The association between self-control and satisfaction in life among Filipino older adults

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Self-control has been associated with a host of positive life outcomes. This correlational study was aimed at determining the link between self-control and life satisfaction among the older population.

Methods: This study used a quantitative correlational design. Ninety-six (96) older adult residents of Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, Mindanao Philippines, who met the inclusion criteria were recruited. This quantitative study made use of two standardized instruments namely the Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The association was assessed using Pearson correlation statistics.

Results: There is a significant relationship between the older adults' self-control and their life satisfaction. The computed r value is 0.248 ($p < 0.05$). Evidently, there is a positive relationship between self-control and life satisfaction. This current study has provided evidence to support the assumption that exercising self-control leads to life satisfaction.

Conclusions: As a significant positive relationship between the older adults' self-control exercise and their life satisfaction was proven, this means that effective exercise of self-control positively leads to better life outcomes such as satisfaction in life. Linking self-control exercise with life satisfaction offers an innovative way for us to know why some people may feel more satisfied with life than others.

Keywords: elderly; Filipino; life satisfaction; older adults; self-control

Introduction

The concept of attaining life satisfaction has always been an aspiration to most human beings. While self-control is attributed to a host of positive outcomes, it is still interesting to know the link between self-control and the satisfaction with life. The essence of self-control in attaining important life outcomes is widely recognized. High self-control, according to several authors, positively predicts a person's well-being, life satisfaction and positive affect. High self-control here means the ability of a person to regulate his thoughts, feelings and behaviors (De Ridder et al., 2012; Hofmann et al., 2014).

Several authors have pointed out that self-control is a powerful determinant of success across the life span (De Ridder et al., 2012). The practice of self-control is associated with positive outcomes such as better interpersonal relationships, good physical health and better intellectual performance (Finkel and Campbell, 2001; Schmeichel, Vohs and Baumeister, 2018). In this study, self-control is defined as the self's capacity to

override or change one's inner responses, as well as to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies and to refrain from acting on them (Tangney, Boone and Baumeister, 2018).

Exercising high self-control is a pertinent aspect of a person's behavior for a person to have a successful and healthy life (De Ridder et al., 2012; Tangney, Boone and Baumeister, 2018). It was found that behaviors such as minimized aggression, reduced criminality improved relationships, less abuse of alcohol, smoking and other prohibited substances and high self-esteem and improved interpersonal skills were all related to the practice of high self-control (Finkel and Campbell, 2001; Sayette and Griffin, 2004). Moreover, Hofmann et al. (2014) stated that self-control is a person's ability to override one's inner response and to interrupt undesirable behavioral inclinations or impulses.

Additionally, greater self-control is also positively attributed to psychological adjustments and negatively predicts psychopathology (Tangney, Boone and

Baumeister, 2018). It was also found that the more self-control a person exhibits, the fewer are the experience of symptoms and stress while having a better mental health (Boals, Vandellen and Banks, 2011). This finding was corroborated with the outcome of the study that there is a link between self-control and higher quality and satisfying relationships (Bogg and Roberts, 2004; Jensen-Campbell and Malcolm, 2007).

Moreover, several researchers have perceived self-control as a key aspect in personal conscientiousness, which is subsequently linked to longevity, physical health and other relevant health behaviors (Friedman et al., 1993; Bogg and Roberts, 2004; Goodwin and Friedman, 2006). Succinctly, self-control practice is an all-encompassing important human quality trait essential for attaining a good life, thus its practice results in many positive life outcomes.

The aging population is rapidly growing worldwide, and attention must be given to the older sector of the society. There are certain conditions associated with aging such as decline in economic resources, decrease in cognitive ability, failing health and weakening social support (Deary et al., 2009). The various changes that take place in old age suggest that aging might be linked to a decline of the older adults' well-being. An important measure of subjective well-being is life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is established as an essential indicator of wellness in general. It is also seen as a necessary gauge of positive functioning (Gilman, 2009). Numerous people and several researchers find getting old linked to a decline in happiness in older people. This is attributed to the physical, social and psychological changes that they experience in old age which clearly exhibit that the experiences that older people go through impact their satisfaction with life.

The theory of self-control in old age has an assumption that the exercise of self-control is linked to life satisfaction (Caorong, 2019). The aim of this study is to know and determine if the exercise of self-control is associated with life satisfaction. Determining the association between self-control and life satisfaction will help confirm the assumption of the theory of self-control in old age which states that the exercise of self-control among older adults leads to life satisfaction. The result of this study will give a better perspective on the concept of life satisfaction in late life and will provide and enhance the viewpoint on the link between life satisfaction and self-control.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study utilized a quantitative correlational research design to determine the relationship between the self-control of older people and their life satisfaction.

Respondent

The target participants were 60 years old and older adults from Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, the Philippines. Target population (N=96) was calculated based on correlation sample size calculator [α=0.05, ß=0.50, r=0.2]. Participants were purposively chosen to answer the research instruments. Inclusion criteria included: being a male or female, sixty years old and above, and those older adults demonstrating normal cognitive and mental functioning. Cognitive functioning was assessed utilizing the Short Portable Mini-mental Status Questionnaire or SPMSQ by Pfeiffer (1975). Participants who committed two or less errors were asked to join the study. However, those who committed three or more errors using the (SPMSQ) indicating cognitive impairment were not included.

Instrument

The Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) is a standardized instrument which measures self-control. It is comprised of statements which are measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 indicates 'not at all like me' and 5 indicates 'very much like me' (Tangney, Boone and Baumeister, 2018). The scale consists of a total of thirteen items with an internal consistency estimate (alpha) of 0.83 and 0.85 in two study samples. The test-retest reliability estimate was 0.87 (three-week interval). Self-control as defined by Tangney is the self's capacity to override or change one's inner responses, as well as to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies and to refrain from acting on them (Tangney, Boone and Baumeister, 2018).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is another standardized instrument used in this study which measures the life satisfaction element of subjective well-being. Life satisfaction judgments represent the cognitive component of subjective well-being, or the experience commonly referred to as happiness (Diener et al., 1985, 1999). The SWLS is Likert in type where a seven-point response category is used for the 5-item statements comprising the scale. The lowest score is five while the highest possible score that can be obtained is 35. Score interpretation included the following: 5-9 (extreme dissatisfaction with life); 10-14 (dissatisfied with life); 15-19 (slightly dissatisfied with life); 20 (neutral); 21-25 (slightly satisfied with life); 26-30 (satisfied with life) and 31-35 (extremely satisfied with life). The scale has a high internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of 0.79 to 0.89. Additionally, in a month interval, the test-retest correlation scores were 0.84 and 0.80.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data by distributing a standardized research instrument for the participants to answer. The instrument comprised the Brief Self-control Scale developed by Tangney, Baumeister and Boone (2018) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by

Table 1 Profile of the participants (N = 96)

Variable	n	%
Age		
60-69 years old	60	62.50
70-79 years old	31	32.29
80 years old and above	5	5.20
Marital Status		
Married	51	53.12
Widow	37	38.54
Single	3	3.12
Separated	5	5.20
Religion		
Roman Catholic	82	85.41
Islam	9	9.37
Others	5	5.20
Educational Attainment		
No Formal education	18	18.75
Elementary Level	30	31.25
Elementary Graduate	7	7.29
High School Level	12	12.50
High School Graduate	8	8.33
College Level	7	7.29
College Graduate	10	10.41
Postgraduate Level	4	4.16
Employment Status		
Unemployed	53	55.20
Employed	43	44.7
Monthly Income (in PHP)		
5,000 and below	76	79.16
5,000-9,999	7	7.29
10,000-14,999	7	7.29
15,000-19,999	2	2.08
20,000-24,999	1	1.11
25,000-29,999	1	1.11
30,000 and above	2	2.08

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the older adults' level of self-control (N = 96)

Self-control Categories		n	%
Very low	(13-26)	0	0
Low	(27-39)	27	28.01
Moderate	(40-52)	55	57.30
High	(53-65)	14	14.60

Note: Categories arbitrarily made by the researcher
(Cutoff scoring was determined through averaging from perfect score into Quintiles); Perfect score is 65.

Diener et al. (1985). The survey took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The survey was conducted where older adults congregated in groups or individually at their homes or work area.

Qualified research assistants were employed to help in the qualitative data collection. They were at least high school graduates and able to communicate and document written information from the research participants. They were initially required to undergo a training that was personally conducted by the researcher herself before the data collection process. The research assistants were also asked to sign a confidentiality agreement form.

The administration of the research questionnaires was carried out by the researcher herself and the investigator's research assistants. The researcher hired three research assistants who helped in the data gathering process. The data collection was completed within four weeks. The participants' concerns and questions were addressed during the data collection process. The participants were also asked to indicate their agreement to participate in the research study by asking them to sign a consent form before giving them the questionnaire or allowing them to start answering the questions. Only those who were keen and willing to be included in the study were involved.

The study respondents were invited voluntarily by giving them a letter of invitation indicating the aims and purpose of the study. They were also informed of their right to refuse and it was highlighted to them that participation was voluntary. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent indicating their voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were tabulated and transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for analysis (file version 1.0.0-51). Data analysis of the sample characteristics was utilized as descriptive statistics to determine the sample characteristics. The correlation of the two main variables (self-control and life satisfaction) was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Correlation coefficients vary from -1 to +1, where 0 indicates no relationship, -1 indicates a perfectly negative linear relationship, and +1 indicates a perfectly positive linear relationship. For a positive coefficient, as one variable increases, the other also increases. For negative coefficients, as one variable increases, the other variable decreases (Pallant, 2020). Cohen's standard (Cohen, 2013) was used to evaluate the coefficient to assess the strength of the relationship between self-control and life satisfaction. Coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 represent a small relationship; coefficients between 0.30 and 0.49 represent a medium relationship and coefficients 0.50 and above represent a large relationship. An alpha of 0.05 was used for analysis.

Ethical Consideration

Data collection started after approval from the Cebu Normal University-Research Ethics Committee (CNU-REC) with CNU REC Code 335/2019-06 Caorong. The study participants were purposively selected to join the study. They were screened following certain inclusion criteria such as the following: older adults aged sixty years old and above, cognitively, physically and psychologically well, and female or male residents of Iligan City and Lanao del Norte. Each of the participants was given a copy of the informed consent duly approved by the Cebu Normal University-Ethics Review Committee (CNU-REC).

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for the older adults' life satisfaction (n = 96)

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Rating
I am satisfied with my life	5.50	1.472	Satisfied
The conditions of my life are excellent	5.44	1.609	Satisfied
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	5.34	1.368	Satisfied
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	5.15	1.402	Slightly Satisfied
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	5.07	1.643	Slightly Satisfied
Overall Mean	**5.30**		**Satisfied**

Scaling:
1.00-1.85 = Strongly Disagree/ Extremely Dissatisfied;
1.86-2.71 = Disagree/ Dissatisfied;
2.72-3.57 = Slightly Disagree;
3.58-4.43 = Neither Agree nor Disagree/ Neutral;
4.44-5.29 = Slightly Agree/ Slightly Satisfied;
5.30-6.15 = Agree/ Satisfied;
6.16-7.00 = Strongly Agree/ Extremely Satisfied
Categorization of scaling was determined through averaging from perfect score resulting to seven classified ranges.
*Perfect score is 7 in each item

Table 4 Correlation between the older adults' self-control and their life satisfaction

		Life-satisfaction
	Pearson Correlation	0.248*
Self-control	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.015
	N	96

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

Results

This section of the study presents the results and findings of this current study. To test the hypothesis that older adults' self-control is associated with life satisfaction, correlation statistics was performed. The presentation starts with descriptive statistics describing the characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, gender, religion, educational attainment, income and occupation. The older adults' self-control scores and their level of life satisfaction are also presented in this section of the study as well as the correlation between the two.

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents who participated in the current study are young older adults, most are female Roman Catholics, and the majority of them still remain married in late life. Additionally, a great number of study participants did not reach college and more than half of them were unemployed. It can also be noted from the findings that the majority of the older participants have a monthly income of less than five thousand pesos.

Results as shown in Table 2 revealed that, generally, the respondents have moderate self-control (M=44.10, SD= 6.72) using the Brief Self-control Scale. This result is shown in the above figure, indicating that more than half of the older people involved in the study have moderate self-control. Yet it cannot be discounted from the figure above that there are fairly a number of study participants who have low level of self-control while participants of the study with high self-control are lesser in number.

It is established from the results above that the older adult participants are satisfied with life. The data show that, generally, the participants agree to the first three indicators listed in the scale while slightly agreeing to the other two indicators.

Table 4 shows the correlation between the two main variables of the current study, which are self-control and life satisfaction. Using Pearson correlation statistics, the computed r value signifies that there is a positive relationship between the older adults' self-control and their life satisfaction. It means that a significant positive relationship between the identified variables exist. This suggests that the higher the self-control, the more satisfied the older adult is. Although Pearson's correlation between the self-control of the older adult respondents and their life satisfaction is significant at the 0.5 significance level, the magnitude is relatively small. This may be due to the sample size (N=96), hence an indication that further study must involve a much larger sample.

Discussions

The aim of this current study was to determine the link between self-control and life satisfaction among the older people to validate a proposition of the Theory of Self-control in Old age which states that the exercise of self-control leads to life satisfaction. In this study, it was hypothesized that older adults who have high self-control have better life satisfaction.

Findings of this present study reveal that the majority of the older adult participants have moderate level of self-control while are also satisfied with life. The result of the study coincides with several modern empirical studies indicating the relevance of self-control in achieving important life outcomes. Good self-control as being able to give up immediate desires and focus on long-term

goals, positively predicts life satisfaction as was concluded by Hofmann et al. (2014) in their study.

The present findings reveal that the majority of the older adult participants of the study are satisfied with life. This result is arguably plausible as was concluded by a study of Mercier, Peladeau and Tempier (1998) to older people determining their satisfaction with life. It was found in their study that, with aging, older people's psychological state remains stable or even increases even with some inevitable aging changes being experienced. Moreover, the satisfaction with life does not necessarily change in late life. as was established by Carstensen, Isaacowitz and Charles (1999). The result of this study is also in consonance with the findings of a recent study conducted by Ng, Tey and Asadullah (2017) among China's eldest people where the majority of the older adults who participated in their study considered their satisfaction with life as very good.

Furthermore, as exercising self-control has been associated with many positive outcomes, including life satisfaction, the result of the current study positively linking self-control to life satisfaction is not at all unforeseen. This is corroborated by numerous studies claiming that high self-control positively predicts not only a person's life satisfaction but also their well-being (Hofmann et al., 2014). Moreover, in a study conducted by Dou et al. (2016) to Chinese employees, self-control was also found to be positively related to both job and life satisfaction. This provides evidence of the positive association between self-control and life satisfaction. Additionally, it was also concluded in a study that high trait self-control positively predicts happiness (Cheung et al., 2014). This current study has a similar finding, that there is an apparent positive association of self-control with life satisfaction. The higher self-control the more satisfied are the older adults.

Understanding the link between self-control and life satisfaction has potential applications across a broad range of human behaviors. Linking self-control exercise to life satisfaction offers an innovative way to make people know why some may feel satisfied and why some do not.

Conclusions

This current study has provided evidence to support the proposition claiming that exercising self-control leads to life satisfaction. The significant positive relationship between the older adults' self-control exercise and their life satisfaction means that effective exercise of self-control positively leads to better life outcomes such as satisfaction in life. Linking self-control exercise to life satisfaction offers an innovative way for people to know why some people are satisfied with life and others are not.

Findings of this research underscore the positive relationship of self-control and life satisfaction among older adults. It is recommended that further research be conducted using other variables such as quality of life to enhance the exploration concerning the relationship of self-control to the subjective well-being of the older people.

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