Social Capital, Psychological Sense of Community, Psychological Empowerment and Citizen Participation in HIV/AIDS community Initiatives of Uganda

By

Paul Nyende
Makerere University School of Psychology, Kampala, Uganda
P.Box 7062 Kampala, Uganda
Email: pgnyende@yahoo.com
Abstract

The study seeks to examine the relationships among variables including social capital, psychological sense of community, psychological empowerment and how they relate to continued citizen participation. Data was collected from 360 volunteers supporting people living with HIV/AIDS. Correlational analysis and multiple regression analysis are used to test the hypotheses. Findings show that there is a significant relationship between social capital and psychological sense of community, psychological sense of community and psychological empowerment, social capital and psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment and the level of citizen participation. The findings also show that Psychological sense of community is a stronger predictor of Psychological empowerment than social capital. The study recommends that it is essential for mobilizers to move away from limiting community mobilization in HIV/AIDS voluntary programs to sensitization and education activities towards comprehending how the social psychological variables interact to build psychological empowerment which predicts citizen participation.

Key Words: Social capital, Psychological sense of community, Psychological Empowerment and Citizen Participation

1.0 Introduction

Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital encourages volunteering and charitable giving in a number of ways (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Benefits of social capital are identified as improved local government performance, community cohesion or sense of community, and community access to resources and decision makers as well as social support and social networks (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000). Social Capital is central to the notion of mobilization. Putnam’s (2000) theory of social capital emphasizes social and community networks and civic engagement based on norms of cooperation, reciprocity and mutual trust. People who have a strong sense of trust feel more solidarity with other people and feel more inclined to help them, and are also less inhibited by concerns about others taking advantage of their generosity (Brown & Ferris, 2007). Bonding capital is regarded to be social support and reciprocity, and differs from bridging capital, which is empowering in a way that it makes it possible for the individual to access resources outside of his/her homogeneous group. Social capital influences feelings of sense of community. Psychological sense of community can be a trigger for participation in community organizations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Social capital is associated with increased social cohesion, a sense of belonging and reciprocity and these elements foster a sense of community and in communities with high social capital, residents develop a psychological sense of community (Putnam, 1995).

Psychological sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group and the shared faith that members’ needs will be met through commitment to be together. Psychological sense of community can predict psychological empowerment. Psychological sense of community has been empirically linked to empowerment. McMillan, Florin, Stevenson, Kerman, and Mitchell (1995) found that empowerment could be predicted by both participation in
a community coalition and a sense of community. In a random sample of community residents, Speer (2000) found that individuals who participated more in voluntary organizations and had higher levels of neighborhood psychological sense of community also had higher levels of empowerment. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988), demonstrating construct validity for their empowerment scale, showed that individuals higher in social isolation and normlessness, dimensions of alienation, participated less in community activities and were less empowered. Additionally, Colby (1997) described ways in which feelings of alienation and distrust between residents and institutions could be offset by participation in development of a substance abuse project suggesting that participation in community activities can increase psychological empowerment. Similarly Peterson and Reid (2003) found that psychological sense of community predicted psychological empowerment directly and indirectly through its positive effect on participation in substance abuse prevention activities. Individuals with greater psychological sense of community tended to participate more and were more psychologically empowered.

Psychological empowerment can be influenced by alienation. When community members are alienated, they tend to show lower sense of community and hence lower psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment is a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them (Rappaport, 1987). Zimmerman, 1990 focuses psychological empowerment on to the individual level of analysis. Psychological empowerment is regarded to integrate perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life and a critical understanding of the social political environment.

According to Wallerstein (1992), empowerment is a social-action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice. Psychological empowerment has the potential to become a stimulator for citizens participation.

Citizen participation is a process in which individuals participate in decision making in the institutions, programs, and environments that affect them (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger, & Wandersman, 1984). This involves volunteering in activities within community based groups without expecting benefit. Engagement of the efforts is committed by the volunteer at his or her own free will without coercion and for no financial payment. Volunteerism symbolizes free will and free choice with a desire to learn and gather experience, a commitment to share with members of the community as well as personal fulfillment (Ubaldo, 2003). Much as citizen participation can be seen as an outcome of psychological empowerment, it can in turn also influence psychological empowerment. Citizen participation has been shown to be a key factor in development of empowerment in a variety of community contexts. Speer (2000) found that individuals who participated more in voluntary organizations and had higher levels of neighborhood sense of community also had higher levels of empowerment.

Several community initiatives in social mobilization have been undertaken in Uganda over the years in response to HIV/AIDS encouraging and recruiting volunteers and are faced with constraints and challenges including poor mobilization strategies and volunteer attrition. Community initiatives view mobilization only as a process of sensitization involving only educational activities. While community education can be crucial in enhancing mobilization, it is regarded to be just only a trigger that stimulates social mobilization in the beginning phase. Many Ugandan community mobilizers do not recognize that several social psychological variables interact to produce participation in community activities. Citizen participation cannot be separated
from psychological empowerment and that there is an interplay among several social psychological variables including social capital and psychological sense of community that influence psychological empowerment in order to sustain continued effective citizen participation.

2.0 Statement of the problem

Despite the desirable outcomes proposed as consequences of participation, relatively few people in Uganda participate in grassroots voluntary groups and yet continued participation is essential for impact in the struggle against HIV and sustained social change. The success of community initiatives relies on the strengths, commitment, expertise, and skills of volunteers. Many well-intended community-based programs in Uganda often end at educational activities, and this does not guarantee that participants will be empowered adequately in order to commit their effort and time to the process, hence resulting into early failure. Many programs initiated by hired facilitators are motivated by the strong sense of urgency about the pandemic and fail to recognize the community’s natural rhythms and thus fail (UNAIDS, 1997). This coupled with failure of the facilitators to understand the complex interaction of social psychological factors in the mobilization process.

3.0 Purpose

The study seeks to examine the relationships among variables namely: social capital, psychological sense of community, psychological empowerment and how they ultimately relate to continued citizen participation focusing on HIV/AIDS community initiatives.

4.0 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see figure 1) illustrates the interaction among the social psychological factors interact and relate to citizen participation. The social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) places emphasis on social and community networks civic engagement based on norms of cooperation, reciprocity and mutual trust.

When the sense of trust is encouraged in the community concurrently with feelings of solidarity, people will feel more motivated to help other community members. Mobilization is facilitated in such an atmosphere and getting members engaged and committed to the cause is made easier. These connections and bonds developed do facilitate psychological sense of community, hence a sense of belonging and attachment blended by a feeling that together much can be accomplished. Both social capital and psychological sense of community bring about a feeling of security in individual members and hence influencing ones empowerment at a psychological level. McMillan (1995) points out that empowerment can be predicted by psychological sense of community and likewise the trust developed through building social capital enhances psychological empowerment.

Citizen participation is seen as the goal for which empowerment is a means. Empowering citizens is a means to organize and guarantee citizen participation. When psychological empowerment is viewed as a means, it also gets strategic value. Psychological empowerment then becomes a strategy for motivating citizen participation.
5.0 Hypotheses:
The study had the following hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between social capital and psychological sense of community.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between psychological sense of community and psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between social capital and psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between psychological empowerment and the level of citizen participation.

Hypothesis 5: Psychological sense of community is a stronger predictor of Psychological empowerment than social capital.

6.0 Methodology

The study took a cross sectional survey design. Quantitative data was collected and hence quantitative approaches were employed in the study. The sample for the study was drawn from a population of volunteers working in Village health teams and other community volunteers from varied community initiatives supported by various training programs. The questionnaire comprised of four sections. Three of these, all 4-point Likert scales were designed and tested for the study including: a social capital questionnaire used was developed by Bullen and Onyx (1998), a 12-item psychological sense of community questionnaire developed by Speer and Peterson (1999). A 12 - item psychological empowerment questionnaire was developed basing on the three main constructs of empowerment in mutual self-help groups; i.e. the intrapersonal, the interactional and the behavioral components that gave Cronbach’s reliability Alpha of 0.84, 0.87 and 0.85 respectively. The fourth 11-item scale measuring participation level was adapted from the study of Ohmer and Beck (2006) with a reliability of 0.95.

In Analysis, correlation analysis was used to test the first four hypotheses to establish the relationship between the major variables of the study. Pearson’s product moment correlation (r) was employed to test the first four hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test hypothesis 5 in order to identify the independent variable that can better predict psychological empowerment in the context of citizen participation.

7.0 Results

7.1 Correlation Analysis
The results in table 1 show the relationship between Social Capital and Psychological Sense of Community. The Pearson $r = .642$ with the Sig (2-tailed) is .000 that is less than 0.05, showing that there is a significant relationship between social Capital and Psychological Sense of Community.

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between social capital and psychological sense of community.
The results in table 1 show that there is a significant relationship between Social Capital and Psychological Sense of Community. The findings concur with hypothesis 1 and therefore hypothesis 1 is retained.
The results in table 2 show the relationship between Psychological Empowerment and Psychological Sense of Community. The Pearson $r = .249$ with the Sig (2-tailed) is .000 that is less than 0.05, showing that there is a significant relationship between Psychological Empowerment and Psychological Sense of Community.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a relationship between psychological sense of community and psychological empowerment.

The results in table 2 show that psychological sense of community influences psychological empowerment and that there is a significant relationship between psychological sense of community and psychological empowerment. The findings agree with hypothesis 2 and therefore hypothesis 2 is retained.

The correlation results in table 3 show the relationship between Social Capital and Psychological Empowerment. The Pearson correlation coefficient $r=0.256$ and the sig (2-tailed) value at 0.000 which is less than 0.05, hence showing a significant relationship between the two variables.

**Hypothesis 3.** There is a relationship between social capital and psychological empowerment

The results in table 3 show that there is a significant relationship between social capita and psychological empowerment. The findings agree with hypothesis 3 and therefore hypothesis 3 is retained.

The correlation results in table 4 show the relationship between Psychological empowerment and citizen participation. The Pearson correlation coefficient $r=0.140$ and the sig (2-tailed) value at 0.007 which is less than 0.05, hence showing a significant relationship between the two variables.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is a relationship between psychological empowerment and the level of citizen participation.

The results in table 4 show that there is a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and citizen participation. The findings concur with hypothesis 4 and therefore hypothesis 4 is retained.

### 7.2 Regression Analysis

The results in table 5 show standardized coefficients ($Beta$) as 0.142 for social Capital and 0.167 for psychological sense of community. The $p$ value for social capital is 0.039 and the $p$ Value for Psychological Sense of Community is 0.015 showing that Psychological sense of Community is a stronger predictor of Psychological empowerment than social capital.

**Hypothesis 5: Psychological sense of community is a stronger predictor of Psychological empowerment than social capital.**
The findings in Table 1 indicate that social capital enhances Psychological Sense of community. Higher levels of Social Capital foster Psychological Sense of Community. The finding are also in accordance with the assertion by Chavis and Wandersman, 1990, that in communities with high social capital, residents develop psychological sense of community. Putnam’s (1995) theory of social capital emphasizes bonding including aspects such as networks, norms of reciprocity and social trust. Berkman &Kawachi, 2000 also point out social support and social networks as important outcomes of social capital. Given that bonding capital provides the needed social support, while bridging capital enables the individual to access resources through networks, generally social capital translates into community cohesion and gravitating into a sense of belonging, therefore, enhancing psychological sense of community.

The findings in Table 2 give evidence of a significant relationship between psychological sense of community and psychological empowerment. The results concur with findings by Speer et al 1995, in which they conclude that empowerment could be predicted by a sense of community. Similarly Peterson and Reid (2003) found that psychological sense of community predicted psychological empowerment directly in substance abuse prevention activities. Conclusively, the feeling of belonging and that members matter to one another drives a sense of psychological empowerment.

Table 3 provides evidence for a significant relationship between social capital and psychological empowerment. The social networks or bridges and bonds of social capital enable the members to access resources and hence provide a sense of security together with a feeling of personal control, a proactive approach to life and a critical understanding of the social environment This also helps groups and individuals build capacity to tackle their challenges effectively and hence feed directly into psychological empowerment.

Reference to Table 4, the results give evidence for a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and citizen participation. These findings also agree with Boluijt & DeGraaf, 2010, who suggest that psychological empowerment has an important role to play in stimulating citizen participation. In empowerment we are looking at community members enhancing the possibilities for control of their ownlives. The word empowerment has to do with power and freedom. Hence, if power is the ability to predict, control, and participate in one's environment then empowerment is the process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take power and act effectively in changing their lives and their environment. Much as psychological empowerment can be seen as a goal of participation, in-order for projects to survive, it is important to focus on what precedes citizen participation and in this case it is psychological empowerment.

The findings in this study (Table 5) emphasize that, in the mobilization process psychological sense of community has greater influence on psychological empowerment as compared to social capital. The alternative hypothesis is accepted, i.e. Psychological sense of Community is a stronger predictor of Psychological empowerment than Social Capital. It makes sense that psychological sense of community is a stronger predictor because it has its foundation in bondedness and interpersonal connections. It has a lot to do with the quality of interpersonal relationships and in a way enhances harmony. When all these elements are summed up, they impinge upon psychological empowerment.
9.0 Conclusions

The study concludes that social capital enhances Psychological Sense of community. Higher levels of Social Capital enhance Psychological Sense of Community. Social capital and Psychological sense of community are important variables that interact and ultimately augment psychological empowerment. The networks and bonds of social capital build a strong sense of belonging and security and together these outcomes are translated in a feeling of mastery of the environment hence psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment has an important role to play in stimulating citizen participation. As individuals get empowered, they have the confidence that they have the capacity to bring about change in their lives and lives of others in the community. This confidence drives them into involvement in voluntary community activity.

Psychological sense of community has greater influence on psychological empowerment as compared to social capital. Therefore in mobilization of the community, there is a need to emphasize the psychological sense of community.

The conceptual model developed above shows a new way of explaining the process of citizen participation and explores social psychological variables that interact through empowerment to initiate and sustain citizen participation.

10.0 Recommendations

- To understand citizen participation in HIV/AIDS activity, it is critical to comprehend how social psychological variables like social capital, psychological sense of community interact to influence psychological empowerment.
- There is a need for authorities to move away from limiting community mobilization in HIV/AIDS voluntary programs to sensitization and education activities towards understanding the broad social learning variables involved in the process.
- A clearer understanding of what motivates people to volunteer, especially in under-resourced settings, will help in the development of more effective strategies for involving volunteers in the provision of community services.
- In-order to understand citizen participation, it is paramount to analyze the process of psychological empowerment and how it influences the patterns of voluntary participation.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on the social networks and strengthening bonds among community members to enhance a sense of belonging.
- Future research needs to explore how citizen participation can, on the other hand, also influence psychological empowerment because participation in voluntary HIV/AIDS community activity may lead to psychological empowerment.
- Future research needs to explore personality characteristics and how they influence the decision to participate in voluntary HIV/AIDS community activities.
11.0 References


Appendix

Figure 1: The conceptual model of factors involved in citizen participation

Table 1: Correlation table to show the relationship between Social Capital and Psychological Sense of Community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Sense of Community</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital (Bonding and Bridging Capital) (SC)</td>
<td>642**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 2: Correlation Table to show relationship between Psychological Sense of Community and Psychological Empowerment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Sense of Community</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment</td>
<td>.249**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Correlation Table to show relationship between social capital and psychological empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Empowerment</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>.256**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Table 4: Correlation Table to show relationship between Psychological Empowerment and Citizen Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizen Participation</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>.140**</th>
<th>Psychological Empowerment</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>.007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Table to show coefficients and compare the predictive power of Social Capital and Psychological Sense of Community on Psychological Empowerment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients*</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>28.882</td>
<td>2.021</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>2.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Sense of Community</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>2.455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Empowerment