living. The initiation of this process is contingent upon the attitudes exhibited by parents within the familial context, subsequently extending to encompass the surrounding environmental conditions.

The third hypothesis which states that optimism will moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction among middle aged adult was rejected. This could be explained by the premise that empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction never shared a significant relationship in this study. Middle-age adults do not associate empty nest syndrome with their life satisfaction but rather their high levels of achievement striving.

Implications of the Study

The construct of optimism can be distinguished from trait-based assessments of negative affect. Evidence suggests that the optimism variable exhibits a moderate and statistically significant relationship with life satisfaction. Hence, one can posit that there exists a potential correlation between heightened levels of optimism and increased levels of life satisfaction. It could be argued that the correlation between self-optimism and life satisfaction is significant. In general, the results of this study demonstrate a significant correlation between self-esteem, optimism, and the preservation of overall life satisfaction. Moreover, it can be argued that optimism has the potential to influence middle-aged adults.

Limitations of the Study

Although the sample used in this study was carefully selected from the population, it was not chosen randomly, but rather through convenience. To improve future studies, it is essential to use random assignment, which is a critical aspect of regression analysis. Moreover, the study's findings may be limited due to the fact that it only covered the southeast region of the country, specifically Enugu State, and did not include all geopolitical zones. Additionally, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 150 middle-aged adults. Increasing the sample size would likely enhance the study's validity, internal validity, and generalizability. Furthermore, the location of the sample may have imposed restrictions on the study's findings.

Suggestions for further studies

To examine the relationship between empty nest syndrome, life satisfaction, and levels of optimism, future research endeavours should consider sampling middle-aged adults from various geopolitical zones. A more comprehensive understanding of the topic can be achieved by including participants from different regions. In order to enhance the credibility of the findings, it is necessary to augment the sample size. By increasing the sample size, additional study indices may be uncovered.

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated the moderating role of optimism in the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction in middle age (40-60) adults. The study showed that empty nest syndrome did not relate with life satisfaction among middle-aged adult. Optimism significantly related with life satisfaction but did not moderate the relationship between empty nest syndrome and life satisfaction. Optimism is the key that drives life satisfaction of middle aged adults. It embraces the tendency to expect the best or at least a favourable outcome.

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