

Why Subjective Community Well-Being Matters for Public Health Nutrition

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INTRODUCTION

Flourishing refers to thriving in multiple life aspects ^{2,3}. Community well-being expands this, focusing on shared experiences shaping a community's quality of life. Harvard's framework to measure flourishing identifies five areas: happiness, health, meaning, character, and relationships ^{2,3}. The 5-item Subjective Community Well-Being (SCWB) measure extends this to the collective level, helping assess how communities experience well-being ¹.

In this study, we aimed to pilot test the SCWB survey to understand how feasible, effective, and accepted it was when used in a public health setting.

METHODOLOGY

A revised version of Harvard's 5-item SCWB survey was pilot-tested in Wright County, MN. A focus group (n=8) provided feedback on clarity and accessibility, informing minor wording changes. Additionally, a series of demographic questions were added to monitor for differences across gender, age, race/ethnicity, zip code, length of residency in the county, living status, employment status, and community program participation (e.g. SNAP, WIC, Medical Assistance). The final survey was distributed through Google Forms at community events using Samsung[®] tablets, with additional outreach by email. Participants ages 18+ were recruited through convenience sampling. Responses were anonymous, and gift card drawings were used to encourage participation.

TABLE 1: FIVE SURVEY QUESTIONS AND AVERAGE RANKINGS (10-POINT SCALE)

Survey Question	Average Ranking
1. Everyone in our community trusts one another.	6.1
2. Leaders in our community have the skills and understanding they need to guide our community well.	6.8
3. Our community has resources and ways of doing things that allow it to accomplish its goals.	7.1
4. Everyone is satisfied with the way things are in our community.	6.1
5. Our community's values are clear to everyone.	6.2

RESULTS

Data was collected from 58 Wright County residents who rated five community well-being questions on a 1–10 scale. Individual responses ranged from 1 to 10, with average scores for each question ranging from 6.1 to 7.1 (Table 1). The highest average ranking was for community resources and capacity (7.1), while the lowest were for trust and satisfaction (6.1). Female respondents consistently rated all items higher than males. Higher scores were also observed among respondents who participated in senior programs and SNAP/WIC, those who had lived in the county for 1–5 years, and individuals living with others. In contrast, trends by zip code, employment, and race were inconclusive due to small subgroup sizes.

This small pilot study was not powered to detect statistical significance; however, it revealed patterns that may warrant further exploration. Full demographic comparisons are available upon request.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this pilot test indicate that the 5-item SCWB survey has the potential to reveal meaningful differences by demographic characteristics and can be feasibly integrated into a variety of settings. The survey's succinct nature allows for easy and rapid administration and is suitable for those with limited time or literacy.

With broader implementation, this tool could guide public health planning and track trends in community well-being over time.

PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION IMPLICATIONS

While measures of flourishing and SCWB have not been widely applied to public health nutrition, the results of this pilot test indicate that the survey may be a valuable tool given its acceptability, succinctness, and the potential to detect differences across a variety of demographic characteristics.

Potential applications in public health nutrition include:

- Understanding social factors influencing program participation (e.g. SNAP, WIC)
- Tailoring interventions and programs to strengthen community cohesion
- Monitoring changes in SCWB throughout nutrition programming
- Identifying differences in well-being across specific populations

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