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INFLUENCE OF AGENCY AND COMMUNION ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of agency and communion on the psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri Municipal. Two hundred and fifty (250) participants comprising 106 males and 144 females were selected through convenience sampling technique from schools and residential areas in Owerri municipal Imo state. Their ages ranged from 18-30 years, with a mean age of 22.37 years. The participants were administered with the Index of Agency and Communion scale (IAC), developed by the researcher and Psychological Wellbeing scale (PWB), constructed by Ryff (1989). Three hypotheses were postulated and tested. Cross-sectional survey design and 2-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were adopted as the design and statistic respectively. Results showed that there is a significant influence of agency on psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal and that communion has no significant influence on psychological wellbeing. It also found that agency and communion has a significant interaction effect on psychological wellbeing. It is therefore recommended that individuals reinforce and develop their agentic and communal tendencies and traits in other to improve their psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: *agency, communion, interpersonal motives, psychological wellbeing, wellness.*

INTRODUCTION

Psychological wellbeing is important to every individual on the surface of the earth because it has a lot to do with that individual's subjective wellbeing; in that, it is central to life satisfaction, influences an individual's quality of life and determines whether or not the individual will be happy. Many factors can adversely affect this sense of wellbeing and they include life stresses and cataclysms and an individual's appraisal of them.

However, central to this is the extent of control and power an individual exerts in life which has a lot to do with an individual's ability to carve a niche for himself. This is because individuals feel a sense of esteem when they are able to influence other people and feel a sense of satisfaction from their profession. More so, psychological wellbeing may also be hampered by a person's skew in belongingness, affiliation and sense of community which come from social interaction and social acceptance. This is why the researcher intend to study the influence of agency and communion on the psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri Municipal. The researcher wants to see whether the presence or absence

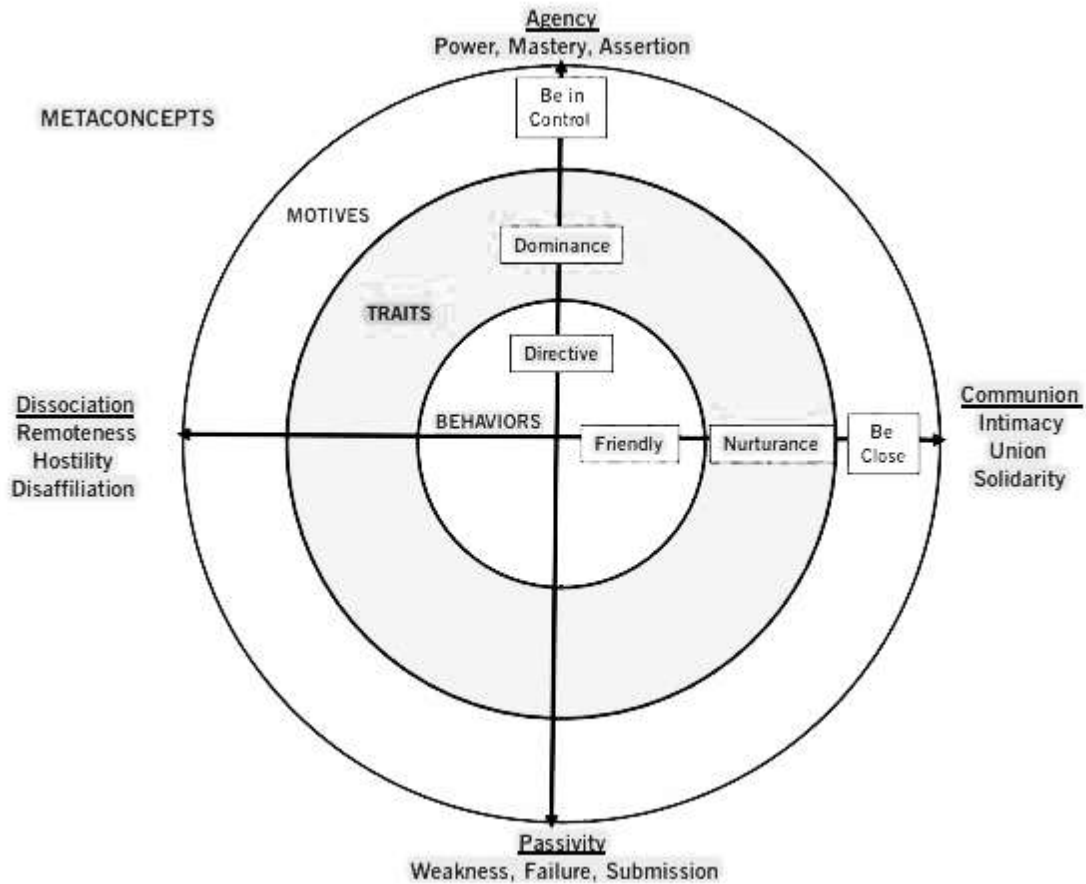
of this variable can increase or decrease the psychological wellbeing of young people. Also, this study is motivated by the void in current research in this area both in Nigeria and in Africa.

Agency and communion is like a superstructure to a substructure. Pincus, Lukowitsky & Wright (2010: 526) put it succinctly in the third assumption of the interpersonal tradition as follows “agency and communion provide an integrative meta-structure for conceptualizing interpersonal situations”. They went on to assert that the constructs have power to explicate both normal and pathological interpersonal motives, traits, and behaviours (Pincus *et al.*, 2010: 526). However, our interest in the work bothers on using this explanatory paradigm to evaluate and describe normality which is otherwise termed psychological wellbeing. The concepts of agency and communion was introduced by Bakan (1966). However It was Wiggins’s (1991, 1997a, 2003) that expanded the interpersonal paradigm to accommodate these concepts. Agency is defined as the “condition of being a differentiated individual that it is manifested in strivings for power mastery and assertion which can enhance and protect one’s differentiation while communion refers to the condition of being part of a larger social or spiritual entity, and is manifested in strivings for intimacy, union, and solidarity with the larger entity” (Pincus *et al.*, 2010:528). Agentic and communal traits entail lasting configurations of behaving, perceiving, feeling, and thinking that are changeable in nature, and that describe the interpersonal tendencies of an individual accumulated across relationships, time and place (Locke,2006; Pincus & Gurtman, 2006). The usefulness of agency and communion draws from the proposition of the interpersonal tradition in personality which views the concepts as the fundamental meta-concepts of personality, providing a superordinate structure for conceptualizing interpersonal situations (Pincus *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, Heck and Pincus (2010) and Moskowitz, (1994; 2005: 528) argued that explicatory systems abstracted from agency and communion can be utilized in the understanding, description and measurement of interpersonal behaviours and traits. Also, Markey, Funder & Ozer (2003) demonstrated that explicatory systems developed from agency and communion can be adequately used to objectively describe ongoing interactions between two or more close interactants and to interpersonal situations within the mind evoked through mental representation, perception, fantasy, and memory (Heck & Pincus, 2001; Moskowitz, 1994, 2005: 528).

Below is a rendition of the interpersonal circumplex showing agency on the vertical pole and communion on the horizontal axis.

Figure 1: Agency and communion; metaconcepts for the integration of interpersonal



motives, dispositions, and behaviours.

Source: Pincus, Lukowiksy & Wright (2010 :529).

Individuals who exist at the extreme positive pole of this diagram on agency possess more power, mastery and assertion. They exist at the level of dominance and have a greater tendency to direct others. Thus, they are assumed to be more independent, and can take care of themselves, think for themselves; and do not have a strong need to conform. They worry less about what others think of them and are able to resist social pressures to think and act in ways that please others. They regulate their behaviour and evaluate themselves by personal standards. Individuals with high level of mastery have the tendency to excel in their chosen profession have the resources and mental capacity to adjust to problems and are not overwhelmed by stress. Power means the ability to control others, while mastery is the degree to which one feels competent to meet the demands of any situation. Assertion

entails possession of self-confidence and hence the capacity to express feelings, thoughts and beliefs without inhibition.

People who operate at the positive pole of communion possess intimacy, union, and solidarity. They are assumed to be friendlier and can be in more positive relationship with others. They are more concerned about the welfare of others and are capable of showing empathy and understanding of the reciprocal nature of human relationships. They feel connected, respected and loved, and can share aspects of their lives with others. As a result of adequate levels of union, intimacy and solidarity experienced by these individuals they are more likely to be psychologically healthy and secure than the individuals at the negative pole. The ones at the negative pole are more likely to experience, dissociation, remoteness, hostility, disaffiliation and are likely to have poor relationships. They often feel unappreciated, unloved, rejected, or misunderstood. They tend to feel insecure and sometimes alone or distant from others. Individuals who possess these attributes may drift from psychological wellbeing to psychopathology.

Psychological wellbeing is conceptualized as some combination of positive affective status such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (the endomonic perspective) (Ryan and Deci, 2008). As summarized by Winfield (2012) psychological wellbeing is about life going well; it is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively, and involves people's evaluation of their lives. Psychological wellbeing is compromised when negative emotion are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person's ability to function in his or her daily life. Furthermore, Crumhaugh and Motiolic (1969) considered psychological wellbeing to be a set of psychological features involved in positive human functioning that include resilience, maturity, purpose in life and self-efficacy.

According to Diener (1997) the evolution of psychological wellbeing may be cognitive or affective. The cognitive aspect is an information based appraisal of one's life, where a person gives conscious evaluative judgment about one's satisfaction with life while the affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant /unpleasant mood in reaction to their lives. The assumption behind this is that most people evaluate their life as either good or bad, so they are normally able to offer judgment. Invariably, people experience moods and emotions

which have positive or negative effect. Thus, most people have a level of subjective wellbeing even if they do not often consciously think about it.

According to Winefield (2012), the consequences of psychological wellbeing include better physical health mediated possibly by brain activation patterns, neurochemical effects and genetic factors. According to “eudemonic perspective” the most frequent criterion of psychological wellbeing is linked to the individual’s sense of “self- acceptance” defined as a central feature of mental health as well as the major characteristic of self- actualization, optimal functioning and maturity (Ryff, 1989). Another important criterion is positive relations with others. This is linked to the ability to express strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and to be capable of greater love, deeper friendship and more complete identification with others. The criterion of autonomy is assumed as self-determination, independence and regulation of behaviour through internal locus of control. The criterion of environmental mastery is considered as an individual’s ability to create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions which often surface at the period of an individual’s adolescence.

The purpose in life is another recurrent criterion of psychological wellbeing considered as a sense of directedness. Individuals with purpose in life have goals in life and hold beliefs that give life purpose, aims, and objectives for living. Such individual have a sense that they know what their life is about and have a high sense of purpose. Those who have weak purpose in life lack a sense of meaning in life, have few goal or aims, lack a sense of direction and have no outlook or beliefs that gives life meaning (Schwarz & Waner 2013). The last aspect of psychological wellbeing is “personal growth and optimal psychological functioning requires not only to actualize oneself and realize one’s potentialities but also to continue to develop and expand oneself as a person, increasing self-knowledge, becoming more mature, and learning new skills. The importance of new challenges or task at different periods of life.

Psychological wellbeing leads to desirable outcome even economic one’s and does not necessarily follow from them but it is compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person’s ability to function in his or her daily life. The concept of feeling good incorporates not only the positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also such emotion as interest, engagement, and confidence. Sustainable wellbeing does not require individuals to feel good all the time, the experience of painful

emotion is normal part of life, but being able to manage their negative or painful emotions is essential for long-term psychological wellbeing.

The purpose of this study is to investigate if agency and communion will influence the psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri Municipal. The specific objectives comprise to find out if agency will influence the psychological wellbeing of young people; to investigate if communion will influence the psychological well-being and to find out if agency and communion will have influence on the psychological well-being of people.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and fifty (250) participants which comprises of 106 males and 144 females selected from schools and different residential areas in Owerri Municipal were involved in the study. Their age ranges from 18-30 years, with a mean of 21.96 years. They were selected through convenience sampling technique because of the transient nature of most of the participants. The researcher could not gather these participants in specific location and this made random selection and assignment impracticable.

Measures

Index of Agency and Communion (IAC)

The first instrument (IAC) is a twenty-two (22) item inventory. The instrument is scored on a three point Likert scale ranging from 1- Disagree, 2- Undecided and 3- Agree. Question 1 to 11 covers the agentic domain of the scale. Two items in the scale reads as follows: I like exerting influence over others; it makes me happy to be in control. While question 12 to 22 covers the aspects of communion. Examples are as follows: I am part of community organizations and love contributing to their growth; I have a good number of intimate friends. For the purpose of validation of this scale, the researcher carried out a pilot study using fifty (50) participants (25 male and 25 female, mean age 21.22) drawn from Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri Imo State, Nigeria. The data generated was subjected to split half reliability analysis which involves the correlation of scores from odd and even items. This yielded a Chronbach Alpha of .38 which is a fair coefficient. In order to ascertain the validity of the scale, IAC was correlated with the social interaction domain of Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) by Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) and it yielded a coefficient of concurrent validity (Chronbach's Alpha) of .35. Also, the communion

domain of AIC was correlated with EPQ and it yielded a Chronbach's Alpha of .38. The norm is the basis for differentiating participants who are low or high in Agency and the norm is 28.54. Participants who score above the norm live with agentic tendencies. The norm for communion is 25.66. Participants who score above the norm indicate presence of communal tendencies. All the items were directly scored, except for item numbers 3,16,17 which are scored in reverse pattern.

Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale

Psychological wellbeing (PWB) scale developed by Ryff (1989) has 42- items theoretically grounded instrument that specifically focuses on measuring multiple facets of psychological wellbeing. These facets comprise: autonomy, positive relation, environmental mastery, self- acceptance, personal growth, and purpose in life. The instrument is scored on a six point Likert scale, ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 6-strongly agree. Ryff (1989) reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.86, 0.93 and a six week test-retest reliability coefficients for subsample of participants were (0.81-0.88). The six dimensions of the scale have Cronbach's Alpha of .72, .66, .78, .69, .72 and .70 for autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance respectively). Sunday and Okhakhume (2017) conducted a pilot study on the scale using ninety-seven (97) police officers in Otupko Area Command, Benue State and obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of .87 and a total variance of 67.506 indicating that the test items are highly reliable and valid measures of psychological wellbeing. For the Nigeria environment; Nwankwo, Okechi and Nweke (2015) provided an overall coefficient of internal consistency of 0.87 for psychological wellbeing scale and a coefficient ranging from 0.71-0.74 for individual items. The authors also provided a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .89. For the purpose of reliability, the researcher carried out a pilot study on the scale using forty (40) adolescents (male =19, female = 21, mean age =19.65) drawn from Federal Polytechnic Nekede. The researcher correlated the scale with life satisfaction scale developed by Neugarten *et. al* (1961) and it yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .40.

Procedure

The researcher distributed the questionnaire in different schools (Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Imo State University) and residential areas of Owerri municipal (Okigwe Road, Wetheral road, and ikenegbu). The researcher approached the course representatives of

Economics Department of Imo State University and Health Science of Alvan Ikoku College of Education who helped to gather the students. Then the researcher created rapport with them and explained that he came for research purposes and will not disclose participants personal information to third parties. Convenience sampling technique was used to select fifty (50) participants from each department in two different schools. A total number of 100 participants from these two Universities were selected and the researcher later went to residential areas to distribute the remaining questionnaires. The researcher met with individuals in their different houses and asked them to fill the questionnaires in their own convenient time and this was collected the same day. 150 questionnaires were recovered from these participants in their houses. After data collection, the scores were computed and subjected to data analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 21 (SPSS.20)

Design /Statistics

The design utilized in this study is a cross sectional survey design. This is because data was collected from participants from different segments of society at a particular point in time. The two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis since the study has two independent variables (Agency and Communion) and one dependent variable (Psychological wellbeing)

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores of agency and communion on psychological well-being.

Variables		mean	standard deviation	N
Agency	High	185.31	19.72	144
	Low	175.54	18.81	106
Communion	High	180.61	10.55	102
	Low	181.55	20.18	148
	Total	181.16	19.89	250

DV: Psychological Wellbeing

The mean and standard deviation scores of Agency suggests a significant difference between those who are high in Agency (185.31) and those who are low in the construct (175.54) in terms of

Psychological Wellbeing. However, the mean difference in terms of scores between those who are high in communion (180.61) and those who are low in it (181.55) is marginal.

Table 2: Summary of 2-way Analysis of variance of agency and communion on psychological well-being Tests of between subject effects

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Agency (A)	4382.45	1	4382.45	11.89	.001
Communion (B)	59.21	1	59.21	.16	.69
A X B	1783.39	1	1783.39	4.84	.03
Total	80303661.00	250			

Dependent variable: Psychological wellbeing.
P<.05

From table II above, the first hypothesis which states that there will be no statistically significant influence of agency on psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal was rejected [F(1,250) = 11.89, p<.05]. This means that agency has a significant influence on psychological wellbeing. The next hypothesis which asserted that there will be no statistically significant influence of communion on psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal was accepted [F (1,250) = .69, p>.05). This denotes that communion has no significant influence on psychological wellbeing.

The last hypothesis which stated that there will be no statistically significant influence of agency and communion on psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal was rejected [F (1,250) = 4.84, p<.05). This showed that agency and communion interacted significantly to influence psychological wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the influence of agency and communion on the psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal. The result of the analysis of the first hypothesis shows that there is a statistically significant influence of agency on the psychological wellbeing of young people in Owerri municipal, Imo State, Nigeria. This means that agency has an influence on psychological wellbeing. In line with the above finding, the study by Tastan (2015) on the role of agentic and communal values in the individual outcomes of job related affective wellbeing and

political deviance found a positive association between agentic values and affective wellbeing. The explanation to this finding is that (consistent with theoretical propositions) people who are high in agency (power, mastery and assertion) feel happier, are more confident in life and have more stable self-esteem and therefore enjoy a more satisfying life and psychologically balanced lives than their counterparts who are on the negative continuum of agency. They have the capacity for positive affirmation and to maintain and defend their rights. Individuals who exist at lower pole of agency experience weakness, failure and submission. They are likely to be controlled by those at the upper part of the cycle and are likely to be unhappy, insecure, timid and depressed. These feelings and tendencies constitute symptom patterns that are antithetical to psychological wellbeing; it is therefore likely that these weak and subjugated individuals will tend more towards psychopathology than psychological wellbeing. Also, Anaf, Baum & Newman *et al.*, (2013) found that individual agency helped people adjust to the devastating effect of job loss. Furthermore, Hojman & Miranda (2018) confirmed that agency increases subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction. Moreover, found that agency is evolutionarily linked to human wellbeing by boosting chances for emancipative values which reinforces agentic feelings leading to increase in life satisfaction (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010) and agentic tendencies in early life predicts emotional wellbeing and social connection in the future. However, Lawrence, Jennings, Kioup, Thompson, Diffey & Verrammen (2022) found that sense of agency is related to distress about climate; and another study found that adolescents increased health based agency ironically experience diminished mental health benefits during adulthood (Hitlin, Erikson & Brown, 2015).

The second finding showed that communion has no significant influence on psychological wellbeing. This finding was in line with a study conducted by Aube (2008) on communion and psychological wellbeing in the study 2, the result shows that unmitigated communion is an important factor that impacts negatively on the psychological adjustments of men and women. In addition a study by kuiper, Nicholas and Borowiz-Sibenik, Metanie (2015) on the moderating effect of agency and communion on psychological wellbeing was in support of the finding. Individuals displaying high level of communion which was measured in terms of humor had low scores in psychological wellbeing. Buchanan and Bardi (2015) contradicted this finding in their study on the role of values, behaviour, and value-behaviour fit in the relation of agency and communion to wellbeing. Result showed that communal behaviours were positively and significantly correlated with both subjective and psychological wellbeing.

The finding of third study indicated that there is a significant influence of agency and communion on the psychological wellbeing of young people. The study by Buchanan and Bardi (2015) is in

concordance with this finding. All four studies within the study consistently found that agentic and communal behaviours were positively correlated with both subjective and psychological wellbeing. Also, Diehil, Owen and Youngblade (2004) investigated agentic and communal attributes in adults' spontaneous self-representations. Correlation analysis showed significant associations of agentic, and communal attributes with personality traits and defense mechanisms. Communal attributes also showed significant correlation with four dimensions of psychological wellbeing. In addition, the third finding of this present research strongly suggest that agentic and communal behaviors maybe beneficial for everyone, since it boost their psychological wellbeing.

Therefore, it is recommended that individuals boost both their agentic and communal tendencies in other to improve their psychological wellbeing. Boosting communal tendencies alone especially in an unmitigated fashion does not enhance subjective wellbeing. Society and governments who love their citizens are expected to boost their agentic and communal characteristics in other to get the best out of them. This implies not only encouraging good life and happiness but also making sure that each individual is led and assisted not only to carve a niche for his/herself but to gain mastery of a particular field of human endeavor.

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