

Research Article

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Demographic Variables and Engagement in Community Development Service: A Survey of an Online Cohort of National Youth Service Corps Members

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Abstract: The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Community Development Services (CDS) programme in Nigeria is designed to promote societal development and equip graduates with practical skills. However, opinions differ on how effective the programme is, especially regarding the involvement of corps members and the influence of factors like age, gender, marital status, and educational qualifications. This study looked into the demographic factors that affect graduates' participation in the CDS programme. Using an electronic questionnaire, data were gathered from 19,278 former corps members from the 2019–2021 cohorts and earlier participants. The questionnaire was reliable, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.87 and 0.92. The responses were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including one-sample *t*-tests, independent *t*-tests,

and one-way ANOVA. The results indicated that corps members were more involved in CDS activities than expected. Age, gender, and marital status had no significant influence on participation in CDS activities by corps, but educational qualifications had a significant influence; those with higher qualifications were more involved. These findings can help policymakers, educators, and community organisations design better ways to encourage corps members to engage more effectively in community services, creating a stronger impact in different areas across the country.

Keywords: age; community development; gender; national service; youth mobilisation

1 Introduction

Community development involves joint efforts to improve life in local areas. In Nigeria, one of the major platforms for this is the Community Development Service (CDS) under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The scheme was introduced to engage young graduates in practical service that meets community needs. While some corps members tend to participate and show a strong desire to help, others view it as a way to gain experience, improve skills, or enhance their career prospects (Owan et al. 2025). The federal government encourages participation by offering a monthly allowance and a certificate of service upon completion. CDS is, therefore, both a civic responsibility and a personal development opportunity.

Participating in such projects is crucial for improving living conditions and addressing local needs (Owan et al. 2025). In many countries, similar initiatives have helped expand access to basic services and raise the standard of living (Hains et al. 2021). Where such efforts are neglected, communities often struggle with poor infrastructure and limited services. In response to these challenges, the Nigerian government introduced the NYSC programme in 1973.

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The aim was to promote national unity and foster integration after the civil war. The NYSC is a mandatory one-year service for Nigerian graduates below the age of 30 from approved institutions (Owan et al. 2025). In this study, the term “graduates” refers to those who recently completed their university or polytechnic education and are currently enrolled in the NYSC. It does not refer to NYSC alumni.

The scheme has four main components. First is the 21-day orientation course, which includes physical drills and civic education. The second is the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme. The third is the primary assignment, where corps members are posted to schools, health centres, or government offices (Owan et al. 2025). Finally, there is the CDS component, which places corps members in groups or individual projects that address community needs (Arubayi and Akobo 2018). These include education support, health campaigns, environmental cleanups, and small infrastructure projects. CDS participation is mandatory and contributes to the award of the certificate of service. Currently, corps members receive ₦77,000 (around 50.38 USD) monthly.

Over time, CDS projects have improved access to services and increased civic awareness (Arubayi and Akobo 2018; Sheikheldin and Devlin 2015). They have also helped many participants build leadership and entrepreneurial skills that support future employment or self-reliance (Bodley-Bond and Cronin 2013). However, there is growing concern that many corps members show little interest in their CDS duties. While the orientation camp lasts only 21 days (Owan et al. 2022), the rest of the service year is meant for CDS and primary assignment work. Yet, reports suggest that some participants avoid their duties or show minimal commitment.

This raises several questions. If CDS was created to empower young people and support development, why do some corps members avoid it? Is this due to poor management of the programme, or are deeper individual or structural issues responsible? Some studies have linked poor implementation to low funding, weak supervision, and insecurity in some areas (Adesope et al. 2013; Lamidi et al. 2018). Others report more positive outcomes, where corps members express support for the programme and identify long-term benefits (Arigbo et al. 2019; Fareo 2020; Muogbo et al. 2021). These different findings suggest a need for more research on why participation in CDS vary among corps members.

One issue that has not been studied enough is the influence of demographic variables on corps members’ level of

participation in community development service. Are younger participants more active? Do men and women take part equally? Does marital status or education level make a difference? Understanding these differences is important for planning interventions that improve participation. While earlier studies have looked at demographic factors in similar settings (Aduma et al. 2022; Owan, Chuktu, et al. 2024; Owan, Osim, et al. 2024), none have done so within the NYSC using large datasets.

Beyond the identified gap, there are other important variables that could influence corps members participation in CDS as well. Some states in the North deal with serious security challenges. In the South, especially the Niger Delta, issues like militancy and environmental degradation affect community life. Moreover, infrastructure also varies widely across states. These differences affect how corps members engage with CDS. While this paper focuses only on age, sex, marital status, and education, another publication from the same project will tackle these other factors.

This study, therefore, investigates how age, gender, marital status, and education influence corps members’ participation in CDS. The decision to focus on demographics was intentional. Including all variables would make the analysis too broad and reduce clarity. Demographic data are also easier to analyse statistically and can provide useful baseline data for subsequent works to build on. In contrast, variables like regional inequality or socio-economic status often require qualitative data or a deeper quantitative analysis.

2 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Age and Participation in Community Development Services (CDS)

Age is a central demographic variable often associated with variations in motivation, physical capacity, exposure, and attitudes towards civic engagement. In the context of community development, age determines not just an individual’s willingness to participate but also their ability to follow through with the expectations of voluntary or assigned service. In the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, only graduates aged 30 or below are eligible to serve, creating a relatively narrow but youthful population whose engagement in CDS may reflect different degrees of enthusiasm, capacity, or constraint based on age.

Social learning theory, proposed by Bandura (1977), provides a useful lens to interpret age-related behaviours. It suggests that individuals learn and adopt behaviours based on observations and experiences, which vary with age and exposure. Younger participants, particularly recent graduates aged between 20 and 25, are more likely to be flexible, adventurous, and open to group-based learning and experimentation, which are essential features of CDS. In contrast, older participants (26–30 years) might be more career-focused or face competing responsibilities that lower their enthusiasm for communal engagement. This is supported by Agumagu et al. (2006), who found that younger corps members were more favourably disposed to CDS tasks and displayed greater initiative in completing community-based projects.

Further evidence suggests that age-related differences influence civic behaviour. For example, Okafor and Owolade (2023) found that younger participants in the NYSC programme show stronger civic engagement, with 89 % attendance at Community Development Service (CDS) events; 22 % points higher than their older counterparts. They also demonstrate higher completion rates for assigned community tasks (78 % compared to 52 % among older groups) and are more involved in public health, education, and environmental initiatives (Balogun 2018). Some studies suggest that younger corps members may be more likely to participate actively in CDS projects, possibly due to fewer family responsibilities and the excitement of new post-school experiences (Fareo 2020; Usman 2020).

While younger NYSC participants reported higher CDS attendance rates, the relationship between age and civic engagement is non-linear. Analysis of Nigerian graduates aged 36–49 reveals peak civic participation that exceeds both younger and older age groups (Owan et al. 2022). This suggests that civic responsibility follows a life-stage pattern rather than a simple age-based decline. Age may also intersect with deployment locations and environmental constraints. For instance, older participants may request redeployments due to personal commitments, which could alter their exposure to community development opportunities. Conversely, younger corps members often accept postings with fewer complaints, increasing the likelihood of exposure to community needs and collaborative service (Udoma et al. 2024). Although the age range among corps members is relatively narrow, differences in maturity, responsibility, and orientation towards service may still yield important insights into participation levels. Given this background and the reviewed literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Younger corps members will have significantly higher CDS participation mean score than older ones.

2.2 Gender and Engagement in Community Development Services

Gender remains a pivotal factor in analysing civic participation, particularly in environments with entrenched social expectations, mobility constraints, and culturally defined roles. In the Nigerian context, gender norms often influence both the perception and practical execution of development-related activities. Within the NYSC programme, these roles continue to manifest in the distribution of tasks, group leadership dynamics, and overall participation in CDS.

Corps membership is roughly balanced by gender (about 52 % male and 48 % female), but gender roles can shape CDS involvement (Owan et al. 2022). Theoretical support can be drawn from gender role theory, which posits that societal expectations about male and female behaviour influence how individuals engage in various aspects of public life (Eagly 1987). For instance, women are often encouraged into health, education, or social-mobilization roles, whereas men traditionally handle heavy or infrastructure projects (Chukwu 2024). Reflecting these patterns, studies of NYSC projects frequently list community sanitation and educational programs as the most common CDS activities (Uko et al. 2024). Such activities (e.g. school support, health education, environmental clean-up) often draw on communication and caregiving skills that women typically perform, while large-scale construction or technical projects tend to involve men. In some reports, female corps members score higher in commitment to public health and education initiatives, whereas males predominate in building and road projects (Egobueze et al. 2024). However, empirical findings vary: some research finds women contributing heavily in certain sectors, while other analyses report no significant gender gap in overall CDS attendance.

For instance, Arigbo et al. (2019) reported a moderate gender difference, with female corps members showing slightly higher commitment to CDS activities, especially in the health and education sectors. Similarly, Ukpabi (2021) found that, contrary to stereotypes, women did not participate less than men in development efforts, even in areas with gender disparities. However, Obar et al. (2017) concluded that men had a higher rate of participation in physical community development projects, such as road repairs or facility construction. This suggests that the nature of the CDS activity may affect the observed gender differences in participation levels.

Nevertheless, other studies present a more detailed perspective. Atta et al. (2024) observed that while male corps members were more visible in the execution of large-scale projects, female participants played critical roles in

mobilisation, planning, and follow-up. This supports the view that gender influences not just whether corps members participate, but how they contribute. While gender may not be the sole predictor of CDS participation, it remains an important variable to investigate, especially given the variation in findings across different regions and activity types. To this end, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: There is no significant difference in CDS participation between male and female corps members.

2.3 Marital Status and Participation in Community Development Services

Marital status is a demographic factor that may influence social responsibilities, time availability, and motivation toward community involvement. Within the NYSC scheme, corps members' marital status may shape their engagement in CDS activities by determining how they allocate time and prioritise commitments. Corps members who are married might face different pressures compared to their single counterparts, especially when family responsibilities compete with CDS demands. Understanding this variation is key to improving the implementation of inclusive development strategies.

The role strain theory (Goode 1960) is helpful for interpreting how marital status influences behaviour. It posits that individuals occupying multiple social roles may experience strain, especially when these roles demand time and energy. Married corps members may face competing obligations to spouses or children, reducing their flexibility and time to engage fully in CDS activities. For single corps members, fewer domestic responsibilities could mean more freedom to participate in development tasks and group projects. Several studies lend support to this line of reasoning. Fareo (2020) found that married corps members were more likely to prioritise financial stability and personal obligations over participation in CDS. Similarly, Oladeji et al. (2014) argued that family obligations among married corps members limited their participation. Corroborating this, Agumagu et al. (2006) reported that younger and often unmarried corps members displayed stronger commitment to CDS, citing their enthusiasm and fewer life constraints.

Nevertheless, it appears that the effect of marital status on civic engagement is not straightforward. This is because a study by Fakere and Ayoola (2018) found marital status to be a significant predictor of community project involvement when age was excluded as a variable. This suggests that while marital status is influential, it might interact with or be

mediated by other factors such as age or gender. Oladeji et al. (2014) noted that marital commitments may reduce CDS participation, especially for women whose families expect them to prioritise home duties over public service. The study argued that these societal expectations discouraged full engagement from married corps members, particularly in regions with conservative gender norms. On the other hand, Ayinde and Adegoke (2016) found no significant difference in CDS participation based on marital status, implying that other factors, such as orientation during camp or support from fellow corps members, could mediate the influence of marital status. While there is no single consensus, the literature suggests that marital status can influence participation in CDS programmes in both positive and negative ways, depending on context and support systems. This therefore leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: There is no significant difference in corps members' participation in Community Development Services based on marital status.

2.4 Educational Qualification and CDS Participation

Human capital theory (Becker 1964) and civic skills theory (Verba et al. 1995) suggest that education enhances the ability of individuals to participate in civic activities. Education imparts knowledge, skills, and confidence, all of which are essential for effective engagement in community projects. Hence, those with higher educational attainment are expected to exhibit greater participation levels in structured development initiatives. Applied to CDS, corps members with higher education may view participation as a way to build professional skills, improve employability, and leave a positive legacy in their host communities. Those with lower qualifications may view it as less rewarding or less aligned with their career goals.

Burgos and Mertens (2017) found that individuals with lower educational attainment were less active in community projects, suggesting a correlation between education and community engagement. In contrast, Ukpabi (2021) reported that educational qualification had no significant effect on corps members' involvement in CDS projects, indicating that programme structure or team dynamics might neutralise individual educational differences. The studies cited reveal a clear disagreement among studies on the influence of educational qualification on outcome variables such as community projects and in community development. Based on this review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is no significant difference in corps members' participation in Community Development Services based on educational qualification.

2.5 Summary of Gaps and Study Objectives

Although several studies have examined civic engagement among Nigerian youths, many rely on small samples or focus on isolated institutions, limiting the strength of their conclusions. Very few have analysed how corps members' demographic characteristics influence their participation in CDS activities using a national sample. Even fewer have explored this within the structure of the NYSC programme.

This study responds to that gap by focusing specifically on age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification. The analysis draws from a national dataset of 19,278 responses collected across multiple cohorts of Nigerian graduates. By narrowing the focus to these four demographic features, the study avoids the complications of mixing in broader socio-economic or regional variables, which are addressed in related publications from the larger research project.

The aim is to provide a clearer understanding of how basic personal characteristics influence participation in Nigeria's most prominent civic programme. This can be useful to inform targeted policy and support strategies aimed at improving CDS outcomes.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (1) Assess the overall level of corps members' commitment to CDS activities.
- (2) Examine whether participation differs significantly by age group.
- (3) Investigate possible gender-based differences in CDS engagement.
- (4) Determine whether marital status influences corps members' involvement in CDS.
- (5) Explore whether educational qualifications affect the extent of participation in CDS projects.

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design. This method was suitable for describing patterns of Community Development Service (CDS) participation among National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members and for making generalisations about the wider population based on the observed trends.

4 Participants

The sample consisted of 19,278 former NYSC members. Participants included individuals from the 2019, 2020, and 2021 batches who were still serving, as well as those from the 2018 batch and earlier who had completed their service. The sample was 52 % male ($n = 10,028$) and 48 % female ($n = 9,250$). In terms of age, 34.1 % ($n = 6,569$) were between 26 and 30 years, 29.4 % ($n = 5,665$) were aged 21 to 25, 26.8 % ($n = 5,176$) were over 30 years, while 9.7 % ($n = 1,868$) were between 16 and 20 years. Regarding marital status, 91.7 % ($n = 17,678$) were single, and 8.3 % ($n = 1,600$) were married. With respect to education, 73.8 % ($n = 14,226$) held higher national diplomas (HND), 16.8 % ($n = 3,244$) had bachelor's degrees, 8.9 % ($n = 1,718$) held master's degrees, and 0.5 % ($n = 90$) had doctoral degrees. Further demographic details are reported in Owan et al. (2022).

4.1 Instrument

Data were collected using a structured electronic questionnaire developed in Google Forms, following the procedures described in Owan et al. (2022). The initial instrument was drafted based on the researchers' personal NYSC experiences, supplemented by relevant literature. Feedback was obtained from 10 corps members from the 2019 Batch B, leading to refinements in wording and clarity.

4.2 Validity, and Reliability

A pilot test was later conducted with 60 corps members from Batch C in Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory. These participants were excluded from the main study. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha produced acceptable internal consistency coefficients for the four core sections of the questionnaire: orientation course (0.90), SAED (0.87), primary assignment (0.92), and CDS (0.89). These values indicate that the instrument reliably measured participants' engagement with the NYSC activities.

4.3 Data Collection

Data were collected between March 2019 and December 2021 across all 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. The researchers disseminated the survey through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook groups dedicated to NYSC members. Participants were also encouraged to share the link with others, allowing for snowball sampling. The

final dataset included 19,278 responses and 95 variables. After exporting the data to Excel, the team cleaned and coded the responses numerically. There were no missing values, as most items were compulsory. The team reviewed timestamps and response patterns across demographics to identify any possible duplications or suspicious entries. Although no duplicate responses were detected, the survey's length and inclusion of open-ended questions likely discouraged manipulation. The large sample size was considered sufficient to offset minor biases, should any have occurred.

4.4 Data Analysis

The section assessing Community Development Service (CDS) participation comprised 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale of agreement: 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), and 1 (strongly disagree) for positively worded statements. These items captured respondents' levels of commitment by assessing their planning, attendance, leadership roles, reporting, and follow-up in CDS-related activities. The total maximum score obtainable was 40, with higher scores indicating greater perceived engagement in community service.

To evaluate the adequacy of participation, a benchmark score of 25.00 was established. This was derived by calculating the average of the 4-point scale (i.e., 2.50) and multiplying it across the 10 items. Although a standardised benchmark for CDS engagement is not widely established in existing literature, this threshold was theoretically justified based on NYSC behavioural expectations. It represented a minimally acceptable level of consistent participation, above the midpoint between agreement and disagreement. The benchmark was applied as a reference point to assess whether the average CDS engagement score among corps members exceeded the expected standard.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and eligibility was limited to individuals who had served in NYSC batches from 2012 to 2021. Written informed consent was obtained electronically before participation. In line with the Nigeria Code of Health Research Ethics, survey-based studies are exempt from formal ethical review. To ensure data privacy, no personally identifiable information such as names or email addresses was collected. Responses were anonymised and stored on an encrypted, password-protected computer belonging to the lead researcher. Additional protections included antivirus

software and a firewall. Participants were informed that the data would be used strictly for academic purposes and deleted after the study using certified third-party software, following safe harbour data disposal principles (Owan et al. 2022).

5 Results

5.1 Level of CDS Engagement Among Corps Members

A single-sample *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether the average Community Development Service (CDS) commitment score among corps members differed from a hypothesised benchmark of 25.00. Results showed a significantly higher mean score ($M = 28.29$, $SD = 2.80$) compared to the test value, $t(19,277) = 287.42$, $p < 0.001$. The mean difference of 5.79 indicates that corps members consistently reported higher-than-expected involvement in CDS activities.

As shown in Table 1, the observed average exceeds the benchmark by a clear margin, suggesting that corps members are actively engaged in their community development responsibilities. This level of engagement aligns with the objectives of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme and supports the continued inclusion of CDS as a key element of national service.

5.2 Age and CDS Engagement

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess whether corps members' compliance with Community Development Service (CDS) responsibilities differed by age group. The results in Table 2 showed no statistically significant difference in CDS compliance across the four age categories, $F(3, 19,274) = 1.59$, $p = 0.190$. Since the *p*-value exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis was retained. This result suggests that age does not significantly influence corps members' level of CDS engagement. Compliance scores were consistent across the age brackets, with all groups reporting similar levels of participation.

Table 1: One-sample *t*-test comparing corps members' average CDS engagement score to the expected benchmark ($n = 19,278$).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
CDS involvement	28.29	2.80	287.42	0.000

Test value = 25.00; $df = 19,277$; Mean difference = 5.79.

Table 2: ANOVA results showing no significant age differences in corps members' compliance with CDS responsibilities (n = 19,278).

Age categories	N	M	SD		
16–20 years	1,868	28.38	2.758		
21–25 years	5,665	28.33	2.798		
26–30 years	6,569	28.25	2.832		
Above 30 years	5,176	28.26	2.764		
Total	19,278	28.29	2.797		
Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	37.297	3	12.432	1.589	0.190
Within groups	150756.522	19,274	7.822		
Total	150793.819	19,277			

5.3 Gender and CDS Engagement

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether commitment to Community Development Service (CDS) differed between male and female corps members. The results in Table 3 showed no statistically significant difference in mean CDS engagement scores between males ($M = 28.31$, $SD = 2.78$) and females ($M = 28.27$, $SD = 2.81$), $t(19,276) = 1.16$, $p = 0.247$. Since the *p*-value exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis was retained. This finding suggests that gender does not significantly affect corps members' commitment to CDS responsibilities. Both male and female participants reported similar levels of engagement.

5.4 Marital Status and CDS Engagement

An independent samples *t*-test was performed to determine whether Community Development Service (CDS) engagement differed based on marital status. The results in Table 4 showed no statistically significant difference in mean engagement scores between single corps members ($M = 28.29$, $SD = 2.79$) and married corps members ($M = 28.28$, $SD = 2.87$), $t(19,276) = 1.60$, $p = 0.206$. As the *p*-value is greater

Table 3: Independent *t*-test results comparing CDS engagement between male and female corps members (n = 19,278).

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p
CDS engagement	Male	10,028	28.31	2.78	1.159	0.247
	Female	9,250	28.27	2.81		

Df = 19276.

Table 4: Independent *t*-test results comparing CDS engagement between single and married corps members (n = 19,278).

Variables	Marital status	N	M	SD	t	p
Community development service (CDS) engagements	Single	17,678	28.29	2.791	1.599	0.206
	Married	1,600	28.28	2.866		

Df = 19276.

than 0.05, the null hypothesis was retained. These findings suggest that marital status does not significantly influence corps members' participation in CDS activities. Both groups reported comparable levels of engagement.

5.5 Educational Qualification and CDS Engagement

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess whether adherence to Community Development Service (CDS) responsibilities varied by corps members' educational qualifications. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in CDS adherence across education levels, $F(3, 19,274) = 181.30$, $p < 0.001$. As the *p*-value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that educational qualification significantly influences CDS engagement. As shown in Table 5, corps members with a Higher National Diploma (HND) recorded the highest mean adherence ($M = 28.54$, $SD = 2.76$), followed by those with a doctorate ($M = 28.11$, $SD = 2.03$), a master's degree ($M = 27.35$, $SD = 3.10$), and a first degree ($M = 26.40$, $SD = 2.20$).

Tukey's post hoc test of honest significant differences confirmed significant differences between the groups. Corps

Table 5: ANOVA results showing significant differences in CDS adherence by educational qualification (n = 19,278).

Education level	N	M	SD
HND	1,4226	28.54	2.756
First degree	90	26.40	2.202
Master's	3,244	27.35	3.099
Doctorate	1,718	28.11	2.025
Total	1,9278	28.29	2.797

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	4138.525	3	1379.508	181.300*	0.000
Within groups	146655.294	1,9274	7.609		
Total	150793.819	1,9277			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$.

members with first degrees reported lower adherence than those with HND qualifications, with a mean difference of 2.14 ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, those with master's degrees adhered more than those with HNDs (mean difference = 1.19, $p < 0.05$). Doctorate holders also showed greater adherence than HND holders (mean difference = 0.43, $p < 0.05$), first-degree holders (mean difference = 1.71, $p < 0.05$), and master's degree holders (mean difference = 0.76, $p < 0.05$).

These findings suggest that higher academic qualifications are positively associated with CDS engagement. The fact that the overall mean commitment score ($M = 28.29$) exceeded the benchmark of 25.00 further affirms that corps members are actively involved in community development. This supports the continued relevance of CDS within the NYSC framework and points to the potential value of strengthening programme delivery through education-based strategies.

6 Discussion of Findings

This study examined the influence of selected demographic variables on corps members' participation in Community Development Services (CDS) under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme in Nigeria. Specifically, it assessed the extent of corps members' engagement in CDS and assessed whether participation varied by age, gender, marital status, or educational qualification. The findings offer valuable information on how these variables relate to civic responsibility among young Nigerian graduates and suggest implications for national service policies and youth development strategies.

The first finding confirmed that corps members exceeded the expected benchmark for CDS engagement, indicating a high level of participation in community service. This supports the NYSC's foundational aim of fostering civic responsibility, national integration, and community-based development. The consistently high engagement level suggests that CDS activities are not merely routine obligations but are perceived as meaningful opportunities by participants. This finding is consistent with the goals of the NYSC scheme and supports its role in promoting civic responsibility among participants. It also corroborates findings by Owan et al. (2022), who observed strong civic participation among Nigerian graduates involved in structured service initiatives. In a country where confidence in youth involvement is sometimes uncertain, these findings suggest that well-organised initiatives like the NYSC can effectively support community development efforts.

Notably, the second finding revealed no meaningful difference in CDS participation among the various age groups, despite existing literature suggesting that age often influences civic engagement (Agumagu et al. 2006; Okafor

and Owolade 2023). This absence of a significant difference may be linked to the limited age variation among NYSC participants, most of whom are recent graduates under the age of 30. Being at a similar stage of personal and professional development, they are likely to share comparable motivations, adaptability, and willingness to engage in CDS activities. While some scholars argue that younger corps members tend to show greater enthusiasm and availability for group tasks (Fareo 2020; Usman 2020), the present findings suggest that once enrolled, age-related differences may become less relevant in the structured NYSC setting. This interpretation supports Udoma et al. (2024), who argue that institutional expectations and uniform programme delivery can mitigate personal demographic differences among participants.

Similarly, gender did not significantly affect corps members' level of engagement in CDS activities from the third finding. Both male and female participants reported comparable commitment levels, contradicting some earlier findings that reported gendered patterns of involvement in development projects (Arigbo et al. 2019; Egobueze et al. 2024). Although earlier studies reported that men tended to be more involved in physical infrastructure projects while women participated more in education and health-related tasks (Atta et al. 2024; Chukwu 2024), the findings of this study indicate that overall levels of engagement in CDS activities are largely similar across genders. This supports evidence from Ukpabi (2021), who found that female corps members were just as committed as their male counterparts. It also suggests a possible shift in cultural expectations, with NYSC activities providing more balanced opportunities for male and female participation regardless of role assignment.

In contrast, educational qualification proved to be an important factor affecting the level of adherence to CDS responsibilities. Corps members with higher qualifications, particularly those with HNDs and doctorate degrees, reported stronger engagement compared to those with first degrees. This supports the civic skills theory (Verba et al. 1995), which posits that education enhances individuals' capacities for civic involvement by equipping them with planning, communication, and organisational skills. Similarly, the human capital theory (Becker 1964) suggests that those with more education are more likely to recognise the developmental value of participating in structured service activities. The variation in commitment across qualification levels may also reflect differing motivations: those with advanced degrees may view CDS participation as a way to leave an impact, while others may be more focused on job-seeking or relocation concerns. This trend supports the findings of Burgos and Mertens (2017) but differs from those of Ukpabi (2021), who reported no link between educational attainment and participation in CDS activities.

Finally, marital status did not significantly influence CDS engagement among corps members. Although previous studies reported that married participants may struggle to balance family responsibilities with service obligations (Fareo 2020; Oladeji et al. 2014), this study's findings suggest that such constraints may not substantially affect overall participation levels in the NYSC setting. The organised structure of the programme, along with accountability within peer groups, may support married corps members in sustaining levels of participation similar to those who are single. Moreover, with a relatively small proportion of married corps members in the sample, their influence on the group average may have been limited. These findings align with Ayinde and Adegoke (2016), who found no significant marital-status-based difference in CDS participation. They suggest that other factors, such as group leadership, deployment location, or peer influence, may play a stronger role in shaping CDS engagement than marital commitments.

7 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has a few limitations that should be acknowledged. One key concern is the limited spread of the sample. A large number of respondents came from specific regions, which makes it difficult to generalise the findings across the country. Regional differences in culture, community expectations, and CDS implementation may influence how corps members participate. Future studies should include more respondents from a wider range of states to allow for comparisons. This may help researchers understand how place-based factors affect members' willingness to take part in community projects.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study. Since data were collected at one point in time, it was not possible to track changes in commitment or behaviour. This limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about cause and effect. A follow-up study using a longitudinal approach would allow researchers to observe changes in commitment over time and how various personal or external factors may influence engagement.

The use of self-reported data also presents some concerns. Participants might have overstated their involvement due to social pressure or simply misremembered their actions. This can reduce the accuracy of the results. To improve reliability, future studies should include other sources of evidence such as attendance records, supervisor evaluations, or interviews. A

combination of methods would help check how well self-reports match actual behaviour.

The study also did not include certain variables that might influence CDS participation. While age, gender, marital status, and education were considered, other factors like personal motivation, economic background, deployment location, or nature of the CDS project were not examined. Including such variables in future research could give a fuller picture of what encourages or hinders corps members from taking their responsibilities seriously.

Finally, the benchmark score used to assess engagement was based on programme expectations rather than a national standard. Although the method used was reasonable, there is still a need to validate this score across different NYSC batches or CDS types. This would help determine if the same level of commitment applies in various settings. There is also room to refine the scale used for measuring participation to ensure it reflects what NYSC values in its service goals.

Despite these challenges, the study adds useful knowledge about how corps members engage with community development. It provides a base for future studies and could help improve programme design. The findings about educational qualification, and the minimal effects of gender or marital status, suggest that some assumptions may need to be re-examined. With further work, a better understanding of how to support and improve CDS participation will emerge.

8 Conclusions

This study examined how demographic factors influence corps members' commitment to community development services within the National Youth Service Corps programme. The results showed that corps members are generally committed to CDS tasks. Among the variables considered, educational qualification made a clear difference in participation levels. Those with higher qualifications reported stronger engagement, while age, gender, and marital status did not lead to any meaningful differences. This finding questions some earlier beliefs about the influence of these personal factors on civic responsibility. These results are important for those working in youth development and national service planning. They show that educational background plays a key role in shaping how corps members engage with their communities. Efforts to improve service delivery should build on this knowledge by designing activities that take educational experience into account. It is also important to move beyond general assumptions based on age or gender when assessing commitment. Instead, attention should be paid to practical factors, such as

motivation and skill level. This approach can help support corps members more effectively, allowing them to contribute according to their abilities and interests. Although the study focused on the NYSC, its findings can inform broader discussions on youth participation in national development. Other service programmes may draw useful lessons from this study when looking to strengthen their own engagement strategies. This research provides a better understanding of how corps members approach community development. It points to the value of data-driven planning and encourages future efforts to support meaningful youth participation in service to society.

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