

ROMANIAN ADAPTATION OF THE SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE

Michael J. Stevens *

Illinois State University, USA

Iuliana Lambru ***

*Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu,
Romania*

Cristina Gabriela Sandu *****

University of Bucharest, Romania

Petru-Madalin Constantinescu **
University of Bucharest, Romania

Andreea Butucescu ****

*Ovidius University of Constanța,
Romania*

Lavinia Uscățescu *****

Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania

Abstract

Quality of life and well-being are key ingredients of mental health. There are several conceptual models and derivative measures of well-being. Subjective well-being is, perhaps, the most prominent perspective on well-being, with the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) constructed in line with this perspective. Regrettably, the SWLS has not been adapted for use in scientific research and applied practice in Romania. In our initial study, we translated the SWLS using

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

* Ph.D., Illinois State University and The Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu; Address for correspondence: Michael J. Stevens, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, Campus Box 4620, Normal, IL 61790-4620, USA. E-mail: mjsteven@ilstu.edu

** M.A., University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences; Address: sos. Panduri, nr. 90, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: petrumadalin@gmail.com

*** M.A., Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Psychology; Address: Bd. Victoriei, no. 40, Sibiu, Romania. E-mail: iulianaconstant@gmail.com

**** M.A., Ovidius University of Constanța, Educational and Psychological Counseling Center; Address: Bd. Mamaia, no. 124, Constanța, Romania. E-mail: andreea.butucescu@gmail.com

***** M.A., University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences; Address: sos. Panduri, nr. 90, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: cristina.gabriela.sandu@gmail.com

***** M.A. student, Babes Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology; Address: St. Republicii, no. 37, Cluj-Napoca, CJ 400015, Romania. E-mail: lavinia.carmen.u@gmail.com

transliteration and back-translation procedures, and tested the equivalence of Romanian and English versions of the SWLS with the bilingual retest technique. In our second study, we established some of the psychometric properties of the Romanian SWLS, including its factor structure. Preliminary results revealed high test-retest and internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and a single factor similar to that found in other cross-cultural adaptations of the SWLS. Future research will entail further examination of the psychometric properties of the Romanian SWLS and the development of national norms so that the instrument can be used in research and practice.

Keywords: subjective well-being, Satisfaction with Life Scale, test adaptation

Theoretical Background

Throughout its history, clinical psychology has tended to define mental health as the absence of mental illness. More recently, well-being has become an important topic in understanding mental health (McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Schwarzer & Gutierrez-Dona, 2000). The study of well-being falls within the domain of positive psychology, specifically positive clinical psychology (McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Seligman & Peterson, 2003). The concept of well-being has clear ties to psychology (e.g., satisfaction with life), whereas a related concept, quality of life, reflects more objective conditions believed to impact the well-being of individuals and society as a whole (e.g., social belonging) (Schumacher, Klaiberg, & Brahler, 2003). The psychological study of well-being can be divided into two major areas: the hedonic view and the eudaimonic view (see Ryan & Deci, 2001 for a review). Both traditions in the study of well-being can be traced to ancient philosophy, with the hedonic view emphasizing a person's happiness and the eudaimonic view concerned with the optimal functioning of the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Perhaps the best-known approach to the study of well-being from a hedonic framework centers on subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being is usually defined as and measured with instruments that tap the dimensions of life satisfaction and both positive and negative affect (Andrews & Withey, 1976).

Development of the SWLS

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Ed Diener and colleagues (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Although

numerous scales of life satisfaction were in use at the time, they were characterized by several important limitations: they either consisted of a single item (Diener, 1984) or had been designed especially for geriatric populations (Lawton, 1975). Moreover, despite their stated goal, some of these scales did not exclusively measure satisfaction with life (e.g., the Life Satisfaction Index) (Neugarten, Havinghurst, & Tobin, 1961). Therefore, the SWLS was developed as a multi-item scale to measure satisfaction with life as a cognitive-judgmental process, according to the definition given by Shin and Johnson (1978): the global way in which a person perceives quality of life according to his or her own subjective criteria.

Clinical and Non-clinical Uses of the SWLS

The measurement of satisfaction with life has considerable value in scientific research and applied practice. First, an important approach in determining general quality of life is to measure satisfaction with life as a cognitive-judgmental process (Diener, 1994; Veenhoven, 1996). Moreover, life satisfaction can serve as a key social indicator in the evaluation of social change (Bălătescu, 2006; Stevens, Constantinescu, & Butucescu, 2011). Apart from its scientific relevance, the measurement of life satisfaction has value for clinicians (Heisel & Flett, 2003; Patterson, Ptacek, Cromes, Fauerbach, & Engrav, 2000). For example, using the SWLS as an index of well-being and mental health, clinical and quasi-clinical samples report less life satisfaction than do non-clinical groups (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The SWLS can also be administered by clinicians to ascertain a client's level of well-being at intake and to track therapeutic progress; Friedman (as cited in Pavot & Diener, 1993) found substantial improvement in clients' life satisfaction after 1 month of psychotherapy ($M = 14.1$ at onset, $M = 26.9$ at 1 month).

The SWLS has been adapted for use in various countries, with normative data available for diverse adult and student samples, medical inpatients and outpatients, prison inmates, abused women, and psychotherapy clients (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Notwithstanding the potential scientific and practical promise of the SWLS, Romanian scholars and clinicians at present do not have an well-established adapted instrument that they can use in the measurement of satisfaction with life. Their only option is the *Lebenszufriedenheit* (Life Satisfaction) scale of The Freiburg Personality

Inventory (Fahrenberg, Selg, & Hampel, 1970), a personality inventory that resembles the 16PF and Eysenck Personality Inventory. Promising work has already been undertaken to adapt the SWLS to Romania using rigorous scientific methods (Marian, 2007). Thus, we believe that further research on the adaptation of the SWLS for use in Romania is a priority.

Objective

We conducted two studies that together were intended to demonstrate the validity of a new and independent translation of the SWLS into the Romanian language. The first study aimed to translate the SWLS into Romanian in accordance with International Test Commission guidelines (Bartrum, 2000; Hambleton & Patsula, 1998), determine the equivalence of the Romanian version with the original English SWLS, and provide evidence of the temporal stability of the translated instrument.

Method 1

Participants

The bilingual Romanian university students who consented to participate in the translation and adaptation of the SWLS were proficient in English; participants were 26 students majoring in Modern English and 7 students majoring in Informatics, all of whom had been recommended by their professors because of their ability to comprehend English language in its written form. The decision to recruit students majoring in informatics was made in order to increase the heterogeneity of the sample.

Five students did not return for the second testing and one student did not complete the SWLS. The final bilingual sample contained 18 students with the following demographic characteristics: 18-23 years old ($M = 20.94$, $SD = 1.51$), 4 (22.22%) men and 14 (77.78%) women, and 10 (55.56%) majoring in English and 8 (44.44%) majoring in Informatics.

Measure

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is a 5-item measure of the cognitive-judgmental component of subjective well-being. The unidirectional

items that comprise the SWLS were derived from factor and item analyses of an original set of 48 items. The SWLS measures the cognitive aspects of life satisfaction as experienced phenomenological by inviting respondents to evaluate their personal circumstances against normative standards. Responses are based on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), with total scores above 20 indicating life satisfaction. Students were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with each item. The approximate time required to complete the SWLS was 2-3 min.

Regarding reliability, the SWLS appears capable of accurately measuring ambient levels of life satisfaction without being impervious to static fluctuations due to life events or therapeutic progress (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The 2-month test-retest reliability of the SWLS is .82 (Diener et al., 1985), with decreases in stability over longer time intervals given the measure's sensitivity to the impact of changing conditions on perceived life satisfaction (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993). The internal consistency of the SWLS ranges from .79 (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991) to .89 (Alfonso, Allison, Rader, & Gorman, 1996).

The validity of the SWLS as an index of subjective well-being has been established (Diener et al., 1985; Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003; Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997). The SWLS is moderately correlated with other measures of well-being, such as the Gurin Scale (.59-.62; Gurin, Veroff, & Field, 1960) and Delighted-Terrible Scale (.62-.68; Andrews & Withey, 1976). In addition to its concurrent validity, the SWLS has demonstrated moderate convergence with the Beck Depression Inventory (-.51) and Social Interest Index (.46), the latter derived from Alfred Adler's construct that has conceptual ties to psychological health (Saunders & Roy, 1999). The factorial validity of the SWLS has been consistently confirmed by evidence that the scale measures a unidimensional construct (Diener et al., 1985; Maluka & Grieve, 2008), corroborating the theoretical proposition that satisfaction with life is unitary (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Procedure

We used transliteration and back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1970) to translate the SWLS into Romanian. Transliteration entails greater concern for preserving the psychological meaning of an item than for deriving a literal

translation. Back-translation (Butcher & Gur, 1974) involves a subsequent re-translation of Romanian items into English to maximize their similarity in meaning, linguistic form, and readability to the source instrument.

A philologist with a master's degree translated the SWLS from English into Romanian. Another master's-degreed philologist back-translated Romanian items into English without having seen the original English version of the SWLS. A professor of philology with a doctorate provided input when either translator encountered linguistically challenging items. All three members of the translation team were volunteers. After considering cultural idiosyncrasies, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical and syntactical errors, one disputed item was modified until the Romanian version was deemed equivalent by the entire team to the original SWLS. Both versions of the SWLS are presented below.

We used the bilingual retest technique to determine the equivalence of our translation (Butcher & Gur, 1974). We recruited bilingual students to complete the original English and Romanian versions of the SWLS in counterbalanced order 2 weeks apart. Students gave informed consent and completed the measures anonymously after providing a code that would allow only them to identify their completed scores if they so desired.

Results

To evaluate the equivalence of the Romanian translation, we performed a *t*-test for correlated samples on scores for English and Romanian versions of the SWLS. Means for the English SWLS ($M = 22.61$, $SD = 4.77$) and Romanian SWLS ($M = 23.89$, $SD = 5.37$) were not statistically different, $t(17) = 1.54$, $p > .05$ (see Table 1). We then determined the test-retest reliability of the Romanian SWLS by correlating the scores obtained from both test administrations, $r(16) = .78$, $p < .01$. The results (see Table 2) are consistent with previous international research reported by Pavot and Diener (1993) as well as with recent research conducted in Romania (Marian, 2007), which found a similar test-retest reliability coefficient, $r(391) = .69$, $p < .01$.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and *t*-test for English and Romanian Versions of the SWLS

Scale	English Version		Romanian Version		<i>t</i> - test
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	
Satisfaction With Life Scale	22.611	4.767	23.889	5.368	1.544

Table 2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (*r*) showing the Test-Retest Reliability of the Romanian SWLS

Scale	Pearson Correlation
Satisfaction With Life Scale	0.783*

Note: **p* < 0.01

Discussion

Given no significant difference between means for the English and Romanian forms of the SWLS, we conclude that our translation yielded an equivalent version of the SWLS. Given the strong positive correlation between the original and translated versions of the SWLS, we further conclude that the Romanian SWLS has high short-term temporal stability, a finding that dovetails with those of other studies (Diener et al., 1985; Marian, 2007).

Having constructed an equivalent version of the SWLS in the Romanian language and demonstrated its temporal stability, we then proceeded to investigate the concurrent and convergent validity of the Romanian SWLS by comparing it to other highly regarded instruments that have been translated into Romanian and which tap constructs that are theoretically related to subjective well-being. We also explored the factor structure of the Romanian SWLS.

Method 2

Participants

We recruited 73 volunteers, 12 of whom were men (16.44%) and 61 women (83.56%). The sample ranged in age from 19-50 years of age ($M = 28.7$, $SD = 7.92$). Most were ethnically Romanian (85.0%), Orthodox (84.0%), university-educated (52.8%), never married or engaged (50.7%), and without

children (46.9%). The sample reported a median monthly income of 200-300 Euros.

Measures

We selected and administered five instruments that we considered to be psychometrically sound and appropriate for demonstrating the concurrent and convergent validity of the Romanian SWLS: the Romanian SWLS - Peer Report Version (SWLS Peer), State Self-esteem Scale - Current Thoughts (SSES-CT; Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; Marian, 2009), Hospital Anxiety Scale (HAS) and Hospital Depression Scale (HAD) (Ladea, 2007; Snaith, 2003), and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977).

We created the SWLS Peer by transforming the five items of the Romanian SWLS from the first person singular into the third person singular. For example, "I am satisfied with my life" became "He/She is satisfied with his/her life". When we distributed the SWLS Peer along with the other four measures, we instructed participants to invite a close relative or friend to complete the SWLS Peer with them in mind.

The SSES-CT is an index of transient fluctuations in self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). It consists of 20 items and correlates 0.82 with the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The SSES-CT has three correlated dimensions: performance, social, and appearance self-esteem. The SSES-CT has been translated into Romanian and adapted by Mihai Marian (2009), who granted permission for its use in the current study.

The HAS and HAD scales have performed well in assessing the incidence and severity of anxiety and depressive disorders, respectively, in medical/surgical and psychiatric patients in hospital settings and in the general population (Snaith, 2003). Translation into Romanian and further validation of the HAS and HAD have been undertaken by Maria Ladea (2007).

The CES-D (Radloff, 1977) is a self-report measure of depressive symptoms in the general population. The 20 items of the CES-D measure affective and somatic dimensions of depression as reflected in depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, helplessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance. The CES-D has been translated into Romanian and its level of equivalence reported in previous research (Stevens et al., in press).

Procedure

After receiving permission to use the instruments just described, we transposed these measures, along with a background data sheet, into two online forms using Google docs. Links to these online documents were then disseminated to various psychology-related websites and online discussion groups. Interested individuals were invited to complete the forms either by printing out a hard copy, filling in the blank spaces, and returning the completed form, or by electronically selecting and entering the most appropriate answer while online. Consent was implied by the voluntary choice to participate and respondents could freely terminate their participation at any time. Participants were encouraged to take their time and provide honest, thoughtful responses. Ten participants completed the measures in paper-and-pencil format. Each participant took approximately 30 min to complete all measures. Participants' answers were automatically transferred to an output data file, with the data then subjected to a series of statistical analyses.

Results

The Cronbach alpha of .82 demonstrated high international consistency reliability for the Romanian SWLS (see Table 3). However, item 5 (“Dacă aş putea să mai trăiesc viaţa încă odată nu aş schimba aproape nimic [If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing]”), did not meet the corrected item-total correlation coefficient criterion of .40. Alpha values decreased when each of the first four items were separately omitted (.74-.75). When item 5 was removed, the alpha level rose to .90, increasing the homogeneity of the resultant scale (see Table 4). Item 5 appeared to elicit somewhat less favorable judgments of life satisfaction (63.5% disagreed slightly to strongly whereas only 29.8% agreed slightly to strongly), perhaps owing to some as yet unknown meaning that respondents attributed to this item. For example, while fairly satisfied overall, respondents may have felt that they could attain even greater satisfaction if given a chance to relive their lives (Maluka & Grieve, 2008).

Table 3. Internal Consistency Reliability of the Romanian SWLS

Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
0.82	5

Table 4. Internal Consistency Reliability of the Romanian SWLS when Deleting Each Item Sequentially

Item	Alpha	Standard Alpha
1	0.75	0.78
2	0.75	0.78
3	0.74	0.76
4	0.75	0.78
5	0.90	0.91

As expected, significant one-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients, tested at an alpha level of $< .01$ using a Bonferroni correction, were obtained for the Romanian SWLS with SWLS Peer, $r(71) = .57$, SSES-CT, $r(71) = .57$, HAS, $r(71) = -.69$, HAD, $r(71) = -.41$, and CES-D, $r(71) = -.54$ (see Table 5). The direction and moderate strength of these associations are evidence of the convergent validity of the Romanian SWLS. Previous research on another Romanian version of the SWLS (Marian, 2007) showed a similar pattern of correlations with anxiety, depression and life satisfaction. Our findings provide additional evidence of for the convergent validity of the Romanian SWLS in the form of significant positive correlations with peer ratings and reports of self-esteem.

Table 5. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Reflecting the Convergent Validity of the Romanian SWLS

Measure	SWLS Peer	CES-D	SSES-CT	HAS	HAD
SWLS	0.57**	-0.54**	0.57**	-0.69**	0.41**

Note: ** Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Factor Analysis

We subjected the five items of the Romanian SWLS to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. The sample size ($N = 73$), Kaiser-Meyer-Olin test of sampling adequacy (.78), and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < .0005$) together indicated sufficient power, sampling adequacy, and association among items, respectively, to conduct a factor analysis. An

eigenvalue of 1 served as the criterion for factor extraction. The results yielded a single factor with an eigenvalue of 3.21 that accounted for 64.18% of the variance in responses. The first four items of the Romanian SWLS had communality estimates of .76-.80, whereas item 5 (“Dacă aş putea să mai trăiesc viaţa încă odată nu aş schimba aproape nimic [If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing]”) did not meet the communality estimation criterion of $\geq .3$, having a much lower factor loading of .12. With item 5 removed, a second principal components factor analysis was run, again producing a single factor, this time with an eigenvalue of 3.12 that explained 78.02% of the variance, increasing the factorial validity of the scale somewhat. The findings reported in a previous validation study of another Romanian SWLS (Marian, 2007) were similar, with the exception that item 5 of that translated instrument performed better.

Discussion

The internal consistency of the Romanian SWLS was high, even without the removal of item 5, and comparable to the level of scale homogeneity reported in previous research (Alfonso et al., 1996; Pavot et al., 1991). We also demonstrated the construct validity of the Romanian SWLS as indicated by moderate positive correlations with peer reports of satisfaction with life and an index of state self-esteem, and by moderate negative correlations with measures of the severity of anxiety and depressive disorders and depressive symptoms; these findings comport with those of earlier studies (Diener et al, 2003; Marian, 2007; Pavot & Diener, 1993). Consistent with the literature, we also found evidence of the factorial validity of the Romanian SWLS (Marian, 2007; Pavot & Diener, 1993); all five items revealed the existence of a single factor that accounted for 64% of the variability of the scale, almost identical to the 66% of total variance explained in Diener et al. (1985). The SWLS seems to be a unitary construct, with its unidimensionality replicated after being translated and administered to different cross-national samples (Maluka & Grieve, 2008; Pavot & Diener, 1993). However, like other studies, we found a relatively low item-total correlation and factor loading for item 5. Pavot and Diener (1993) suggest that the weaker homogeneity and convergence for this item as compared to the other items may reflect its distinctive past time orientation, which could have elicited an unspecified

culturally grounded interpretation by Romanian respondents. Additional research designed to clarify the relationship of time orientation to perceived life satisfaction is warranted, a especially given conflicting evidence in research on an alternative Romanian version of the SWLS. Of course, this discrepant finding could be due sampling differences between the two validity studies of different Romanian versions of the SWLS. Although the Romanian translation of item 5 appeared equivalent across studies, the sample used by Marian (2007) was almost four times as large and noticeably more heterogeneous with respect to age, education level, and marital status.

Conclusion

The purpose of our research was twofold: (1) to translate the SWLS into the Romanian language using rigorous, standardized procedures and demonstrate the equivalence of the translated version with the parent instrument, and (2) to establish the reliability and validity of the Romanian SWLS. Although our studies were constrained by relatively small and homogeneous samples of convenience, we can assert that our translation of the SWLS has promise as a measure of the cognitive component of subjective well-being, specifically satisfaction with life, in scientific research and clinical practice in Romania, which will add to the cross-national literature on this topic (Schumacher et al., 2003). Moreover, consistent with previous research conducted in Romania (Marian, 2007), our findings lend support for satisfaction with life as a culturally relevant construct as well as for the Romanian SWLS as a suitable instrument with which to measure it. Although a validation study of SWLS had already been conducted in Romania (Marian, 2007), our findings confirm the usefulness of the Romanian SWLS by replicating previous findings (e.g., temporal stability), notwithstanding minor differences in item translation. Our study also extended validation research on the Romanian SLWS by correlating scores with peer reports and other measures predicted to have a relationship to the construct of life satisfaction (e.g., self-esteem).

Future investigations should examine the temporal stability versus sensitivity of the Romanian SWLS, as any measure of life satisfaction worth its salt is expected to demonstrate both capacities (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Such

studies might involve administrations of the Romanian version over increasingly longer time intervals. Different measures of life satisfaction can be administered simultaneously on multiple occasions to discover the extent to which variations in scale scores reflect actual change over time or error variance. In addition, the Romanian SWLS can be used to test the relationship of scale scores to the presence or absence of major life events as well as to other life circumstance in which this psychological trait and process is hypothesized either to enhance or threaten well-being (McNulty & Fincham, 2012).

Further inquiries are needed to establish the discriminant validity of the Romanian SWLS, perhaps using a multi-trait – multi-method research design or by factor analyzing the Romanian SWLS along with measures of positive and negative affect. The latter approach would help to clarify whether the more general construct of subjective well-being incorporates cognitive (i.e., life satisfaction) and emotional (i.e., positive and negative affect) components as separate or integrated dimensions (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Given that the SWLS is a cognitive-judgmental measure of satisfaction with life, research is needed to identify the cognitive structures and processes that contribute to life satisfaction. For example, Romanians' internal locus of control is lower than that of Americans (Spector et al., 2001) and their generalized expectancies reflect greater perceived hostility by the social system in which they live (Bond et al., 2004). Such fatalism and apprehension imply that Romanians may be disadvantaged in their opportunities to experience life satisfaction.

Finally, it is imperative to develop a set of national norms for Romanians and other ethnic groups in Romania so that the Romanian SWLS can be used in basic and applied research and in clinical practice. As fundamental is the importance of examining the sources of cross-cultural differences in SWLS scores, specifically efforts to disentangle genuine differences in life satisfaction from a host of contextual variables (e.g., economic, political, social, cultural) that are germane to this issue (see McNulty & Fincham, 2012, for a more complete discussion of the need to adopt a contextual view of well being as a psychological trait and process). For instance, the perceived status of Romanians (i.e., goods owned and favorable social comparisons) is tied to their subjective well-being (Cernat, 2010),

suggesting that, unlike more economically robust countries, Romania may not be able to provide its citizens with the same preconditions for life satisfaction as those found in Western Europe and North America.

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