

## **ROLE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, PERSONALITY AND SENSATION SEEKING ON THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF UNDERGRADUATES**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated the role of civic engagement, personality and sensation seeking on the social well-being of undergraduates. Participants were four hundred and fifty one (451) undergraduates who were drawn from university of Uyo, Akwa-Ibom using simple random sampling technique. Their ages ranged between 16 to 35 years, with a mean age of 22.07. Cross sectional design was adopted. Four instruments were used for data collection. Civic Engagement Scale (Dolittle & Faul, 2013), Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue & Kentle, 1990), Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking Scale (Arnett, 1993), and Social Wellbeing Scale (Keyes, 1998). Seven hypotheses were tested. Step wise multiple regression was the main statistic used for data analysis. Results of the regression analysis showed that amongst the studied variables, only civic engagement was a significant predictor of social well-being ( $p < .001$ ). The

five dimensions of Personality; e x t r a v e r s i o n , a g r e e a b l e n e s s , conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness were not significant predictors of social wellbeing. Similarly, sensation seeking did not also significantly predict social well-being. One good practical implication of the finding of this study is that individuals with patriotic minds and willingness to engage in civic duties are needed at all sectors to change our society for the best. Limitations were made, while suggestions for further studies were stated.

**Key Words:** Civic Engagement, Personality, Sensation Seeking, Social Well-being

### **Introduction**

The study of social well-being in childhood through youth age, as a holistic concept, is still in its early stages. However, many of the more narrowly defined concepts under the broader banner of 'social well-being' have been studied for decades (Guttman & Louis, 1982).

**The psychological concept well-being** is a general term for the condition of an individual or group, for example their social, economic, psychological, spiritual or medical state; high well-being means that, in some sense, the individual's experience is positive, while low well-being is associated with negative happenings (Guttman & Louis, 1982). Social well-being, a psychosocial component of wellbeing is a multifaceted concept encompassing both individual capacities and social competencies. Hence, one may ask; what is the place of the global society especially the contemporary Nigerian society in addressing these challenges that when met, ensures better social well-being of it citizens? In addressing this, Aked, Marks, Cordon and

Thompson (2008) have maintained that it depends on the sum of individual mental well-being in a group, community or society; the quality of government – local, organisational, national and international; the quality of services and provision of support for those in need; the fair distribution of resources including income; the norm with regard to interpersonal relationships in a group, community or society, including respect for others and their needs, compassion and empathy, and authentic interaction (Aked, Marks, Cordon & Thompson, 2008).

Interestingly still, some recent works have operationalized social well-being in terms of behaviours that reflect community and organizational participation and membership (Putnam, 2000).

One foremost socio psychologically based research on social well-being posits that individual-level social well-being can be conceptualized as having two facets: social adjustment and social support (McDowell & Newell, 1987). Social adjustment refers to the subjective satisfaction with relationships or the performance of social roles. Social support refers to the quality and number of persons whom an individual trusts and can rely on, as well as the degree to which one is needed and matters to others and society. Thus, social wellbeing as a psychological concept can be broadly defined as an individual's appraisal of their social relationships, how others react to them, and how they interact with social institutions and community.

Social well-being is considered an important component of overall well-being, besides emotional and psychological well-being (Keyes 2003). This construct seems particularly promising to capture well-being of individuals as nested within social structures, since its five dimensions are broad enough to cover the evaluation of self with respect to the

social context (social integration, social contribution), the evaluation of other people (social acceptance), and the evaluation of the society (social coherence, social actualisation).

For undergraduates, Social well-being may create the foundations for healthy behaviour and educational attainment. It may also help prevent behavioural problems (including substance misuse) and mental health problems. Social well-being provides personal competencies (such as emotional resilience, self-esteem & interpersonal skills) that help to protect against risks relating to social disadvantage, family disruption and other adversity in life (NICE, 2013). Such competencies provide building blocks for personal development which will enable undergraduates/young people to take advantage of life chances (Humphrey, Yoon, Kumar, Lestou, Kitadono, Roberts & Riddoch, 2010). That notwithstanding, it is common fact that poor social well-being predicts a range of negative outcomes in adolescence and adulthood.

A range of factors (such as civic engagement) related to individual and environmental characteristics have been associated with the promotion of social well-being in undergraduates (Bernard, Stephanou & Urbach 2007). Hence, **one variable of primary interest in this study is civic engagement.** **Civic engagement** involves working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2013). Over the past 20 years, social participation among young people (undergraduates) has gained increasing attention in the scientific literature, as well as among policy makers. Following this assertion, this study will investigate the extent

of civic engagement among undergraduates in Nigeria. Undergraduates' active involvement in their community and citizenship behaviours are implicitly considered indicators of positive youth development and well-being, and their promotion has become a central aim of youth policies in different countries. Therefore, if civic engagement is key to attaining successful social well-being of the youths in the present global world, then there is need for Nigeria to promote same among her youths. However, far less attention has been devoted to the empirical test of such assumptions (Cicognani, Pirini, Keyes, Joshanloo, Rostami & Nosratabadi 2008).

Many studies have found that civic engagement is associated with positive developmental outcomes (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec 1998; Larson, [Wang, Bowen, McCormick, Teri, Crane & Kukull](#) 2006; Ludden, 2011; Schmidt, Loyens, van Gog, & Paas 2007). How this play a role on the youths is paramount to this study. Despite recent calls for a closer investigation on how engaging in civic activities potentially can impact the lives of undergraduates/young people who have the greatest need, few studies have examined the impact or role of civic engagement for social well-being of young people at all levels. Moreover, researchers have pointed out that the civic opportunity gap exists well before the young adult years (Kahne & Middaugh 2009).

Researchers have reported that changes in social well-being are closely tied to one's personality, with positive changes in one corresponding to similar changes in the other (Bergman & Magnusson 1997). With this, social well-being is related to an individual's connectedness to the larger community and the belief that he or she can contribute to society's growth. Remarkably, Psychologists have continually maintained that the aim of Big-Five assessment approaches is to locate people

on underlying trait continua as reliably as possible (Shadel & Cervone, 1993). For example, a person who scores high in extroversion may be regarded as highly outgoing, friendly and active. Those who score high in conscientiousness are seen as organized, responsible and hardworking etc. An analysis of the responses in researches revealed that individual social well-being is linked to personality over time, is a strong predictor of social well-being, and is recognized as people's levels of positive versus negative emotion and their satisfaction with life (Bergman & Magnusson, 1997; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Social well-being is consistently associated with all Big Five factors (McCrae & Costa, 1991). This study, also aims at addressing the problem of whether the five dimensions of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) would predict social wellbeing among undergraduates or among undergraduates in Nigeria.

Moving away from the contributions of civic engagement and personality to social wellbeing, extant research suggests that the involvement in more socially accepted highrisk activities such as high-risk sports may also serve an escape strategy to cope with negative effects for some individuals (Castanier, Christine & Woodman, 2010). This may be interpreted to mean that humans have evolved through taking risks. In fact, most human actions can be conceptualized as containing an element of risk. Most studies investigating individual differences in the propensity for risk taking have focused on sensation seeking (Ferrando & Chico, 2001; Zuckerman, 2007). Recent research suggests that risk-taking behaviours can serve many different goals or functions in addition to the management of physiological arousal states (Cooper, Agocha & Sheldon, 2000). This study

will examine how this works for youths especially the Nigerian undergraduates who form the focus of this study.

Zuckerman (1994) suggested that sensation seekers display a willingness to take risks in order to experience the sensation rewards of “sensation-seeking activities” such as drug use, dangerous driving, and risky sports. These traits can be partitioned into four dimensions: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility (Zuckerman, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978).

Sensation seeking individuals tend to engage in behaviours that increase the amount of stimulation they experience. Such behaviours (e.g., interest in stimulating occupations, drug use, driving recklessly, etc.) involve seeking out arousal. The present study focuses on finding the role of civic engagement, personality and sensation seeking in social wellbeing of undergraduates. If the general statement that has existed today in our present day Nigeria and the world at large that the youths (undergraduates) are the leaders as well as the pioneers of future is true, then there is need to examine the social wellbeing of undergraduates in carrying out patriotic duties as future leaders. Our undergraduates at all levels receive series of trainings that qualify them as future leaders and engineers of development; it is therefore worthwhile to investigate some factors (civic engagement, personality and sensation seeking) that might play key roles in making them better leaders and citizens.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested in this study.

1. Civic engagement would statistically significantly predict social well-being of undergraduates.

2. The five dimensions of personality (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness Personality) would significantly predict social well-being of undergraduates.

3. Sensation seeking would statistically significantly predict social well-being of undergraduates.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Four hundred and fifty one (451) undergraduates participated in the study. They comprised two hundred and forty nine males (249) and two hundred and two females (202). Participant's age ranged from 16 years to 35 years with a mean age of 22.07. Participants were drawn from four faculties of University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State through simple random sampling technique. Selection of the faculties was done using table of numbers random sampling technique. The faculties were Education, Social Sciences, Business Administration and Arts.

#### **Instruments:**

The Social Well-being Scale by Keyes (1998) was used to measure social well-being. The scale includes 33 items measuring social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualisation. It is scored on a 7-point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. In this research, only the overall score of social well-being will be considered. Keyes reported a Cronbach alpha of .90 for the total scale using the Italian sample and .88 using American and Iranian samples. In a validation study for the present research using undergraduate students from university of Nigeria, Nsukka, the researchers obtained a Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability of 0.72.

The Civic Engagement Scale developed by Doolittle and Faul (2013) has been created to measure two specific aspects of engagement: attitudes and engagement behaviours.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the 8 items of the attitude dimension and to rate their level of participation as *never* to *always* on the behaviour dimension of the scale. Participants' level of agreement was measurement on a 7-point Likert (1932) scale (1 = *disagree*, and 7 = *agree*) and their level of participation was also measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, and 7 = *always*). The developers reported that attitude component with eight items had a Cronbach's alpha level of .91. The behaviour component with six items had a Cronbach's alpha level of .85. The strongest attitude items were "I am committed to serve in my community" and "I believe that all citizens have a responsibility to their community." The strongest behaviour items were "I help members of my community" and "I stay informed of events in my community." In a validation study for the present research using undergraduate students from university of Nigeria, Nsukka, the researchers obtained a general Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.83.

The 44-item Big Five Personality inventory developed by John, Donahue and Kentle (1990) was adopted to assess personality from five distinct dimensions: Extraversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Neuroticism (8 items) and Openness to experience (10 items). According to Omoluabi (2002), BFI was adapted for the use of professionals in Nigeria after several years of research at re-standardizing it, in order to enhance its suitability and relevance for Nigerians. John, Donahue & Kentle (1991) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability of .80 and a 3 month test retest reliability of .85 for the BFI. The authors also reported mean convergent

validity coefficients of .75 and .85 with the Big five Instruments authored by Costa & McCrae (1992) and Golberg (1992) respectively. Using a Nigerian sample, Umeh (2004) obtained a reliability coefficient of .77 indicating an evidence of BFI's cross-cultural validity. Sample items in the BFI includes I see myself as: Someone who is full of energy (extraversion), someone who has a forgiving nature (agreeableness); someone who is a reliable worker (conscientiousness); someone who gets nervous easily (neuroticism); someone who is inventive (openness to experience).

The Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking Scale was developed by Arnett (1993). The scale has 20 items with two subscales of 10 items each, namely intensity and novelty. For each item, participants indicated the extent to which the item describe them (1 = Describe me very well, 2 = **Describe me somewhat**, 3 = **Does not describe me very well**, 4 = **Does not describe me at all**). Six of the items were worded negatively in order to avoid affirmation bias (DeVellis, 1991). Internal reliabilities for the total scale have been found to range from 0.83 to 0.86. In a validation study for the present research using undergraduate students from university of Nigeria, Nsukka, the researchers obtained a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.65.

### Procedure

The researchers got permission from the class representatives of the classes that were used for the study. Afterwards, the researchers created rapport with the participants before administering the questionnaires. Participants were equally assured that their responses will be treated with confidentiality. And that participation in the study was voluntary. The questionnaires were administered with the help of a research assistant. The questionnaires were collected back from the participants after they

were filled. One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were distributed in each faculty, making a total of four hundred and eighty (480) questionnaires. After the questionnaires were collected back, they were cross checked. Out of four hundred and eighty (480) questionnaires distributed, only four hundred and sixty five (465) questionnaires were returned. After cross checking the questionnaires, only four hundred and fifty one (451) questionnaires were found to be properly filled and were used for data analysis.

**Design/statistics:** The design is cross-sectional design. Analysis of data was done using step wise Multiple Regression. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was employed for the data analyses.

**Results**

The data obtained from respondents were analyzed by computing the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Before analyses were performed, data were crosschecked for abnormalities. Specifically, data were checked for outliers and errors in coding. No error was found. Afterwards, data were analyzed with the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences Version 20. To test the hypotheses Step Wise Multiple Regression was conducted in which social well-being was the dependent variable.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations for civic engagement, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness, sensation seeking on social well being.

Variable	M	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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SD

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Civic Engagement	73.5						
Extraversion	75	0.43***					
Agreeableness	28.6	4.79	0.34***				
Conscientiousness	30.2	5.26	0.27***				
Neuroticism	32.9	6.55	0.27***				
Openness	37.3	6.55	0.40***				
Sensation Seeking	49.1	7.12	-0.01				
Social Well Being	139.89	18.74	0.34***	0.11*	0.15**	0.14**	0.05

significantly related to social wellbeing. Note. N = 451, \* = p < .05 (two-tailed), \*\* = p < .01 (two-tailed), \*\*\* = p < .001 (two-tailed).

**Table 2: Step Wise Multiple Regression predicting social well being from civic engagement, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness, sensation seeking on social well being.**

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Civic Engagement	.33*	.45*	.35*
Extraversion		-.28	-.07
Agreeableness		-.17	-.04
Conscientiousness		-.02	-.01
Neuroticism			
Openness			
Sensation Seeking			

33% Adjusted  $R^2$  variance  $R^2$  in .12\* $p$ the \*\*< .001), however making .12.13prediction .12.14 of social wellbeing ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .13$ \*\*\* unique  $\Delta F$  and statistically 56.91\*\*\* .86 significant 1.20 positive

contribution Note. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* = to  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* = the  $p < .001$ prediction of social wellbeing ( $AR^2 = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The five dimensions of personality; extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness were entered in step 2.

Regression coefficient indicated that they were not significant predictors of social wellbeing. Similarly, sensation seeking was entered in step 3. Regression coefficient indicated that sensation seeking is not a significant predictor of social wellbeing.

## Discussion

This study seeks to provide solution to the problem of whether civic engagement, personality and sensation seeking predicted social well-being of undergraduates. The result of the findings showed that civic engagement is

a significant positive predictor of social wellbeing. This therefore confirmed the first hypothesis that civic engagement will play a significant role on the social well-being of undergraduates was confirmed. The finding not only interesting, but is consistent with previous empirical research findings (Cicognani, Pirini, Keyes, Joshanloo, Rostami, & Nosratabadi, 2008; Albanesi, Cicognani, Zani., & Balsano 2005) indicating that civic participation and sense of community contributed to high levels of social well-being. And that a developmental disadvantage awaits non-civically engaged youths, especially those growing up in communities deficient in assets which promote positive development. Therefore, communities which provide opportunities for civic engagement foster positive youth development and well-being.

Furthermore, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement observes that undergraduates who are involved in civic activities devote significant energy to academics, spend time on campus, participate actively in student organizations and activities, and interact often with faculty. Therefore, when youths are trained to always embrace civic activities despite how small, patriotically, they learn how to be good leaders which is what our society needs to be better.

Contrary to the first finding, the finding of the study shows that the five dimensions of personality (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) personality did not significantly predict social well-being of undergraduates. Hence, the second hypothesis that extraversion personality will play a significant role on the social well-being of undergraduates was not confirmed. This finding is consistent with the previous empirical research findings of Jin (2010) which indicated that the influence of personality on the emotional component of psychological well-being is pan cultural, whereas the influence of personality on the cognitive component of psychological wellbeing is moderated by different cultures. The finding is inconsistent with previous findings (e.g [Marzuki](#) 2013; [Hill](#), [Turiano](#), [Mroczek](#), and [Roberts](#) 2012; Shigehiro and Ulrich 2010) showing that extraversion specifically represent strong predictor of subjective wellbeing; *positively, related to well-being and that* initial levels of social well-being correlated positively with initial standing on extraversion, while *changes* in social well-being over time coincided with *changes* on personality traits like extraversion, in the same directions. Also, as stated by researchers the findings provide broad support that trait development and social well-being development coincide during adulthood. Similarly, an analysis of the responses in

researches revealed that individual social well-being is linked to personality over time, is a strong predictor of social well-being, and is recognized as people's levels of positive versus negative emotion and their satisfaction with life (Bergman & Magnusson, 1997; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998).

The result of the study also showed that sensation seeking is not a significant predictor of social well-being. Therefore, the last hypothesis which stated that sensation seeking will play a significant role on the social wellbeing of undergraduates was not confirmed. The present finding is consistent with previous empirical research findings (Roth 2003; Stephenson, Hoyle, Palmgreen & Slater 2003) showing that sensation seeking proved to be unaffected by social desirability. Intensity- a dimension of sensation seeking is in addition to achievement motivation, a significant predictor of the intention of changing workplace. Similarly, the dimensions of sensation seeking intensity and novelty correlated with a series of risk and protective factors as well as tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use.

As stated by Magid, MacLean, and Craig (2004) sensation seeking and impulsivity were associated with alcohol use and problems through different mediational pathways.

*Sensation seeking theory maintains that individuals seek activities and experiences that will gratify their need for sensation.* However, an individual's values often come into play when deciding whether or not to act upon the urge to satisfy their need for sensation regardless of the level of sensation seeking, thus satisfying the free will component of the ontological assumption (Ferrando, & Chico 2001). This finding implies that sensation seekers other than engaging in sensation seeking to achieve wellbeing, individuals who

engage in sensation seeking do that for personal gratification of risk behaviours, living hard life etc. Also, the finding implies that most sensation seekers do not engage in it for new discoveries which ought to be source of social wellbeing.

The findings of this research have practical implications. Civic engagement is a significant predictor of social well-being. The implication of this finding is that getting involved in different civic activities at different levels within the society makes one's life balance and self-fulfilling, thus giving more meaning to the individual's life as well as becoming inherently rewarding. Also, since civic engagement is linked to patriotism, and only patriotic individuals can form the best leaders or leadership style needed to make our society better; civic engagement is a promising factor in forming the best leadership for our society. Thus, only individuals with patriotic minds and are willing are needed to change our society for the best. This research therefore advocates for serious and consistent orientation on the need to engage in civic duties other than just concentrating on paid duties, or even showing less concern attitudes. This orientation is particularly important because the world at large will be better when people learn to achieve life fulfillments through civic duties; as well as achieving comfortable society for all. More so, engaging in civic activities encourages the youth- future leaders to imbibe spirit of patriotism which make best form of leadership.

Sensation seeking did not predict social wellbeing. This finding introduces another practical implication. By assumption, people think that individuals who have high sensation seeking abilities will achieve social well-being. The present empirical study have shown that sensation seekers rather than trying to achieve social well-being instead engage in it as a



compensatory self-gratification. Therefore, the present study serves as a clarion call to the society, government at all levels and health related agencies as well as security/intelligence to look into this issue. This is particularly so because sensation seeking has been linked to unhealthy life styles such as taking of hard drugs.

However important, the findings might be, the study has some limitations. Some previous researches have continually shown that at least one or two of the personality dimensions are strong predictors of social wellbeing. The finding of this study is in opposite. None of the five dimensions of personality was found to be a predictor of social well among undergraduates. This probably could be as a result of the choice of only one particular university or homogeneity in sampling/training. The participants might be of a particular single character in filling questionnaires. However, future studies on social well-being among Nigerians, should dedicate effort in investigating the moderating or mediating roles of variables like ethnic groups, religion and gender and other variables like moral reasoning, motivational preference, and self-efficacy; while involving participants of different regions.

### Summary and Conclusion

It is common fact that poor social and emotional well-being predicts a range of negative outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. Over the past 20 years, social participation among undergraduates/young people has gained increasing attention in the scientific literature, as well as among policy makers. Interestingly however, young people's active involvement in their community and citizenship behaviours are implicitly considered indicators of positive youth development and well-being, and their promotion has become a central aim of youth

policies in different countries; therefore, if civic engagement is key to attaining successful social well-being of the youths in the present global world, then there is need for Nigeria to promote same among her youths. Finally, since the finding showed that civic engagement is important in achieving social wellbeing, the study therefore advocates for serious and consistent orientation on the need to engage in civic duties other than just concentrating on paid duties, or even showing less concern attitudes; especially as it raises individuals of good leadership quality

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