Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS)
David H. Olson, Ph.D.

I. Overview of Family Satisfaction

While there has been a great deal of research on marital satisfaction, a literature review found no family satisfaction scale. So in the early 1980’s, David Olson and Marc Wilson (1982; 1989) created what we presumed to be the first family satisfaction scale. This scale was developed to provide a reliable and valid instrument for use in family research and family therapy.

A. Conceptual Definition
Family satisfaction is defined as the degree to which family members feel happy and fulfilled with each other. The operational definition includes the three dimensions that are related to the Circumplex Model—cohesion, flexibility and communication. So items in the family satisfaction scale assess the satisfaction in all three of these dimensions.

B. Theoretical Foundation
At the time of the development of the Family Satisfaction Scale there were no other family satisfaction measures found in the literature. Based on the integrative nature, theoretical salience, and clinical relevance of the Circumplex Model, the Family Satisfaction Scale was designed to assess overall family satisfaction including the two main dimensions of this model, cohesion and flexibility.

Hypotheses:

The basic hypothesis of the Circumplex Model is that “balanced” families will be more satisfied with their system than “unbalanced” families.

(1) Families that have high scores on balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility will have higher levels of family satisfaction. Conversely, families with high scores on the unbalanced scales will have lower levels of family satisfaction. More specifically: Balanced families will have significantly higher family satisfaction than Unbalanced families.

(2) Family satisfaction will have a positive relationship to Family Communication. More specifically: Families high in family satisfaction will have significantly better family communication that families low in satisfaction.
II. Review of Literature

The Family Satisfaction Scale has been used extensively in research, most frequently in conjunction with one of the FACES instruments. The scale was first used in a study of 1,000 families across the life cycle (Olson et al., 1983; 1989) and it is upon this data that the instrument was originally normed. Since its initial development, the instrument has been used in studies covering a wide variety of family phenomena. The current version of the Family Satisfaction Scale contains 10 items and is based on the original 14 item scale.

The FSS has been used to study a wide variety of family issues and a list of some of the published studies are listed in the references. Mathis (1992) found that husband’s family satisfaction during mediation was generally negative while the wives’ satisfaction declined only after mediation. Family satisfaction was found useful in validating an assessment in Japanese families (Kusada, 1995). Bonk (1984) found that family satisfaction increased during treatment for alcoholism and was significantly higher at post-treatment assessment. Cook (1991) also found that family satisfaction was higher after treatment for alcoholism. Caetano (1986) used the FSS to study Mexican-American families and found that family satisfaction along with cultural involvement, flexibility and cohesion were the best predictors of family functioning.

The Family Satisfaction Scale has also been used in studies which have attempted to take into account the diversity of families in our society. Zacks and colleagues (1988) used the FSS to study lesbian couples and compare her findings with the normative data which is based on heterosexual couples. She found that satisfaction scores in the lesbian couples were highly correlated with levels of cohesion and flexibility and lesbian couples had significantly higher levels of satisfaction than heterosexual couples.

III. Empirical Foundation of Family Satisfaction

A. Validity of Scale

The 10 item family satisfaction scale is based on a 14 item scale developed by Olson and Wilson (1982). Both the original 14 item scale and the revised 10 item scale were designed to assess satisfaction with various aspects of family functioning including family closeness, flexibility and communication.

There has been reported in the literature a large overlap between the concepts of marital satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. The national study of over 1,000 families by Olson and colleagues (1989) found similar findings with respect to family satisfaction (see table 1)
As can be seen in Table 1, marital satisfaction accounts for half of the variation in family satisfaction ($r=.70$, $r$-squared=.49), and family satisfaction accounts for nearly half of the variance in quality of life ($r=.67$, $r$-squared=.45). The lower correlations between husband and wife scores indicate that it is indeed individual realities which are being measured rather than a family reality.

Satisfaction across the life cycle as examined by the national study is displayed in Figure 1 showing that satisfaction is not a static variable but one which changes with changes in the family life cycle. Findings were similar for two measures of marital satisfaction and a measure of quality of life.
Family satisfaction seems to follow the same shallow U curve across the family life cycle as has been found with marital satisfaction in previous studies (Olson, et.al. 1989). Family satisfaction starts out higher for wives than husbands as has been found with marital satisfaction. Satisfaction then dips for both husbands and wives reaching its lowest point as adolescents reach the launching stage and then rises. T-tests revealed significant differences in satisfaction levels with satisfaction being higher at earlier couple stages (stages 1 and 2) than at childrearing and launching stages (stages 4 and 5) for both husbands and wives.

It is interesting to note that adolescents' reports of family satisfaction are very similar to their parents when group mean scores are used. However, correlation among fathers, mothers, and adolescents' scores are low ($r=.32$) and the difference in male and female adolescent scores are significant.

**B. Reliability of the Scale**

Based on a sample of 2,465 family members, the 10 item family satisfaction scale has an alpha reliability of .92 and test re-test of .85.

**C. Mean & Standard Deviation**

Based on a sample of 2,465 family members, the mean score for the scale is 37.5 and standard deviation is 8.5.
D. Scoring of the Family Satisfaction Scale

1. Add all items of the Family Satisfaction scale.
2. The sum of these items is the total score.
3. The range of scores is from 10-50.

Family Satisfaction: Interpretation of Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage and Levels</th>
<th>Family Satisfaction</th>
<th>Family Satisfaction (Raw</th>
<th>Percent)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very High</strong> 86-99%</td>
<td>Family members are very satisfied and really enjoy most aspects of their family.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>99</td>
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<td><strong>High</strong> 61-85%</td>
<td>Family members are satisfied with most aspects of their family.</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td><strong>Moderate</strong> 36-60%</td>
<td>Family members are somewhat satisfied and enjoy some aspects of their family.</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong> 21-35%</td>
<td>Family members are somewhat dissatisfied and have some concerns about their family.</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Very Low</strong> 10-20%</td>
<td>Family members are very dissatisfied and are concerned about their family.</td>
<td>29</td>
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# Family Satisfaction Scale

David H. Olson

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Generally Satisfied</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td>Extremely Satisfied</td>
</tr>
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How satisfied are you with:

1. The degree of closeness between family members.
2. Your family’s ability to cope with stress.
3. Your family’s ability to be flexible.
4. Your family’s ability to share positive experiences.
5. The quality of communication between family members.
6. Your family’s ability to resolve conflicts.
7. The amount of time you spend together as a family.
8. The way problems are discussed.
9. The fairness of criticism in your family.
10. Family members concern for each other.


References and Published Articles on the
Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS)


