



Understanding Sense of Community Among University Students

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Abstract

The present study aimed to assess the sense of community among the university students. A quantitative-descriptive research design was adopted by the researchers. A total sample of 123 participants was selected using the simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Sense of Community Index-2 (Chavis et al., 2008). Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS. The findings suggest that the students reported a moderate level of sense of community ($M=34.05$, $SD=10.629$). Among the four dimensions, shared emotional connection ($M=8.88$, $SD=3.561$) reported the highest mean, followed by reinforcement of needs ($M=8.77$, $SD=3.387$) and influence ($M=8.60$, $SD=3.138$), whereas membership ($M=7.96$, $SD=3.238$) showed the lowest mean. Although results indicate that students experience a satisfactory level of connectedness within the university community, there is a scope to strengthen their sense of membership and belonging. The findings highlight the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive campus environments to enhance students' overall sense of community.

Keywords: Sense of Community, Shared Emotional Connection, University Students

Introduction

Research on the role of sense of community among college students has emerged as a critical area of inquiry due to its implications for democratic participation and student development. Early studies emphasized higher education institutions as pivotal environments for fostering political identities and civic skills, highlighting campuses as micro-public that facilitate diversity and solidarity formation (Yang & Kinchin, 2022; Bivens, 2006).

McMillan and Chavis's theoretical model, which outlines four interrelated components that influence people's experiences of attachment and belonging in groups and surroundings, articulates the idea of sense of community (SoC) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In order to define

inclusion criteria, membership involves setting defined boundaries and making a personal commitment to the group. Influence is a reciprocal power dynamic that promotes commitment and engagement by allowing members to both influence and be influenced by the group. The terms "integration" and "fulfillment of needs" relate to the group's collective expectations that members' needs will be met, encouraging continued involvement. The cumulative history and emotional ties that bind people together via shared symbols and experiences are encapsulated in shared emotional connection (Bermea et al., 2019).

SoC's potential to link individual attachments to group action and general well-being makes it a crucial concept in social psychology and community development. Research indicates that strong SoC is linked to increased psychological well-being, life happiness, academic adjustment, and involvement in cooperative and community-focused activities. Students who experience a sense of belonging on campus are more likely to participate in civic activities and prosocial behaviors (Pretty et al., 1996; Peterson et al., 2008).

According to empirical research, SoC has an impact on environment perceptions, perceived control, and empowerment mechanisms-all of which are important to cooperative behavior and community cohesion (O'Connor, 2013). Based on empirical studies carried out in community coalitions and higher education settings, dimensions of SoC are predictors of willingness to participate in social change and offer important information for institutional programs meant to promote civic development among historically underrepresented student populations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; O'Connor, 2013; Alcantar, 2022). By enhancing students' sense of institutional connectedness and belonging, a strong sense of community in higher education promotes civic identity and civic duty. Such encouraging campus settings promote increased participation in democracy and community service (Astin & Sax, 1998; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Objectives

1. To assess sense of community among college students.
2. To assess reinforcement of needs among college students.
3. To assess membership among college students.
4. To assess influence among college students.
5. To assess shared emotional connection among college students.

Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative-descriptive research design. Researchers have used simple random sampling method for data collection. The sample consists a total of 123 participants. Data were collected from the students of Chaudhary Charan Singh University Campus, Meerut. Participants were informed about the objective of the study and then they were told about their right to voluntary participation. After that, their informed consent was taken. A standardized scale of sense of community was used for the data collection (Chavis et al., 2008). Collected data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics.

Results

The current study explores the descriptive statistics of sense of community and its different dimensions among the university students.

Table 1: Description of Sense of Community

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Sense of Community	123	13	61	34.05	10.629

The SoC was measured with the help of 24 items. The items of the scale are scored on a 4-point scale (0= Not at All, 1= Somewhat, 2= Mostly, 3= Completely). Thus, a maximum score of SoC that can be reported is 72. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of sense of community among the university students. The minimum score of SoC is 13 and the maximum score reported by the participants is 61. The mean score of SoC is 34.05, which indicates that the participants moderately feel a sense of connectedness with the community of the university. The standard deviation indicates a good variation among scores.

Table 2: Description of the dimensions of Sense of Community

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Reinforcement of Needs	123	0	16	8.77	3.387
Membership	123	2	17	7.96	3.238
Influence	123	2	17	8.60	3.138
Shared Emotional Connection	123	2	17	8.88	3.561

Table 2 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of different dimensions of the SoC. Shared emotional connection (M=8.88, SD=3.561) has the highest mean, indicating that the college students feel a relatively stronger bond and shared experiences within the campus community. Reinforcement of needs (M=8.77, SD=3.387) and Influence (M=8.60, SD=3.138) show similar mean scores, whereas Membership (M=7.96, SD=3.238) shows the lowest mean, suggesting that the participants have a lesser sense of identification with the campus community. The standard deviations indicate moderate variability in scores across all four dimensions.

Conclusion

The results of the current study indicate that participants experience a satisfactory sense of community. Among the four dimensions, shared emotional connection obtained the highest mean score, indicating that the university students share a relatively stronger emotional bond and shared experiences with their peers and campus community. Reinforcement of needs and influence also showed moderate levels, suggesting that students perceive the university as moderately supportive of their personal needs and believe they have some degree of mutual

influence within the community. The membership dimension of SoC obtained the lowest mean score, indicating a comparatively weaker feeling of identification with the university community.

Overall, findings suggest that there remains room for strengthening SoC. Universities may further enhance students' sense of belonging by promoting inclusive campus environments, encouraging student participation in academic and co-curricular activities, facilitating peer interaction, and creating opportunities for collaborative engagement.

Limitations

The current study solely relied on the self-report measurement for data collection, which may be influenced by social desirability and response bias.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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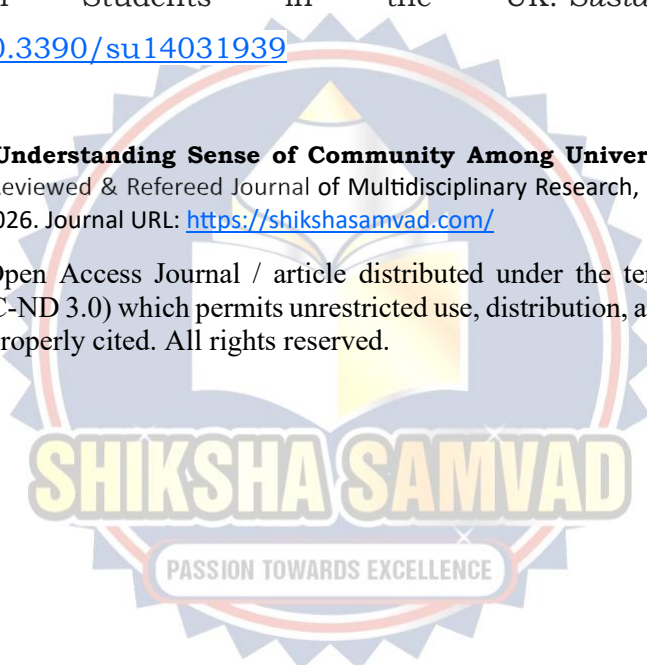
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