



## GENDER DIFFERENCES, SELF ESTEEM AND LIFE SATISFACTION

**MAYUNGBO, O.A.**

*Department of Sociology and Psychology,  
Faculty of Social and Management Sciences,  
Lead City University Ibadan, Nigeria.*

*Email: doctormayungbo@gmail.com. Phone: 08136174435*

### ABSTRACT

*Life satisfaction, recognized as one of the main goals of life for individuals and for social policies of governments, is generally low in Nigeria. The few available studies on life satisfaction have been concentrated on other aspects of life satisfaction without giving attention to the importance of gender and self-esteem in improving life satisfaction. This study, therefore, examined the effects of gender and self-esteem on life satisfaction among residents in Ibadan metropolis. Using a 2-way factorial design and a multistage sampling technique, five of the eleven Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the metropolis were purposively selected. Based on the list of enumeration areas for 2005 census, 10 enumeration areas each were selected from the LGAs with simple random technique. The number of houses on the selected enumeration areas was determined with enumeration area maps. Two hundred and twenty households each were selected from the LGAs using systematic technique. A total of 1100 household heads were randomly sampled. A structured questionnaire focusing on socio-demographic profile, self-esteem ( $r=0.61$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r=0.74$ ), were administered to the participants. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance at 0.05 level of significance. Self-esteem influenced life satisfaction ( $F(1,685) = 30.59; p < .05$ ) while, gender did not influence life satisfaction ( $F(1,685) = .85; p > .05$ ). There was a significant interaction effect of self-esteem on gender to predict life satisfaction ( $F(1,685) = 5.40; p < .05$ ). Gender was not important but self-esteem was crucial in improving life satisfaction. Gender differences should be considered for adequate measurement of life satisfaction based on gender descriptions of men and women.*

**Keywords:** *Life satisfaction, Gender, Self Esteem, Households, Enumeration Areas.*

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophers and psychologists have long been concerned with the study of life satisfaction and how it can be achieved (Russell, 1930; Guignon, 1999). Yet, the interest in the study of life satisfaction has not diminished in the recent times (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Life satisfaction is what individuals seek to improve at all times. When psychologists attempt to measure life satisfaction, they are seeking to measure how individuals think and feel about their lives generally. Life satisfaction is an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of his or her life (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002). The cognitive part refers to what individuals think about their life satisfaction in specific and general terms. The affective aspect refers to individuals' emotions, moods and feelings about how their lives are going. People are said to experience positive affect when they have pleasant emotions, moods and feelings and they are considered to have negative affect when they experience unpleasant emotions, moods and feelings.

An individual who has a high level of satisfaction with life and has more positive affect and less negative affect, would be regarded as having a high level of life satisfaction and vice versa. Life satisfaction is an important life goal but it appears to be low in Nigeria in particular and in Africa in general. Studies have shown that the lowest levels of life satisfaction are found in Africa. The highest level of life satisfaction in the world are found in Northern European countries while the least satisfied countries are all poor countries in Africa (OECD, 2013). Most studies done on life satisfaction are done on cultures outside Africa (Snyder, 2002) while the few available studies on life satisfaction have not given attention to the influence of self-esteem and gender differences on life satisfaction.



Difference in gender has been identified in explaining levels of satisfaction with life. This argument indicates that the differences in people's life satisfaction are in part, due to their being males or females. However, the examination of gender differences in predicting life satisfaction has produced mixed outcomes which has generated some questions. The gender research has raised the question of whether men and women are different in terms of life satisfaction on the basis of the way they describe themselves. According to Angeleitner (1978) and Mutran, (1987), men tend to describe themselves as independent, achievement oriented, financially oriented, and more competitive than women. While Women are more likely to describe themselves as sociable, moral, dependent, and less assertive (Mutran, 1987; Siegler, George and Okun, 1979). Therefore gender differences in terms of the different manner men and women describe themselves may suggest that men and women do not derive their life satisfaction from the same source, which makes the concept of gender and life satisfaction difficult to understand.

The issue of gender differences has also raised the question of whether differences in life satisfaction is connected to gender-related limitations for women, such as low socio-economic status, poor physical health, higher rate of being widowed etc .Researchers have also considered the question of whether gender differences in life satisfaction vary with the age of participants.

In addition to the many questions associated with gender research, findings on gender differences on life satisfaction have shown conflicting results. For example, in studies conducted by Wood, Rhodes, and Whelan (1989), they compared the life satisfaction levels of men and women and found no significant gender differences across all studies. However in another national study they conducted, women reported higher levels of life satisfaction than men. Moksnes and Espnes (2013) reported a lower level of life satisfaction for women than men and Goldbeck et al. (2007) reported a lower life satisfaction for girls as compared to boys. On the other hand, Kling, Hyde, Showers and Buswell (1999) and Haring, Stock and Okun (1984), reported a slightly higher life satisfaction in men than women. Similarly, Smith and Baltes (1998) also reported higher life satisfaction in elderly men than women. Therefore, gender differences in life satisfaction have been investigated in many studies. However, conflicts in the results being reported have made it very difficult to derive clear conclusions from these studies. Due to the many inconsistent results and because most of these studies were conducted in foreign cultures, this study would be helpful at this time.

Studies have also suggested the association of self-esteem and life satisfaction. Self-esteem is a global evaluative attitude towards the self (Rosenberg, 1965). It is a general feeling of individual self-worth or adequacy as a person, or general feeling of self acceptance and self respect (Coopersmith, 1967 & Rosenberg, 1965). This personal judgement of worthiness is characterized as the evaluative component of the self and different from collective or racial self esteem (Crocker and Major, 1989). Maslow (1954), suggested that people have a basic need for self esteem, which is being maintained by several strategies in the Western cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). All humans have a need for self esteem and being respected by others. Self esteem is a typical human desire to be accepted and valued by other members of the society. People often get some jobs or join some clubs or take on some hobbies for the purpose of gaining social approval or recognition. These activities are believed to give the individual a sense of contribution or value. However, if individuals are unable to achieve these needs, it may result to low self esteem and weakness. Low self-esteem may occur due to the inability of individuals to maintain a balance during this level in the hierarchy of needs. Psychological imbalances such as depression can hinder individuals from obtaining a higher level of self-esteem or self-respect.



The concern with self-esteem therefore, is the fact that it is an important aspect of psychological functioning (Crocker & Major, 1989). Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of satisfaction. High self-esteem people consider themselves equal in dignity to others rather than feeling inferior or superior although they acknowledge differences in certain talents, personal prestige or financial status. Having a high self-esteem has many positive effects while low self-esteem is associated with depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, heavy self-criticism and general dissatisfaction with one's life (Harter, 1986). Unlike individuals with low self-esteem, high self-esteem individuals are more likely to have positive emotion, to continue in the face of failure and see negative experiences as a challenge rather than a threat (Wood et al., 2003; DiPaula & Campbell, 2002; Seery et al., 2004).

The general view is that life satisfaction and self-esteem are closely related to the extent that it is difficult to separate them conceptually. Life satisfaction is believed to be unrealizable without self-confidence and self-acceptance. Ryff (1989) concluded that the most consistent requirement for positive subjective well-being has been the individual's sense of self-acceptance or self-esteem (Myers, 1992). Many people who are socialised in individualistic cultures may not even make a distinction between how satisfied they are with their lives and how satisfied they are with themselves (Lucas, 1996). Another view holds that life satisfaction and self-esteem are different constructs. According to Parnicki (1995), self-esteem may seem important for life satisfaction, it does not provide an adequate description of life satisfaction and may not be related to many of our most satisfied or unsatisfied experiences. High self-esteem is said not to be a sufficient condition for life satisfaction. This perspective may help explain why the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction varies in individualist cultures as against collectivist cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995). In cultures where the group and the community are valued higher than the self, self-esteem may simply not be an important source of life satisfaction. Lucas (1996) found that life satisfaction is empirically different from self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995).

Life satisfaction and self-esteem therefore appear, on the surface, to be linked. In their daily experiences, individuals who are satisfied with life tend to feel good about themselves, and people who lack self-esteem and self-respect are generally not satisfied with life. Empirical evidence supports this, revealing moderate to high correlations between life satisfaction and self-esteem (Andrews, 1991; Campbell, 1981; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999 & Schimmack, 2004). However, these associations are not consistent which calls for the need for further examination of the relationship between these two variables.

The review of literature has however generated two hypotheses; that gender and self-esteem will significantly independently influence life satisfaction and that there will be an interaction effect of gender and self-esteem on life satisfaction.

## **METHODS**

### **Design**

The study design is a 2 x 2 factorial design. The independent variables in the study are: gender which comprises of (male and female) and self-esteem which comprises of (high and low). The dependent variable is life satisfaction.



## Sample and sampling technique

A multi stage sampling method was adopted for the study. The study sample comprised of one thousand one hundred heads of households randomly selected from five Local Government Areas in Ibadan metropolis. The participants' age was  $42.11 \pm 15.20$  years. There were 56.2% females. Participants' educational qualification was 9.9% no formal education, 23.7% primary education, 29.9% secondary education, 20.8% post secondary education, and 11.6% university graduates. Participants' marital status was 79.6% married, 1.7% separated, 0.27% divorced, 4.9% widowed and 11.3% never married. Christian participants were 428 (42.5%), Muslims were 573 (56.6%) while 3 (0.9%) were traditional worshippers. Participants' ethnic groups was 906 (89.5%) Yoruba, 60 (5.9%) Igbo, 3 (3.4%) Hausa, and 12 (1.2%) others.

## Instrument:

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which consist of four sections: A to C.

**Section A** consists of the social demographic characteristics of participants i.e. age, gender, religion, occupation, marital status, ethnic group, educational status and so on.

**Section B** is a 10-item scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure self esteem. It has a four-point Likert response form ranging from strongly agree, agree, and disagree, to strongly disagree. The scale generally has high reliability: test retest correlations were in the range of .82 to .88 and Cronbach alpha was in the range of .77 to .88. Studies have demonstrated both a uni-dimensional and a two factor structure for the scale. In scoring the items, items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 were reversed scores. Scores from the scale range from 0 to 30 with 30 indicating the highest score. The mean score for this study is 21.42. Participants who scored above the mean were considered as having high self esteem while those who scored below the mean were regarded as having low self esteem.

**Section C** is a 20-item scale developed by Neugarten et al (1961) to measure life satisfaction. It has 3 response formats which are disagree, agree and don't know. It measures 5 domains of life such as zest for life, resolution and fortitude, congruence between desired and achieved goals, high physical, psychological and social self-concept, happy and optimistic mood tone. The Cronbach alpha reported ranges from 0.79 to 0.90. The total score on the scale was based on participant's agreement with specific responses to individual items. The possible range with one point given for each agreement is 0-20. The mean for this study is 19.61. Participants who scored above the mean were categorised as being satisfied with life; those who scored below the mean were classified as not being satisfied with life.

## Research setting

The study took place in 50 enumeration areas (EAs) or neighbourhoods across the five major Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Ibadan metropolis. Ten enumeration areas each were selected through systematic random sampling from the list of each of the five major Local

Governments (LGs). The choice of selection across the five major Local Governments Areas (LGAs) is to enable the researcher have a representative sample of Ibadan while the choice of Ibadan metropolis as the research setting is due to the cosmopolitan nature of the city.

## Procedure

The main study involved using the enumeration area maps to identify the selected households. Having identified the households, the researcher identified heads of households of each of the selected houses and presented the researcher's letter of introduction to them. The researcher sought their permission to mark their houses before the commencement of the administration of questionnaires. Participants were made to understand that the purpose of the exercise was purely academic and therefore the confidentiality of their responses was guaranteed. Having agreed to participate in the study, participants were made to sign the consent form. Some questionnaires were completed and returned immediately, some were collected later, while some were not returned. The completed questionnaires were scored, processed and analysed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The statistical tool employed in this study was a 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for the effect of gender and self esteem on life satisfaction.

**Table 1: Summary of 2 x 2 ANOVA showing the main and interaction effect of self esteem and gender on life satisfaction.**

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Self Esteem	535.88	1	535.88	30.59	<.05
Gender	14.95	1	14.95	.85	>.05
Self Esteem * Gender	94.50	1	94.50	5.40	<.05
Error	12,000.16	685	17.52		
<b>Total</b>	<b>12731.42</b>	<b>688</b>			

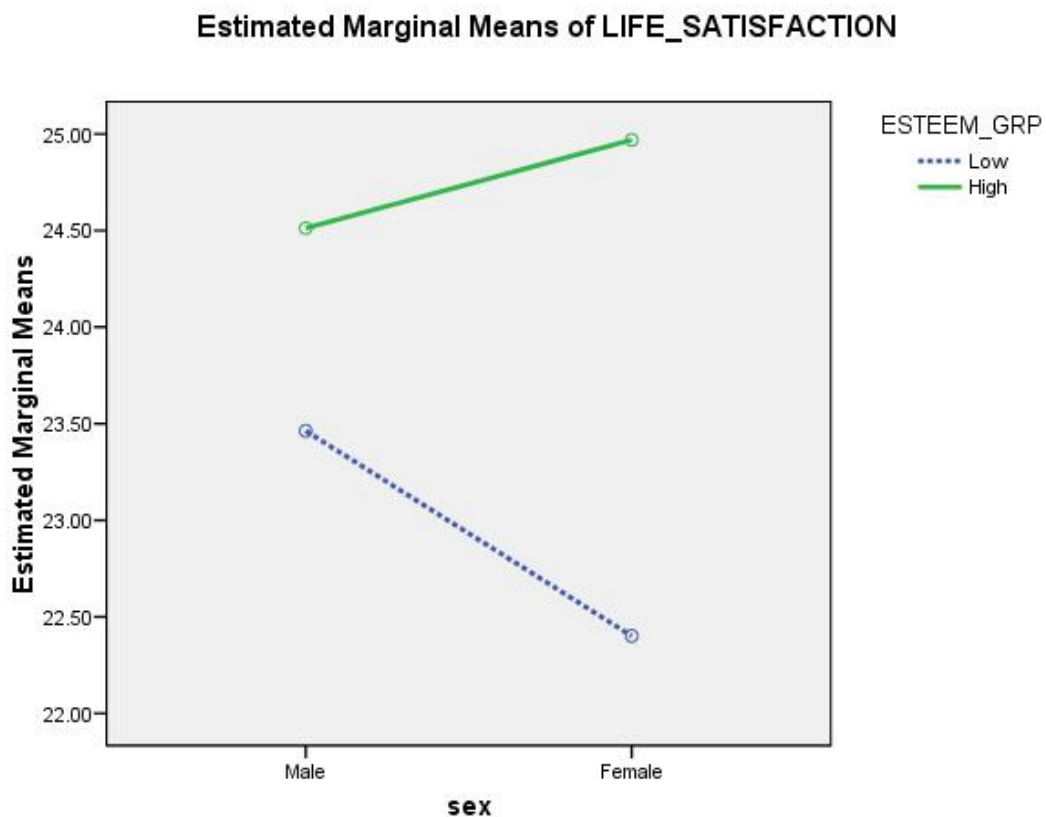
The result from table 1 reveals that self esteem influenced life satisfaction ( $F(1,685) = 30.59$ ;  $p < .05$ ) while, gender did not influence life satisfaction ( $F(1,685) = .85$ ;  $p > .05$ ). But there was an interaction effect of self esteem and gender on life satisfaction. ( $F(1,685) = 5.40$ ;  $p < .05$ )

**Table 2; Mean table showing the mean scores of participants on the effect of self esteem and gender differences on life satisfaction**

Self esteem	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Low	Male	434	23.46	3.38
	Female	561	22.51	4.32
High	Male	452	24.51	4.32
	Female	543	26.97	4.28

The result of the mean difference shows that there was no difference in gender when self esteem was low but there was a difference in gender when self-esteem was high.

Fig. 1: showing the interaction effect of self esteem and Gender on Life Satisfaction



The graph indicates an interaction effect of self esteem and gender on life satisfaction. Female participants with high self-esteem reported better level of life satisfaction than male participants with high self-esteem.

## DISCUSSION

The findings show that gender did not have a significant main effect on life satisfaction but self esteem influenced life satisfaction. In other words, there is no gender difference in the life satisfaction levels of the participants. This finding is consistent with the findings of Huebner et al. (2004), Casas et al. (2007) and Froh et al. (2009) who concluded that there was no difference in



the level of life satisfaction across gender. It is also in agreement with Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) who indicated that men and women were equally satisfied with life. This can be explained by the extensive findings by researchers that men and women derive their life satisfaction from different sources. Piquart and Sorensen (2000) reported additional support for the claim that men and women derive satisfaction from different sources. In their study, life satisfaction was more highly associated to income for men than for women. More women live in poverty than men, so it may be easier for men to derive satisfaction from their financial situation than it is for women. In addition to that, Diener et al. (1999) and Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003) have argued that demographic variables, including gender, are sometimes seen as weak predictors of life satisfaction. Some studies have demonstrated that the greater the gender equality within a nation such as, equal pay, equal right under the law, freedom to make reproductive choices, equal opportunity to education and achievement, the greater the reported life satisfaction by women.

Golombok and Fivush (1994) and Whitbourne and Powers (1994) have also suggested that the reason why men and women may not differ in life satisfaction is that they may have different sources of life satisfaction. Women's identity tends to be more strongly related to social network events, whereas men's identity may be more strongly linked to their careers. One might therefore conclude that lower career success, educational attainment, lower income and other limitations of older women may not result in lower life satisfaction in older women than men because women's life satisfaction is primarily associated with other sources. For example, French, Gekoski, and Knox (1995) reported that undesirable events are negatively related to life satisfaction for women but not for men. However, women may also respond to positive events than men. For example, French et al. (1995) reported some evidence that positive life events reduces the impact of negative events for women, more than for men.

The above factors and others such as ages of participants, gender related limitations of women and so on may be responsible for the reasons why majority of studies found no gender differences and why several studies have reported inconsistent results in relation to gender and life satisfaction.

The findings show the independent influence of self esteem on life satisfaction. This means that participants who had high self esteem reported higher level of life satisfaction than participants who had low self esteem. This result is in line with Rey et al. (2011) whose findings suggested that self-esteem correlated significantly and positively with life satisfaction. Similarly, Piccolo et al. (2005) found a positive significant correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem. In addition, Li et al. (2010) in their studies also found that self esteem significantly correlated with life satisfaction.

The result of data analysis further shows that gender interacted with self esteem to influence life satisfaction. This implies that female participants who were high on self esteem reported significantly higher level of life satisfaction than their male counterparts who were high on self esteem. Further findings reveal that women reported significantly higher level of life satisfaction than men both when self esteem was low and high and than other women when self esteem was low. This result is consistent with Vieira Lima (2011) who reported that women were more satisfied than men in most African countries and in many developing countries and less satisfied in around 15 European and other industrialized countries. Arrosa and Gandelman (2013) found women more satisfied than men in most countries. This result is also consistent with Brand and Smith



(1974) and Coke (1992) who found higher life satisfaction in older women than men. Cowan (1998) found that women who report greater equality in their marriages have a tendency to report greater level of life satisfaction than women whose marriages are relatively more traditional. Nolen-Hoeksema (1999) suggested that regardless of the type of marriage, married women report better level of life satisfaction than the singles, the widowed, or the divorced women.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that gender did not influence participants' level of life satisfaction but self esteem independently influenced life satisfaction. There was an interaction effect of gender and self esteem on life satisfaction. Further examination of the factors reveal that female participants whose self esteem were high, reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their male counterparts both when their self esteem was low and high and other women who had low self esteem.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study have shown the relevance of gender differences and self esteem to research on life satisfaction. This has implications for the consideration of gender differences in relation to life satisfaction on the basis of men and women's various values, self descriptions and sources of life satisfaction. Since life satisfaction involves both cognitive and affective evaluation of individuals' lives, the different ways in which men and women think, feel and describe themselves should be considered. It is therefore suggested that gender differences in life satisfaction research should include variables that are common to both men and women regarding their sources of deriving life satisfaction. One important implication of this study is in the area of enhancement of life satisfaction for interested researchers. This suggests that people's self esteem should be considered when considering the improvement of life satisfaction.



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