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Original article

## Psychometric evaluation of the satisfaction with life scale in Togo: A three-step approach<sup>☆</sup>



### Évaluation psychométrique de l'échelle de satisfaction générale de vie au Togo : une approche en trois étapes

L. Sovet<sup>a,\*</sup>, K.A. Atitsogbe<sup>b</sup>, P. Pari<sup>b</sup>, M.S.A. Park<sup>c</sup>, A. Villieux<sup>d</sup><sup>a</sup> EA 4132, centre de recherche sur le travail et le développement, Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, 41, rue Gay-Lussac, 75005 Paris, France<sup>b</sup> Institut national des sciences de l'éducation, filière de psychologie appliquée, université de Lomé, S/C BP1515, Lomé, Togo<sup>c</sup> Department of psychology and global public health, Jeffrey Cheah school of medicine and health sciences, Monash university, Jalan Lagoan Selatan, 46150 Bandar Sunway, Selangor, Malaysia<sup>d</sup> UFR des sciences de l'Homme et de la société, Équipe Action, laboratoire PSY-NCA, EA 4700, université de Rouen, rue Lavoisier, 76821 Mont-Saint-Aignan, France

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** – The Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) is considered the most widely used psychometric scale for assessing life satisfaction. Despite plethora of cross-cultural research that provided evidences of its robustness, none was conducted in French-speaking sub-Saharan countries such as Togo.

**Objective.** – Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the validity of the SWLS extensively among Togolese college students ( $n = 460$ ) in a three-step approach from 2012 to 2014.

**Method and results.** – Firstly, social representations of well-being were explored qualitatively. Then, the original version of the SWLS was administered. Based on the results we gathered, a scale item was altered. Psychometric properties of the revised version of the SWLS were examined, revealing adequate construct validity, reliability, temporal stability, measurement invariance across gender, convergent validity with a single measure of life satisfaction, and discriminant validity with various life domain satisfactions.

**Conclusion.** – Limitations and implications in life satisfaction measurement are also discussed with regards to the Togolese cultural context.

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## R É S U M É

**Introduction.** – L'échelle de satisfaction générale de vie (*satisfaction with life scale* [SWLS]) développée par Diener, Emmons, Larsen et Griffin (1985) est considérée comme l'échelle psychométrique la plus utilisée pour mesurer la satisfaction de vie. Bien qu'une pléthore d'études interculturelles ait fournie des preuves d'une forte robustesse, aucune recherche n'a été conduite auprès de pays de l'Afrique subsaharienne francophone parmi lesquels figure le Togo.

**Objectif.** – Ainsi, l'objectif de cette étude consiste en l'exploration approfondie de la validité de la SWLS auprès d'un échantillon d'étudiants togolais suivant une approche en trois étapes.

**Méthode et résultats.** – Premièrement, les représentations sociales du bien-être ont été qualitativement explorées. Ensuite, la version originale de la SWLS a été administrée. À partir des résultats obtenus, nous avons constaté qu'un item n'était pas adapté. Les propriétés psychométriques de la version révisée de

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Laurent.sovet@gmail.com (L. Sovet).

la SWLS ont été examinées mettant en évidence des indicateurs pertinents concernant la validité de construit, la fiabilité, la stabilité temporelle, l'invariance de la mesure entre les hommes et les femmes, la validité convergente avec une mesure en un item de la satisfaction de vie et la validité discriminante avec la satisfaction dans différentes sphères de vie.

*Conclusion.* – Les limites et les implications de la mesure de la satisfaction de vie sont discutées au regard des spécificités du contexte culturel togolais.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Life Satisfaction in Togo

Togo is a French-speaking Sub-Saharan African country located between Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Benin and is considered as one of the smallest nations in Africa. With the GNI per capita estimated at US \$596 in 2011 (United Nations, 2013), the country is also considered as one of the poorest nations in the world. Consistently, one may expect to find financial satisfaction as the most significant predictor of overall life satisfaction for Togolese (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Levin et al., 2011; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999; Veenhoven, 1991). Oishi et al. (1999) advocated describing this phenomenon with a value-as-a-moderator model, claiming that the needs that are most salient to those belonging to a specific culture contribute significantly to overall life satisfaction. Indeed, their study reported higher correlations between financial satisfaction and life satisfaction in poorer nations compared to the more affluent ones. Furthermore, it has been found that religion is also very important in the daily life of Togolese population and may have a significant influence on their life satisfaction (Afrobarometer, 2013; Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011). Along with these, exploration of several life domain satisfactions may provide more detailed information about significant determinants of overall life satisfaction in Togo (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005).

Recently, Togo has been included in several large international surveys on well-being. While these have provided some valuable information that can be used to characterize the situation in the country, the data may not be comparable and interpretation of the results requires some caution. According to the Gallup World Survey (2006, cited by Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008) based on a nationally representative sample of 1000 Togolese, Togo was designated as the nation with the lowest level of life satisfaction in the world with an average score of 3.2 on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Interestingly, the data was collected during a long period of politic troubles, which could have affected the overall reports of life satisfaction. In another study, Abdallah, Thompson, and Marks (2008) estimated life satisfaction in Togo at 5.18 on 10, which was relatively equivalent to the scores of other Sub-Saharan African countries, based on human and built capital, natural capital, and sociopolitical capital. Currently, the economic and political situation in Togo may appear to be better than in the past suggesting an increase of life satisfaction at the country level. Nevertheless, a recent data collected in 2012 by the Afrobarometer (2013) among a national representative sample of 1200 Togolese revealed that 70% of people rated their life conditions bad or very bad, 45% worse or much worse than in the previous year, and 49% worse or much worse than their fellow citizens. Moreover, youths are still experiencing tenacious economic difficulties and high level of uncertainties in their daily life (Chitou, 2011). As the future leaders of the nation, it is particularly important to understand youth subjective well-being. Our study, thus, may extend the current literature by providing more detailed information about life satisfaction of Togolese, especially among college students.

### 1.2. Subjective well-being and domains of life satisfaction

Over the last three decades, a considerable amount of research has explored the concept of subjective well-being (SWB, Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener, 2009). SWB may be defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002, p. 63). Accordingly, SWB includes two distinctive major components including an emotional dimension and a cognitive dimension (Diener, 2009). Emotional dimension refers to the balance between pleasant and unpleasant affect while cognitive dimension refers to life satisfaction and also various specific life domain satisfactions such as work, family, leisure or finances (Diener et al., 1999). Among these concepts, life satisfaction has been widely used as a reliable construct in many well-being related studies including cross-cultural comparisons and international surveys in various research fields (Beckie & Hayduk, 1997; Bjørnskov, Dreher, & Fischer, 2008; Camfield & Skevington, 2008; Diener, 2009; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Oishi et al., 1999; Oishi, 2012). However, despite the large amount literature available, few studies were specifically conducted in Africa and psychometric properties of well-being scales in this cultural context were not systematically investigated (Abbott & Wallace, 2012; Levesque, Blais, & Hess, 2004a, 2004b; Møller, 2001; Razafindrakoto & Roubaud, 2006; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002; Westaway & Maluka, 2005; Westaway, Maritz, & Golele, 2003). Thus, we decided to explore the cultural understanding of the well-being concept and the validity of the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) in Togo.

### 1.3. Psychometric properties of the satisfaction with life scale

The SWLS was originally developed as a cognitive assessment of subjective well-being providing a short evaluation of overall life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS is a self-report measure composed of five items, all positively worded, representing a strong single factor. All the items are rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The total score results from the sum of the five items. Considerable number of studies was conducted with this scale, and they have demonstrated good psychometric properties in diverse populations (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Strong temporal stability in both short-term (one month) and long-term (four years) periods was demonstrated in spite of the fact that life satisfaction may vary due to changing life conditions or events and over time (Pavot & Diener, 2009). Most of studies have also reported high internal consistency (e.g., Pavot & Diener, 2008). Significant and positive relationships between SWLS and specific life domain satisfactions such as finance, friends, family, romantic life were also found (Diener et al., 1999; Oishi & Diener, 2001). Finally, investigation of measurement invariance of SWLS across gender showed some inconsistencies but more studies seem to report equivalence (Bai, Wu, Zheng, & Ren, 2011; Biswas-Diener, Vittersø, & Diener, 2005; Clench-Aas, Nes, Dalgard, & Aarø, 2011; Hultell & Gustavsson, 2008; Shevlin, Brunson, &

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