

**Manual for the
Multidimensional Students' Life
Satisfaction Scale**

2001 Version

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Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale: Introduction and Rationale

The impetus for the construction of the Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) was the increased interest in the promotion of positive psychological well-being in children and adolescents (Compass, 1993; Sarason, 1997). In contrast to models that infer well-being from the absence of psychopathological symptoms, the World Health Organization (1964) defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Psychologists, such as Cowen (1991), shared this perspective, arguing that psychological well-being should be considered on the basis of positive indicators, including indicators like “a basic satisfaction with oneself and one’s existence...or life satisfaction” (p. 404).

Life satisfaction has been defined as a “global evaluation by the person of his or her life” (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991, p. 150). Although hundreds of studies of life satisfaction of adults have been conducted (see Diener, 1994; Veenhoven, 1993), life satisfaction in childhood has only recently become the focus of empirical work. Recent investigations have demonstrated the incremental importance of the life satisfaction construct in understanding children and adolescents’ psychological well-being. For example, life satisfaction reports have been differentiated from other well-being constructs such as self-esteem (Terry & Huebner, 1995; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Huebner, Gilman, & Laughlin, 1999), depression (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seely, 1991), positive affect (Lucas et al., 1996; Huebner, 1991c; Huebner, & Dew, 1996), and others.

Systematic research has been hindered by the lack of well-validated instruments for children and adolescents (Bender, 1977; Huebner, 1997). To date, children’s life satisfaction instruments have been limited to unidimensional measures of global or general life satisfaction, which yield only a single overall score (e.g., Perceived Life Satisfaction Scale: Adelman, Taylor, & Nelson, 1989; Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale: Dew & Huebner, 1994; Huebner, 1991a & b).

The MSLSS was designed to provide a multidimensional profile of children’s life satisfaction judgments. Such differentiated assessments are expected to enable more focused diagnostic, prevention, and intervention efforts. For example, students who indicate relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with their family experiences should necessitate different intervention strategies than students who indicate greater dissatisfaction with their school experiences. Such differentiated assessments may also yield more revealing comparisons with traditional objective indicators used to assess the quality of life of children and adolescents (e.g., divorce rates, family income levels, per pupil expenditures on schooling).

Specifically, the MSLSS was designed to (a) provide a profile of children’s satisfaction with important, specific domains (e.g., school, family, friends) in their lives; (b) assess their general overall life satisfaction; (c) demonstrate acceptable psychometric properties (e.g., acceptable subscale reliability); (d) reveal a replicable factor structure indicating the meaningfulness of the five dimensions; and (e) be used effectively with children across a wide range of age (grades 3-12) and ability levels (e.g., children with mild developmental disabilities through gifted children).

Scale Structure

MSLSS Items

Family

I enjoy being at home with my family.
My family gets along well together.
I like spending time with my parents.
My parents and I doing fun things together.
My family is better than most.
Members of my family talk nicely to one another.
My parents treat me fairly.

Friends

My friends treat me well.
My friends are nice to me.
I wish I had different friends.*
My friends are mean to me.*
My friends are great
I have a bad time with my friends.*
I have a lot of fun with my friends.
I have enough friends.
My friends will help me if I need it.

School

I look forward to going to school.
I like being in school.
School is interesting.
I wish I didn't have to go to school.*
There are many things about school I don't like.*
I enjoy school activities.
I learn a lot at school.
I feel bad at school.*

Living Environment

I like where I live.
I wish there were different people in my neighborhood.*
I wish I lived in a different house.*
I wish I lived somewhere else.*
I like my neighborhood.
I like my neighbors.
This town is filled with mean people.*
My family's house is nice.
There are lots of fun things to do where I live.

Table 1 (continued)

Items
<p><u>Self</u></p> <p>I think I am good looking. I am fun to be around. I am a nice person. Most people like me. There are lots of things I can do well. I like to try new things. I like myself.</p>

*reverse keyed items

Administration and Scoring

The 40-item MSLSS may be administered to children in groups as well as individually. The instructions for the scale are provided prior to the rest of the scale. With younger children, (grades 3-5), it is recommended that the examiner read the directions aloud to the students and encourage them to ask questions as necessary. With all students, it is essential to monitor their responses to ensure that they respond appropriately (e.g., answer all questions, non-random and non-biased responding). The readability of the scale is at the 1.5 grade level, so most students require little or no assistance in responding to the questions.

Scoring is straightforward. The four response options are assigned points as follows: (never = 1); (sometimes = 2); (often = 3); and (almost always = 4). Negatively-keyed items must be reverse scored (see pp. 3-4 for the list of negatively-keyed items). Hence, negatively-keyed items are scored so that almost always = 1, and so forth. Higher scores thus indicate higher levels of life satisfaction throughout the scale.

It should be noted that a 6-point agreement format has been used with middle and high school students (Huebner et al., 1998). In this case, response options are assigned points as follows: (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, etc.).

Because the domains consist of unequal number of items, the domain and total scores are made comparable by summing the item responses and dividing by the number of domain (or total) items.

Normative Data

Normative data obtained to date are available for elementary (grades 3-5) (Huebner, 1994), middle (Huebner et al., 1998), and high school students (Gilman et al., 2000; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1997).

Reliability

Internal consistency (alpha) coefficients have been reported in various publications (Dew, 1996; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1997). The findings suggest that the reliabilities all range from .70s to low .90s; thus they are acceptable for research purposes. Test-retest coefficients for two- and four-week time periods have also been reported (Dew, 1996; Huebner et al., 1997; Huebner & Terry, 1995) falling mostly in the .70 - .90 range, providing further support for the reliability of the scale.

Validity

The results of exploratory factor analyses have supported the dimensionality of the MSLSS (Huebner, 1994). Confirmatory factor analyses have provided further support for the multidimensional, hierarchical model consisting of a general life satisfaction higher-order factor at the apex of the hierarchy along with five specific domains below (Gilman et al., 2000; Huebner et al., 1998). Findings have generalized to school age students in Canada (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997) Korea (Park, 2000), and Spain (Casas et al., 2000).

Convergent and discriminant validity have also been demonstrated through predicted correlations with other self-report well-being indexes (Dew et al., 2001; Gilman et al., 2000; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Huebner, 1994; Huebner et al., 1998), parent reports (Dew et al., 2001; Gilman & Huebner, 1997), teacher reports (Huebner & Alderman, 1993), and social desirability scales (Huebner et al., 1998). Findings of weak relationships with demographic variables (e.g., age, gender) also fit with theoretical expectations (Huebner, 1994; Huebner et al., 1998).

Nevertheless, additional validation research is needed to clarify the precise boundaries of the life satisfaction construct as well as the range of applications for particular children. For example, Ash and Huebner (1998) and Griffin and Huebner (2000) reported on unique aspects of the validity and usefulness of the MSLSS in the assessment of the well-being of two groups of exceptional children (i.e., academically gifted and emotionally disordered middle school students). Studies of the usefulness of the MSLSS and other life satisfaction scales with other groups of children (e.g., children with mental disabilities, ADHD) would be illuminating as well.

Permission to Use

The MSLSS is in the public domain. Researchers may use it without permission. The author welcomes any feedback regarding its usefulness.

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