

SOCIAL WELL-BEING IN GEN Z INDIVIDUALS: EXAMINING THE CORRELATION WITH SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

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Abstract

Generation Z represents individuals born in the era of growing digital innovations, and they comprise most of the world's population. This study explored the correlation between this cohort's self-esteem, social support, and social well-being. Two hundred and twenty undergraduates enrolled in four public tertiary institutions in River State, Nigeria, were recruited. The male and female students were conveniently pooled from different departments in the selected institutions. The respondents completed a self-report measure of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and The Social Well-being Scale. A Pearson moment model was computed to test the correlations among the study variables. The results indicated that self-esteem ($r = .44, p < .01$) and social support ($r = .69, p < .001$) positively correlated with social well-being in Gen Z. The study concludes that self-esteem and social support are essential determinants of social well-being in the Gen Z. The result has implications for enhancing the social well-being in younger individuals.

Keywords: social well-being, self-esteem, social support, Gen Z

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is witnessing a tremendous increase in social-related issues, especially among younger individuals. Generation Z individuals are born in a time of rising technological innovation. Gen Z represents a significant proportion of the world's population and differs significantly from earlier generations. Predominantly, these cohorts constitute the predominant majority of the incoming workforce. However, Gen Z faced a unique set of social-driven circumstances that could impact their well-being. Numerous studies have underscored the trend of mental health issues and well-being in the younger generations (Broglia et al., 2021; Cage et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2020; Kosharnaya & Korzh, 2020; López et al., 2021; Moliner et al., 2021; Schwab et al., 2022; Sining et al., 2022). Similarly, disparate studies have accentuated the importance of mental health in this group, with well-being being an essential component in academic performance. Indeed, the social context is characterized by increasing social issues in varying contexts. In particular, Gen Z is trapped in the growing social challenges experienced in every society. The concern for the trend has triggered the quest for developing programs and research to address the well-being of young individuals. Thus, research on social well-being has increased considerably (Alkire et al., 2020). More so, research has indicated that various variables contribute significantly to the variations in the social well-being of individuals (McIntosh et al., 2022; Oguntayo et al., 2020).

Research in social well-being in childhood through the stages of early adulthood, as a holistic concept, is still in its early stages (Mowat, 2019; Spratt, 2016). However, many more hardly defined concepts under the broader banner of 'social well-being' have been studied for decades (Sutherland & Adams, 2019). The psychological phenomenon of well-being is a general term for the subjective state of a person or group, including their social, economic, psychological, spiritual, or medical situation. The concept of well-being has been categorized from the standpoint of the self, thus referring to an individual. Therefore, it is most often discussed as subjective well-being. In this viewpoint, well-being tends to be regarded as something that occurs within an individual (Cynthia et al., 2004). It encompasses intertwined individual, connective, and environmental elements that continually interact across the lifespan (Usca et al., 2020).

Well-being has also been considered a multidimensional set of psychological constructs not reducible to a single facet (Cronin De Chavez et al., 2005; Lomas, 2015). Well-being comprised not only satisfaction with life, a cognitive appraisal of one's life, but positive emotions and psychological resources, thoughts of social dissimilarity, deprivation, and political liberations. For example, Morrison et al. (2011) found that people tend to use proximate factors, such as one's job, health, or standard of living to judge their well-being when overall living conditions are satisfactory or when individualism is salient. In contrast, individuals are more likely to use perceived societal success to evaluate life satisfaction when living conditions are difficult or when collectivist norms form part of their culture. This suggests additional dimensions are needed to emphasize well-being appraisals, preferably through consensus founded on empirical evidence proffered by the global academic community. This approach also means capturing the diverse influences overlooked in existing measures and matter to individuals and societies.

Accordingly, Keyes and Lopez (2002) noted that well-being comprises five distinct social scopes: social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration. In this sense, social acceptance entails accepting others as they are. Social actualization means an acceptable positive comfort level with the sociocultural environment. Social contribution is the perception of a positive contribution to society. Social coherence denotes the comprehensiveness of the socio-world, while social integration encompasses the feeling of a community member. Furthermore, researchers have argued that well-being could be categorized within five dimensions: physical well-being, material well-being, social well-being, emotional well-being, and development and activity. In young people, the physical dimension of well-being refers to health position, participation in physical exercise, and embracing healthy behaviors (Statham & Chase, 2010). The following indicators categorize physical well-being: self-satisfaction, proper utilization of leisure time, strength and joy in life, pleasant fatigue, pleasure, ability to concentrate and react adequately, and a clean and well-groomed body (Frank, 2004). Physical stability and goodness indicators include several aspects, such as harmony and liberation, vitality and joy in life, concentration and response skills, and cleanliness (Wydra, 2014).

The social dimension of young people's well-being refers to the quality of their social lives (Kruger, 2011), including family and peer relationships and social life's overall perception (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Material resources ensure proper care and support for young people, making effective learning and adequate development possible. Govindasamy et al. (2020) suggested that self-acceptance, belonging, autonomy, positive relations, environmental mastery, and purpose in life are significant dimensions that potentially characterize well-being. Research in the diversity of well-being defines its multidimensionality as the concurrent accomplishment of outcomes in five dimensions: material well-being, health status, personal activities, social connections/relationships, and economic security (Mitra et al., 2020).

In recent times, the social problems experienced by young people have become a unique aspect of our daily living and contemporary society. Generation Z is considered to be at a critical stage of their lives. As members of the young generation, they tend to adopt unhealthy behaviors that can adversely impact their health (Al-Qahtani, 2019). Gen Zs' well-being results from their interaction with their environment, the material resources they have access to, and students' responses to external opportunities and stress factors. High stress, burnout, and symptoms of poor mental health have been well-known among undergraduates for several years. Indeed, many schools have formal and informal mechanisms to offer support and treatment where needed, though this varies tremendously across cultures (Brooker & Vu, 2020).

Social well-being describes essential aspects of human functioning, including academic performance, positive relationships, competence, meaning, and purpose (Diener et al., 2010). The concept of social well-being is subjective, relating to an individual's perceptual outcome. A growing body of evidence shows that well-being is essential to education and overall success. Indeed, the above statement could be considered based on why education is about much more than academic outcomes. Individuals with high levels of well-being tend to have better academic and life outcomes in school and beyond. For example, Gen Z in Nigeria encounters peculiar modern-day social challenges relating to social class, income inequalities, poverty, insecurity, and political instability, directly impacting their mental health and well-being (Esan et al., 2019). As such, researchers need clear empirical evidence of the aspects of the social variables contributing to this cohort's well-being. Indeed, the present study is aimed to investigate self-esteem and social support as scarcely explored psychological variables that could account for the variation in social well-being among Gen Z individuals.

Self-esteem describes an individual's perceptions of their life quality which can involve cognitive evaluations (i.e., life satisfaction) and emotional reactions (i.e., positive affect). Self-esteem, equally, is a significant individual factor and generally refers to a person's evaluation of the self (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). In several studies, self-esteem strongly predicts social well-being (Simsek, 2013; Zhao et al., 2014). Low self-esteem is related to negative psychological consequences such as anxiety (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). In psychology, self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of their worth. It is a judgment of oneself and an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself (for example, "I am competent," "I am worthy"), as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Hewitt, 2012). Accordingly, Smith and Mackie (2007) described self-esteem as thoughts relative to the self, thus, reflecting a positive or negative evaluation of the self and how we feel about it.

Self-esteem is based on the conception of one's worthiness, which is determined by self-perceptions and interpretations of feedback from significant others. A high level of self-esteem is commonly associated with social well-being and happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003). Researchers have demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between different agents of well-being and self-esteem among adolescents (Ebru & Cakarb, 2010). However, social well-being appears to be a context-bound phenomenon (Colenberg et al., 2020). In this case, research attempting to identify the relevant determinants of social well-being among Gen Z remains scarce. The present study examined the variations in social well-being among Gen Z based on self-esteem.

Hypothesis 1: *Self-esteem would positively correlate with the social well-being of Gen Z.*

There is some evidence that intimate relationships and social connections are crucial to one's health and happiness. (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Poots & Cassidy, 2020). In particular, those with strong bonds with their peers are more likely to experience happiness and success. (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gerson, 2018). People's sense of who they are and how the world works is influenced by the amount of social support they receive. Having few close friends or family members predicts an early death more than any other lifestyle factor studied, including smoking or lack of exercise (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). The academic literature abundantly documented the relationship between social support and social well-being. It assists individuals in reducing their stress levels and acts as a buffer for those facing stressful situations.

The presence of social support among adolescents may act as a protective factor and play an essential part in the adolescents' overall social well-being (Emadpoor et al., 2016). Therefore, the support they receive from their communities provides the capacity for adolescents' later adulthood social well-being (Ratelle et al., 2013; Tian et al., 2013). Social support means feeling like other people care about you and having a group of friends you can count on in everyday situations and times of crisis. For instance, perceived support from friends, family, and significant others increases the chance for improved well-being. Social support entails how often people help each other (Santini et al., 2015), which can be understood as the subjective feeling of being supported (Santini et al., 2015). Additionally, the type of support can be emotional, instrumental, evaluative, and informative.

According to studies, when people feel they have the support of their peers, they are more likely to feel good about themselves and have a more positive outlook on life (Chu et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2014; Thoits, 2011). Several facets of hedonic well-being can be foreseen by examining how people rate their own and others' social support (life satisfaction, positive and negative effects) (Siedlecki et al., 2014). Also, perceived social support mediates the relationship between stress and social well-being (Poots & Cassidy, 2020). Evidence connects levels of perceived social support to other indicators of happiness. Perceived social support has been shown to have either no effect on well-being by some researchers or a negative effect by others (Lakey et al., 2010; Lepore et al., 2008). How social support and well-being are conceptualized and measured can have significant consequences (Siedlecki et al., 2014). Since Gen Z represent socially involved individuals, and research shows that social support moderate well-being, it is crucial to assess how young people's perception of their support from others influences their social well-being.

Hypothesis 2: *Social support will significantly correlate with the social well-being of Gen Z.*

Method

Participants

The participants for the present study were randomly selected from tertiary institutions in the River State of Nigeria. The participants comprised males and females with no age, sociocultural or economic disparities. However, the samples were students enrolled in various academic disciplines and all years of study in the selected institutions. The researcher obtained

permission from the departmental authorities, including the representatives of the departments used for the study. In total, the researcher approached 238 male and female undergraduates between December 2022 and February 2023 and asked whether they were current students of the institutions. Those who identified themselves as current students of the institutions were considered qualified for the study. These students (238) were then asked to participate in a survey to understand their social well-being and its predicting factors. In total, 228 consented to participate and were thus handed a questionnaire. In the end, only adequately completed questionnaires (i.e., 220) were subjected to statistical analysis.

Measures

The social well-being scale by Keyes (1998) measured social well-being. The scale includes 33 items measuring social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence, and social actualization. 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 was considered. Keyes (1998) reported a Cronbach alpha of .90 for the total scale using the Italian sample and .88 using the American and Iranian samples. The scale has been modified, validated, and previously used in the Nigerian context, and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained (Effiong et al., 2017). Thus, the present study adopted the modified version of the scale.

Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, initially developed by Rosenberg (1965), which has ten items scored on a four-point Likert scale (0 to 3) ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly. Five of the scale's items are reversely coded (strongly, agree to agree strongly). The higher the score, the greater the respondent's self-esteem perspective. Satisfactory validity and reliability have been described among Nigerian samples by numerous researchers (Adegunju et al., 2017; Aremu et al., 2019; Mustapha & Odediran, 2019).

The multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) is quantitatively evaluating an individual's perception of the social support obtained from three principal avenues, namely: Family, consisting of items 3, 4, 8, and 11; Friends, consisting of items 6, 7, 9, and 12; and Significant others, consisting of items 1, 2, 5, and 10 (Zimet et al., 1988). The scale is a subjectively completed brief instrument composed of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The total score ranges from 12 to 84, with higher scores reflecting more excellent perceived social support. The scale has been previously validated and used on Nigerian samples (e.g., Akosile et al., 2018; Aliche et al., 2020; Aloba et al., 2019; Eze et al., 2021; Folayan et al., 2020; Mohammad et al., 2015; Nwoke et al., 2017; Ogunbajo et al., 2020; Vincent-Onabajo et al., 2015; 2016)

Design/statistics

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design. The rationale for adopting the design is that it allows researchers to collect data from numerous individuals at a single point in time. Also, the study adopted simple linear regression as the statistical tool for data analysis because the model provides the platform for researchers to estimate the relationship between two variables.

Ethical considerations

The researcher tried to address some ethical issues during the study period. For all prospective respondents, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study orally to them. It was also clearly stated, orally and through a letter accompanying the questionnaire, that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Finally, the respondents were informed they could withdraw from the study without penalty.

Result

The researcher conducted preliminary analyses on the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The internal consistency reliability was assessed based on Cronbach's alpha. Correlations are offered here to test whether the independent variable was related (i.e., a sign of multicollinearity), which may warrant combining the scores of the variables to form a composite score.

Table 1 shows the variables' means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Self-esteem	2.89	0.31	.11***		
2. Social support	2.69	0.33	.33**	.34**	
3. Social well-being	0.38	0.49	.44**	.69**	.12***

Note. *N* = 220, * = *p* < .05(two-tailed), ** = *p* < .01 (two-tailed), *** = *p* < .001 (two-tailed).

A Pearson moment model was computed to test the correlations among the study variables. The analysis indicated no threat of multicollinearity. The results in Table 1 above indicate that self-esteem (*r* = .44, *p* < .01) is positively correlated with social well-being in GenZ. Thus, the result affirms the first assumption (*H*¹). Furthermore, the result demonstrated a positive between social support and social well-being in the cohort (*r* = .69, *p* < .001).

Discussion

This study investigated the correlation between self-esteem, social support, and social well-being in a cohort of Gen Z. Two hundred and twenty respondents completed the study's instrument. The result of the Pearson moment correlation

model showed that self-esteem statistically significantly correlated with the social well-being of undergraduates. Hence, the hypothesis that self-esteem would positively correlate with the social well-being of undergraduates was confirmed. This means that high or low self-esteem influences an individual's well-being. In other words, the finding entails that better social well-being is significantly related to more positive and less negative self-esteem. This reflects the perception that improved self-esteem leads to enhanced social well-being. This finding is consistent with the previous empirical research findings (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018; Detrie & Lease, 2007; Koch, 2013), which indicated that self-esteem is a positive determinant of well-being. The positive association between self-esteem and well-being aligns with previous findings (Cai et al., 2009; Robins et al., 2001), showing that people high in self-esteem tend to report more vital life satisfaction, positive affect, meaning in life, and subjective vitality.

The result indicated a relationship between social support and social well-being. This means that support from different sources, including the family domain, might potentiate the experience of positive social well-being in Gen Z. The existence of high social support for this group helps them to be able to manage their social interaction and makes it an experience for sustainable personal growth and development. This finding is consistent with previous empirical research findings (Adyani et al., 2019; Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018; Ekas et al., 2010; Ermer & Proulx, 2020; Karademas, 2006; Saputra & Setyo Palupi, 2020; Seagle et al., 2021; Thomas, 2010; Wang et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020) indicating that social aid and positive contributions from the community is an essential determinant of social well-being. Thus, unhealthy social comfort awaits those deprived of support from their significant others, especially those growing up in communities deficient in assets that promote social support. Thus, a social environment that provides opportunities for support to young people, especially undergraduates, fosters positive social well-being.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to ascertain the correlation between self-esteem, social support, and social well-being among generation Z individuals. The result established a positive relationship between self-esteem, social support, and social well-being. Thus, it is revealed that self-esteem and social support are significant predictors of social well-being. The current study's finding offers an additional and exciting insight into the role of these variables on the well-being of young people in Nigeria. Consequently, a study of this nature always poses inherent limitations that are needed to be reported. Thus, the outcome of the present study must be interpreted in light of these limitations. For instance, the study adopted a cross-sectional design such that the role of social support on social well-being was tested in only one direction. Thus, the mechanism through which the independent variable interacts with the dependent variable remains unclear. Also, data for the study was based on only self-report measures. Hence, raising the issue of common method variance. Nonetheless, the findings of the study call for future research to investigate the role of other potential prevailing variables, including but not limited to educational level, academic self-efficacy, economic status, and social relationships on the social well-being of the undergraduates in a more representative sample of not just university students but also secondary school students. The study has implications for developing adequate social well-being of generation Z individuals.

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