

## Sense of Community and Civic Engagement as a Function of Positive Youth Development

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Youth is both the resources and agents for any social and community change. Tapping this potent resource by empowering youth through positive youth development (PYD) can help in bringing desired social and economic change in any community. For that, we need to understand the role of positive youth development in the youth's sense of community and civic engagement. The present research explores the relationship of the five Cs of positive youth development (PYD) with youth's sense of community and civic engagement. A sample of 500 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) with an age range of 17-22 years (mean age 19.74 years) was selected based on availability from the different institutes/ departments of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak. Correlation and regression analysis was used for data analysis. The results of the correlation analysis revealed that a significant and positive association with the five Cs of positive youth development with a sense of community and civic engagement. Further, the results of regression analysis showed connection as a significant indicator of youth's sense of community. Connection, character, and competence were found to be significant predictors of youth's civic engagement. These findings highlight the need for and importance of designing, developing, and implementing positive youth development programs which in turn would enhance youths' sense of community and civic engagement that is important for any community or society to flourish.

**Keywords:** five Cs of positive youth development, sense of community, civic engagement

Youth, the most important asset for any country, if developed positively has the power to benefit themselves and their families, communities, and societies. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) projections, India will continue to have the youngest population in the world till 2030. India is experiencing a demographic window of opportunity, a "youth bulge" that will last till 2025. Countries like India should capitalize on this opportunity and make it a demographic dividend by focusing on the positive and holistic development of the youth.

In the last few decades, a new paradigm has emerged in the field of youth development which is built on the strength-based approach known as Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Lerner & Steinberg 2009). The newly emerged PYD perspective has taken a prominent place in the contemporary models of youth development (Small & Memmo, 2004). A distinctive feature of PYD as a model for the holistic development of

youth is the emphasis on the active engagement of youth (Hameed & Mehrotra, 2017). Earlier, the emphasis was on addressing the youth's problem behavior, but it failed to lead to any significant improvement. Towards the end of the 1990s, PYD perspectives gained momentum. Lerner is credited with promoting the PYD framework and proposed the "five Cs" of PYD which are competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Competence is defined as having a positive outlook on one's own actions in specific areas like social, cognitive, academic, and vocational realms (Phelps, Zimmerman, Warren, Jeličić, von Eye, & Lerner, 2009). Connection is manifested in positive bonds with people and institutions such as school, family, and peers. Confidence refers to a positive self-regard and a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy (Phelps et al., 2009). Character refers to behavioural conduct in context of cultural and societal rules,

and a sense of right and wrong (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittan, Lerner & Lerner, 2010). According to Phelps et al. (2009), Caring is defined as a sense of sympathy and empathy for other people. Thus, PYD is a concept that marks a shift from problematic youth to thriving youth who are full of potential and actively engage and contribute to society and community.

Youth is integral to their communities and helps maintain and develop their communities. They actively participate and engage to address the challenges faced by their community. So, communities are stronger and more resilient when youth participate. Over the past two decades, youth civic engagement has started gaining academic interest and importance in research, policy, and practice in many parts of the world. Youth civic engagement is perceived as a driving force for community and national development. The civic participation of youth in their communities is widely recognized and acknowledged, especially in the context of democratic countries (Checkoway, 1997, 1998, 2007, 2009). Civic engagement is driven by a sense of community belongingness. A psychological sense of community which has a cognitive element refers to the perception or feeling that one has of an interdependent relationship with one's community (Sarason, 1974; Bivens, 2006). McMillan and Chavis (1986) formulated a theory of a sense of community which includes four elements i.e., membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Both sense of community and civic engagement are understudied and under-researched topics, especially in the context of youth.

A few studies have explored the concept of sense of community and civic engagement as a function of PYD among youth. Prior studies, which have focused on this issue, suggest a significant role of PYD in sense of community belongingness and civic engagement in youth. A sense of belongingness with the community and its members is closely associated with the PYD (DeCubellis & Barrick, 2020). Expression of positive youth development is represented by civic engagement (Sherrod 2007). Youth must feel a connection to build a sense of community belongingness and to civically engage in

community. Character is important because sense of community and civic participation always relates to and involves values (Sherrod, 2007). Citizens who care enough to identify social injustices and take action to correct them have more sense of community belongingness and civic participation (Sherrod, Flanagan, Kassimir, & Syvertsen, 2005). Competence and confidence facilitate active participation in the community. Individuals must have the competences to contribute to their community and the confidence that their actions are useful, meaningful, and worthy (Sherrod, 2007).

Youth's willingness for civic engagement is strongly intertwined with their sense of confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character. (Crocetti, Erentaitė, & Zukauskienė, 2014). Based on the research pieces of evidence and explanations given above, the present research was designed to explore the relationship of the five Cs of positive youth development (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) with a sense of community and civic engagement among youth.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To assess the relationship between the five Cs of positive youth development, sense of community and civic engagement.
2. To assess the contribution of the five Cs of positive youth development in predicting sense of community and civic engagement.

#### **Hypotheses:**

1. There would be significant associations between the five Cs of positive youth development, sense of community and civic engagement.
2. The five Cs of positive youth development would contribute significantly to the variance in sense of community and civic engagement.

#### **Method**

##### **Design:**

A correlational design was used in the present study.

##### **Sample:**

A sample of 500 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) with an age range of 17-22 years (Mean age = 19.74 years) was selected based on the availability from different institutes/ departments of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak.

**Measures used:**

Positive Youth Development Short form developed by Geldhof et.al, (2014) was used to assess the five Cs of PYD. The questionnaire contained 34 items divided into five dimensions measuring the five Cs of positive youth development: Competence, Character, Connection, Caring, and Confidence. This questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly Agree. The scale possesses good psychometric properties. Both a global measure of PYD and the individual five Cs of PYD consistently correlate with important criterion measures (i.e., contribution, depressive symptoms, and problem behaviors) in expected ways (Geldhof et.al, 2014).

*Sense of Community:* The Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) by Peterson, Speer, & McMillan (2008), was used in the present study to assess a sense of community. The BSCS is an eight-item scale which includes four domains of sense of community including needs fulfilment, group membership, influence, and emotional connection, based on the original work of McMillan and Chavis (1986). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert rating scale with a response option format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The BSCS has strong internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha for the overall score on BSCS was .92. The overall sense of community score on the BSCS scale and its subscales scores correlate as expected with community participation, psychological empowerment, mental health, and other related variables, indicating sound construct validity (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008).

*Civic Engagement:* Civic Engagement Scale (CES) developed by Doolittle, & Faul (2013) was used to measure respondents' engagement in their community. The scale consists of 14 items comprising of two subscales: the Attitude subscale (Cronbach's alpha level of .91) and

the Behavior subscale (Cronbach's alpha level of .85). The responses on the items are based on a 7-point rating scale. The CES has been widely recognized and used for assessing civic engagement (Brown et al., 2017; Choudhary & Gupta, 2017; Henderson, 2017; Sanderson et al., 2019; Sunil & Verma, 2018).

**Procedure:**

To fulfil the aim of the present study, participants were contacted individually. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. After establishing rapport with the individual participant, the scales of PYD, sense of community and civic engagement were administered one by one. Instructions for each scale was provided separately. The order of presentation of the scales was randomized to avoid any inadvertent bias in answering items. It was assured that the participants have filled each item and had not left any blank items. Afterwards, the scales were scored as per the manuals and the scores were tabulated. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations analysis and multiple regression analysis through SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25).

**Results and Discussion**

The current study was designed to explore the relationship of the five Cs of positive youth development with a sense of community and civic engagement among youth. Descriptive statistics, correlations analysis (product-moment correlation) and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The mean and standard deviation of the present sample on measures of positive youth development with sense of community and civic engagement were calculated and are depicted in Table 1. All the mean values were above the midpoint of the scale score ranges. A high score on five Cs of PYD indicates greater competence, better character, higher confidence, more caring and connections. A higher score on the sense of community scale indicates greater group membership, influence, and emotional connection and a higher score on the civic

engagement scale indicates more engagement in one's community.

**Table 1. Descriptive analysis (Means and SDs)**

	Mean	SD
Five C's PYD		
Competence	19.06	4.607
Character	28.34	5.659
Confidence	22.85	5.275
Caring	22.08	4.732
Connections	28.78	6.412
Sense of Community	3.58	.907
Civic Engagement	75.16	15.165

The coefficients of correlation depicted in Table 2 show significant associations of the five Cs of PYD (competence, character, confidence, caring and connection) with a sense of community and civic engagement. Sense of community was significantly and positively correlated with the four Cs of PYD i.e., competence ( $r=.123$ ,  $p<.01$ ), character ( $r=.158$ ,  $p<.01$ ), confidence ( $r=.133$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and connection ( $r=.232$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Sense of community was not found to be significantly correlated with caring. Civic engagement was found to be significantly and positively correlated with all the five Cs of PYD i.e., competence ( $r=.356$ ,  $p<.01$ ), character ( $r=.410$ ,  $p<.01$ ), confidence ( $r=.316$ ,  $p<.01$ ), caring ( $r=.287$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and connection ( $r=.411$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Thus, the results of the correlation analysis clearly suggest positive associations between positive youth development, sense of community and civic engagement, in accordance with the first hypothesis. This means that young people's willingness to become civically engaged is strongly associated with their sense of competence, character, confidence, caring and connection. More specifically, youth who have a sense of belongingness in their community and are likely to engage civically are those who have

the competence and confidence to contribute to their society; are careful in recognizing the needs of the people around them and the social issues and injustices in their community; have a set of values that guide them in their behavioural conduct and taking actions to address the social issues. Sherrod et al. (2005), observed that civic engagement is an expression of positive youth development. Civic engagement can be considered as an instantiation of positive youth development, especially as it relates to the contribution that youth can make to civil society (Boyd & Dobrow, 2011).

Despite these encouraging results, a question is raised from the results of this study which could not be answered satisfactorily. Caring is not significantly correlated with a sense of belongingness, which is contrary to the results of earlier research, whereas caring does significantly correlate with civic engagement. This may be because care and civic engagement both are action oriented. Care includes a set of goals, practices, and acts to help others which are guided by a set of beliefs and accompanied by emotions and feelings (Hall, 1990). Civic engagement is a process in which people take collective action to promote quality of life and welfare in one's community and society. More research is needed to better understand the relationship between caring, sense of community and civic engagement among youth.

Further, stepwise regression analysis was applied to assess the contribution of the five C's in predicting a sense of community and civic engagement among youth. From the results of the regression analysis, as shown in Table 3, it was observed that sense of community among youth was significantly and positively predicted by connection. Connection significantly contributed to the prediction of sense of community ( $R^2 = .054$ ,  $F = 28.314$ ,  $p<.01$ ), which means that

**Table 2. Coefficients of correlation between the Five Cs of positive youth development, sense of community and civic engagement among youth**

	Competence	Character	Confidence	Caring	Connections
Sense of Community	.123**	.158**	.133**	.074	.232**
Civic Engagement	.356**	.410**	.316**	.287**	.411**

\*\* $p<.01$  (2 tailed)

Table 3. Positive Youth Development Cs as predictors of Sense of Community and Civic Engagement

	Predictors	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE-B	Beta
Sense of community							
Step 1	Connection	.232	.054	.054	.033**	.006	.232**
Civic Engagement							
Step 1	Connection	.411	.169	.169	.504**	.127	.214**
Step 2	Character	.455	.207	.038	.566**	.145	.211**
Step 3	Competence	.464	.215	.008	.381**	.170	.115*

\*\*P<.01, \*p<.05

connection accounted for 5.4% of the variance in the criterion variable. The results in Table 3 also highlight the contribution of three Cs of PYD in predicting civic engagement among youth i.e., connection, character, and competence. Connection contributed the maximum to the prediction of civic engagement ( $R^2 = .169$ ,  $F = 100.972$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which means that connection accounted for 16.9% of the variance in civic engagement. In the second step, the character entered the regression equation with  $R^2 = .207$  and  $\Delta R^2 = .038$  ( $F = 65.040$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This implies that character accounts for 3.8% of the variance in civic engagement. In the third step, competence entered the equation with  $R^2 = .215$  and  $\Delta R^2 = .008$  ( $F = 45.400$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) thereby accounting for 0.8% of the variance in civic engagement. The three Cs together accounted for 21.5% of the variance in civic engagement. The regression coefficients reveal the positive direction of influence of all three predictors on the criterion variables i.e., a sense of community and civic engagement. Thus, the findings of regression analysis suggest PYD as a predictor of sense of community (the three Cs of PYD i.e., connection, character and competence are significant predictors) and civic engagement (connection is a significant predictor). In other words, it can be stated that one or more than one attributes of PYD are significant indicators of a sense of community and civic engagement among youth, as stated in the second hypothesis. This means young people sharing positive bonds with their families, communities, peers, school, and other institutions contribute to building a higher sense of community and civic participation. Fong & To

(2022) observed that nurturing positive bonds with family members and support from significant others helps in enhancing the youth's sense of belongingness and further facilitates youth's participation in civic engagement. Dolan (2022) reported that core connections of youth lead to getting better civically engaged. The findings of the present study also suggest that the youth who respect cultural and societal rules; and have a sense of morality and integrity engage more in civic activities. These findings are supported by Sunil and Verma (2018) who found that the moral identity significantly predicted civic engagement. According to Oosterhoff, Whillock, Tintzman and Poppler (2021), character strengths play an integral role in youth civic action. Ortiz Cermeño (2018) highlighted the role of character education in promoting civic participation. The current study also found that competencies like academic, cognitive, social, and vocational contribute to greater civic participation. These findings are supported by Bynner, Schuller, Feinstein (2003) who reported that not only education but other skills like social, and civic skills help in the promotion of a cohesive society where community members actively contribute. Thus, this study uncovers PYD as a strong indicator of a sense of community and civic engagement.

The contribution of two Cs (confidence and caring) in predicting either a sense of community or civic engagement could not be observed. This may be because these two Cs vary across age, both caring (sympathy, empathy and acts of caring) and confidence are greater in older people compared to younger people (Lennon &

Eisenberg, 1987; Pliske, & Mutter, 1996; Richter & Kunzmann, 2011). The present sample was quite young (Mean age 19.74 years), and maybe as they grow and have more life experiences which make them more confident than they may be able to better understand and share the emotions of sympathy and empathy; and engage in caring acts.

The limitations need to be acknowledged and taken into consideration while analyzing and interpreting the results and for designing future research. Firstly, the sample was drawn from various departments and institutes of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak which limits generalizability to the general youth population. The use of self-report scales also has some limitations such as social desirability and recall (Chan, 2009). Thus, other ways of assessment and measurement like situational tests could be used in future research. Despite the above limitations, this study holds strengths and implications which are worth emphasizing.

### Conclusion and Implications

The relevance and importance of this study and other such studies focusing on positive youth development are great, especially in the Indian context. India has its largest ever adolescent and youth population because of which India is experiencing a demographic window of opportunity, a “youth bulge”. Despite this PYD-based promotion programs focusing on the holistic development of youth are in a nascent stage with a scarcity of published research work and literature on the same. The findings of the present study contribute to the limited knowledge of positive youth development and its role in youth’s contribution to the community and society. The results suggest the contribution of connection, character, and competence in predicting a sense of community and civic engagement among youth. The present investigation also stresses the need for developing and testing psychological interventions focusing on positive youth development for enhancing a sense of belongingness and participation in the community and civic activities. Implementation

of these tailor-made intervention programs for the positive development of youth by educational institutes would help in the holistic development of youth at the individual level and contribute to transforming them into responsible citizens who would function as a great resource for the welfare of the community and the society.

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