

**Title:** Increasing civic responsibility in college students: Service learning in Pakistan

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**Context and setting:** Given the host of social problems Pakistan faces, it is important to create awareness in the youth about their civic role in society. A service learning project was implemented by College of Social Sciences students in an urban community health center visited by women of reproductive age in Lahore, Pakistan.

**Why the idea was necessary:** In the Pakistani educational system there is a lack of programs that provide learning in context of real life situations. Service learning integrates community service with academic learning. It promotes civic responsibility, strengthens communities by emphasizing interaction with community. Reflection of students' experiences enhances their learning and communication skills.

The program was designed to increase awareness of the students about the needs of the community while focusing on Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA) which is a significant national health problem with a prevalence of 52%. This strengthened the bond between our youth and community.

**What was done:** Thirteen students from a girls' college volunteered to work in the project. They spent 26 hours during their spring semester with women at a community health centre. Prior to commencing the project the students went through interactive role-play communication skills sessions and spent 6 hours with the facilitator to learn about IDA. The students' perceptions regarding their ability to communicate with others were recorded using the Self Perceived Communication Competency (SPCC) survey both before and after the project. A pre and post survey of the students' perceptions regarding their civic role using the K-12 Civic Responsibility Survey plus a focus group discussion was also conducted. Forty-eight women volunteered to be enrolled in the program. A validated tool adapted for this study was used to gauge the community women's understanding of the causes, signs, symptoms and preventions of IDA before and after the educational intervention.

**Evaluation of results and impact:** For students, statistically significant improvements on measures of connection to community (p-value 0.022), civic awareness and attitude (p-value <0.018) and civic action and efficacy (p-value <0.001) were obtained. Similar improvement was seen in five constructs of the SPCC survey. The awareness of students regarding their civic role in society and understanding of the problems faced by the community increased. The data showed a gain in students' sense of satisfaction and their health related knowledge as well as their ability to disseminate it to community.

For the community, women reported improvement in their knowledge about IDA, especially its prevention. They reported positive feelings about interacting with students.

The project generated ripple effect among the faculty of the students' college who now plan to include Service Learning in the institution's curriculum.