



## Life Satisfaction, Self Esteem and Depression in a Sample of Nigerian Adolescents

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### Authors' contributions

This study was jointly conducted by all the authors. Authors FEO, ENA and CSE contributed to the conception, literature review, data collection and proof reading of the manuscript. Author ENA did the analysis, author FEO did the discussion, while all the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** A person's state of mind often affects his/her health and how he/she responds to stress. The level of happiness and life satisfaction in the individual can be assessed by finding out if a person has high amounts of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships and self esteem. Present study was therefore aimed at obtaining the levels of life satisfaction, self esteem and depression among Nigerian adolescents.

**Materials and Methods:** This was a descriptive cross sectional study design that was carried out in Enugu, south east Nigeria between May and July 2015. The Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Self Esteem Scale, the Beck Depression Inventory version two (BDI-2) and a socio demographic questionnaire were used to access 720 Nigerian adolescents.

**Results:** About 30% of the respondents indicated not being satisfied with their lives and 32.1% had low self esteem. Also 16.7%, 9.4% and 0.6% had mild depression, moderate depression and severe depression respectively.

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**Conclusion:** This study observed low levels of life satisfaction, self esteem and varying degrees of depression in a sample of Nigerian adolescents. It is recommended that there is the need to introduce regular adolescent counseling and personality assessment for all adolescents.

*Keywords: Life satisfaction; self esteem; depression; adolescents; positive psychology; Nigeria.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For several years psychology has mostly paid attention on the study of psychopathological conditions, but quite recently positive psychologists have advocated for the study of wellness including the nature and development of key human strengths [1]. Such human strengths that have received the attention of researchers in positive psychology especially among adolescents include life satisfaction and self esteem [2]. Studies in positive psychology had long identified two major components of what make people to be contented with their lives: the cognitive and affective components of subjective wellbeing. The cognitive dimension of subjective wellbeing has to do with life satisfaction whereas the affective component has to do with positive and negative emotions such as happiness and loneliness [3] Diener et al. [4] posited that life satisfaction refers to a person's subjective and global evaluations of the positivity of his or her life as a whole or with specific life dimensions such as family life or school experience.

Indeed, it has variously been argued that life satisfaction tends to vary over time and that in the long run even painful or traumatic experiences do not change it significantly [5]. Self esteem, on the other hand, has to do with an individual's overall evaluation of his or her sense of worth [6]. It means having confidence in oneself, a satisfaction of what one is and the self-respect that confidence brings. It is the appraisal or assessment of a person about his or her self worth. According to UNICEF [7] adolescence is the period of human development lasting between the ages of ten to nineteen years. It is seen as a stage in individual growth and development associated with wide fluctuations in behavior. Although adolescents are generally perceived as a healthy age group, 20% of them in any given year experience mental health problems, most commonly depression and anxiety [8]. Some researchers have posited that adolescence is the critical period for the development of self esteem and self identity, and that low self esteem may endanger adolescents' emotional development [9,10].

According to DSM-IV-TR [11] some of the signs of depression include deep sorrow or grief, insomnia, loss of appetite, unpleasant mood, hopelessness, irritability, self dislike and suicidal tendencies. Studies have revealed that depression may impair adolescents' academic performance, lead to school refusal as well as other forms of antisocial behaviors including truancy, delinquency, promiscuity, teenage pregnancy and equally can increase the risk of suicide among adolescents [12,13]. Previous studies have also established a significant association between self esteem and life satisfaction [14]. and between life satisfaction and depression [15,16]. Variables like good job, better physical and mental health, positive life events healthy interpersonal relationships and high income have been observed to correlate significantly with high level of life satisfaction [17].

It has equally been argued that although most adolescents experience some difficulty in developing positive self esteem, yet researches in positive psychology had shown that adolescents who maintain positive self esteem tend to exhibit more positive affective states, greater wellness, more life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms [18,19] Despite all these observations there is paucity of similar data among adolescents in Nigeria. Hence, the main aim of present study was to assess life satisfaction, self esteem and depression in a sample of adolescents resident in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Study Location

The study was conducted in Enugu which is a major metropolitan city in south eastern Nigeria. It has several primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions which are private, public or mission owned. This study was conducted among secondary school adolescents attending these public schools within the metropolis between the months of May and July 2015.

## 2.2 Subjects

Subjects for the study were male and female secondary school adolescents in Enugu metropolis. Three schools each of public, mission and private secondary schools were selected from each of the two local government councils in the metropolis using simple random sampling procedure, making a total of 9 secondary schools per local government and 18 secondary schools from the two local governments. Then from each school 40 students made up of 20 male and 20 female adolescents were selected using the same sampling procedure making a total of 720 adolescents (360 males and 360 females). This number therefore formed the study sample. Those who were sick as at the time of data collection or refused consent were excluded from the study. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the state schools management board and the school authorities concerned while ethical permit was obtained from University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Ethics Committee.

## 2.3 Data Collection and Instruments

The authors collected the data for the study with the help of three psychology interns between the months of May and June 2015. The study tool was in English (the lingua franca of the study environment) and the researchers were available to respond to queries from the respondents. The study tools were self-administered instrument that was made up of three parts. Part one contained basic socio-demographic information such as age, gender, religion and current class in school. Part two was the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) [20]. The SWLS was used to measure life satisfaction among the respondents. This is a 5 item instrument that measures life satisfaction on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Sample items in the scale include: I am satisfied with my life and my life is close to my ideal. Scores on this scale ranged from 5-35. A total score for a respondent is obtained by adding his or her responses to the five items of the scale. Scores ranging from 5-9 = extremely dissatisfied; 10-14 = dissatisfied; 15-19 = slightly dissatisfied; 20= neutral; 21-25 = slightly satisfied; 26-30 = satisfied; 31-35 = extremely satisfied [20]. However for ease of analysis, in the present study we dichotomized life satisfaction into satisfied and not satisfied. Thus scores ranging from 5-20 = not satisfied, while scores ranging from 21-35 = satisfied. The SWLS is the most widely used measure for assessing life

satisfaction to date [21]. The SWLS items were said to be global rather than specific in nature thereby allowing respondents to weigh domains of their lives in terms of their own values [22]. The 2 month test-retest correlation coefficient of the scale was reported to be 0.82 and an alpha coefficient of 0.87 [20]. In a recent study among college students Khatib [21] reported an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.85 and a two week test –retest reliability coefficient of 0.79. For this study the internal consistency reliability coefficient was 0.83 and the two week test – retest reliability coefficient was 0.74.

Part three was the Self esteem scale (SES) by Rosenberg [23]. The SES was used to assess self esteem among the participants. The SES is a widely used and validated self –report measure for assessing self esteem. This is a ten-item measure that is scored on a 4-point Likert type response format starting from 1=strongly disagree to 4= strongly agree. Sample items in the SES include 'I think I have a number of good qualities' and 'I feel I do not have much to be proud of'. In the SES five of the items (2,5,6,8,9) are reverse scored. Total obtainable score including the reverse scores ranged from 10-40 with high scores indicating high self esteem. Equally we dichotomized self esteem into high and low, thus scores ranging from 10-20 indicates low self esteem while scores ranging from 21-40 indicates high self esteem. The SES has a reported reproducibility coefficient of .92 and a test –retest correlation of .85 over a two week period. Furthermore Khatib [21] reported the cronbach alpha of the scale in their own study to be .86 and a two week test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.79. For the present study the cronbach alpha of the scale was .84 and the two week test –retest reliability coefficient was 0.76. Furthermore the SES has been used for studies in Nigeria [18]. Part four was the Beck Depression Inventory, second edition (BDI-2) developed by Beck et al. [24]. The BDI-2 was used to assess depression among the respondents. It is a well-known self-report measure used to assess depression and its severity. The validity and reliability of the BDI-2 has been well established across a broad spectrum of clinical and non-clinical population. The BDI-11 positively correlated with the Hamilton Depression rating scale  $r=0.71$ , has a one week test-retest reliability of  $r=0.93$  and an internal consistency  $\alpha =.91$  [25].

The BDI-2 is a 21-item self report questionnaire, it is scored by adding the ratings of the 21 items.

Each item is scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 0-3. The maximum total score is 63. The questions in the BDI-2 cover a broad area of an individual's feelings such as sadness, self-dislike, past failure and loss of pleasure. Sample questions include: I do not feel sad; I feel sad much of the time; I am sad all the time and I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it. In the BDI-2 total scores ranging from 0-9 indicates absence of depression; 10-18 indicates mild depression; 19-29 indicates moderate depression while scores ranging from 30-63 indicates severe depression. The BDI-2 has been used for studies in Nigeria [26].

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Data for the study was analyzed using the Statistical package for social science, SPSS version 16.0. Percentages and the Pearson's chi-squared test were performed to find relationships between variables. The level of significance chosen for this study was  $p \leq 0.05$  at 95% confidence interval.

## 3. RESULTS

Age of respondents ranged from 13-19 years (mean age= 16.35; SD =1.70). There was equal representation of males and females (50% each), all were Christians. About 37% were in the junior secondary (JSS), while 62.6% were in the senior secondary (SS). With regards to life satisfaction and self esteem 30.0% reported not satisfied with life, while 32.1% reported having low self esteem respectively. Equally 16.7% indicated

mild depression, 9.4% reported moderate depression whereas 0.6% reported severe depression, (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution of socio-demographic variables, life satisfaction, self esteem and depression among the respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percent
13-15	240	33.3
16-19	480	66.7
Gender		
Male	360	50.0
Female	360	50.0
Religion		
Christianity	720	100.0
Class In school		
Junior secondary	269	37.4
Senior secondary	451	62.6
Life satisfaction		
Satisfied	504	70.0
Not satisfied	216	30.0
Self Esteem		
High self esteem	489	67.9
Low self esteem	231	32.1
Depression		
Non depressed	528	73.3
Mild	120	16.7
Moderate	68	9.4
Severe	4	0.6

Result further revealed no significant association between life satisfaction, self esteem and age group but there was a significant association between age group and depression,  $\chi^2 = 38.6$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$  (Table 2).

**Table 2. Life satisfaction, self esteem and depression among the age group**

Life satisfaction	Age group	
	13-15 (n1=240)	16-19 (n2=480)
Satisfied	179 (74.6)	325 (67.7)
Not satisfied	61 (25.4)	155 (32.3)
	$\chi^2 = 3.60$ ; P value = 0.057	
Self esteem		
High self esteem	173 (72.1)	316 (65.8)
Low self esteem	67 (27.9)	164 (34.2)
	$\chi^2 = 2.87$ ; P value = 0.09	
Depression		
None	194 (80.8)	334 (69.6)
Mild	30 (12.5)	90 (18.8)
Moderate	15 (6.3)	53 (11.0)
Severe	1 (0.4)	3 (0.6)
	$\chi^2 = 38.6$ ; p = 0.003*	

\*Significant

Although more females reported being depressed more than the males this difference was not significant ( $P = 0.433$ ). Similarly there were no significant gender differences in life satisfaction ( $P = 0.870$ ) and self esteem ( $P = 0.576$ ) (Table 3).

Class in school was significantly associated with life satisfaction ( $P = 0.03$ ) and depression ( $P = 0.01$ ) but not with self esteem ( $P = 0.06$ ) as shown in Table 4.

Table 5 showed significant relationship between life satisfaction, self esteem and depression.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The result of this study has revealed low levels of life satisfaction and self esteem with varying degrees of depression among the adolescents

who acted as respondents. About 30% were not satisfied with their lives and 32.1% had low self esteem. With regards to depression 16.7% indicated mild depression, 9.4% indicated moderate depression whereas 0.6% indicated severe depression respectively. This pattern of results had been variously documented by researchers across the globe, for instance Bayati et al. [15] found that depression has negative impact on life satisfaction and wellbeing and that depression was significantly associated with life satisfaction among college students. Furthermore Paschalis and Tsitsas [16] reported that lower life satisfaction was related to high depressive symptoms. In another study on the relationship between depression, life satisfaction and social interest researchers observed that depression correlated negatively with life satisfaction [27].

**Table 3. Life satisfaction, self esteem and depression among gender**

Life satisfaction	Gender	
	Male (n1=360)	Female (n2=360)
Satisfied	251 (69.7)	253 (70.3)
Not satisfied	109 (30.3)	107 (29.7)
	$\chi^2 = 0.027$ ; $P = 0.87$	
Self esteem		
High self esteem	248 (68.9)	241 (66.9)
Low self esteem	112 (31.1)	119 (33.1)
	$\chi^2 = 0.312$ ; $P = 0.576$	
Depression		
None	270 (75.0)	258 (71.7)
Mild	60 (16.7)	60 (16.7)
Moderate	29 (8.1)	39 (8.1)
Severe	1 (0.3)	3 (0.8)
	$\chi^2 = 2.743$ .; $P = 0.433$	

**Table 4. Relationship between life satisfaction, self esteem, depression and class in school among the respondents lease**

Life satisfaction	Class in school	
	JSS (n1=269)	SS (n2 = 451)
Satisfied	201 (74.7)	303 (67.2)
Not satisfied	68 (25.3)	148 (32.8)
	$\chi^2 = 4.56$ ; $p = 0.03^*$	
Self esteem		
High self esteem	194 (72.1)	295 (65.4)
Low self esteem	75 (27.9)	156 (34.6)
	$\chi^2 = 3.48$ ; $p = 0.06$	
Depression		
None	215 (79.9)	313 (69.4)
Mild	30 (11.2)	90 (20.0)
Moderate	22 (8.2)	46 (10.2)
Severe	2 (0.7)	2 (0.4)
	$\chi^2 = 11.38$ ; $P = 0.01^*$	

\*Significant

**Table 5. Relationships between life satisfaction, self esteem and depression**

Life satisfaction	Depression			Total	
	No depression	Mild depression	Moderate depression		Severe depression
Satisfied	465 (88.1)	28 (23.3)	10 (14.7)	1 (25.0)	504
Not satisfied	63 (11.9)	92 (76.7)	58 (85.3)	3 (72.0)	216
<b>Total</b>	<b>528 (100.0)</b>	<b>120 (100.0)</b>	<b>68 (100.0)</b>	<b>4 (100.0)</b>	<b>720</b>
$\chi^2 = 309.4;$ $P = 0.00^*$					
Self esteem					
High	450 (85.2)	25 (20.8)	12 (17.6)	2 (50.0)	489
Low	78 (14.8)	95 (79.2)	56 (82.4)	2 (50.0)	231
<b>Total</b>	<b>528 (100.0)</b>	<b>120 (100.0)</b>	<b>68 (100.0)</b>	<b>4 (100.0)</b>	<b>720</b>
$\chi^2 = 274.1; P = 0.00^*$					

The pattern of relationships between life satisfaction, self esteem and depression noticed in this study corroborates these earlier findings. Our result revealed a significant association between depression and age of the adolescents. This may imply that the older an adolescent becomes the more likely he may become depressed due to life's daily challenges and the stress of living associated with the present harsh economic environment in the country which has made some adolescents to combine school work with some menial jobs like after school hours as a way of getting additional income to augment their school fees and provide some of their necessities since the meager resources of their parents or guardians may not be enough to go round for the overall family upkeep. These additional works by these adolescents apart from making them depressed may also lead to low self esteem and feeling of dissatisfaction with life. Furthermore in this regard it has been observed that adolescents are generally perceived as a healthy age group and yet 20% of them in any given year experience mental health problems, most commonly depression and anxiety [8]. The low levels of life satisfaction and self esteem coupled with the varying degrees of depression noticed among the adolescents may dampen their positive self image and equally impair their academic performance as has been previously documented [12,13,28].

We did not find any gender differences in life satisfaction, self esteem and depression among the subjects, even though females were more depressed than the males but this was not significant. This pattern of finding has previously been reported [25]. With regards to class in school significant association was noticed between life satisfaction and class in school. This may be as a result of the positive feelings

associated with advancing from one class to the other which may tend to remind the adolescent that he or she is about to finish secondary school and enter the university and progress further in educational advancement. However the increasing academic workload and the hurdles associated with advancing from one class to another may weigh down on some of the adolescents and make them feel depressed. In this regard Zawawi and Hamaideh [29] working with 429 Jordanian college students had reported a negative relationship between satisfaction with life and depressive symptoms. Similar finding was equally reported elsewhere [30] among university students.

Furthermore the result of this study revealed significant association between life satisfaction, self esteem and depression. This finding relates to previous reports which had indicated how life satisfaction and self esteem influence depression. According to some of these reports higher life satisfaction and self esteem predicted lower levels of depression whereas low life satisfaction and self esteem tend to predict higher levels of depression among adolescents and university students [31,29,30]. Other researchers had equally reported positive associations between life satisfaction and self esteem among adolescents. [32,33,34].

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study had observed that some of the adolescents who took part in the study manifested low levels of life satisfaction and self esteem with varying degrees of depression. The pattern of findings in this study had laid credence to earlier reports which opined that depression tends to lower life satisfaction and self esteem especially among adolescents. There is therefore

the need to introduce regular adolescent counseling and personality assessment for all adolescents with a view to identifying those with low levels of self esteem and life satisfaction so that adequate measures will be put in place to help uplift their positive self image and prevent them from becoming depressed.

### STUDY LIMITATION

The collection of data for this study from only one state may limit the generalization of the result beyond the study location; in future efforts should be made to carry out similar study across many locations in Nigeria. Furthermore, presence of some confounders like socioeconomic status, academic achievement, relation with teachers, family & home circumstances, etc were not included in the study.

### CONSENT

All the subjects gave their consents to participate in the study.

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the university of Nigeria teaching hospital ethics committee.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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