# Confirmatory factor analysis of the multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale

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## Abstract

The assessment of children's life satisfaction (LS) is a relatively new area of research. To date, one of the most comprehensive investigations in this area has culminated in the development of the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale [MSLSS; Huebner, E. S. (1994). Preliminary development and validation of a multidimensional life satisfaction scale for children. *Psychological Assessment*, 6, 149–158]. The first multidimensional scale of its kind, the MSLSS assesses children's subjective perceptions of LS in five conceptually relevant domains: Family, Friends, School, Self, and Living Environment. Initial investigations of its psychometric properties and relationships to theoretically related variables have supported the validity and reliability of the MSLSS. The present study builds upon this past research by assessing the relative goodness-of-fit of the MSLSS using confirmatory factor analytic procedures by means of the SPSS LISREL statistical package. Subjects were 314 children in Grades 3–8. Results of the analyses and their implications for the reliability and validity of the MSLSS are discussed. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Key words:* subjective; well-being; life-satisfaction

## 1. Introduction

The psychological construct of subjective well-being (SWB) has received much attention in the past two decades. Current research has yielded robust support for a tripartite model of subjective well-being in which three interrelated yet separate factors have emerged: Positive Affect, Negative Affect, and Life Satisfaction (LS) (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Diener, 1984; Emmons and Diener, 1985). The subjective perception of LS differs from the other two factors in that it involves a cognitive judgement rather than the evaluation of affect.

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Although areas such as marriage, work, and aging have received the lion's share of attention in SWB research, in recent years a handful of researchers have begun to examine the structure of SWB in childhood. Similar to our own findings, Huebner (1994) found only two measures of children's LS in his review of the literature. One measure was the Perceived Life Satisfaction Scale (Adelman et al., 1989). An investigation of this scale by Huebner and Dew (1993) found limited psychometric data for the measure, as well as difficulty in interpreting the factor structure of the scale (Huebner and Dew's results yielded four primary factors as opposed to the unidimensional factor structure assumed by the authors of the measure). Furthermore, the scale was designed only for children who have reached adolescence and thus would not be appropriate for younger children.

The second scale which Huebner found was the Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS; Huebner, 1991a). This seven-item measure of global LS was developed for use in large scale surveys of children's (Grades 3 to 8) well-being. Although the scale was found to have a unidimensional factor structure (Huebner, 1991a; Dew and Huebner, 1994), the results of one study (Huebner, 1991b) indicated that preadolescent students were able to differentiate among specific domains in their lives, in terms of perceived LS. However, because of the inherent shortcomings of single-item scales (e.g. Diener, 1984), it was apparent that the SLSS would not suffice as a multidimensional scale of LS for children.

Spurred by the encouraging results of his previous studies, Huebner developed the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994), one of the most comprehensive investigations in the area of childhood SWB to date. The MSLSS assesses children's subjective perception of LS in five domains: Family, Friends, School, Self, and Living Environment. The philosophy behind the development of measures like the MSLSS suggests a broader societal perspective which includes *promoting mental health* rather than exclusively treating mental illness.

In the first of two studies (Huebner, 1994) the MSLSS included 70 items and was administered to 312 students in Grades 3–8. Using principal-components analysis, only those items with factor loadings of 0.30 or greater were maintained, resulting in the 40-item, five-factor scale, with each factor having internal consistency values greater than 0.80. For Study 2, the 40-item version was administered to 413 students in Grades 3–5. In addition, Huebner examined the relationships between the MSLSS and relevant measures to assess convergent and discriminant validity, as well as relationships between the MSLSS and demographic variables. The results from Study 2 replicated those of Study 1 and offered initial convergent and discriminant validation for the MSLSS scales. Huebner's encouraging results were later replicated and extended by Greenspoon and Saklofske (1997), who replicated the factor structure, obtained acceptable estimates of internal consistency, demonstrated one-month stability, and found meaningful relationships to several self-reported variables known to be associated with LS. In short, the results of these studies clearly identified five separate and replicable factors, each of unique conceptual meaning showing considerable face validity.

For the present study Huebner's proposed five-factor structure was tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the LISREL module of the SPSS statistical package. The greatest advantage of CFA as compared to standard exploratory factor analytic procedures is that it offers an estimate of the "goodness of fit" of the entire model. Although conventional procedures for CFA were employed in the present study, the reader should note that alternative CFA methods are available. For example, Kishton and Widaman (1994) outline two alternative methods of creating "item-parcels" for individual factors. Take for example a factor comprised of sixteen