

Relationship between Locus of Control, Emotional Intelligence and Subjective Happiness among Widows: Implications for Psychological Mental Health

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between locus of control, emotional intelligence and subjective happiness among widows. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study and the purposive sampling technique was used to select the 92 respondents for the study. The collection tools adopted for the study were: the Norwick and Strickland (2003) Locus of Control Questionnaire (L.O.Q), the Wong & Law (2003) Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) Subjective Happiness Scale. All the tools have high validity and reliability coefficients. The results showed that there is a positive relationship between locus of control, emotional intelligence and subjective happiness. A significant relationship also exists between emotional intelligence and locus of control. The study also revealed that majority of the respondents have external locus of control, low emotional intelligence and low subjective happiness. The implications for mental health were highlighted and counseling interventions and strategies suggested for the possible acquisitions of adequate locus of control, emotional intelligence and subjective happiness and consequently good psychological mental health.

Key words: Locus of control, Emotional intelligence, Subjective happiness, Widows, Mental health.

Introduction

Marriage exist as a socially recognized, durable, though not necessarily life – long relationship between man and woman. The marital life of couples could be affected by death as we have in all the nations of the world. cursory observations show that death especially that of a very close person is often seen as an ultimate loss, which, invariably is accompanied by grief. The death of a spouse and its consequences seem not to be the same for males and females. Typically, the widow in Nigeria seems to face a lot of problems after the death of her husband. Widows are not well treated by the Nigerian society compared with widowers (Olusakin, 1998).

The widows in Nigeria experience various dimensions of stress which invariably constitute a great challenge to their lives. This stress situation makes Nigerian widows to suffer a lot of emotional, physical, mental stress that may lead to perpetuated unhappiness. Health and happiness enhance ability to function physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially in an environment (Normah, 2009). Nigerian widows seem not to enjoy the best of Health and happiness due to pressures of conforming to widowhood practices. A lot of sanctions placed on widows by the Nigeria society make it difficult for women to even express their view point in widowhood. Depending on the ethnic culture, some of the practices widows are meant to pass through on the loose of their husbands include: confinements during which the widow is not allowed go out of the house for a period ranging from six months to one year. In some cases, there is the issue of defacement which includes hair scrapping. This is intended to make the woman unattractive since the hair is said to be the woman's crowning glory. Disinheritance may also be carried out in some areas thereby denying the widows the rights to inherit their husbands' properties. In - laws forcing the widow out of the home, leaving her with no means of shelter or support for herself and her children are also common. The mourning period is another stress inducing factor for the widow during which she is forced to wear black or a particular dress always and also go through routine crying, whether or not she feels like it. She is also made to sit on the floor or mat (dethronement), this is to emphasize her apparent fall in status.

In some primitive Nigeria villages the widow is seen as a defiled and capable of defiling others. She may not be touched or receive a hand shake (ostracism). I some cases, her hands are also padded. Moreover, during the widows' final ritual cleansing in these villages, which is normally done to supposedly sever the link between the living and the dead, the widow washes in the stream, her mourning clothes are burnt and she is forced to walk back home naked. Other harmful traditional practices include enforced silence, sleeping on the floor and feeding from dirty dishes. In extreme cases too, the widow is forced to drink the water from which her husband's body had been washed to prove her innocence of the husband's death. The various harsh treatments can be very stressful for the widow who is attacked by myriads of stressors which sends silent messages about her actions, inactions and the actions of others towards her in her predicament.

Edward, (2002) observed that human beings have limits to the amount of change stressors they can absorb hence according to him, human beings may be subjected to changes they will not be able to tolerate and this may lead to various psychosomatic illnesses.

Rahe, (1968) in his study of changes in life events, observed that changes in a person's life could be statistically correlated with the onset of illnesses. He observed that certain internal psychological conflicts pre-disposes individuals to particular diseases such as duodenal ulcer, neurodermatitis, essential hypertension, rheumatoid arthritis, glaucoma and migraine. Holmes and Rahe, (1967) generated a hierarchical list of life event changes likely to require significant alternations in the ongoing adaptive patterns of the individual and concluded that such changes need to be traumatic and negative as in the case of the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, using their Social Readjustment Rate Scale, they observed a

relationship between a clustering of life changes and onset of illness. They discovered a strong relationship between major health changes and life crisis. Each life change (as a stimulus) has a fixed numerical value: thus the more the events, the more they presumably require a shift in the usual mode of living.

Alexander (2000) observed that specific emotional tensions influence biochemical endocrinological and physical changes. He further stressed that all our emotions are expressed through physiological processes (e.g. sorrow by weeping, amusement by laughter, fear by palpitation of the heart, anger by increased heart activity, elevation of blood pressure and changes in carbohydrate metabolism). According to him, an emotionally disturbing situation triggers off a conflict which exacerbate a previous conflict constellation that has been rendered unconscious or largely inactive. In such cases, the functional distress may not be easily reversed and chronic symptomatology results. Thus, a functional disturbance of long duration or of overwhelming intensity (as we have in the case of widows) may lead to definite and demonstrable anatomical changes.

Many psychologists and sociologists (Bowers, 2003, Angyal, 2009) have emphasized the importance of considering the meaning of the environment, and events in terms of how it is perceived, interpreted and cognitively represented in the minds of the individual. The perceived environment and events approach has important consequences for the individual personality and mental health. Thus, appraisal underlies the actual experience of threat. The same stimulus event which may be perceived as threatening by some individuals may not by other individuals and these may have serious consequences on mental health.

It therefore becomes imperative to investigate the psychological variable like the locus of control and emotional intelligence of widows as they influence their subjective happiness and invariably mental health.

Locus of control refers to a person's belief about control over life events. Individuals who perceive both positive and negative events outcomes as being contingent on their behaviours are considered "internals". Individuals who perceive their outcomes in life as determined by forces beyond their control such as the result of luck, fate or powerful others are considered "external". Internals assume responsibility for their actions and accept responsibility for outcomes. Externals project blame on others or outside events.

Locus of control in widowhood may be defined as widows' form of attributions about their situation. They form casual explanations either tending to internal factors such as their own effort and ability or external factors such as the influence of their in-laws. The attributions they form go a long way in affecting their emotional reactions to various social and domestic issues in life. The development of locus of control was found to be associated with family style and resources, cultural stability and experiences with effort leading to reward (Gatz & Karel, 2008). According to them, many internals have grown up with families that modeled typical internal beliefs. The families emphasized efforts, responsibilities and thinking. In contrast, externals are typically associated with lower socio-economic status. They also observed that societies experiencing social unrest (as we have presently in Nigeria) increase the expectancy of being out-of-control, so people in such societies become more external. The research of Schultz (2008) suggested that children in large single parent families headed by a woman are more likely to develop an external locus of control.

The way individuals interpret events in their lives has profound effect on their psychological well-being. If people feel they have no control over further outcomes they are less likely to seek solutions to their problems. The far-reaching effects of such maladaptive behaviours can have serious consequences on one's subjective happiness and mental health.

Emotional intelligence construct has attracted a lot of research attention in the Health sector, education, psychology and the world of work in the recent times. Several studies by

(Palmer, 2012, Donaldson & Stough, 2008) have found that emotional intelligence have significant impact on various elements of everyday living. Palmer (2012) found that higher emotional intelligence was a good predictor of life satisfaction. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use the information to guide ones thinking and actions.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed a model that identified four different factors of emotional intelligence: the perception of emotion, the ability to reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion and the ability to manage emotions.

1. **Perceiving Emotions:** The first step in understanding emotions is to accurately perceive them. In many cases, this might involve understanding non – verbal signals such as body language and facial expressions.
2. **Reasoning with Emotions:** The next step involves using emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. Emotions help prioritize what we pay attention and react to; we respond to things that garner our attention.
3. **Understanding emotions:** The emotion that we perceive can carry a wide variety of meanings. For example, if someone expresses an angry emotion, the observer must interpret the cause of the anger and what it might mean.
4. **Managing Emotions:** The ability to manage emotions effectively is a key part of emotional intelligence. Regulating emotions, responding appropriately and responding to the emotions of others are all important aspects of emotional management.

Studies have also shown that emotional intelligence is related to social adjustment and happiness (Willson, 2009, Salvoey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence is one of the important factors that determine success in life and psychological wellbeing. Everyone have certain level of emotional intelligence and will take a position toward what is confronting him either positive or negative life events and will compromise with them. A person who has high emotional intelligence gives order and stability to his life in such a way that with high emotional intelligence, the he will experience less negative events in his life (Richardson, 2012). Most psychologists consider happiness as one of the basic human emotions: anger, disgust, surprise, happiness and sadness (Disky, 2009). According to him happiness essential components include: positive emotions, life satisfaction, lack of negative emotions, positive relations with others, having purposeful life, personal growth and love of others. Campbell, (2011) also observed that different factors such as education, social success, cognitive, behavioural and personality variables have effect on happiness.

Research Question

What is the relationship between Locus of control, emotional intelligence and subjective happiness?

Method

A descriptive survey method was adopted using the Ex – Post – Facto research design. It is an ex-post -facto because the researcher did not manipulate any of the variables but measured them as they were manifested in the participants. The independent or predator variables were Locus of control and emotional intelligence while subjective happiness is the criterion or dependent variable.

Participants for the study were 92 widows who were members of some Non – governmental widow organizations at both State and Local government levels in Ondo State

Nigeria either by birth or by residence. The instruments for the research were: the Wong & Law (2003) Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), the Locus of Control Questionnaire (L.O.Q) developed by Nowicks and Strickland (2003) and the Lyubomirsky & Lepper, (1999) Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). All the three scales were adopted for the study. The Wong & Law (2003) Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was made up of 16 items which was sub – divided into four dimensions, namely: Self – Emotions Appraisal (SEA), others – Emotion Appraisal (OEA), use of Emotion (UOE) and Regulation of Emotion (ROE). Each sub – section has four items.

The reliability of the instrument was carried out using the Test – re – test reliability method. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. The internal consistency of 0.82, 0.79, 0.81 and 0.77 were obtained for the sub – sections of the instrument.

The Locus of Control Questionnaire (L.C.Q) developed by Nowick and Strickland (2003) was also used. The instrument consists of 17 items to which subjects were to respond based on how the items affect their personal beliefs. Responses ranged from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), and Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD).

The validity of the instrument was determined using the concurrent validity. The Locus of Control Scale by Rotter, J.B (1966) was administered along with the instrument. The correlation coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. The test – re – test reliability of the instrument was carried out at two weeks interval. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The instrument was therefore considered very valid and reliable for the study.

The Lybomirsky, S & Lepper, H (1999) Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was adopted for the study to measure the dependent variable. The instrument was made up of 4 items. In item 1, subjects were required to respond to a general statement about their happiness. Response was on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from “not a very happy person (1) to a very happy person (7)”. Item 2 dealt with how subjects compare of their happiness with others. The response is on a 7 – point Likert scale ranging from less happy (1) to more happy (7). Items 3 & 4 solicit for subjects’ response on a 7 – point Likert scale on how they enjoy life regardless of circumstances. Responses ranged from ‘not at all (1) to ‘a great deal’ (7).

A test – re – test reliability was carried at a two weeks interval. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.78 was obtained.

The three instruments were personally administered by the main researcher. Permission was obtained and explanations on the aims of the research work were given to the respondents who were willing to cooperate in the questionnaires. All questionnaires were collected immediately the respondents completed them.

Descriptive Analysis

Table I showing: The means and standard deviation of variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Locus of control	92	22.0	54.00	44.75	53.1
Emotional intelligence	92	16.00	59.00	45.71	7.65
Subjective happiness	92	4.00	12.00	7.11	1.14

Table I above shows the means and standard deviations of the variables. Emotional intelligence has a mean of (45.71) and a standard deviation of (7.65), Locus of Control has a mean of (44.75) and standard deviation of (5.31) while subjective happiness has a mean of (7.11) and a standard deviation of (1.14).

Table II showing the frequency and percentage analysis of participants’ responses in category.

Variables	Valid	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Locus of Control	Internal	42	45.7	45.7	45.7
	External	50	54.3	54.3	100
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	
Emotional Intelligence	High	39	42.4	42.2	42.4
	Low	53	57.6	57.6	100
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	
Subjective Happiness	Low	70	76.1	76.1	76.1
	High	22	23.9	23.9	100
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	

Table II shows the categorization of participants' responses. The table revealed that a greater percentage of the respondents have external locus of control (54.3%), Low emotional intelligence (57.6%) and Low subjective happiness (76.1%).

Table III showing Pearson correlation matrix of the variables involved in the research.

	Locus of Control	Emotional Intelligence	Subjective Happiness
Locus of Control Pearson Correlation. Sig. (2 - tailed) N	1 92	.268* .010 92	.135 .200 92
Emotional Intelligence Pearson Correlation Sig. (2 - tailed) N	.268* .010 92	1 92	.105 .319 92
Subjective Happiness Pearson Correlation Sig. (2 - tailed) N	.135 .200 92	.105 .319 92	1 92

*Correlation is sig. at the 0.05 level (2 - tailed).

Table III above showed that there is a significant relationship between Emotional intelligence and Locus of Control. It also shows that a correlation exists between Subjective happiness and Emotional intelligence but it is not significant.

Table IV showing the responses of participants on Subjective Happiness in frequency and percentages.

Items		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
I consider my self	A happy person	12	13.0	13.0	13.0
	Not a very Happy person	71	77.2	77.2	90.2
	A very Happy person	9	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	
Compared with most of my friends I consider my self	Less happy	8	8.7	8.7	8.7
	Not a very Happy person	75	81.5	81.5	90.2
	Very happy	9	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	
Getting most of everything, I consider my self	Less happy	14	15.2	15.2	15.2
	Not a very Happy Person	69	75.0	75.0	90.2
	More happy	9	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	
Regardless of circumstances, I consider myself enjoying my life	Not at all	79	85.9	85.9	85.9
	Fairly	10	10.9	10.9	96.7
	A great deal	3	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	92	100.0	100.0	

Table IV shows that majority of the respondents consider themselves not very happy persons (77.2%). Compared with most of their friends they also consider themselves not very happy persons (81.5%). A greater number of the participants consider themselves not very

happy persons when it comes to getting the most of everything. In the same vein, 85.9% of the subjects attest to not at all enjoying their lives in their circumstances.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between Locus of Control, Emotional Intelligence and Subjective Happiness among widows. The results show that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between Locus of control, Emotional intelligence and Subjective happiness. The results revealed that the respondents have external Locus of control, low emotional intelligence and consequently low subjective happiness. These findings are consistent with the observations of Hackett, (2008) who found that people who have high Emotional intelligence are less prone to become depressed in the face of negative life events. Moreover, he reiterated that people with internal locus of control respond more positively to treatment of depression. Furthermore, people with internal locus of control are more likely to lose weight or quit smoking when desired and are less likely to relapse afterward. The results also indicate that there is a significant relationship between Locus of control and Emotional intelligence. This implies that an improvement in an individual's Emotional intelligence would also have a significant effect on his/her Locus of control and invariably the Subjective happiness. The findings also agree with observations of other researchers (Abbasi, 2012, Richardson, 2012) who indicated that emotional intelligence is able to predict the variables of happiness and mental health however they found a significant difference between men and women emotional intelligence.

Implications for Psychological Mental Health

Many physical illnesses have psychological roots, but by learning and cognition behaviours and proper coping skills, incidence of these diseases can be prevented and the psychological status of individuals can be improved. Hence learning to acquire higher emotional intelligence and internal Locus of control would enhance better mental – social performance and better psychological health, it is counseled that individuals especially widows should see change rather than stability as normal in life, appraise change as incentive to personal growth and not a threat to self and security. They should learn to have control over their emotions and learn to behave as though they are influential rather than helpless in facing the various issues of life. They must as a matter of necessity learn to have internal locus of control. It is counselled that the primary socialization process of the girl – child in Nigerian families should be geared toward developing internal locus of control, high emotional intelligence which would enhance subjective happiness and good mental health. This is necessary because the Nigerian female folks seem to be faced with myriads of challenges more than their counterparts in other developed nations. Developing these vital ingredients of life would make Nigerian women to be more resistant to stress by choosing to face it, interpret it or encode the stress more positively and not as compounding pressure. Other researchers (Alloy, 2002, Clements, 2008) also found that even the illusion of being in control of one's situation tends to enhance one's mood in the face of stress.

Governments are counselled to establish community counselling centres where individuals can visit professionals for assistance. Assertive trainings techniques can be taught by therapists in these centres to enhance the Emotional intelligence and locus of control of clients as these would make a difference in their ways of thinking, feeling and acting. With respect to thinking, an external locus of control is associated with depression, anxiety and helplessness. People with low Emotional Intelligence harbor pessimistic thoughts about their personal development. These maladaptive tendencies could be ameliorated through appropriate counselling techniques.

Emotional Intelligence and Locus of Control contribute to success in most endeavours, it therefore becomes imperative for governments to put in place programmes and policies that would enhance these ingredients among women. The Nigeria populace as a whole need to be re- educated and re – oriented on the position of women in the society. Since intelligence quotient is not sex – linked, the women should be seen and addressed as individuals having equal intelligence with men and not as properties of men.

Enlightenment campaigns on the mass media about respect for women especially widows would also go a long way in enhancing the view of the society about the widow. This would invariably assist in the development of self-confident, high emotional intelligence, internal locus of control ability to withstand stress leading to good psychological wellbeing and happiness particularly among the widows.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and locus of control. Majority of the respondents were found to possess external locus of control, low emotional intelligence and consequently low subjective happiness. Developing adequate Locus of control and Emotional intelligence would enhance positive mental health and improve subjective happiness of the individuals and that of the widows in particular.

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