

## Life Satisfaction Predicts Positive Workplace Outcomes Among Filipino Guidance Counselors

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The study tested the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998; 2003) in the field of counseling practice. The researchers hypothesized that counselors' life satisfaction would predict outcomes relevant in practice: counseling self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and flow state. Participants ( $n = 137$ ) completed measures of counseling self-efficacy, flow state, life satisfaction, and emotional awareness. Age, gender, civil status, and degree earned were identified as covariates and their effects were controlled in the regression analyses. Findings revealed that life satisfaction positively predicted flow state and emotional awareness. Counselors who expressed greater satisfaction with their lives seem to see the counseling experience as rewarding and are more attuned to their emotions. This finding is consistent with the key postulate of broaden-and-build theory on the beneficial consequences of positive affect on psychological resources.

*Keywords:* life satisfaction, emotional awareness, flow state, counseling self-efficacy, Filipino counselors

One of the primary contributions of literature on positive psychology is providing strong evidence for the link between happiness and success (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Happy individuals evaluate their life as satisfying, report an overall sense of well-being, and are oriented towards personal growth and goal attainment.

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Individuals who experience even mild positive emotions have also been found to exhibit greater cognitive flexibility (Isen, 2004; Yang & Yang, 2014). The experience of positive psychological states, therefore, promotes the development of personal strengths that leads one to generate the necessary resources that bring about benefits in different aspects of one's life (see Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

Life satisfaction is an overall cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Higher life satisfaction has been found to be prospectively associated with positive work and family life events (Luhmann, Lucas, Eid, & Diener, 2012) and negatively associated with lower levels of problematic Internet use (Kabasakal, 2015).

The association of life satisfaction and positive psychological outcomes is consistent with the assumptions of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2003). The theory postulates the importance of positive emotions, an essential component of life satisfaction, on one's growth and overall well-being. The presence of positive emotions, such as love, joy, and interest, leads one to broaden their cognitive and behavioral responses, which then results in the development and increase of personal resources. These personal resources create more positive emotions, which brings about an upward spiral of personal growth. In other words, the accumulation of such experiences leads to future growth and resilience, even though positive emotions are experienced transitorily. Over time, it is assumed to promote personal resources in different aspects of one's life. The consequences of positive emotions are in contrast to those of negative emotions, which lead to a narrowing of responses, such as the activation of fight-or-flight responses. Although necessary for survival, they do not lead to the needed growth and flourishing results of positive emotions.

The counseling profession will benefit greatly from looking into the effects of positive states on work outcomes. Previous studies have focused on the factors associated with burnout as counselors work in highly stressful conditions due to the nature of their profession (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Butler & Constantine, 2005; Craig & Sprang, 2010; McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambart, & Guzman, 2010; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Counselors are expected to attend to their

clients' psychological problems and to competently address them with little regard for their own personal issues. They are also expected to balance the different needs and concerns of their clients, those of the institution they work for, and the profession in general. In the Philippines, the plight of counselors is worsened by role conflict, lack of supervision, increasing severity of problems, low compensation, and high workload (Mateo & Reyes, 2015). This results in negative outcomes such as decreased well-being and effectiveness in providing basic counseling services. Even worse, counselors may be prone to developing severe stress and burnout. It is approximated that 21% to 67% of workers in the mental health services experience burnout (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012). Counselors who are not functioning optimally will not be able to provide the best possible services to their clients. Burnout among counselors has been associated with less engagement in work-related activities (e.g., counseling and curriculum-related services; Gutierrez & Mullen, 2016). These findings bring to view the importance of examining the positive impact of life satisfaction on the practice of counselors.

Life satisfaction is typically treated as an outcome variable in the research literature as individuals are more interested in identifying the factors that lead them towards increasing their overall well-being (see Datu & Mateo, 2015, 2017). Even in the guidance counseling profession, research has focused on the factors that determine life satisfaction among counselors (Poyrazli, Yesilyaprak, & Milliogullari, 2012). Considering the assumptions of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2003), we hypothesized that counselors' life satisfaction predicts work-related outcomes relevant to the counseling profession.

Previous research has established self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and flow state as variables that lead to positive outcomes (Datu & Mateo, 2015; Williams, Wissing, Rothmann & Temane, 2010; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This study looked into the impact of life satisfaction on these three important work-related outcomes in counseling. This study extended the application of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2003) to a different population.

Individuals with high levels of life satisfaction are assumed to

experience more positive emotion states and exhibit more positive qualities. In the current study, the key assumption is that counselors who expressed satisfaction with their life would have better emotional and occupational functioning. They experience flow at work, are emotionally aware, and feel efficacious at work. This is hypothesized on the account that counselors who are more satisfied with their life would have more cognitive and personal resources to allot for and focus on the demands of the job.

### **Counseling Self-efficacy**

Social cognitive theory defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). People with high self-efficacy believe that they will be able to successfully accomplish the specific tasks that they have set out to do. When faced with difficult tasks, individuals with high self-efficacy see them as a challenge to be mastered rather than an ordeal to be avoided. High self-efficacy has been linked to successful outcomes in a vast range of areas, specifically in school and work settings. In a study that compares students with high and low self-efficacy, higher self-efficacy accounts for higher engagement and flow experience (Mesurado, Richaud, & Mateo, 2016), higher academic aspirations, longer time spent doing homework, and higher likelihood that learning will be considered as a positive experience (Bassi, Steca, Delle Fave, & Caprara, 2007). In the realm of work, self-efficacy has been found to be an important personal resource that results to greater engagement and satisfaction (Williams et al., 2010).

In the counseling profession, counseling self-efficacy is the belief of the counselor in their ability to perform tasks related to their profession, such as individual and group counseling (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Counseling self-efficacy has been found to be positively correlated with work performance (Larson & Daniels, 1998), job satisfaction (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997), and flow states among counselors (Datu & Mateo, 2016). At the same time, counseling self-efficacy has been found to be negatively correlated with negative emotional states such as state and trait anxiety (Al-Damarki, 2004), as

well as burnout among counselors (Gunduz, 2012).

### **Emotional Awareness**

Emotional self-awareness has been linked to positive outcomes such as increased well-being and job performance (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The ability to reflect, especially with regard to one's emotions is considered as one of the essential components of success in counseling (Parveen & Shafiq, 2014). Emotional awareness involves the five core characteristics of emotion-focused attention with adaptive consequences: recognizing emotional content, identifying emotional states, understanding the context surrounding emotions, communicating emotional experience, and arriving at a decision using this emotional knowledge (Kauer et al., 2012).

### **Flow State**

Flow is a psychological state defined as "the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement" (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2005, p. 136). Individuals report that flow is an enjoyable experience that one wants to repeat, even though it may require effort. In the process of experiencing flow, individuals are motivated to learn and to be good at the specific task that brings them flow. The flow experience is characterized as having nine characteristics: balance between one's level of ability and skills (feeling competent to accomplish challenging activities), action-awareness merging (doing things spontaneously without thinking), clear goals (being aware of what should be done), unambiguous feedback (being conscious of evaluating one's own performance), concentration on the task at hand (being focused on the task), sense of control (exercising greater control on actions), loss of feeling of self-consciousness (being unconscious of others' reactions to one's performance of activity), distorted sense of time (sensing that time is passing in an unusual manner), and autotelic experience (sensing that an activity is extremely rewarding). When these elements are present and individuals are in a flow state, experience is optimal and leads to positive outcomes. Past studies have shown that there are person-related antecedents of flow,

which include trait emotional intelligence, locus of control (Keller & Blomann, 2008), conscientiousness (Ullén et al., 2012), and self-control (Kuhnle, Hofer, & Kilian, 2012).

### **The Present Study**

Using a cross-sectional research design, this study investigated the association of life satisfaction with the professional resources that Filipino counselors draw from in their therapeutic practice (i.e., flow state, emotional self-awareness, counseling self-efficacy). We explored the possible predictive power of life satisfaction on positive outcomes. The research aimed to provide further understanding of how life satisfaction could have positive consequences on workplace outcomes. Guided by the major assumptions of the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2003; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005), it is hypothesized that life satisfaction may be associated with optimal functioning in workplace contexts. Specifically, it is anticipated that life satisfaction would positively predict counseling self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and flow state. This is because the broaden-and-build theory highlights the role of well-being states (e.g., positive emotions and life satisfaction) not only in broadening mindsets but also in promoting positive physical, social, and psychological outcomes. A counselor who is satisfied with life is likely to evidence gains in personal and professional functioning. In the current study, these gains were counseling self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and flow state. These were selected as relevant constructs on account of the role that they play in the therapeutic alliance and in the execution of relevant assessment and intervention. The study adds to the existing literature on how life satisfaction is linked to optimal functioning, particularly in the counseling profession in the Philippines.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

A total of 137 Filipino counselors (116 female, 21 male;  $M_{age} = 34.35$ ,  $SD = 8.74$ ) from Metro Manila were recruited as

participants for the study via convenience sampling. From this sample, there were 65 licensed counselors and 71 counselors who have yet to receive their professional license. All participants read and signed consent forms that expressed their voluntary participation in the study. Upon completion of the consent form, participants completed measures of life satisfaction, counseling self-efficacy, flow state, and emotional self-awareness.

### **Instruments**

**Satisfaction with Life Scale.** Participants completed the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). SWLS measures the degree to which participants deem their present living conditions as satisfying (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life”, “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life”) using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Internal consistency of items in the current study was at  $\alpha = .61$ .

**Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale.** The Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES; Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, & Kolocek, 1996) is a 20-item measure of counselors’ and therapists’ perceived capabilities to perform individual counseling (e.g., “I am not able to conceptualize client cases to form clinical hypotheses”) and group counseling (e.g., “I am able to recognize the facilitative and debilitating behaviors of group members”). Participants responded to the items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Disagree strongly*; 5 = *Agree strongly*). Internal consistency of items in the current study was at  $\alpha = .90$ .

**Short Flow State Scale.** The Flow State Scale (Jackson, Martin, & Eklund, 2008) is a 9-item measure of the flow experience that counselors experience during therapeutic work. Sample items are “I found the counseling experience extremely rewarding” and “I was completely focused on the task at hand”. Items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*). Internal consistency of items in the current study was at  $\alpha = .61$ .

**Emotional Self-Awareness Scale.** This scale includes 33 items (Kauer et al., 2012) that measure the degree to which an individual is invested in knowing and assessing their ability to understand their thoughts and feelings and its consequences on behavior. Participants

responded to items such as “I analyse my personality to try to understand why I’m upset” and “I find it easy to write down how I feel” using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *Never*, 4 = *A lot*). Internal consistency of items in the current study was at  $\alpha = .83$ .

### **Control Variables**

Age, gender, civil status, and educational attainment were selected as control variables. These variables have the potential to impact flow state, emotional awareness, and counseling self-efficacy. Previous empirical studies suggest that these variables have the potential to affect the outcomes. Specifically, women have been found to exhibit higher emotional intelligence (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Self-efficacy is influenced by experiences of the individual in selected life domains and the credentials that one gains (i.e., performance accomplishments; Bandura, 1977).

## **RESULTS**

We calculated for participants’ mean ratings for each of the measures (i.e., counseling self-efficacy, flow state, emotional awareness, and life satisfaction) and the correlation coefficients of the variables (see Table 1). These were subjected to a two-stage hierarchical regression analyses, with flow state (Model 1), emotional awareness (Model 2), and counseling self-efficacy (Model 3) as criterion variables and life satisfaction as the predictor. Age, gender, civil status, and educational attainment (ranging from having a Bachelor’s degree to having a Doctor of Philosophy degree) were entered as covariates. These control variables were first entered in the model to examine their influence on flow state, emotional awareness, and counseling self-efficacy. Life satisfaction was entered in the second step. Results are presented in Table 2.

In Model 1, age and gender significantly predicted flow state,  $R^2 = .096$ ,  $F(4, 118) = 3.12$ ,  $p = .02$ . In step 2, life satisfaction, alongside age and gender, significantly predicted flow state,  $R^2 = .119$ ,  $F(5, 118) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .01$ . However, the effect of life satisfaction on flow state is of small practical significance.



Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Coefficients Among Predictor and Outcome Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$
1. Life satisfaction	-				.85	5.50	.93
2. Flow	.22*	-			.61	4.12	.44
3. Emotional awareness	.30**	.58**	-		.83	2.74	.37
4. Counseling self-efficacy	.15	.52**	.46**	-	.90	79.73	11.02

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

In Model 2, age, gender, civil status, and educational attainment did not significantly predict emotional awareness in counselors,  $R^2 = .030$ ,  $F(4,118) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .45$ . Life satisfaction significantly predicted emotional awareness. However, given the value of  $R^2$ , the effect of life satisfaction on emotional awareness is of small practical significance. For Model 3, educational attainment significantly predicted counseling self-efficacy,  $R^2 = .030$ ,  $F(4,118) = .93$ ,  $p = .45$ . Effect size was small and of little practical significance.

## DISCUSSION

The current study examined the role of life satisfaction in work-related outcomes of counseling professionals. The study tested postulates from the broaden-and-build theory on the impact of positivity in the thought-action repertoire of an individual (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). The theory suggests that positive affect (happiness) serves an adaptive function, leading the individual to approach instead of to avoid, to move instead of being passive (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Previous empirical investigations revealed that positive affect leads to school engagement (King, McInerney, Ganotice, & Villarosa, 2015), improved use of control processes that form part of executive functioning (Yang & Yang, 2014), and behavioral engagement during academic tasks (Poorthuis et al., 2015).

Findings of the current study revealed that life satisfaction significantly predicted the flow state and emotional self-awareness of the counseling professionals sampled. Counselors' evaluation of their life as satisfying positively predicted their concentration and focus on their work-related tasks, sense of autonomy and control on the task, and their perception that time goes by fast as they go through their counseling roles and responsibilities. The experience of flow is key in counseling practice. A counselor who experiences flow during therapeutic practice evidences more focus and engagement with the client. The counselor will be better able to connect with the client and attend to her concerns. Experiencing flow during counseling also leads the counselor to persevere and continue with the task at hand (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This intent to persevere is

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Demographic Variables and Life Satisfaction as Predictors of Flow (Model 1), Emotional Awareness (Model 2), and Counseling Self-efficacy (Model 3)

Model	Variable	$\beta$	t	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1 - Predicting Flow	Step 1			.096	.096*
	Age	.17**	2.61		
	Gender	-.28*	-2.49		
	Civil status	-.09	-.17		
	Educational attainment	.01	.22		
	Step 2			.119	.023*
	Age	.17**	2.61		
	Gender	-.30**	2.70		
	Civil status	-.10	1.34		
	Educational attainment	-.003	-.06		
	Life satisfaction	.09*	2.13		
Model 2 - Predicting Emotional Awareness	Step 1			.030	.030
	Age	.003	.50		
	Gender	.07	.48		
	Civil status	.02	.79		
	Educational attainment	.05	.29		
	Step 2			.085	.055**
	Age	.002	.47		
	Gender	.05	.49		
	Civil status	.003	.05		
	Educational attainment	.03	.71		
	Life satisfaction	.10*	2.87		
Model 3 - Predicting Counseling Self-Efficacy	Step 1			.079	.047
	Age	.15	.99		
	Gender	-1.37	-.51		
	Civil status	-1.29	-.72		
	Educational attainment	3.02	.29		
	Step 2			.087	.047
	Age	.15	.98		
	Gender	-1.59	-.59		
	Civil status	-1.44	.79		
	Educational attainment	2.84*	2.08		
	Life satisfaction	1.01	1.00		

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

important in the counseling profession as counselors meet their clients more than once and engage intensely with clients during sessions.

The ability to be aware of and evaluate one's thoughts and feelings is essential in engaging with clients who seek counseling. Emotional self-awareness has been implicated in physical and mental health outcomes (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional self-awareness plays a key role in social interactions as it allows individuals to be sensitive to others (Moriguchi et al., 2006). This is important for counselors to develop as their practice involves manifesting empathy, listening and focusing on the thoughts and feelings of their clients. The role of emotional and cognitive self-awareness is pivotal in the successful practice of professionals who deal with the mental and physical concerns of their clients. In the medical profession, errors are best prevented when physicians are made to learn and practice emotional self-awareness and self-regulation of attention (Borrell-Carrió & Epstein, 2004). In the counseling profession, engaging with the client with the use of active listening skills is important in the development of the therapeutic alliance and eventual success of counseling.

The findings of the current study on life satisfaction and its impact on work-related outcomes is supported by theoretical work on life satisfaction (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) and empirical findings on life satisfaction and job performance (see Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012 for a review). The findings confirm the assumption of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2003) that positive states lead to positive outcomes. There are indeed benefits to possessing positive emotions as it brings with it positive consequences that directly affects work outcomes, which holds true for the counselors who participated in this research. This shows how the broaden-and-build theory may apply to specific situations and populations. Possessing a high degree of life satisfaction influence factors that are important in the conduct of counseling.

Results do not support the hypothesis that life satisfaction predicts counseling self-efficacy. There have been previous investigations that map the link between self-efficacy and life satisfaction in student samples (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Jiang, Hu, Wang, & Jiang, 2017). In these studies, self-efficacy is assumed to impact life satisfaction rather than vice versa. The nature of the construct of self-efficacy is

based on the individual's assessment of their knowledge, skills, and competencies in counseling practice and her ability to see these tasks through (Bandura, 1997). Participants' evaluations of their satisfaction with their life may not have had an impact on their functioning as counselors because self-efficacy is a cognitive construct that is rooted on specific experiences in the counseling profession. Self-efficacy is founded on firsthand or vicarious learning experiences and past performance (Bandura, 1977). An individual who is made to assess satisfaction with life may not have work-related functioning at the foreground on account that life satisfaction has a broader focus, directing the individual's attention to all or most aspects of life.

Future research can take into view the degree to which the individual sees one's work in the profession as contributing to overall life satisfaction. In studying the development of counselors, future research can focus on identifying positive emotion experiences that serve as a foundation for skills and competencies important in counseling practice. In the current investigation, the focus was on how evaluations of life satisfaction serve as springboards and end up influencing work-related outcomes in counseling. Future research can continue to build on this by not only looking into life satisfaction in general but by looking at emotions and cognitions that counselors experience during therapy that serve as a foundation in building a therapeutic alliance and creating an environment of attention and engagement with the client during therapy.

### **Conclusions and Practical Implications**

The results provided support to the growing body of research in counseling effectiveness which states that the actual factors that lead to successful counseling have less to do with specific technique but in the person of the counselor themselves (see Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010 for review). In particular, it is the ability of the counselor to form a positive alliance with the client and convince him or her to believe that there is hope and that the interventions will make a positive difference. These skills can only be achieved when counselors are able to experience positive states that lead to the broadening of thought-action repertoires leading to the development

of psychological and social resources.

The results also provided further evidence on how the different constructs within positive psychology relate to one another. This study was able to show the relationship of life satisfaction to work flow and emotional awareness. It would be interesting to discover how positive psychological constructs such as flourishing, psychological well-being, and subjective well-being, among others, are related to one another, particularly in this unique sociocultural context. This could be further examined through qualitative inquiries that will give us a better picture of how such variables operate within the individual.

There is currently a rise in the application of positive psychological interventions in the field of counseling (Magyar-Moe, Owens, & Conoley, 2015). The counseling profession is slowly integrating recent positive psychological concepts such as hope, optimism, and strength into its repertoire of approaches consistent with the broaden-and-build theory. This research could be an important step in strengthening the role of such positive psychological concepts in the practice.

#### AUTHOR NOTE

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