

# Life Satisfaction Of Retired West Virginia Secondary School Agriculture Teachers

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Retirement is for many a time of fulfillment and great personal satisfaction, while for others it is a time of frustration and isolation. An individual's perception and satisfaction with life in retirement has been shown to be related to factors such as gender, age, religiosity, attitude toward work, retirement income, health, types of and time spent in activities, leisure satisfaction, mobility, marital status, housing, years in retirement, and retirement planning (Atchley, 1985, and Russell, 1984). Relationships between life satisfaction and situations, characteristics, and activities of the retired have been of great interest to social scientists for the past 40 years (Lohmann, 1980 and Russell, 1984).

Social science researchers have defined the concept of life satisfaction as "an assessment of the overall conditions of existence as derived from a comparison of one's aspirations to one's actual achievements" (George and Bearnon, 1980, p. 38). Campbell, Converse, and Rogers (1976) quoted in Russell (1984) stated that, ". . . [Life] satisfaction pertains to a cognitive process in which the current situation is evaluated by contrasting it with an external standard of comparison" (p. 46).

In order to measure life satisfaction, various scales have been developed by researchers. Life satisfaction scales have been used in measuring the adjustment to retirement and aging of large numbers of individuals in order to explain why some elderly people seem to adjust to the retirement and aging processes while others do not.

With regard to the retired population in the United States, teachers have been found to be somewhat different in their adjustment to retirement and aging than other professional groups or blue collar workers (Atchley, 1985). Cottrell and Atchley (1969) concluded from their research that teachers generally enter retirement with high life satisfaction ratings, and continue to do many of their former work related roles (although at reduced levels). They also found depression among retired teachers to be uncommon, and that teachers adjust quickly to retirement and make valuable contributions to the communities in which they live for several years after they formally terminate their jobs. Former teachers were reported to continue in some manner, formally or informally, to teach classes, offer advice and information to groups and organizations, and to contribute to research and writing.

Of all the retired teachers in the United States, retired secondary school agriculture teachers make up a relatively small sub-group. In West Virginia they make up an even smaller percentage of the total retired teacher group. This research focused on this unique sub-group of teachers, particularly their life satisfaction ratings after retirement. The study also addressed the relationships which exist between life satisfaction ratings and retirement income, health, marital status, types of activities, time spent in activities, and years in retirement of former West Virginia agriculture teachers.

## Purpose and Objectives

This study was conducted to provide information to administrators and presently employed secondary school agriculture teachers regarding self-reported life satisfaction

ratings of retired agriculture teachers and selected factors which may influence those ratings. The following research questions were designed to guide the study:

What is the self-reported income, health, marital status activities, activity level, and life satisfaction of retired West Virginia agriculture teachers?

What are the relationships between self-reported income, health, marital status activities and activity level and life satisfaction ratings of retired West Virginia agriculture teachers?

What are the relationships between self-reported income, health, marital status activities, activity level and life satisfaction ratings, and years in retirement of retired West Virginia agriculture teachers?

### **Procedures**

A descriptive, correlational survey research method, in the form of a census study, was used to collect data from retired West Virginia agriculture teachers. Although some 834 individuals had taught vocational agriculture in West Virginia for a year or more between 1977 and 1987 (Odell, Howell, and Wayman, 1988), information from the West Virginia Department of Education, verified by state agriculture supervisors and teacher educators, indicated a total of 46 former teachers who were living as of January 1, 1989, and who had been agriculture teachers at the time of their retirement. These 46 individuals, all males, formed the population for this study.

A three part survey questionnaire was developed to address the research questions. The instrument consisted of an activity type and participation instrument, a modified Leisure Activity Blank which was developed by McKechnie (1975); a life satisfaction measurement instrument, a modified Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Lohmann (1980); and demographic questions. Content validity of the questionnaire was assured by a panel of experts in gerontology and education at West Virginia University. A reliability coefficient of .92 was computed post-hoc for the life satisfaction instrument.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through a questionnaire mailed to each individual in the population. Those who failed to respond were sent a postcard reminder. If the reminder failed to elicit a response, a follow-up letter and a duplicate questionnaire were mailed. Thirty-seven individuals returned the survey instrument for an 80% response. An early versus late respondent comparison was made to determine if nonresponse was a threat to the validity of the study (Smith, 1984). Using this procedure, no statistically significant differences between the groups were found. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SSPS, Inc., 1988). Frequencies and Rho correlations were used to describe and analyze the data.

### **Findings**

The demographic section of the mail questionnaire asked respondents about their general life circumstances. They responded to questions regarding age, years employed as an agriculture teacher, years retired, marital status, annual income, health status, and number of activities in which they had participated during the past twelve months. The age of respondents ranged from 57 to 88 years, with the median being 72 years. The number of years which respondents taught agriculture in secondary schools ranged from 8 to 45 years, with the median being 32 years. Respondents had been retired from 1 to 21 years with a median of 10 years. Regarding marital status, 31 (86.1%) respondents were married, 3 (8.3%) were widowed and 2 (5.6%) were divorced. All respondents were or had

been married. Average income of respondents, including spouse's income, ranged from \$13,000 to \$60,0000 annually with the median being \$30,0000. Nine (14.3%) respondents reported being in good health, 23 (62.2%) in satisfactory health, and 5 (13.5%) in poor health. None indicated excellent health.

Number of activities in which respondents participated during the past twelve month period were calculated by computing responses to 51 activity level questions. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had participated in an activity by circling a number from 1 to 7. A number 1 indicated that a respondent never participated in the activity while numbers 2 through 7 indicated that the respondent participated in the activity anywhere from a few times a year to every day. If a number 1 (never) response was indicated after a given activity, that activity was not computed in the number of activities in which a respondent participated, while any other number (2 through 7) was indicative of participation in that particular activity during the past twelve months and was counted as such. The number of different activities in which respondents had participated during the past twelve month period ranged for 10 to 45 with a median of 30. Activities in which respondents indicated that they participated every day (median = 7) during the past twelve month period were reading magazines, books and newspapers, being with or talking with spouse, and watching television. Respondents indicated that they listened to the radio a few times a week (median = 6), and that they participated in physical fitness activities (such as swimming, jogging, walking, aerobics), eating out, and gardening or home landscaping at least once a week (median = 5). A number of activities were shown to have a median of 1 indicating that the activity was never done; some of these activities included teaching extension classes, running as a candidate for political office, playing team sports, and drawing.

Based upon responses to a modified Life Satisfaction Scale (Lohmann, 1980), life satisfaction of the respondents was found to be high. Fifteen (40.4%) of the respondents were found to be very satisfied with life; nineteen (51.4%) were satisfied; two (5.4%) were dissatisfied; and 1 (2.7%) was very dissatisfied.

Relationships between life satisfaction ratings, years in retirement, and selected factors were found by using the SSPS-X procedure CORRELATIONS (SPSS, Inc., 1988). Various magnitudes and directions were found and are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationships (Rho) Between Life Satisfaction Ratings, Years of Retirement and Selected Factors

| Factors              | Life Satisfaction Rating | Years in Retirement |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Health rating        | .56                      | -.25                |
| Number of activities | .38                      | -.59                |
| Income level         | .22                      | -.11                |
| Years teaching       | .21                      | -.16                |
| Marital status       | -.35                     | -.08                |
| Age                  | -.38                     | .92                 |
| Years in retirement  | -.51                     | ---                 |

This study found that a substantial positive relationship existed between health and life satisfaction ratings (Rho = .56). Higher reported health ratings correlated with higher life satisfaction ratings while lower health ratings correlated with lower life satisfaction ratings. There was a moderate positive relationship between number of activities in which an individual participated and life satisfaction ratings (Rho = .38). If an individual participated in a number of different activities his life satisfaction was higher than that of individuals who participated in fewer types of activities. Income and years teaching had low positive relationships with life satisfaction ratings (Rho = .22 and .21 respectively). Although income level was positively correlated to life satisfaction, it was not as great as expected. In general, however, as income level rose, life satisfaction increased. Moderate

negative relationships were found between marital status and age with life satisfaction ratings (Rho =  $-.35$  and  $-.38$  respectively). The negative correlation between marital status and life satisfaction showed that retired teachers who were married had higher life satisfaction ratings than those who were widowed or divorced. The correlation with age showed that as age increased life satisfaction ratings decreased. Finally, a moderate negative relationship was found between years in retirement and life satisfaction ratings (Rho =  $-.51$ ). This finding indicated that teachers who had been retired longer reported lower life satisfaction ratings than did those retired for fewer years.

Relationships were also correlated between years in retirement and several factors. As would be expected there was a very strong positive relationship between years in retirement and age (Rho =  $.92$ ), indicating that those respondents reporting a higher number of years retired also reported being older than those respondents who reported having been recently retire. Years in retirement were shown to have a negligible negative relationship with marital status (Rho =  $-.08$ ), and low negative relationships with income level (Rho =  $-.11$ ), years teaching (Rho =  $-.16$ ) and health (Rho =  $-.15$ ). A substantial negative relationship was noted between years in retirement and number of activities in which an individual participated (Rho =  $-.59$ ) indicating that as years in retirement increased, the number of activities in which an individual participated decreased.

Further analysis indicated that as participation in activities which involved social contact increased, life satisfaction increased although many individual activities had negative correlations with life satisfaction ratings. Specifically, as time spent in religious activities, including church or Bible studies, increased, life satisfaction increased (Rho =  $.73$ ). A substantial positive relationship between life satisfaction ratings and teaching religious classes was found (Rho =  $.51$ ), while moderate positive relationships were found between life satisfaction ratings and socializing with children or grandchildren (Rho =  $.48$ ), visiting friends (Rho =  $.46$ ), traveling (Rho =  $.44$ ), going to club meetings (Rho =  $.40$ ), and working as a volunteer (Rho =  $.38$ ). Activities which were found to have low to negligible negative relationships with life satisfaction ratings included taking care of a sick relative or friend, farming, and sitting and reminiscing.

### Conclusions

The typical retired West Virginia secondary school agriculture teacher is a 72 year old married male, who taught agriculture for 32 years, has been retired for 10 years, and has a family income of approximately \$30,000. He has participated in 30 different activities during the past year and reads magazines, books or newspapers, watches television, and talks with his spouse daily. He participates in physical fitness activities, eats out, and works in the garden or yard a few times a week.

Retired West Virginia agriculture teachers are quite satisfied with life.

Life satisfaction of retired West Virginia agriculture teachers is most positively influenced by satisfactory health, involvement in activities--particularly religious and social activities--and having a spouse.

Life satisfaction of retired West Virginia agriculture teachers is most negatively influenced by an increase in years in retirement and age.

### Implications

Practicing teachers should be made aware of the relationships which exist between life satisfaction ratings and health as well as the variety of activities which seem to enhance life satisfaction in retirement. Since health is a factor that can be monitored and enhanced, practicing teachers should be encouraged to participate in activities that will

enhance their health. Stress management and exercise programs should be encouraged and perhaps implemented by local schools. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to participate in a number of activities outside the teaching environment which include involvement with people. Social clubs and service organization membership and participation might be beneficial.

Practicing teachers who reach the age of 60 before retirement should be encouraged to participate in Elderhostel. This organization offers educational programs for older adults which are designed to continue to expand horizons and to develop new interests, enthusiasms, and friendships. Elderhostel offers several programs in West Virginia, other states, and throughout the world each year.

Replication of this study as a longitudinal cohort study is recommended with presently employed West Virginia agriculture teachers, as well as with retired agriculture teachers in other states. Results of a comparative analysis of retired agriculture teachers in different states could then be made to determine if geographical or state differences/similarities exist among retired teachers.

Retired agriculture teachers should be encouraged to form their own alumni association. By participating in annual or quarterly get-togethers, retired agriculture teachers could effectively organize their own support groups in retirement. Owing to the small number of retired agriculture teachers in West Virginia, retirees may elect instead to join a broader support group such as a College alumni group which meets periodically.

Practicing and retired teachers who experience the loss of a spouse either through death or divorce have been found to report low life satisfaction ratings. There exists a need for a support/counseling mechanism for both practicing and retired teachers who experience loss of a spouse. Inservice activities might focus on this issue and other findings from this study.

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