



Mitigating Life Challenges to Subjective Well-being through Civic Engagement: Insights from a Global Perspective

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Extensive research has demonstrated that life challenges, such as unemployment, poor health, and marital disruptions, can significantly reduce individual and societal well-being. To aid individuals navigating these stressful events, both formal institutions and informal sources like social capital can provide valuable support.

Most of the existing studies on social capital have focused primarily on trust. However, civic engagement, encompassing actions that contribute positively to collective community or societal life, has received less comprehensive attention despite its potential to foster trust and cooperative behaviors.

To bridge this gap, researchers Fengyu Wu (STATEC Research) and Jeffrey B. Nugent (University of Southern California) investigated how civic engagement, encompassing both within-group activities and participation in broader network structures, relates to subjective well-being. They specifically explored its role in mitigating the adverse effects of stressful life events.

Their findings indicate that memberships focused on the common good (Putnam-type) partially alleviate the impact of unemployment on subjective well-being, while those encouraging the pursuit of more self-serving goals (Olson-type) partially mitigate the effect of poor health. Combining both types fully moderates the negative impact of divorce, separation, or widowhood. Besides, broader civic engagement activities, including donating, volunteering, and helping strangers, fully mitigate the negative effect of divorce, separation, or widowhood on subjective well-being and partially mitigate the effect of poor health.

A significant policy implication of this study is that policymakers should promote civic engagement, as it can broadly benefit society and help protect against the negative impacts of various life challenges. The study drew on large-scale cross-national data from waves 3 (1995-1998), 5 (2005-2009), 6 (2010-2014) and 7 (2015-2022) of the World Values Survey and the Gallup World Poll conducted between 2009 and 2021.

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