

LIFE SATISFACTION IN RETIREMENT: THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG CATHOLIC PRIESTS

Anyaorah, G. C., PhD; Nnaemeka, I. J., PhD, Okpala, M.O. PhD, Okoye Cornelius
Email:gc.anyaorah@unizik.edu.ng
Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

Life satisfaction represents a key component of subjective well-being and is particularly important during retirement, when individuals undergo significant psychosocial transitions. Despite growing research on retirement adjustment, limited attention has been given to religious vocational groups such as Catholic priests, especially within African contexts. The present study examined the roles of personality traits and perceived social support as predictors of life satisfaction among retired Catholic priests in Anambra State, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was adopted. Participants consisted of 51 retired Catholic priests aged between 70 and 87 years ($M = 72.84$, $SD = 5.14$) selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI-Z), the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that personality traits of extraversion ($\beta = .679$, $p < .001$), conscientiousness ($\beta = .432$, $p < .05$), and agreeableness ($\beta = .692$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors of life satisfaction. However, neuroticism and openness to experience were not significant predictors. Perceived social support also showed a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction ($\beta = .372$, $p < .05$). The overall regression model was significant, $F(6, 44) = 18.30$, $p < .001$, indicating that the predictors jointly explained a substantial proportion of variance in life satisfaction. The findings highlight the importance of both dispositional characteristics and social relational resources in promoting psychological well-being among retired clergy. Implications for pastoral care, retirement planning, and psychological support for aging clergy are discussed.

Keywords: life satisfaction, retirement, personality traits, social support, Catholic priests.

Introduction

Life satisfaction constitutes the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being and reflects an individual's evaluative judgement of the overall quality of his or her life (Diener, 2018). Rather than merely signifying the absence of distress, high life satisfaction represents a positive appraisal of life circumstances and has been associated with psychological resilience, adaptive coping and reduced vulnerability to mental health difficulties (Stepto et al., 2015). In later adulthood, life satisfaction assumes heightened relevance as individuals negotiate significant developmental transitions, including retirement. With global demographic trends indicating a steady rise in ageing populations, the psychological adjustment of retirees has become an increasingly important focus within gerontological and clinical research. Retirement is no longer conceptualised solely as cessation of paid employment; it is recognised as a major psychosocial transition capable of reshaping identity, social participation and perceived meaning in life (Hansson et al., 2020).

Among the psychological variables consistently linked to life satisfaction across adulthood are personality traits. Conceptualised within the Five-Factor Model commonly referred to as the Big Five personality traits represent relatively enduring patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. Empirical evidence demonstrates that traits such as extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively associated with quality of life indicators in older adults, whereas neuroticism is typically negatively related to life satisfaction (Hansson et al., 2020; Olaru et al., 2023). For instance, longitudinal findings indicate that emotionally stable and socially outgoing individuals tend to report higher levels of satisfaction during the retirement transition, partly because these dispositions facilitate adaptive coping and sustained social engagement (Hansson et al., 2020). Recent multinational analyses further affirm that personality traits remain robust predictors of life satisfaction throughout the adult lifespan, with emotional stability demonstrating particularly strong associations with social contentment and overall well-being (Olaru et al., 2023).

Emerging research also underscores the interactive role of social context in shaping the influence of personality on well-being. Studies have shown that perceived social support can mediate or moderate the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction (Gu et al., 2024; Litwin&Levinsky, 2023). Individuals high in extraversion and agreeableness, for example, are more likely to cultivate and maintain supportive relationships, which in turn enhance their subjective well-being. Conversely, those high in neuroticism may experience diminished life

satisfaction partly due to reduced perceived support and heightened sensitivity to interpersonal stressors. Such findings highlight the interdependence of dispositional and environmental resources in later-life adjustment.

Social support itself—defined as the perception or experience of being cared for, valued and embedded within a network of mutual obligation has been widely recognised as a critical determinant of life satisfaction in older adulthood. Empirical evidence indicates that supportive ties with family, peers and community members are associated with greater psychological well-being and reduced social strain, even when demographic and personality variables are controlled (Zwar et al., 2024). In addition, perceived social support has been shown to function as a protective factor, buffering the adverse effects of stress and reinforcing positive self-evaluations (Gu et al., 2024). These findings suggest that life satisfaction in retirement is not solely an outcome of internal dispositions but is also shaped by the quality and availability of relational resources.

Although the nexus between personality, social support and life satisfaction has been well documented in general ageing populations, comparatively little attention has been directed towards religious vocational groups. Catholic priests constitute a distinctive population whose occupational identity is deeply intertwined with spiritual calling, communal service and institutional affiliation. For many clergy, retirement entails substantial shifts in role expectations, public visibility and patterns of daily interaction. While spirituality and religious commitment may provide enduring sources of meaning and resilience, retirement may nonetheless challenge previously central aspects of vocational identity and social embeddedness. Foundational personality research suggests that clergy may exhibit relatively high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness compared with non-clerical populations, indicating that the Five-Factor Model is applicable to this group. However, empirical investigations specifically addressing retired clergy remain scarce.

The paucity of research is particularly evident within African contexts. Much of the extant literature has relied upon Western community samples, thereby limiting the cultural generalisability of findings. In regions such as Anambra State, Nigeria, social structures, communal expectations and religious participation patterns may shape retirement experiences in ways that differ from those documented elsewhere. Furthermore, while previous studies have demonstrated that perceived social support correlates positively with life satisfaction and may mediate the effects of personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion (Gu et al., 2024), analogous evidence among retired Catholic priests is virtually non-existent. This empirical gap constrains theoretical understanding and limits the development of contextually appropriate psychosocial interventions for retired clergy.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the relationships among personality traits, perceived social support and life satisfaction in retired Catholic priests in Anambra State. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which personality traits are associated with life satisfaction; whether perceived social support relates significantly to life satisfaction. By situating the investigation within a Nigerian ecclesiastical context, the study contributes to the literature by extending established psychological constructs to an understudied vocational and cultural group, thereby enriching theoretical and empirical discourse on retirement well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Activity Theory of Aging

This work is anchored on activity theory of aging by Havighurst (1961), Activity theory of aging explains that life satisfaction in later life is achieved when older adults remain socially and psychologically active. The theory argues that aging individuals maintain well-being when they continue participating in meaningful activities and sustain social relationships that replace roles lost after retirement.

In relation to this study, personality traits influence how individuals adapt to retirement and engage in activities or relationships. For example, priests with traits such as extraversion, openness, or conscientiousness may be more likely to remain socially engaged in pastoral, community, or spiritual activities. At the same time, social support from fellow clergy, parish members, family, and religious communities helps retirees maintain social interaction and emotional connection. These interactions help compensate for reduced occupational roles and thereby enhance life satisfaction in retirement. Thus, the Activity Theory links the independent variables (personality traits and social support) with the dependent variable (life satisfaction) by suggesting that individuals who maintain active social roles and supportive relationships experience greater satisfaction and psychological well-being in later life.

Hypotheses

In line with the objectives of the study and the correlational design adopted, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between personality traits (Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Agreeableness) and life satisfaction among retired Catholic priests in Anambra State.

2. There will be a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction among retired Catholic priests in Anambra State.

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were 51 retired old priests in Onitsha Ecclesiastical province who met the inclusion criteria were selected using purposive sampling technique. The age ranged from 70 to 87 years, with mean age of 72.84 and standard deviation of 5.14.

Inclusion Criteria

Criteria for the study include:

1. He must have attained the retirement age of 70 years and must not be in charge of any parish.
2. Must be resident in Anambra State.
3. Must have retired from active engagement
4. He must show willingness on voluntary basis to participate in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three sets of instruments were used for the study and they include:

1. The **Life Satisfaction Index (LIS-Z)** by Neugarten et al., (1961). It is a -18 item scale used to measure psychological satisfaction derived from living or psychological well-being in general and elder persons over 60 years in particular.

2. **Big Five Inventory (BFI)** by John, Donahue, and Kentle(1991). This is a 44-item inventory is a psychological instrument which assesses personality from a five-dimensional perspective. The essence of the perspective is that personality characteristics could be resolved into five broad dimensions, which are distinct from one another. The five dimensions or subscales of BFI are: 1. Extraversion – high energy and activity level, dominance, sociability, expressiveness and positive emotion; 2. Agreeableness: Prosocial, altruism, tender mindedness, trust and modesty; 3. Conscientiousness: impulse control, task orientation, goal directedness; 4. Neuroticism: anxiety, sadness, irritability and nervous/tension and 5. Openness to Experience: exemplifies the breath depth and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life.

3. **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)** by Zimet, et al., (1988) is a -12-item scale used to measure perceived social support on three sources of support: family support, friends support and significant others supports.

Procedure

A self-written Letter of introduction was given to the diocesan priests in charge of retired old priests to obtain approval to carry on with the study. After this, the researcher approached the participants of the study mainly in their residence.

1. Participants must be catholic priests
2. He must have attained the retirement age of 70 years and must not be in charge of any parish.
3. He must show willingness on voluntary basis to participate in the study.

Research Design and Statistics

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine the relationships among personality traits, social support, and life satisfaction among retired Catholic priests. This design was considered appropriate because the study focused on naturally occurring variables without manipulation, and sought to determine the direction and strength of associations among the variables of interest.

Table:1 ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	F	Sig
1Regression Residual	241.396	6	18.295	.000 ^b
Total	96.761	44		
	338.157	50		

a. Dependent Variable; life Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Extraversion, neurotism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Openessto experience, Social support.

The table above reveals the analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the regression analysis. ANOVA value assesses the statistical influence of the result. The ANOVA in this study is 18.295 which is statistically significant at .000; this implies that that the model is a good-fit.

Table 2: Coefficients (a)

Model	Standardized Coefficients		Standardized		T	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	
1 (Constant)	.16.435	.4.241		3.873	.000	
Extrevation	.495	.037	.679	.6.133	.000	
Neurotism	-.007	.021	-.029	-351	.728	
Conscientiousness	.318	.041	.432	.446	.002	
Agreeableness	.579	.091	.692	6.377	.000	
Openess	-.038	.061	-.056	-.571	.571	
Social support	.260	.055	.372	2.935	.003	

a. Dependent Variable; Life satisfaction

Table 2 above revealed a significant positive relationship between personality traits of extraversion, ($\beta = .679$, $p = .000$), conscientiousness ($\beta = .432$, $p = .002$) and agreeableness ($\beta = .692$, $p = .000$) and no significant relationship with neuroticism ($\beta = -.029$, $p = .728$) and openness to experience ($\beta = -.056$, $p = .571$). The result also showed a significant positive relationship with social support ($\beta = .372$, $p < .003$)

Discussion

The study included 51 participants whose age ranged from 70 to 87 years with the mean age of 72.84 and standard deviation of 5.14. The result indicated significant positive relationship between personality traits of extraversion, ($\beta = .679$, $p = .000$), conscientiousness ($\beta = .432$, $p = .002$) and agreeableness ($\beta = .692$, $p = .000$) and no significant relationship with neuroticism ($\beta = -.029$, $p = .728$) and openness to experience ($\beta = -.056$, $p = .571$). The result also showed a significant positive relationship with social support ($\beta = .372$, $p < .003$).

The findings of this study is in tandem with the study by Gu et al., (2024); Dumitrache et al., (2018). that personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively associated with indicators of quality of life.

Furthermore, the findings of this study is in line with Onyishi, et al.,(2013) that examined the relationship among personality, social support and life satisfaction among 601 employees of the Nigerian Prisons Service in a southeastern state in Nigeria. The result of the multiple regression analyses showed that personality is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Specifically, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness. The results also showed that social support is positively related to life satisfaction. Friends support, significant others support, and family support were significant predictors of life satisfaction among the participants. The implications of these results to research and clinical practice were discussed. Also the study is in line with Mahanta and Aggarwal (2013) who investigated the effects of perceived social support on the life satisfaction of university students. Finally, the findings revealed that higher the levels of perceived social support from family and friends, the higher the life satisfaction. These findings will be useful in assisting educators, counselors, psychologist, and researchers to develop strategies to increase perceived social support in the students thereby enhancing their satisfaction with life.

Limitation of the Study

The major limitation of this present study was not only the number of participants but mainly that study was conducted in one state out of the 36 states in Nigeria This can affect the generalization of the result.

Recommendations

The researchers recommended that studies on the retirement and life satisfaction among priest should be replicated with larger participants and with other relevant psychosocial factors

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