Life satisfaction among academicians: an empirical study on the universities of Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the levels of life satisfaction among academicians in Turkey and to investigate the effects of demographics on levels of life satisfaction among academicians. A questionnaire-based study was conducted in 648 academicians working in the Universities of Turkey. Data were collected using Diener et al.’s Life Satisfaction Scale. The life satisfaction levels of the academicians were found to be moderately high in the study. The results of the study indicated that professors have a higher level of life satisfaction as compared to assistant professors, instructors and research assistants. Professors have the highest level of life satisfaction among all academicians. Among the demographic variables, gender, age, income level, length of service in present university, length of service in higher education, and abroad experience were significantly related to life satisfaction. On the other hand, marital status was not significantly related to life satisfaction of the academicians.

1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads (Veenhoven, 1996). Donovan & Halpern (2002) discussed that “when people are happier, they tend to be more open-minded and creative in their thinking. In contrast, people who are unhappy, stressed or dissatisfied tend to exhibit ‘tunnel vision’ and rigid thinking”. Furthermore, people who are satisfied with their lives tend to be healthier and life satisfaction is inversely related to turnover intent (Donovan & Halpern, 2002; Lambert et al., 2009).

Life satisfaction has been one of the oldest and most persistently investigated issues in the study of adulthood (Lewis & Borders, 1995). Life satisfaction refers to an assessment of the overall conditions of existence as derived from a comparison of one’s aspirations to one’s actual achievements. Self-reported life satisfaction essentially reflects the individual’s cognitive assessment of his/her progress toward desired goals in life (Brown & Duan, 2007).

2. Theoretical Background

Medley (1976) defined that life satisfaction is a subjective feeling of happiness and contentment with life (as cited in Lee et al., 2004). Life satisfaction is also defined as the degree to which the experience of an individual's life
satisfies his/her personal wants and needs, both physically and psychologically (Rice, 1984). These wants and needs may exist in several domains of life, for example when individuals take the role of employee, parent, spouse or friend (Demerouti et al., 2000). Furthermore, life satisfaction has many positive benefits. A major benefit is that people feel good about themselves and their lives, which has an impact on their overall well-being. Satisfied people tend to be happier and treat others better. They are more likely to deal with problems and issues of work life productively and effectively (Pasupuleti, et al., 2009). Life satisfaction is as a cognitive appraisal of the overall degree of satisfaction one has with his or her life (Hart, 1999). As such, life satisfaction is usually seen as a global measure of an individual’s assessment of the overall quality of life (Lambert et al., 2009).

A great amount of empirical work has been conducted to demonstrate various sources and predictors of life satisfaction including individuals’ demographics, psychological characteristics, and life experiences (Brown & Duan, 2007). For example, Linn et al. (1985) compared academic and clinical faculty affiliated with a major teaching hospital in terms of work characteristics, job stress, conflict between work and personal life, job and life satisfaction, and perceived health. Nair & Gaither (1999) found that pharmacy faculty appeared to be only moderately satisfied with their lives. In their study, respondents were identified being married, receiving social support from spouses or mates and socializing with friends as non work influences that were related to life satisfaction. Landa et al. (2006) examined the relationship between Perceived Emotional Intelligence and Life Satisfaction in 52 university teachers. In this study, the most significant predictors of life satisfaction were positive and negative affect and emotional clarity. Tümkaya et al.’s study (2008) aimed to determine if emotional intelligence levels of academic staff predict their humor style and life satisfaction in significant levels and if their emotional intelligence levels, humor styles, and life satisfaction levels differ with regards to their academic degree.

Furthermore, demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, educational levels, and income levels have some relationship with levels of life satisfaction in the literature. Older age, married status, higher education, and income have been shown to be correlated with higher life satisfaction (Edwards & Klemmacks 1973, Linn et al. 1986, Iwatsubo et al. 1996, Lee et al., 2004). On the other hand, researches on gender differences and life satisfaction have been studied in the literature; but the findings have been unclear. Some research has investigated that women have higher life satisfaction than men; however, other research has reported that men are slightly satisfied with their life than women (Wood et al., 1989, Haring et al., 1984, Brown & Duan, 2007). The results of studies investigating the life satisfaction of male and female faculty have been also mixed (Nair & Gaither, 1999). For instance, Brown & Duan (2007) examined the life satisfaction of men and women counseling psychology faculty who were Division 17 (Society of Counseling Psychology) members of APA (American Psychological Association). They reported that there was no significant sex difference for life satisfaction or role orientation. Nair & Gaither (1999) also reported that no significant difference was found in life satisfaction for female and male faculty. Bryant & Constantine (2006) also explored the relationships among multiple role balance, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction in a sample of 133 “women school counselors”.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and procedure

At the research time, there were 94 state and 31 foundation universities in Turkey. The survey was sent as a web page link to 8 universities selected from each of the seven geographical regions in Turkey. Surveys were sent to all academicians in every department at these universities. Numbers of academicians sent e-mail were 7196 and response rate was 9% with a valid number of 648 university teachers containing of instructors, research assistants, and professors using anonymously completed questionnaire. The demographic details of respondents are given in Table 1.
Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

| Gender          | n   | %   | Length of service in present university n | %   | Academic Title          | n   | %   |
|-----------------|-----|-----|------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| Female          | 321 | 50.6| less than 1                               | 19  | 3.0                     | Professor | 90 | 13.9|
| Male            | 314 | 49.4| 1-5                                      | 180 | 28.4                    | Associate professor | 65 | 10.1|
|                 |     |     | 6-10                                     | 174 | 27.4                    | Assistant professor | 133 | 20.6|
|                 |     |     | 11-15                                    | 114 | 18.0                    | Instructor       | 109 | 16.9|
|                 |     |     | 16-20                                    | 61  | 9.6                     | Research assistant | 232 | 35.9|
|                 |     |     | 21 and over                              | 86  | 13.6                    | Lecturer        | 4   | 0.6 |
|                 |     |     |                                           |     |                         | Specialist       | 13  | 2.0 |
| Age             |     |     |                                           |     |                         |                |     |     |
| 21-30           | 198 | 30.7| less than 1                               | 19  | 3.0                     | Professor | 90 | 13.9|
| 31-40           | 227 | 35.1| 1-5                                      | 180 | 28.4                    | Associate professor | 65 | 10.1|
| 41-50           | 150 | 23.2| 6-10                                     | 174 | 27.4                    | Assistant professor | 133 | 20.6|
| 51 and over     | 71  | 11  | 11-15                                    | 114 | 18.0                    | Instructor       | 109 | 16.9|
|                 |     |     | 16-20                                    | 61  | 9.6                     | Research assistant | 232 | 35.9|
|                 |     |     | 21 and over                              | 86  | 13.6                    | Lecturer        | 4   | 0.6 |
|                 |     |     |                                           |     |                         | Specialist       | 13  | 2.0 |
| Marital Status  |     |     |                                           |     |                         |                |     |     |
| Married         | 414 | 64.3| less than 1                               | 33  | 5.1                     | 1000-1500 TL   | 283 | 43.8|
| Single          | 190 | 29.5| 1-5                                      | 236 | 36.7                    | 1501-2000 TL   | 139 | 21.5|
| Divorced/Widowed| 40  | 6.2 | 6-10                                     | 186 | 28.9                    | 2001-2500 TL  | 57  | 8.8 |
|                 |     |     | 11-15                                    | 87  | 13.5                    | 2501-3000 TL  | 58  | 9.0 |
|                 |     |     | 16-20                                    | 52  | 8.1                     | 3000 TL over  | 105 | 16.3|
|                 |     |     | 21 and over                              | 49  | 7.6                     |                |     |     |
| Abroad Experience|     |     |                                           |     |                         |                |     |     |
| Yes             | 387 | 59.9| less than 1                               | 19  | 3.0                     | Professor | 90 | 13.9|
| No              | 259 | 40.1| 1-5                                      | 180 | 28.4                    | Associate professor | 65 | 10.1|
|                 |     |     | 6-10                                     | 174 | 27.4                    | Assistant professor | 133 | 20.6|
|                 |     |     | 11-15                                    | 114 | 18.0                    | Instructor       | 109 | 16.9|
|                 |     |     | 16-20                                    | 61  | 9.6                     | Research assistant | 232 | 35.9|
|                 |     |     | 21 and over                              | 86  | 13.6                    | Lecturer        | 4   | 0.6 |
|                 |     |     |                                           |     |                         | Specialist       | 13  | 2.0 |

3.2. Measures

Life satisfaction was assessed with The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985) in this study. The scale consists of 5 items which measures an individual’s subjective well-being. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Internal reliability of the scale has been estimated to range between .80 to .89 and temporal stability between .64 to .84. Principal components factor analysis resulted in one factor, which represents an overall evaluation of satisfaction with one’s life (Matheny et al., 2002; Diener et al., 1985; Lucas, et al., 1996). The Turkish version of The Scale was adapted by Köker (1991). Köker (1991) reported an internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version of the scale to be .80, and a test-retest reliability coefficient to be .85 (Türkay et al., 2008). Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the present sample participants was 0.83, indicating high scale reliability.

The questionnaire also included a demographic section, which asked for the following information; academic title, gender, age, marital status, length of service in present university, length of service in higher education, and abroad experience.

For the purpose of identifying and examining the underlying dimensions of the instrument, a factor analysis using principal component method was used. Independent sample t-test and One-way ANOVA were computed to assess differences in level of life satisfaction related to demographic questions. Scheffé test was used for post hoc comparisons of ANOVA. Analyses were performed using SPSS 16.

4. Findings

ANOVA (s) (with post hoc tests - Scheffe) and t-tests were computed to determine differences in level of life satisfaction within the subcategories related to gender, age, marital status, income level, academic title, length of service in present university, length of service in higher education, and abroad experience. Significant differences were found among life satisfaction scores for gender, age, income level, academic title, length of service in present university, length of service in higher education, and abroad experience. No significant differences were found for marital status.

Professors (M=3.71, SD=0.65) have significantly higher level of life satisfaction as compared to assistant professors (M=3.31, SD=0.85), instructors (M=3.26, SD=0.87), and research assistants (M=3.22, SD=0.84). Female academicians (M=3.45, SD=0.80) were significantly more satisfied with their life than male academicians (M=3.22, SD=0.85). In age groups, 51 and over years (M=3.67, SD=0.69) have significantly higher mean levels of life satisfaction than 31-40 (M=3.22, 0.86) and 41-50 years (M=3.33, SD=0.80). In income level groups, above 3000 TL (M=3.76, SD=0.67) have significantly higher mean levels of life satisfaction than 1000-1500 TL (M=3.22,

* Data for lecturers and specialists were not evaluated because of an inadequate group size.
In length of service in present university groups, 21 years and over (M=3.66, SD=0.85) have significantly higher mean levels of life satisfaction than 6-10 years (M=3.20, SD=0.85). In length of service in higher education groups, 21 years and over (M=3.60, SD=0.79) have also significantly higher mean levels of life satisfaction than 6-10 years (M=3.18, SD=0.90). Academicians who have been abroad (M=3.43, SD=0.79) were more satisfied with their life than academicians who have not been abroad (M=3.22, SD=0.88). The results are shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Results of the ANOVA tests

| Characteristic                        | df | F     | Sig. |
|---------------------------------------|----|-------|------|
| Academic title                        | 6  | 4.558 | .000 |
| Marital status                        | 2  | 1.580 | .207 |
| Age                                   | 3  | 5.378 | .001 |
| Income level                          | 5  | 8.667 | .000 |
| Length of service in present university | 5  | 2.753 | .018 |
| Length of service in higher education  | 5  | 4.213 | .001 |

Table 3. Results of the t-tests

| Characteristic             | df | t     | Sig. |
|----------------------------|----|-------|------|
| Gender                    | 630| 3.492 | .001 |
| Abroad experience         | 641| 3.244 | .001 |

5. Conclusions

The Satisfaction with Life Scale was used to assess the academicians’ life satisfaction in this study. Academicians showed a moderately high level of life satisfaction with a mean score of 3.35 (SD = 0.83). The findings of this study indicate that there were significant differences between the life satisfaction and academic titles. Professors have a higher level of life satisfaction as compared to assistant professors, instructors and research assistants. Consequently, professors have the highest level of life satisfaction among all academicians in the study.

Among the demographic variables gender, age, income level, length of service in present university, length of service in higher education, and abroad experience were significantly related to life satisfaction. Female academicians were more satisfied with their life than their male counterparts in the current study. In age groups, 51 and over years were significantly more satisfied with their life than 31-40 and 41-50 years. In income level groups, above 3000 TL were significantly more satisfied with their life than 1000-1500 TL, 1501-2000 TL, and 2001-2500 TL. Both the length of service in present university groups and the length of service in higher education groups, 21 years and over were significantly more satisfied with their life than 6-10 years. Academicians who have been abroad were more satisfied with their life than academicians who have not been abroad in the current study. Besides, marital status is not significantly related to life satisfaction in this study.

Consequently, life satisfaction is an important topic that needs to be researched further in academic life. Because, it is related to many important matters, such as job satisfaction, performance, productivity, stress, and burnout. Life satisfaction studies in academia can help the university managements and university teachers to develop the quality of education. It would be useful that future studies should be replicated within the prescribed time limits, considering variables such as job satisfaction, job stress, burnout, intention to leave, job performance, and, managerial support.

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