Networks in Nigeria: A pilot study on network characteristics and their relation with life satisfaction in a Nigerian sample

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Abstract

Social relationships are a central determinant of life satisfaction. The collectivity of individual social relationships form a social network. This study examines such networks in a Nigerian sample (N = 108). Network size, proportions of positive and negative relationships within those networks, and structural characteristics (e.g., network centrality and network density) were assessed. Furthermore, network characteristics were examined concerning their association with life satisfaction. Results indicate differential relations of network characteristics with life satisfaction. Results are discussed in terms of (1) cross-cultural assessment of network characteristics, (2) life satisfaction as related to social structural characteristics, and (3) differential associations between network types and different aspects of life satisfaction.

Introduction

The essential importance of social relationships to life satisfaction across cultures is well-documented in psychological and sociological research (e.g., Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999; Haller & Hadler, 2006). However, justifications concerning social relationships have been included together with life satisfaction or happiness in many cross-national surveys (e.g., World Values Survey, International Social Survey), structural network characteristics have been rarely investigated in context of life satisfaction, even less so in non-Western samples. To our knowledge, the present exploratory study is the first one investigating the relation between structural characteristics of personal social networks and life satisfaction in a Nigerian sample.

Method

Participants and Procedure

108 Nigerian males aged 19 to 36 years (M = 23.8, SD = 3.4) were recruited by completing a paper-pencil questionnaire.

Assessment of network size

Participants were asked to give the overall number of persons in their personal social network, as well as numbers of positive and negative relationships in their network. These variables were not meaningfully related to life satisfaction.

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Discussion & Conclusion

Life satisfaction and social structure

Overall, endorsement of network type B was positively associated with life satisfaction. One possible (post-hoc) explanation bases on the assumption that matching between an individual's orientation and the values of the cultural environment of this person should promote life satisfaction. For example, Caldwell-Harris and Aycicegi (2006) have shown that individual scores on the individualism-collectivism dimension of the individualism-collectivism orientation on society level are associated with psychopathology. Analogously, life satisfaction should be highest when personal network structure reflects cultural values of the person's social environment. For West African countries, Hofstede (2001) reports relatively low individualism and relatively high power distance. This combination could be reflected by a network structure where both centrality and density are given, such as in networks of type B investigated in this study. Further studies should investigate the association between network structures and cultural values, especially with regard to influences on satisfaction.