

The Latent Structures of Life Satisfaction

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Previous studies have measured the cognitive, affective, and overall elements of life satisfaction in separate efforts. The correlations among these elements have not been revealed. This study, therefore, attempted to verify the correlations among cognitive, affective, and overall life satisfactions. To do so, the study developed an integrative instrument to measure all the three separate elements of life satisfaction. The outcomes supported both the bi-dimensional (cognitive-affective), and hierarchical (cognitive-affective-overall) structures of life satisfaction. Some limitations and directions for future studies were discussed.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, construct conceptualization, measure integration, scale development.

Life satisfaction, or satisfaction with life, is regarded as the “contentment or pleasure with life” (Cavener, 1996, p.5). Different, or even contradictory, levels of satisfaction constitute the overall quality of life (Dann, 2002). Life satisfaction can be evaluated in a rational and/or an emotional sense. In the former sense, an individual compares his/her expectations and the actual achievements of his/her life’s components (Oliver, 1980). When expectations are met and/or exceeded, that individual may be satisfied or vice versa. This mechanism, on the one hand, reflects the cognitive aspect of life satisfaction. Alternatively, the individual may consider his/her feelings toward life in the latter sense. The more positive feelings there are, the more satisfied he/she is and vice versa (Caro & García, 2007). This mechanism, on the other hand, indicates the affective aspect of life satisfaction. In addition, the individual may derive a final conclusion of being satisfied or unsatisfied based on his/her general thinking and/or feeling of his/her life at one moment. This general thinking and/or feeling implies the overall or holistic satisfaction with life (Rode, et al., 2005).

To correspond to these mechanisms, researchers have three types of tools to measure life satisfaction. Under the cognitive approach, they investigate the respondents’ satisfaction with various facets of their lives, for example, family, school, community, health, finance,

and living conditions, among others (Dryman, Gardner, Weeks, & Heimberg, 2016; Pagán, 2015). Under the affective approach, researchers ask the respondents to evaluate their emotional perceptions of their lives in general (de Vroome & Hooghe, 2014; Jayawickreme, Tsukayama, & Kashdan, 2017). The affective descriptions include, for example, “I am as happy as when I was younger,” and “I feel old and tired.” In both cases, life satisfaction is structured by a pool of items or factors, which are considered as its formative indicators (Kim, 2002). In addition, a reflective indicator (Kim, 2002) may also be employed to capture the overall or holistic satisfaction (Rode, et al., 2005; Steiner, Frey, & Hotz, 2015).

Other psychological constructs are also measured in the same way. For example, destination image is formed by the cognitive images, the affective images, and an overall image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The cognitive images are the antecedents of the affective images, and both influence the formation of the overall image. Customer satisfaction is also structured by the cognitive, affective and overall elements, and the correlations among them follow the same patterns underlying those of destination image (Caro & García, 2007; del Bosque & Martin, 2008). With life satisfaction, the cognitive element was found to have some significant impacts on the affective element