

Meaning in Life across the Lifespan in a Nigerian Population

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Abstract

Meaning in life has been demonstrated as a strong component and predictor of well-being. There is however sparse empirical study regarding this construct among a Nigerian population. This study therefore investigated meaning in life across developmental stages and examined gender difference in a Nigerian population. A cross-sectional survey with ex-post facto design was utilised. Five hundred and seventy six (576) respondents whose ages range between 16 and 87 years ($\bar{X} = 28.65, SD = 18.61$) participated in the study. Data was collected with a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic information, and measures of meaning in life, life orientation and life satisfaction. Correlation and independent sample t-test at 0.05 significant level was used to analyse the data. We found significant differences in meaning in life across age groups ($F_{(5,566)} = 2.74, p < 0.05$). Respondents of age group 30 – 39 years reported the highest meaning in life ($\bar{X} = 51.33$), while people aged 60 years and above reported the lowest meaning in life. There was no significant difference between males and females on meaning orientation ($t(574) = -0.84, p > 0.05$). There was significant mild relationship between presence of meaning and search for meaning in life ($r = .18, p < 0.05$), moderate relationship between presence of meaning in life and life orientation ($r = 0.37, p < .01$). Meaning in life was, however, not found to be significantly related to life satisfaction. The present study affirmed a higher meaning orientation among individuals of younger age groups compared to those of older age groups. It was therefore recommended that future studies may investigate other factors that may be responsible for the findings of the present study.

Keywords: Meaning in life, well-being, life-span, Nigerian population

Introduction

Human development – from young up to older ages – comprises constant multidimensional changes and lifelong adaptive processes to internal biological, cognitive as well as external changes in the environment (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995). For instance, young adulthood covers a highly transitional life period characterised by more life-changing roles, demographic diversity, instability, and identity decisions than any other life stage (Arnett, 2000). During young adulthood, many people leave their childhood home, complete their education, establish a career and many take on family responsibilities and nurse small children. Studying human behaviour from this perspective is referred to as life-span approach which has made a significant contribution to the understanding of human development. According to Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt (1990) life-span approach is not a theory, but a general orientation to development, which views development as a lifelong process, continuously modified across the life span, and no age period dominates development.

Baltes *et al.* (1999) also suggested that life-span research investigates: (1) interindividual commonalities in development; (2) interindividual differences in development referring to differences between individuals at a given point in time; (3) intraindividual (within-person) changes, plasticity (malleability) in development, which concerns individuals' potentials and the

changes within individuals over time. Evidence suggests that part of what changes over the course of man's lifetime is his meaning orientation and life satisfaction.

Understanding the primary motive of man has been one of the main focuses of discussion among scholars in psychology and related discipline. This discussion can be regarded crucial because it lays a foundation for understanding and predicting human satisfaction with life. Dissatisfied with Freud's 'will to pleasure' and Adler's 'will to power' principles as the primary motive of man, Frankl (1963) advocated the 'will to meaning' as the primary motivational force in man, the term which he advanced with his theory and principle of meaning in life.

According to Frankl, humans are not just biological, social, and psychological beings but also spiritual, with the capacity to transcend physical limitations through meaning and spirituality. He further opined that when someone is frustrated in the will to meaning, if not treated, it can lead to that person experiencing what he described as an "existential vacuum". This is expressed as a sense of meaninglessness, boredom, or apathy.

Meaning refers to making sense, order, or coherence out of one's existence. The search of which has been regarded as a significant and universal human motive (Frankl, 1988; Maddi, 1970). Meaning in life has been generally described as having a goal or living a purposeful life (Baumester, 1991). Wong (1998) also defined meaning as "individually constructed, culturally based cognitive system that influences an individuals' choice of activities and goals, and endows life with a sense of purpose, personal worth, and fulfillment" (407).

Previous investigations affirmed that human beings have a strong desire to understand themselves and the world around them. They exhibit cognitive and behavioural activities in support of such desires (Heine, Proulx & Vohs, 2006; Higgins, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Ryff & Singer, 1998). From this view, meaning in life can be viewed as the primary motivating force that spurs a human being.

Distinctions have been made between search for and presence of meaning in life. Search for meaning has been defined as the strength, intensity, and activity of people's desires and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorentz, 2008). On the other hand, the presence of meaning is conceptualised as the sense of comprehending oneself and the world, understanding one's unique fit in the world, and identifying what one is trying to accomplish in life (Steger, 2009).

Following the distinction between the two constructs, their relationships have been investigated along with major models – search-to-presence model and presence-to-search model. The first posits that seeking meaning leads to experiencing greater meaning (e.g., Frankl, 1963). As such, search for meaning should be positively related to presence of meaning. The second model posits that meaning in life is a highly desired psychological quality; when people feel their lives have little meaning, or when they lose meaning, they will search for it (e.g. Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006).

There is a strong relationship between sources of meaning and life orientation. It has been stated that one's orientation to life is basically characterised by the source of one's meaning in life (Schnell, 2010). Wong (2012) described life orientation as the meaning mind-set that guides certain choices one makes pertaining to one's way of life and personal goals. Wong further describes these choices as tough, which translates to whether it is meaning or pleasure that will drive the life of an individual. However, he noted that the choice an individual eventually makes reflects the person's core values and basic life orientation.

According to Wong (2012), there are two basic orientations to life – meaning and pleasure. He described a meaningful life as — ‘a virtuous life of serving a higher purpose and making a significant difference in the world’ (p. 1). This is likened to Aristotle’s ideal of eudaimonia. The other orientation is based on the pleasure principle in which an individual pursues whatever will satisfy and make him or her happy. Such life is individual goal-oriented and less concerned with issues that affect the entire humanity. The author further stated that the life orientation of an individual is a link between the individual and his attitude and preference in life in terms of career, hobbies, relationships, and engagement. He emphasised that a meaning-mindset is what is needed to create a culture wherein social responsibility, civic virtues, and service to humanity are valued.

Reker, Peacock and Wong (1987) suggested that meaning in life may be age related; following Frankl’s assertion that meaning in life might be personally discovered. According to the psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1963), attainment of developmental milestone and meaning making differs across the lifespan. For instance, when one successfully passes the stages, it is establishing a stable identity for adolescents, forming intimate relationships for young aged adult, being productive for middle aged adults and developing a sense of integrity and appreciation of why and how one has lived is for late life.

Asagba (2005) investigated inner meaning fulfilment along with differences, ethnicity, and educational background of University of Ibadan students, and concluded that there was a significant difference in inner meaning fulfilment of participants across different age groups, with higher inner meaning fulfilment associated with age advancement.

Researchers have also investigated gender difference on measure of meaning in life with many findings showing that the female gender report higher sense of meaning in life than their male counterparts. Asagba, Agberotimi and Wimberly (2016) in their study among undergraduate students of a Nigerian university concluded that female university students hold a stronger life meaning orientation than the males. Asagba (2007), in a similar study, reported a significant gender difference in meaning in life among university students.

Life satisfaction is another variable that has been observed to change over the life-span. Life satisfaction can be defined as a sense of satisfaction or pleasure about one’s present and past life. Generally, being satisfied with life means “having a favourable attitude toward one’s life as a whole” (Haybron, 2007: 2). It also refers to a general affective and reflective attitude towards life. Diener (1984) conceptualised life satisfaction as the perceived discrepancy between aspiration and achievement, ranging from the perception of fulfilment to that of deprivation. They consider life satisfaction to be a cognitive component of subjective well-being and define happiness as an experience of feelings and emotions. Kane and Kane (2000) further clarify life satisfaction as expectation and perceptions of outcomes for salient components of life such as social situations, relationships, self-worth, and finances across multiple and broad domains and long time periods.

Life satisfaction has been widely viewed as an important indicator of subjective well-being (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005), and is usually conceptualised as a desired and non-specific subjective perception, indicating global well-being, different from evaluative appraisals of specific life-domains such as satisfaction with marriage or work (Diener, Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto & Suh, 2000). It is also regarded as an indicator of the overall quality of life concerning, for example, health, living standard, and support and it is considered essential to overall well-being (George, Ellison & Larson, 2002). Daig, Herschbach, Lehmann, Knoll and Decker (2009) further

stated that life satisfaction is synonymous with subjective well-being, quality of life or happiness. It shows the difference between desire, hope and expectations in an individual's current state (patient or a healthy person) and can be assessed either globally or in specific domains, e.g., regarding family, relationships or work (Daig *et al.*, 2009).

There is no consensus about age-related changes in life satisfaction. There is evidence that life satisfaction may decrease, increase, or remain relatively stable across the lifespan. For instance, Hamarat *et al.* (2002) found no differences in life satisfaction scores across groups of people between 45 and 89 years of age.

Some studies have, however, indicated that the association between age and life satisfaction is U-shaped, i.e., individuals are most satisfied with life at younger and older life stages (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). The authors further reported a significant quadratic effect for age such that levels of happiness seemed to decrease from young adulthood to middle age, reaching a minimum at around age 47, and then increased throughout older adulthood.

In a study of adults between the ages of 25 and 75 years, Prenda and Lachman (2001) found that age was positively correlated with life satisfaction. Results of studies have also revealed marital status to be one of the most important factors affecting people's life satisfaction. That is, being married makes a person more satisfied with life than being single (e.g. Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham & Jones, 2008). Carstensen (1995) argued that as people move into their final years of life, they become increasingly conscious of the amount of time they have left to live. This awareness of impending mortality may lead older individuals to focus on ways to make their remaining experiences as enjoyable as possible. For instance, compared to younger individuals, older people tend to place a greater emphasis on emotional aspects of potential social interactions and are more likely to remember the emotional content of their experiences (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999). Older people may also be more adept at regulating their emotions than younger people (Gross *et al.*, 1997). Taken together, these processes should lead to increases in life satisfaction across the lifespan. In contrast, Chen (2001) found that age was negatively related to life satisfaction in a sample of people aged 60 and above.

Several previous studies have also investigated gender difference in life satisfaction. In a study by Brajkovic, Gregurek, Kusevic, Ratkovic, Bras and Dordevic (2011) on life satisfaction among persons of the third age after retirement, they found that there was no significant difference between men and women on life satisfaction. On the other hand, Lewis, Huebner, Malone and Valois (2011) reported that women have an average level of life satisfaction at all age levels. They further stated that with an increase in age, the overall life satisfaction decreases; whereas, with an increase in personal income, the overall life satisfaction increases. Hatch (1999) however, found that lower satisfaction with life in men after retirement was due to the loss of work role, work-related contacts, and status of the family provider.

Relations between measures of meaning in life and well-being have been consistently affirmed in the literature. According to Ho, Cheung and Cheung (2010), meaning in life is positively associated with domain-specific satisfaction and negatively associated with social problems, such as avoiding social situations and having strong fears of being humiliated. Similarly, presence of meaning is reported to be positively correlated with self-esteem (Steger *et al.*, 2006), positively affects (e.g., King *et al.*, 2006), and negatively related to depression and anxiety (Steger *et al.*, 2006).

Furthermore, meaning in life has overtime been associated with psychological well-being in terms of overall satisfaction with the life of an individual. Positive correlations between life

satisfaction, meaning in life and well-being have been affirmed in previous literature (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Steger, Oishi & Kashdan 2009). In a study by Taş and İskender (2018) on meaning in life, satisfaction with life, self-concept and locus of control among teachers, meaning in life was found to be positively related to satisfaction with life. It was further established that women have higher levels of satisfaction with life than the men.

Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib and Finch (2009), investigated the relationship between purpose, hope, and life satisfaction across individuals of three age groups (adolescents, emerging adults, and adults). It was found that purpose in life was associated with greater life satisfaction at the three stages of life-span. In addition, search for life purpose was significantly correlated with life satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood. In another study to examine the relationship between meaning in life, optimism and well-being among adolescents in Hong Kong, Ho, Cheung, and Cheung (2010) surveyed a sample of 1807 adolescents and concluded that meaning in life significantly correlated with life satisfaction.

Research further shows that a life framed by meaning is more satisfying than a life centered on pleasure. More generally, the reported presence of meaning in life is linked to desirable psychological outcomes such as life satisfaction, (Steger *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, Park, Park and Peterson (2009) established that the presence of meaning in life and search for meaning were positively associated with well-being and greater life satisfaction in particular. In another study by Steger, Oishi and Kesebi (2011), meaning in life was found to be positively associated with life satisfaction. The authors, however, further established an interesting dimension of the relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction, in that search for meaning moderated the relationship between presence of meaning and life satisfaction. In essence, individuals who are in active search for meaning reported stronger relationship between presence of meaning and life satisfaction.

Despite several studies that have established the importance of meaning in life in relation to the psychological well-being of an individual, there is paucity of literature addressing this construct across lifespan in the Nigerian population. The present study investigated the relationship between the two dimensions of meaning, as well as their relationships with life orientation and life satisfaction across different age groups and gender in Ibadan, Nigeria. In this regard, it was hypothesised that:

1. meaning in life will be significantly related with life orientation and life satisfaction across life-span among the Nigerian population.
2. there will be significant difference in meaning in life of participants across different age groups.
3. there will be significant gender difference in meaning in life among the Nigerian population.

Method

Design

This study adopted an ex post facto design utilising cross-sectional survey to investigate dimensions of meaning in life (search and presence) of individuals of different age groups and gender to establish the relationship with life orientation and satisfaction of the Nigerian population.

Setting

The study was conducted in Ibadan metropolis, with sample drawn from the University of Ibadan and Ibadan Polytechnic communities. The University of Ibadan is the premier university in Nigeria. It is located in the city of Ibadan, the state capital of Oyo State, South-West Nigeria. The University formerly called University College, Ibadan was founded on 17 November 1948. There are sixteen faculties in the university namely; Arts, Science, Basic Medical Science, Agriculture and Forestry, Social Sciences, Education, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Technology, Law, Clinical Sciences, Public Health, Economics, Dentistry, Renewable Natural Resources, and Environmental Design and Management. The University has residential and sports facilities for staff and students on campus, as well as separate botanical and zoological gardens. The University of Ibadan is with a students' population of about 20,000, with about 40% made up of post-graduate students. The university also has academic staff strength of 2,500 and 5,000 support staff.

The Polytechnic Ibadan is also located in the city of Ibadan, Nigeria. The institution was established in 1970 and offers a wide range of specialised short courses for the purpose of improving the vocational capabilities of technical and commercial workers. The Polytechnic has five faculties which include: Engineering, Science, Environmental Studies, Financial Management Science, and Business and Communication Science.

Participants

Five hundred and seventy-six (576) individuals whose ages range between 16 and 87 years (\bar{X} = 28.65, SD = 18.61) were purposively selected from students and staff of the University of Ibadan and The Polytechnic, Ibadan participated in the study. Respondents comprised of 321 (55.7%) males and 255 (44.3%) females; seventy-nine (13.7%) of whom are of the Igbo tribe, 423 (73.4%) are of the Yoruba tribe and 18 (3.1%) are of the Hausa tribe. The remaining 56 (9.7%) are from other tribes in Nigeria. The age distribution of the participants show that 278 (48.6%) aged between 16 and 20 years, 154 (26.9%) aged between 21 and 29 years, 24 (4.2%) are between the ages of 30 and 39 years, 31 (5.4%) are in the age range of 40 and 49 years, 23 (4.0%) aged between 50 and 59 years, and 62 (10.8%) of the respondents are 60 years old and above.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire containing instruments with sound psychometric properties was used to collect data in the study. The questionnaire was made up of four sections.

Section A: This section contains information on demographic attributes of respondents which include gender, age, marital status, and ethnic group.

Section B: Meaning In Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

This comprised of a 10-item questionnaire developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler (2006) designed to measure two dimensions of meaning in life: (i) Presence of Meaning (how much respondents feel their lives have meaning – items 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9), and (ii) Search for Meaning (how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives – items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10). Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). Thus, scores range from 5 to 35 on each subscale, and 10 to 70 cumulative score. The author reported $M = 25.00$, $S.D. = 5.9$, and $M = 22.90$, $S.D. = 6.5$ as norm for presence and search

subscales respectively, while Asagba, Agberotimi and Wimberly (2016) established $M = 27.14$, $S.D. = 6.51$, and $M = 21.39$, $S.D. = 8.13$ as norm for presence and search subscales respectively among the Nigerian population. Both subscales (search and presence) have been found to be internally consistent with alpha coefficient ranging between 0.82 and 0.88 (Steger *et al.*, 2006). Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 was established as reliability coefficient among Nigerian population (Asagba *et al.*, 2016).

Section C: Satisfaction with life scale (SLS)

The satisfaction with life scale (SLS) is a 5 item scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). The scale was developed to assess a respondent's satisfaction with life as a whole. The scale does not assess the satisfaction with life domains such as health or finances but allows subjects to integrate and weigh these domains in the way they choose. Each item on the scale is scored from 1 to 7 in terms of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". A total score was calculated from the 5 items, ranging from 5 to 35. A score of 20 is the middle point; so higher scores indicate high satisfaction with life. The scale has been reported to consistently show good psychometric properties and has been used in a number of studies. For example, Abolghasemi and Varaniyab (2010) reported an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82. Cronbach's alpha 0.64 was established as reliability coefficient in a Nigerian population (Asagba, Agberotimi & Wimberly, in press).

Section D: Life Orientation Scale (LOS)

The life orientation scale (LOS) is a 10-item scale developed by Wong (2012) to measure individuals' meaning-mindset. It is responded to on a 5-point scale with options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Items 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are worded in the negative direction. A maximum score of 50 is obtainable. A high score on the scale indicates a high meaning mindset of the respondent. Cronbach's alpha 0.72 was established as reliability coefficient in a Nigerian population (Asagba *et al.*, in press).

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Oyo state Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study. Participants were recruited from the student and staff population of the University of Ibadan and Ibadan Polytechnic. Detailed statement of informed consent that contained the purpose, procedures, potential risk(s) (if any) and benefits of participating in the study were given and explained to each of the participants.

Individuals who consented voluntarily to participate in the study were asked to complete the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, participants were not required to provide their names on the questionnaire; copies of the questionnaire filled by respondents were labeled with special research codes. Questionnaire administration was under the supervision of the principal researcher in order to obtain a high return rate and have sufficient data for input and analysis. Data was collected over a period of four weeks. Returned questionnaires were carefully stored and coded for data analysis. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23. Descriptive analysis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and independent sample t-test analysis were conducted.

Results**Table 1: Showing the socio-demographic statistics of participants in the Study**

	Variable	N	%
Gender	Male	321	55.7
	Female	255	44.3
	Total	576	100
Age group	Less or equal to 20 years	278	48.3
	21 – 29 years	154	26.7
	30 – 39 years	24	4.2
	40 – 49 years	31	5.4
	50 – 59 years	23	4.0
	60 years and above	62	10.8
	Total	572	99.3
Ethnicity	Missing value	4	.7
	Igbo	79	13.7
	Yoruba	423	73.4
	Hausa	18	3.1
	Others	56	9.7
Total	576	100	
Marital status	Single	423	73.4
	Married	144	25.0
	Separated	2	0.3
	Divorced	4	0.8
	Widowed	3	0.5
	Total	576	100

As shown in Table 1, more males (55.7%) participated in the study, which is about half (48.3%) of the participants aged between 16 and 20 years. This is followed by those whose ages range between 21 and 29 years, 60 years and above, 40–49 years, 30–39 years, and 50–59 years who constituted 26.7%, 10.8%, 5.4%, 4.2% and 4.0% of the total sample respectively. In terms of ethnicity, Igbo respondents constituted 13.7%, 73.4% were Yoruba, 3.1% Hausa and 9.7% from other ethnic groups. The majority (73.4%) of the participants were not married, 25.0% were married, 0.3% was separated, 0.8% was divorced, and 0.5% was widowed.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one stated that meaning in life will be significantly related to life orientation and life satisfaction across life-span among the Nigerian population. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson correlation analysis. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: showing the correlation analysis of meaning in life, life orientation and life satisfaction

	Presence of Meaning in Life	Search for Meaning in Life	Life Satisfaction	Life Orientation	Mean	Std. Dev.
Presence of Meaning in life	-				26.74	6.09
Search for Meaning in Life	.183**	-			22.84	8.79
Life Satisfaction	.033	.015	-		25.19	6.39
Life Orientation	.365**	-.002	-.042	-	35.74	6.48

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The result presented in Table 2 showed a significant positive correlation between presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life ($r = .18, p < .01$). The result also revealed a significant positive relationship between presence of meaning in life and life orientation ($r = .37, p < .01$) which implies that the higher the participants perceive a sense of presence of meaning in life the higher they hold meaning orientation to life. Meaning in life was however, not found significantly correlated with life satisfaction ($r = .03, p > .05$).

Hypothesis two

The second hypothesis stated that there will be significant difference in meaning in life of participants across different age groups. The hypothesis was tested using one-way analysis of variance. The results are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Showing the mean and standard deviation scores on Meaning in Life of participants across different age groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Less or equals 20 yrs	278	50.09	11.965
21 - 29 yrs	154	50.79	10.172
30 - 39 yrs	24	51.33	13.017
40 - 49 yrs	31	49.06	8.457
50 - 59 yrs	23	47.00	12.881
Greater or equals 60 yrs	62	45.03	12.698
Total	572	49.60	11.600

Table 4: Showing the analysis of age group variance on Meaning in Life

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	1815.672	5	363.134	2.740	<.05
Within Groups	75015.242	566	132.536		
Total	76830.914	571			

The result presented in Table 4 showed that participants' age had significant influence on meaning in life ($F(5, 566) = 2.74, p < .05$). This implies that meaning in life differs across different age groups. Follow-up test was conducted to determine age group differences on meaning in life. The result in Table 5 revealed that there is a significant difference in the meaning in life reported by individuals within the age group of 16–20 years, 21–29 years and 30–39 years compared to the meaning in life reported by individuals aged 60 years and above ($p < .05$). With mean difference ranging from 5.06 to 6.30, inference can be made that younger Nigerians perceive their lives as more meaningful than older Nigerians. The descriptive statistics presented on Table 3 also indicates an increase in the meaning in life of participants from age group 16–20 years to 30–39 years, then a decrease in the mean score from age group 40–49 years.

Table 5: Pairwise comparison of age groups on meaning in life

(I) Age group	(J) Age group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less or equals 20 yrs	21 - 29 yrs	-.702	1.156	.544	-2.97	1.57
	30 - 39 yrs	-1.243	2.449	.612	-6.05	3.57
	40 - 49 yrs	1.025	2.180	.638	-3.26	5.31
	50 - 59 yrs	3.090	2.498	.217	-1.82	8.00
	Greater or equals 60 yrs	5.058*	1.617	.002	1.88	8.23
21 - 29 yrs	Less or equals 20 yrs	.702	1.156	.544	-1.57	2.97
	30 - 39 yrs	-.541	2.526	.830	-5.50	4.42
	40 - 49 yrs	1.728	2.266	.446	-2.72	6.18
	50 - 59 yrs	3.792	2.574	.141	-1.26	8.85
	Greater or equals 60 yrs	5.760*	1.732	.001	2.36	9.16
30 - 39 yrs	Less or equals 20 yrs	1.243	2.449	.612	-3.57	6.05
	21 - 29 yrs	.541	2.526	.830	-4.42	5.50
	40 - 49 yrs	2.269	3.130	.469	-3.88	8.42
	50 - 59 yrs	4.333	3.359	.198	-2.26	10.93
	Greater or equals 60 yrs	6.301*	2.768	.023	.86	11.74
40 - 49 yrs	Less or equals 20 yrs	-1.025	2.180	.638	-5.31	3.26
	21 - 29 yrs	-1.728	2.266	.446	-6.18	2.72
	30 - 39 yrs	-2.269	3.130	.469	-8.42	3.88
	50 - 59 yrs	2.065	3.168	.515	-4.16	8.29
	Greater or equals 60 yrs	4.032	2.532	.112	-.94	9.01
50 - 59 yrs	Less or equals 20 yrs	-3.090	2.498	.217	-8.00	1.82
	21 - 29 yrs	-3.792	2.574	.141	-8.85	1.26
	30 - 39 yrs	-4.333	3.359	.198	-10.93	2.26
	40 - 49 yrs	-2.065	3.168	.515	-8.29	4.16
	Greater or equals 60 yrs	1.968	2.811	.484	-3.55	7.49
Greater or equals 60 yrs	Less or equals 20 yrs	-5.058*	1.617	.002	-8.23	-1.88
	21 - 29 yrs	-5.760*	1.732	.001	-9.16	-2.36
	30 - 39 yrs	-6.301*	2.768	.023	-11.74	-.86
	40 - 49 yrs	-4.032	2.532	.112	-9.01	.94
	50 - 59 yrs	-1.968	2.811	.484	-7.49	3.55

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis three

The third hypothesis stated that there will be significant gender difference in meaning in life among the Nigerian population. The hypothesis was tested using independent sample t-test analysis. The obtained result is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: T-test showing difference between male and female on Meaning in Life

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	P
Male	321	49.22	11.136	574	-.84	>.05
Female	255	50.04	12.124			

The result in Table 6 showed that there was no significant gender difference in meaning in life reported by the participants ($t(574) = -0.84, p > .05$). As hypothesised, male participants did not report higher meaning in life than their female counterparts. The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion

According to the results of the first hypothesis, the two dimensions of meaning in life, i.e. presence of and search for meaning in life were reported in a similar direction among Nigerian population. In this regard, as people feel their lives to be meaningful, they showed sense of search for meaning and understanding of their lives. This therefore suggests that although people may have established certain sense of meaning or purpose in their lives, they may still be in search of meaning in other areas of lives. For instance, an individual may possess a sense of meaning regarding higher career, while still attempting to find meaning in the area of relationship and marriage.

In addition, it has been previously established that there is an overall/ultimate meaning of life as well as meaning of the moment which is circumstantial (Fabry, 1987). In this regard, at a particular time that meaning of life is assessed in individuals, people may tend to respond based on prevailing circumstances, as well as in terms of perceived overall meaning in life. Discussing from this perspective, it is not uncommon for people to respond in the same dimension on the measure of presence of meaning and search for meaning in life. This finding is in agreement with previous findings of Yek, Olendzki, Kekecs *et al.* (2017) which found positive association between the two dimensions of meaning in life. Also in a similar work by Asagba *et al.*, (2016) among first year students of a Nigerian university, presence of meaning in life was found to be positively associated with search for meaning in life. A similar finding was also reported among Japanese young adults in a study by Steger *et al.* (2008).

Furthermore, it was found in this study that presence of meaning in life is significantly associated with life orientation which has been described in terms of an individual's attitude and preference in life in terms of career, hobbies, relationships, and engagements (Wong, 2012). This finding is in line with Schnell's (2010) proposition that one's orientation to life is basically characterised by the source of one's meaning in life.

The present study, however, found that meaning in life was not significantly related with life satisfaction. Although this finding was not as expected, it revealed that participants did not

perceive the meaning in life in relation to satisfaction. This implies that respondents' satisfaction with life as a whole does not relate with how the individuals see their lives as meaningful. This result is in contrary to several previous findings asserting significant relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction (Oishi *et al.*, 2009; Steger *et al.*, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2009). In this vein, Ho, Cheung and Cheung (2010) reported that meaning in life is positively associated with domain-specific satisfaction among an adolescence Hong Kong population. Furthermore, a strong association was established between life purpose and life satisfaction among individuals across the adolescence, emerging adulthood and adulthood developmental stages of life (Bronk *et al.*, 2009) which affirmed that positive correlations exist between life satisfaction, meaning in life and well-being.

Our findings also revealed that there are differences in the way people of different age groups see their lives as meaningful. This suggests that meaning in life tends to change across the life-span. It was established that people of young age groups (16 – 39 years), young adulthood and middle adulthood perceive their lives as more meaningful when compared to people of old age groups (40 years and above). In 1987, Reker *et al.* had suggested that meaning in life is likely to be age related. Similarly, Asagba (2005) in a study among students of the University of Ibadan, concluded that meaning in life differs across different age groups.

Finally, results of the present study revealed that males were not significantly different from females on the measure of meaning in life. This implies that both perceive life as regards meaning orientation in a similar way. This finding is contrary to previous findings reported by Asagba *et al.* (2016) which found a significant difference between male and female students on measure of meaning in life and established that female students showed significant higher sense of life meaning than their male counterparts. Beutel and Marini (1995) also earlier asserted that during adolescence, females tend to score higher than males on the construct of personal meaning and purpose-driven activities. Wong (1998) also reported that females scored higher than males on personal meaning profiles.

Conclusion

The present study investigated meaning in life across different age groups among a Nigerian population. In this study, the way the participants perceived their lives to be meaningful was also examined in relation to their life orientation and satisfaction with life. It was established that meaning in life differs across different age groups among the Nigerian population, with young respondents in particular, perceiving their lives as more meaningful compared to the older respondents. Presence of meaning in life was also found significantly correlated with life orientation among the participants.

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