



Life satisfaction among low-income rural youth from Appalachia

STEPHAN M. WILSON, CAROLYN S. HENRY AND GARY W. PETERSON

The purpose of this study was to examine the relative strength of objective, subjective, and congruency variables as predictors of life satisfaction among low-income youth from rural areas. A 10-year longitudinal survey of low-income, rural youth from Appalachia ($n=322$) was conducted to explore these issues. Although support was provided for variables representing all three types of life satisfaction predictors, the strongest of these were subjective variables such as self-perceptions about goal attainment in jobs, overall goal attainment in life, and self-esteem. Another set of consistent predictors of life satisfaction, congruence variables, were concerned with the extent to which low-income youth believed that they had fulfilled their own aspirations in terms of formal education, proximity to their childhood homes, and number of children. Finally, some of the objective variables consisting of family of origin's SES, community size, and marital status also were predictive of life satisfaction. In general, the life satisfaction of low-income, rural youth seemed to be influenced more extensively by personal meanings shaped within a particular cultural context rather than by traditional objective measures of life circumstances. © 1997 The Association for Professionals in Services for Adolescents

Introduction

Research on the quality of life often assumes that "being successful," a central value of mainstream American culture, is supposed to be the primary basis for developing a sense of well-being. Although educational and occupational attainments are indicators of success for youth from economically deprived backgrounds, little empirical evidence exists that either upward mobility or improved socio-economic standing improves the subjective feelings of low-income youth about the quality of their lives (Otto, 1986; Wilson and Peterson, 1988).

The quality of most individuals' lives, in turn, is probably a product of their objective circumstances, personal interpretations, and individual goals for attainment. Consequently, more precise prediction of a person's quality of life requires consideration of *objective* conditions (e.g. measures of "actual" economic and environmental conditions), *subjective* evaluations (e.g. individual assessments about their personal, family, and community circumstances), and the extent to which realistic assessments about one's circumstances are *congruent* with personal desires (e.g. the degree of agreement between aspirations and realistic assessments of one's possibilities).

The work on life satisfaction began with analyses of objective indicators and later recognized more subjective influences (Campbell *et al.*, 1976). Earlier work on life satisfaction for older youth from Appalachia was subsequently expanded to acknowledge

*Reprint requests and correspondence should be addressed to S. M. Wilson, Department of Family Studies, Research Center for Families and Children, 107 Erikson Hall, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 40506-0050, U.S.A.

the critical importance of individual interpretive or cognitive evaluations (e.g. self-evaluations, social comparisons, and culturally specific referents) (Wilson and Peterson, 1988). In other words, more realistic assessments of the predictors of life satisfaction must go beyond objective indicators and include both subjective and congruence predictors. Based on these ideas, this study was designed to examine the extent to which objective indicators, subjective assessments, and discrepancies between a person's aspirations and assessments of realistic opportunities (i.e. congruence predictors) would predict life satisfaction (an indicator of the quality of life) among low-income youth from rural areas of Appalachia, an exceptionally understudied population.

Life satisfaction as an indicator of quality of life

Historically, research on the quality of life has focused on the most concrete measures of attainment which are supposed to represent the ability of individuals to meet more basic needs (Campbell *et al.*, 1976). Although "objective" factors are important indicators of the quality of life for low-income rural youth, this approach assumes that external evaluators (e.g. researchers, service providers, or policy-makers) can adequately define and assess components that either compose or contribute to the quality of life. Specifically, more recent research on the quality of life has increasingly emphasized psychological well-being, and especially the feelings of satisfaction that individuals report with reference to their lives (Umberson and Gove, 1989). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, for example, life satisfaction refers to the feelings of gratification that individuals perceive and experience in reference to the roles they occupy and perform (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). Individuals develop conceptions about their self-identities based on the roles they perform, the personal values they acquire, and the quality of experiences they have, which are, in part, reflections of their particular cultural context (Watson and Protinsky, 1988; Fine and Schwebel, 1991).

Objective indicators and life satisfaction

Contrasting with a symbolic interactionist approach, previous work on the quality of life for low-income youth often emphasized "objective" or actual life circumstances in the form of empirically-based measures of status attainment (i.e. survey measures of occupational prestige, educational attainment, and income levels) as "markers" of social status and life conditions. Previous investigators found that individuals who are raised in higher SES families have greater access to various attainment resources (e.g. finances for advanced education) and tend to be more likely to experience greater overall well-being than persons from more modest circumstances (Douthitt *et al.*, 1992). A few investigators have also concluded that males report greater life satisfaction than females (Campbell *et al.*, 1976; Broman, 1991) indicating that *gender* may be an important demographic predictor of differences in life quality.

Conditions of life are often represented by sociodemographic "marker" variables which are indexes of certain barriers to the "pursuit of happiness." Such obstacles may reflect important realities about the prevalent educational, occupational, and gender inequities for many who reside in rural areas of the United States (e.g. rural Appalachia) (Wilson *et al.*, 1993). When viewed as obstacles to social mobility, therefore, these barriers include deficient income (i.e. poverty), higher levels of unemployment or underemployment, less

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات