



Journal of Community Positive Practices

Year XXIV
No. 2/2024

- M. Rezaul ISLAM, Ndungi WA MUNGAI – The British Council's Social Action Project (SAP): nurturing youth leadership through community engagement
- Vlad I. ROȘCA, Georgiana-Virginia BONEA – Paving the way: migrant women's perceptions and experiences regarding gender-based discrimination on the Romanian labor market
- Željko PAVIĆA, Emma KOVAČEVIĆB – Negative information leads to a decline of trust in science: the connection between traditional and social media uses and vaccination conspiracy beliefs
- Muhammad NAZEER – The water, sanitation and hygiene situation in the Central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan
- Manal M. ALQAHTANI – Evaluation of the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities
- Zsuzsanna PÁLFFY, Lívia ABLONCZY-MIHÁLYKA – Sustainable approach of corporate embeddedness: good practices of small and medium-sized family companies



Director

PhD. Sorin CACE, Catalactica Association, Research Institute for Quality of Life,
Romanian Academy

Scientific Committee:

- PhD, Professor Cătălin ZAMFIR*, Member of Romanian Academy
PhD, Professor Asher BEN-ARIEH, Haruv Institute, Jerusalem, Israel
PhD, Professor Gary B. MELTON, University of Colorado, Denver, USA
PhD, Professor John LUTZKER, Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA
PhD, Professor Michael J. PALMIOTTO, Wichita State University, Kansas, USA
PhD, Professor Jill KORBIN, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, USA
PhD, Professor Jimmy TAYLOR, Ohio University, Zanesville, Ohio, USA
PhD, Professor Andrea WIGFIELD, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom
PhD, Professor Elizabeth ECKERMANN, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia
PhD, Professor Renwu TANG, Dean of School of Management,
Dean of Academy of Government at Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
PhD, Professor Amitabh KUNDU, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
PhD, Professor Claude MARTIN, Research Director CNRS, Université de Rennes, France
PhD, Professor Munyae M. MULINGE, United States International University (USIU), Nairobi, Kenya
PhD, Professor Manuel Antonio GARRETON, University of Chile, Santiago de Chile, Chile
PhD, Professor Renata FRANČ, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Zagreb, Croatia
PhD, Professor Asun LLENA BERNE, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
PhD, Professor Nawab Ali KHAN, Sarrar bin Abduaziz University, Al Kharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
PhD, Professor Mihaela TOMIȚĂ, Universitatea de Vest, Timisoara
PhD, Professor Valeriu IOAN-FRANČ, Corresponding Member of Romanian Academy,
National Institute of Economic Research, Bucharest, Romania
PhD, Professor Corina CACE, Academy of Economy Studies, Bucharest, Romania
PhD, Professor Mircea ALEXIU, Western University, Timisoara, Romania
PhD, Professor Ștefan COJOCARU, University Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași, Romania

Editorial Board:

- Andreia-Nicoleta ANTON*, Catalactica Association
Daniela DANDARA-TĂBĂCARU, Catalactica Association
Vlad I. ROȘCA, Lecturer, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
Cristina TOMESCU, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy

Editorial:

Luminița LOGIN – layout and editing
Nicolae LOGIN – cover

Edited by:



Bucharest, Romania
CNCSIS: cod 045/2006
Editor-in-Chief:

Valeriu IOAN-FRANČ

Cover design: Nicolae LOGIN

Design and layout: Luminița LOGIN

Phone: 0040-21 318 24 38; Fax: 0040-21 318 24 32;

e-mail: edexpert@zappmobile.ro

License to the Ministry of Culture no. 1442/1992

**ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND PROMOTION CATALACTICA**

Str. Simetriei 18 A, Sector 2, București, România

Tel/ Fax: 0040 31 4381006

Email: office@jppc.ro;

www.catalactica.org.ro;

cacesorin@gmail.com

ISSN 1582-9344 (printed version); ISSN 2247-6571 (electronic version), indexed in

Scopus; Google Scholar; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; CEEOL; ProQuest; Scipio; Questia; WorldCat

CONTENT

THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT (SAP): NURTURING YOUTH LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.....	3
M. Rezaul ISLAM, Ndungi WA MUNGAI	
PAVING THE WAY: MIGRANT WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES REGARDING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION ON THE ROMANIAN LABOR MARKET.....	27
Vlad I. ROȘCA, Georgiana-Virginia BONEA	
NEGATIVE INFORMATION LEADS TO A DECLINE OF TRUST IN SCIENCE: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA USES AND VACCINATION CONSPIRACY BELIEFS.....	51
Željko PAVIĆA, Emma KOVAČEVIĆB	
THE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA PROVINCE OF PAKISTAN	78
Muhammad NAZEER	
EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.....	95
Manal M. ALQAHTANI	
SUSTAINABLE APPROACH OF CORPORATE EMBEDDEDNESS: GOOD PRACTICES OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED FAMILY COMPANIES.....	115
Zsuzsanna PÁLFFY, Lívía ABLONCZY-MIHÁLYKA	

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

Authors wishing to publish papers at JCPP are asked to send their manuscripts electronic at <http://jppc.ro/en/index.php/jppc/about/submissions>. For publishing a paper, authors must follow the requirements and conditions set forth below.

Who can publish: Papers can be sent by researchers, academics and professionals with interests related to socio-economic sciences. The main criteria considered by the reviewers are originality, novelty, potential to spark debate and coherent exposure. Documents submitted for publication will be examined by editors before being placed into the process of review.

Fields of interest: Papers in area of Social Sciences including: General Social Sciences, Sociology and Political Science, Social Sciences (miscellaneous).

Requirements for publishing: The paper must be submitted in **English**, by e-mail, as attached **Word** file in a single document which will include all images and tables. Minimum requirements must be met on the following:

- **Size:** the paper should contain a maximum of 15 pages including biography. 4000-6000 words
- **Paper title:** should be concise and summarize the most appropriate contents of the paper
- **File format:** Microsoft Word
- **Text format:** Times New Roman 12, 1 line spacing, with diacritics if the text is in Romanian
- **Information about the author/ authors (a maximum of 250 words):** for each author it must be mentioned the academic title, current position, institution to which it belongs, contact details – telephone and e-mail. For the selected authors, all this information will be made public. The submission of a manuscript implies that the author certifies that the material is not copyrighted and is not currently under review for another publication. If the article has appeared or will appear in another publication, details of such publication must be disclosed to the editors at the time of submission.
- **Abstract:** will present shortly the purpose, field of application, research methods, results and conclusions of the paper. It should have a maximum of 250 words and will be written in English.
- **Key-words:** are designed to provide a rapid classification of the paper. The key-words must be written in English, separated by semicolon (;) and placed below the abstract.
- **Tables:** as simple as possible, with explanatory titles, numbered in the order they appear in the text. The source of the data must be mentioned below each table (Times New Roman 10, italic, aligned left).
- **Graphs:** should be made in Excel, in black and white and must be inserted and numbered in the order of appearance in the text. Each graph should have an explanatory title and the source of the data should be mentioned below the graph (Times New Roman 10, italic, aligned left).
- **Footnotes:** are inserted in the text and numbered with Arabic numbers. Their size should be reduced by bringing clarification on the text.
- **References:** should be cited as follows: the name of the author, year of the publication and page, all in parentheses (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003, p. 93) or if the name of the author is mentioned within a sentence it should be included as follows: ...Ritzer and Goodman (2003, p. 93). At a first citation containing from three to five authors, all names are mentioned, afterwards, it is used [the first author] “et al.”. If more than one paper by the same author, from the same year is cited, the letters a, b, c etc. should included after the year of publication. The citation of a paper available online should be performed following the same rules as for a book or a magazine specifying the electronic address where it was consulted.
- **Bibliography:** the full list of the references cited in the text must be presented at the end of the paper, below annexes, in alphabetical order of the names of the authors and in a chronological order for a group of references by the same author. The order is the following: name of the author/ authors, year of appearance, title, publisher, city; for example:
Rea, A., Tripier, M. (2008). *Sociologie de l'immigration*. Paris: La Decouverte
Koh, H. K. (2010). A 2020 vision for healthy people. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 362(18), 1653–1656

The process of review: Papers are reviewed by two specialists. Depending on their recommendations, the editors decide whether publish/ reject the paper or make suggestions for improvement to the author/ authors. The editors have the right to make minor editorial changes to submitted papers, including the correction of grammatical mistakes, punctuation and writing, as well as modify the format of the paper, but no major changes will be performed without the approval of the author. If major changes are needed, the paper is returned to the author for him to make the necessary changes. Authors are informed by e-mail on the status of the papers sent in no more than 6 weeks from their receipt.

Papers accepted for publication are sent to authors for accept printing. Authors are asked to respond to the editorial board within 7 days. Authors submitting papers to the editorial board implicitly declare their publishing agreement in these conditions..



THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT (SAP): NURTURING YOUTH LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

M. Rezaul ISLAM¹
Ndungi WA MUNGAI²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.01>

Abstract: *This article discusses the nature and characteristics of the Social Action Project (SAP) and its effectiveness in promoting youth leadership through community engagement. SAP is a youth leadership program administered by the British Council. The program aims to empower young individuals to address social issues significant to them and to cultivate the necessary skills and confidence to create a positive impact within their communities. The research employed a Qualitative Interpretative Meta-Synthesis (QIMS) framework. Results showed that SAP provided various opportunities for the youths, equipping them with the essential knowledge, skills, and support required to assume leadership roles in their communities. These findings offer important guidelines for youth organizers, practitioners, and policymakers to make this program more youth-friendly and successful in developing youth leadership.*

Keywords: *youth leadership, youth training, youth empowerment, community engagement, Social Action Project, British Council*

1. Introduction

The Social Action Project (SAP) is a youth leadership program run by the British Council that aims to empower young people to take action on social issues that matter to them and develop the skills and confidence

¹ PhD., Center for Family and Child Studies, Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates; Professor, Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh. E-mail: rezauldu@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-2217-7507

² PhD., Senior Lecturer in Social Work, School of Social Work and Arts, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia. E-mail: nmungai@csu.edu.au ORCID: 0000-0002-3281-1022

needed to make a positive impact in their communities (Buzinde et al., 2019). The program is designed for young people aged between 18-25, who are passionate about making changes in their lives and community and want to develop the skills and knowledge to turn their ideas into actions. The SAP program is delivered through a combination of workshops, training, mentoring, and community engagement activities (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). The program is tailored to the needs and interests of the participants and is designed to be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the participants. The program is also designed to be inclusive, ensuring that young people from diverse backgrounds can participate and benefit from the program. Through the SAP program, young people gain a deeper understanding of the social issues they care about, learn how to develop, and implement effective action plans, and develop leadership skills that will serve them well in the future. The program also provides young people with the opportunity to connect with like-minded peers and learn from experienced mentors and community leaders.

The SAP program is part of the British Council's broader efforts to promote youth empowerment and civic engagement. It is argued that many young people are not given the chance to take on leadership roles in their communities, and as a result, they may miss out on valuable experiences and opportunities to make a positive impact. The SAP aims to address this problem by providing young people with the support and resources they need to become effective leaders and active members of their communities. The program is based on the belief that young people have the potential to be powerful agents of change and that by providing them with the right skills and support, we can help them to make a meaningful and lasting impact in their communities. This paper aims to provide an overview of the SAP program, including its design, implementation, and evaluation. It will describe the program's goals and objectives, its target population, and the key components of the program. Additionally, it will provide an assessment of the program's effectiveness in promoting youth leadership and community engagement, and highlight the key lessons learned from the program's implementation.

Developing leadership skills in young people is crucial for their personal and professional growth, as well as for the betterment of their communities. By providing opportunities for community engagement, the

SAP helps young people to develop the skills and knowledge needed to become effective leaders, which can have a positive impact on their communities and society (Hastings et al., 2011; Horstmeier & Ricketts, 2009; Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006; Farago et al., 2018; Checkoway, 2011). Additionally, this research is significant as it can provide valuable insights on how to effectively engage young people in community service and leadership development programs. It will help to identify the key factors that contribute to the success of such programs, which can then be replicated and scaled to reach more young people. Furthermore, the outcomes of this research could inform the design of similar programs in other organizations, thus helping to promote youth leadership and community engagement on a larger scale.

2. Research context: Youth leadership and community engagement of British Council

The British Council (BC) is a UK-based organization promoting cultural relations and education globally. Their Active Citizens program is a social leadership initiative that empowers individuals and communities to create positive change. Since its inception in 2009, the program has impacted over 100,000 people through training, conferences, research, and international visits. It focuses on developing leadership skills, fostering teamwork, and encouraging critical thinking. Participants engage in community service and social enterprise projects while connecting with a global network. The program is inclusive and delivered in partnership with local organizations, tailored to each community's needs. Through the Active Citizens program, the BC aims to foster a sense of global citizenship and empower individuals to address local and global challenges effectively.

This paper conceives two main concepts such as community engagement and youth leadership. Community engagement has been defined as "the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people" (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997). Previous studies have shown that community engagement can have a positive impact on both individuals and communities. For example, community engagement can lead to

increased social capital, improved health outcomes, and increased civic participation (Hawe et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2018; McPherson et al., 2001). On the other hand, youth leadership has been defined as "the ability of young people to inspire, motivate, and direct others toward a common goal or vision" (Komives et al., 2015). Murphy and Reichard (2012) found that education and social contexts such as schools and extracurricular activities play a significant role in shaping early leadership behaviors in fostering leadership skills through opportunities for collaboration, decision-making, and taking on responsibilities. These contexts shape adolescents' values, beliefs, and attitudes towards leadership, as well as provide them with role models and opportunities for social engagement that contribute positively to their communities and society. Youth leadership development programs have been shown to increase civic engagement, self-efficacy, and academic achievement among young people (Flanagan et al., 2011; Liang et al., 2015; Skogan et al., 1999; Murphy & Reichard, 2012).

The BC Active Citizens program promotes cross-cultural, geographic, and political peer-to-peer learning through an engaging community of participants (Percy-Smith, 2015). Upon completion of the program, participants are eligible to apply for a spot on an international study visit. The program is designed for individuals aged 18 and over who possess a strong sense of local culture and identity, an established local network, an interest in learning and expanding their perspectives, good communication skills, and a value for fairness and social justice. Additionally, participants should already have some experience with social action in their community, either through professional or volunteer work. The Active Citizens Learning Journey is a fundamental aspect of the program, which focuses on exploring the ways people connect and appreciate diversity. The journey is guided by a commitment to social justice, inclusion, and empowering individuals to shape society.

The Learning Journey involves going through four learning modules shown below and in figure 1 (The British Council, 2014):

- **Module 1: Understanding Me - Identity and Culture:** In this module, participants gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of identity and culture, and apply this learning to comprehend the beliefs, behavior, and attitudes of themselves and others.

- Module 2: Intercultural Dialogue - Me & You: Participants learn how to use dialogue as a tool for fostering empathy, trust, and understanding within and across cultures.
- Module 3: Building Communities - We Together: Participants gain insight into the concept of 'community' and its relationship with identity and culture. They apply this learning to their community to identify a problem they want to address and the people they need to engage to achieve their goals.
- Module 4: Social Action Planning: Participants focus on planning a social action initiative in their community, taking into account different levels of detail and complexity. This includes identifying and clarifying their agenda, a specific intervention, and how they will implement it.

Figure 1: The learning Journey



Source: The British Council (2014)

The British Council offers youth leadership development training as part of its education and society program. These programs aim to empower young people to become active citizens and leaders in their communities through training, mentoring, and networking opportunities (Buzinde et al., 2019). They provide young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to create positive change in their communities, and to be able to address local and global challenges. These programs may include training in leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. They may also provide opportunities for young people to engage in volunteering, community service, and social enterprise projects. These programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all young people, regardless of their background.

BC's Active Citizens program promotes sustainable social change globally by building a network of local leaders. It targets individuals already committed to social responsibility, such as youth workers, educators, and faith leaders, providing them with training and connecting them with like-minded individuals worldwide. The program operates in partnership with local organizations, and an animation on the homepage gives an overview of its workings. Unique in its direct delivery by BC, the program focuses on developing skills and knowledge for individuals actively working to improve their communities through positive social action. It aims to cultivate "Active Citizens" who are self-aware, understand systems, and take positive actions for their community's benefit. These individuals actively engage in trust-building, understanding, and social participation within their local and global communities. The program empowers leaders to have a significant impact, contributing to sustainable development at both local and global levels.

This active citizen leadership program has a key objective: to inspire young people in the local community to actively participate in making a difference. This involvement, known as community engagement, means working together with community members to address issues that affect them and achieve common goals (Mathur & Clark, 2014; Roman et al., 2023). It is a collaborative approach that empowers people to take an active role in identifying and resolving challenges they face, working together to bring about positive changes. Community engagement can take various forms, such as holding public meetings, conducting focus groups, gathering community feedback through surveys, and even involving community members in deciding how to allocate resources (participatory budgeting). It is often used in activities related to community development, planning, and creating policies. The overall goal of community engagement is to foster a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable community (Suboticki et al., 2023). This is achieved by giving everyone a voice and ensuring that their needs and concerns are considered and included in the decision-making processes. In essence, the program aims to empower local youths to actively participate in shaping their community's future in a way that benefits everyone.

Table 1 presents a planning overview of the "Save Water at Home" social action project, which aims to reduce household water consumption through efficient appliances and water-saving techniques. The table provides details on the project's goals, objectives, expected results,

stakeholders, challenges, required resources, activities, assessment techniques, and sustainability initiatives. For a more comprehensive understanding of the project, readers are encouraged to refer to Table 1 for detailed information.

Table 1: Planning for a social action project on climate actions

Name of social action project: Save Water at Home		
Goal	The goal of the project is to reduce household water consumption through the implementation of efficient appliances and water-saving techniques	
Objectives	<u>Immediate objectives</u> a) Identify the main sources of water consumption: b) Research and implement water-saving technologies c) Educate household members d) Monitor and track usage periods	<u>Long term objectives</u> a) Establish a sustainable water usage plan b) Promote water conservation in the community c) Continuously monitor and improve
Problems that will be solved through this project	High water consumption Lack of awareness Inefficient use of resources Environmental impact	
Expected results	Reduced water consumption Increased awareness and understanding of water conservation Improved water efficiency Positive environmental impact	
Stakeholders associated with this project	a) Stakeholders associated with a project to save water at home can include homeowners, landlords, utility companies, water conservation organizations, and government agencies. b) Homeowners and landlords may be responsible for implementing water-saving measures in their properties, while utility companies and government agencies may provide resources and incentives to help with conservation efforts. c) Water conservation organizations may offer education and support to help individuals and families reduce their water usage.	
Challenging agents	<u>Inside community</u> Homeowners Local businesses Political leaders or government officials Opponents or competitors of the project Misinformed or skeptical community members	<u>Outside community</u> Water rights holders or other stakeholders Other municipalities or regions State or federal government agencies that regulate water usage or allocation Environmental advocacy groups or non-governmental organizations Private water companies or other water providers

	Property developers Industry groups or lobby groups Community members Political groups with different ideologies	Industry groups or lobby groups Other interest groups with different ideologies Other communities with water scarcity problem Scientists and researchers may disagree on the best International organizations or countries		
Resources needed	<u>Materialistic</u> Water-saving fixtures such as low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators, and toilets with dual flush options. Water meter or other device for measuring water usage. Timers or automatic shut-off valves for irrigation systems. Rain barrels or other water storage containers. Tools for repair and maintenance Educational materials or signage to inform and educate household members about water conservation. Water leak detector	<u>Human</u> A project manager or team leader Plumbers or other tradespeople Educators or outreach Maintenance personnel Staff or volunteers to monitor Community leaders or representatives	<u>Natural</u> Water Land or outdoor space Sunlight or other energy sources Plants Soil Materials from nature such as natural stones, clay, sand, and other materials	<u>Social</u> Support and participation from household members Support and participation from local organizations and community groups Support from local government and utility companies Support from experts in fields Support from the media Support from financial institutions
Activities		<i>With whom</i>		<i>Time</i>
1	Select a location where the project will be implemented	Youth		7 days
2	Meeting for building awareness about the project	Youth, members of civil society, local government, standing committee, implementing organizations		8 days
3	Prepare a database about major activities, participants, and resources and fundings, prepare working strategies and challenging groups	Youth, members of civil society, local government, standing committee, implementing organizations		20 days
4	Share the list with major stakeholders	Youth and household and other stakeholders		10 days
5	Resource collection	Youth		10 days
6	Implement the activities (household visits, urban meeting, family-based discussion)	Youth, members of civil society, local government, standing committee, implementing organizations		30 days
7	Continues monitoring and supervision	Youth		During implementation period
8	Evaluation	Youth		5 days

Progress assessment techniques	Gantt Charts Earned Value Analysis (EVA) Progress Reports Milestone tracking Checklists and To-do lists Status Meetings Control Charts Pareto Charts Root Cause Analysis
Project evaluation tools	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Benchmarking Return on Investment (ROI) analysis Water audits Performance monitoring Surveys and interviews Cost-benefit analysis Life cycle assessment Triple bottom line approach
Initiatives to make this sustainable	Regular monitoring and evaluation of water usage Regular maintenance and repair of fixtures and systems Education and awareness-raising Implementing a rainwater harvesting system Incorporating green infrastructure Regularly reviewing and updating the project's plan and goals

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Youth leadership through community engagement refers to the process of empowering young people to take on leadership roles in their communities and actively engage in addressing local issues (Jennings et al., 2006; Russell et al., 2009; Checkoway, 2011). This approach aims to provide young people with the skills, resources, and support they need to design and implement social action projects that address specific challenges in their communities. By taking on leadership roles in their communities, young people can develop a sense of civic responsibility and gain a better understanding of the needs and concerns of the community (Zeldin et al., 2013). Youth leadership through community engagement can take many forms, such as youth-led community service projects, youth-led advocacy campaigns, and youth-led community development initiatives (London et al., 2003; Libby et al., 2006; Suleiman et al., 2006; Delgado & Staples, 2007). The goal of this approach is to empower young people to take an active role in shaping the future of their communities and to provide them with the opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need to become effective leaders. It also provides them with the opportunity to work with other community members and organizations and to learn from

their experiences. This type of engagement can foster community cohesion and empowerment, as young leaders work alongside community members to address local issues. It also can help to develop key skills, such as leadership, project management, communication, and problem-solving, which are valuable for personal and professional development (Lee et al., 2020; Blake et al., 2008).

3. Research Methodology

This study presents its findings through a qualitative investigation where a Qualitative Interpretative Meta-Synthesis (QIMS) was conducted to collect data on the British Council's SAP focused on how the program fostered youth leadership through the community. QIMS is a nonlinear conceptualization of a data collection tool that combines themes from a collection of related studies, resulting in a comprehensive understanding. This approach aligns with previous research conducted by Jofres et al. (2008), Ruiz and Praetorius (2016), Schuman (2016), Islam (2016, 2017), Islam and wa Mungai (2016), and Reza et al. (2019).

Data for QIMS were collected using purposive sampling, selecting studies relevant to the British Council's SAP and its importance toward youth leadership through community involvement. Qualitative studies were identified through computer databases and reference lists in the English-language literature, particularly in the social sciences, using keyword searches such as 'Active Citizens', 'Social Action Project', 'youth leadership,' and 'community engagement'. Studies were included in the sample if they met the following criteria: (1) focused on SAP for promoting youth leadership and community engagement, (2) utilized a rigorous qualitative research design, (3) published in English, and (4) published in peer-reviewed journal articles listed in Scopus. All other studies and articles were excluded. The search covered the period from January 2010 to December 2023 in Scopus databases. had read 52 publications and discarded 25 of them due to irrelevancy to the research objectives. The final selection consisted of 18 articles, 4 reports, 3 books, and 2 other sources which were deemed most relevant for this article. I also reviewed relevant published and unpublished national and international reports and documents, including reports published by the British Council, and the United Nations, as well as research reports. These

significant articles and reports are listed in the reference section. I did not simply summarize the findings of previous research, but critically analyzed the selected articles and documents to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of SAP for promoting youth leadership and community engagement. I was aware about the comprehensive understanding of the limitations, challenges, and difficulties outlined by DeSawal and Peck (2022) in their examination of the extensive literature on youth leadership development.

Each piece of literature was carefully analyzed to extract themes. Original themes within each piece of literature were examined to preserve the integrity of the authors' work. Common factors were identified as themes and collected across studies to form a comprehensive understanding, resulting in discrete categories. Through this process, a structural and contextual understanding emerged, describing the engagement of youth in the SAP to promote their leadership skills. Throughout the theme extraction process, the author engaged in triangulation with the research mentor to ensure the validity of evaluation and accuracy in theme selection.

4. Results and Discussions

Features and characteristics of SAP

The Social Action Project (SAP) for youth leadership is a program that aims to empower young people to take action on social issues that matter to them and develop the skills and confidence needed to make a positive impact in their communities (Lash & Kroeger, 2018; Azizi, 1999). The program is designed for young people aged between 18-25, who are passionate about making changes in their lives and want to develop the skills and knowledge to turn their ideas into actions. The SAP program is a holistic program that focuses on the personal and professional development of the youth. It aims to equip the youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become effective leaders and agents of change. The program is designed to be inclusive and responsive to the needs and interests of the participants.

The SAP program is delivered through a combination of interactive workshops, training, mentoring, and community engagement activities. The workshops and training sessions are designed to provide young

people with a deep understanding of social issues and to teach them how to develop and implement effective action plans (Lash & Kroeger, 2018). The mentoring and community engagement activities are designed to provide young people with the opportunity to connect with like-minded peers and to learn from experienced mentors and community leaders. The program also provides young people with the opportunity to put their newly acquired knowledge and skills into practice by implementing a community project. This implemented project is designed to provide young people with the chance to create a tangible and lasting impact in their communities. SAP for youth leadership is a comprehensive program that equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become effective leaders and agents of change. The program is designed to be inclusive, responsive to the needs of the participants, and to provide young people with the opportunity to make a tangible and lasting impact in their communities.

- The project is designed to provide young people and communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to identify and address local and global challenges in their communities (Lash & Kroeger, 2018). SAP is based on the belief that young people and communities are capable of creating positive change in their communities and addressing local and global challenges. It is grounded in the principles of active citizenship, social entrepreneurship, and community development, and it is designed to be inclusive and accessible to people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. SAP has some distinct characteristics and objectives
- The project is designed to be community-led and community-driven, meaning that the project is initiated, planned, and implemented by the local community.
- The project is based on a collaborative approach, where different stakeholders (community members, organizations, and local authorities) work together to identify and address local challenges.
- The project is designed to provide young people and communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to identify and address local and global challenges in their communities.
- The project encourages participants to reflect on their values, beliefs, and actions, and to develop a sense of global citizenship.

- The project provides opportunities for participants to engage in community service and social enterprise projects, and to connect with a global network of like-minded individuals and organizations.
- The project is delivered in partnership with local organizations and is tailored to the specific needs and context of each community.

SAP is a community-led initiative that empowers people to create positive social change through community service and social enterprise projects, by providing them the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to identify and address local and global challenges in their communities. SAP has some distinct characteristics:

- **Planning:** This phase involves identifying a problem or issue in the community, researching possible solutions, and developing a plan of action.
- **Implementation:** This phase involves carrying out the plan of action, which may include activities such as community mobilization, capacity-building, and service delivery.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** This phase involves tracking the progress of the SAP, measuring its impact, and making any necessary adjustments.
- **Sustainability:** This phase involves ensuring that the impact of the SAP is sustained over time, which may include activities such as scaling up the project, building partnerships, and developing a long-term sustainability plan.
- **Communication and dissemination:** This phase involves communicating the results of the SAP to key stakeholders and disseminating the learnings from the project to other organizations or actors that could benefit from them.

SAP for youth leadership through community engagement

SAPs have been implemented in various countries around the world. For example, the Youth Service America (YSA) program in the United States is a similar initiative that aims to promote youth engagement and leadership through community service projects (Elsabbagh et al., 2013).

The YSA program has been shown to have a positive impact on young people's sense of civic responsibility, leadership skills, and community engagement (Elsabbagh et al., 2013; Wray-Lake et al., 2010). Another similar initiative is the Youth Leaders in Action (YLIA) program in Hong Kong, which aims to develop leadership skills among young people through community service projects (Chan, 2014). The YLIA program has been shown to have a positive impact on young people's leadership skills, sense of social responsibility, and personal development (Chan, 2014).

It is worth noting that these components may vary depending on the specific SAP and the organization implementing it, but these are the general components that are usually considered in an SAP. SAP is important for several reasons:

- **Empowerment:** The SAP empowers individuals and communities to take control of their development and to create positive social change in their communities. It provides them with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to identify and address local and global challenges.
- **Community development:** The SAP is designed to be community-led and community-driven, meaning that the project is initiated, planned, and implemented by the local community. This approach helps to build stronger and more resilient communities, as well as promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members.
- **Global citizenship:** The SAP encourages participants to reflect on their values, beliefs, and actions, and to develop a sense of global citizenship. This promotes mutual understanding and respect among people from different cultures and backgrounds and helps to build a more peaceful and just world.
- **Social entrepreneurship:** The SAP provides opportunities for participants to engage in community service and social enterprise projects, which helps to build a more sustainable and equitable society.
- **Networking:** The SAP connects participants with a global network of like-minded individuals and organizations, which provides opportunities for learning, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices.
- **Global connections:** The SAP provides young people with the opportunity to connect with other young leaders from around the

world. This allows them to share ideas and learn from one another, as well as gain a broader perspective on issues affecting their communities and the world at large.

- **Inclusivity:** The SAP is designed to be inclusive and accessible to people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. This helps to ensure that everyone can participate and contribute to the development of their community.
- **Mentoring and training:** The program includes mentoring and training for participants, which helps them to develop the skills and knowledge needed to be successful leaders. This may include training on leadership, project management, and community development, as well as opportunities to gain hands-on experience through volunteer work and other activities.

The SAP aims to create long-term and sustainable impact. Through the program, young people are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to create meaningful and lasting change in their communities. Additionally, the British Council also tracks the progress of the project and evaluates the impact on the community and the young people who participated.

- **Access to resources:** The SAP provides participants with access to a wide range of resources that can help them to achieve their goals. This may include funding for projects, access to experts and mentors, and opportunities to connect with organizations and individuals who can provide support and resources.
- **Flexibility:** The program is flexible and adaptable to the needs and goals of each participant. It allows young people to identify and focus on the issues that matter most to them, and to take action in ways that are meaningful and impactful.
- **Collaboration:** The SAP encourages collaboration among young people, organizations, and communities. This helps to build a sense of shared ownership of the issues being addressed and to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for change.
- **Long-term Support:** The British Council provides long-term support to participants, even after the completion of the program. This allows

young people to continue their work and achieve their goals, as well as maintain their connection with the British Council and the global network of young leaders.

- **Multi-country project:** The SAP is usually a multi-country project which allows young people from different countries to work together and learn from each other's cultures, experiences, and ways of addressing social issues. This helps to broaden the perspectives of young leaders and to create a more inclusive and diverse environment for change.

SAP of the British Council highlights local context and community problems as part of its approach to empowering individuals and communities to create positive social change.

- **Community-led:** The SAP is designed to be community-led and community-driven, meaning that the project is initiated, planned, and implemented by the local community. This approach allows the community to identify their problems and challenges, and to develop solutions that are tailored to the specific context and needs of the community.
- **Needs assessment:** To identify community problems, SAP uses a needs assessment process. This process involves engaging with the community to understand their needs, aspirations, and challenges. This helps to identify issues that are most pressing for the community and ensures that the project is addressing the real needs of the community.
- **Local context:** The SAP takes into consideration the local context of the community, including its culture, history, and social norms. This helps to ensure that the project is culturally appropriate and relevant to the community.
- **Community ownership:** By highlighting local context and community problems, the SAP promotes community ownership and responsibility. This empowers the community to take control of their development and to create positive social change in their communities.
- **Solution-based:** By highlighting local context and community problems, the SAP can develop solutions that are tailored to the specific context and needs of the community. This helps to ensure that

the project is addressing the real needs of the community and is more likely to be successful.

- **Sustainability:** By addressing the specific and local problems and taking into account the local context, SAP's solution is more likely to be sustainable in the long run and have a greater impact.

SAP has had several positive impacts on youth community engagement and empowerment. Firstly, the program has been successful in increasing youth involvement in community development projects. A study by Oxfam found that SAP had increased the participation of young people in local governance and decision-making processes, leading to the development of more effective and sustainable community projects (Oxfam, 2016). This increased engagement has also helped to foster a sense of social responsibility and civic duty among the youth.

Secondly, SAP has been effective in developing the leadership skills of young people. Through the program's training and mentoring activities, young people have been equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to take on leadership roles within their communities. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank found that SAP had led to the development of youth leaders who were able to initiate and implement community projects independently, thereby enhancing the sustainability and impact of these projects (Asian Development Bank, 2013).

Thirdly, SAP has contributed to the empowerment of young people by providing them with opportunities to address social and economic challenges facing their communities. By engaging in community development activities, young people have been able to address issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion. A study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that SAP had contributed to the empowerment of young people by providing them with the skills and confidence to take on these challenges (UNDP, 2018).

Fourthly, youth leadership through community engagement is closely related to a country's social development because it helps to empower young people to take an active role in their communities and make a positive impact. When young people are allowed to lead and engage in community service, they develop important skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. These skills are essential for personal and professional growth, but they also contribute to the

betterment of the community and society. Additionally, youth leadership through community engagement can help to promote social cohesion and inclusivity. By working together on community projects, young people from different backgrounds and perspectives can learn to appreciate and respect each other, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of community. Furthermore, when young people are engaged in community service, they are more likely to be invested in the well-being of their community and to work towards improving social issues such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination.

Fifthly, youth leadership through community engagement is vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It empowers young people, fosters social cohesion, and promotes sustainable development, addressing poverty, inequality, and discrimination. The SAP: Nurturing Youth Leadership through Community Engagement aligns with SDG 4 by providing access to education and skills training. It also contributes to SDG 11 by promoting sustainable practices in communities. Youth leadership through community engagement can advance progress in other SDGs, such as SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10, and SDG 17.

Finally, SAP has had a positive impact on the overall well-being of young people. Through their engagement in community development activities, young people have been able to develop strong social connections and networks, leading to improved mental health and well-being. A study by Plan International found that SAP had led to improved self-esteem and confidence among young people, and had contributed to the development of a sense of belonging and purpose within their communities (Plan International, 2017).

6. Conclusions

The Social Action Project (SAP) for youth leadership is a comprehensive program that aims to empower young people to take action on social issues and make a positive impact in their communities. The program focuses on the personal and professional development of the youth, providing them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become effective leaders and agents of change. SAP is delivered through interactive workshops, training, mentoring, and community engagement

activities. It is community-led, collaborative, and inclusive, and it encourages participants to reflect on their values and develop a sense of global citizenship. SAP has been implemented in various countries and has shown positive impacts on youth community engagement and empowerment. The key results of the study were:

- o Increased youth involvement in community development projects and local governance.
- o Development of leadership skills among young people, leading to independent initiation and implementation of community projects.
- o Empowerment of young people to address social and economic challenges in their communities.
- o Contribution to personal and professional growth of young people, fostering social cohesion and inclusivity.
- o Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing access to education and skills training, promoting sustainable practices, and addressing poverty, inequality, and discrimination.
- o Improved overall well-being of young people, including enhanced self-esteem, confidence, and social connections.

Overall, SAP has proven to be an effective program in empowering youth to create meaningful and lasting change in their communities, while also contributing to their personal growth and well-being.

We have found several limitations and challenges that can significantly impact SAP's success and sustainability. Firstly, limited funding poses a critical obstacle, making it difficult to sustain the project long-term and restricting its overall impact. This financial challenge can result in a reduction of the project's scope, thus limiting its effectiveness (UNESCO, 2018). Secondly, community engagement plays a vital role in the success of SAPs, necessitating active involvement and participation from the community throughout the planning and implementation stages to achieve desired outcomes. Without adequate community engagement, projects may struggle to fulfill their goals and objectives (WHO, 2020). Thirdly, resistance to change within communities, especially when projects propose modifications to long-standing traditions or practices, can impede progress and make goal attainment challenging. All of such projects

underscore the importance of comprehending the cultural and social context of the community before initiating an SAP (Plan International, 2017). Fourthly, successful SAPs often require specific skills and knowledge. Insufficient access to necessary expertise can hinder project outcomes. Proper planning and training must be in place to ensure the project team possesses the required knowledge and skills to effectively implement the SAP (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, considering sustainability right from the planning stage is crucial. Many SAPs depend on external funding, and without adequate plans for long-term sustainability, projects may struggle to continue after funding runs out (Oxfam, 2020). Finally, evaluating the impact of SAPs on communities is crucial but challenging. Developing appropriate evaluation criteria is essential to accurately measure the project's effect on the community (UNDP, 2019). By proactively addressing these challenges through careful planning, community involvement, resource allocation, and a focus on long-term sustainability, SAPs can enhance their chances of success and achieve meaningful outcomes for the communities they serve.

To overcome the limitations and challenges of SAPs, various strategies can be utilized. One of the essential strategies is to identify potential sources of funding early on, such as grants, donations, and partnerships with organizations, and develop a diversified funding strategy to avoid dependency on a single funding source. Effective community engagement can be ensured by building strong relationships and developing a clear communication plan that involves the community in the planning and implementation of the project. Additionally, understanding the community's values and traditions can help overcome resistance to change. Partnering with organizations or individuals that have the necessary skills and knowledge and providing training and capacity-building opportunities can overcome the lack of expertise. A sustainability plan that identifies potential sources of ongoing funding and outlines strategies for maintaining the project's impact over the long term should be developed. A clear evaluation plan that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures, and involves the community in the evaluation process, is also crucial. Regularly monitoring the political and social context and being flexible to adapt the project to changes in government policies and societal attitudes is also important. Combining these strategies can lead to successful SAP implementation.

Acknowledgements

N/A

Funding

The author did not receive any funding for this study.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

References

- Asian Development Bank. (2013). The Social Action Program: A case study on engaging young people in community development in Myanmar. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/156066/social-action-program-engaging-young-people-community-development-myanmar.pdf>
- Azizi, S. L. (1999). *An analysis of the social action program and education of women in Pakistan* (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Tech).
- Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Mayo, M., Shukra, K., & Yarnit, M. (2008). Community engagement and community cohesion. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York*.
- Buzinde, C., Foroughi, B., & Godwyll, J. (2019). Youth leadership programs for community development and social action: a pedagogical approach. *Community Development Journal, 54*(4), 677-694.
- Chan, Y. K. (2014). The Effects of a Service-Learning Leadership Program on Hong Kong Youth. *Journal of Youth Development, 9*(1), 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2014.321>
- Checkoway, B. (2011). What is youth participation?. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(2), 340-345.
- Delgado, M., & Staples, L. (2007). *Youth-led community organizing: Theory and action*. Oxford University Press.
- DeSawal, D. M., & Peck, A. (2022). Assessment, evaluation, and research: Balancing identity and purpose in leadership learning. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2022*(175), 21-29.
- Elsabbagh, M., Yusuf, A., & Saweeres, N. (2013). Youth Service America: A Case Study in Youth Engagement. *The Journal of Social Studies Research, 37*(1), 55–74.
- Farago, F., Swadener, B. B., Richter, J., Eversman, K., & Roca-Servat, D. (2018). Local to global justice: Roles of student activism in higher education,

- leadership development, and community engagement. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 64(2), 154-172.
- Flanagan, C. A., Syvertsen, A. K., Gill, S., & Gally, L. S. (2011). Youth Civic Development & Education. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Social Development* (2nd ed., pp. 455–475). John Wiley & Sons.
- Hastings, L. J., Barrett, L. A., Barbuto Jr, J. E., & Bell, L. C. (2011). Developing a paradigm model of youth leadership development and community engagement: A grounded theory. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 52(1), 19-29.
- Hawe, P., King, L., Noort, M., Jordens, C., & Lloyd, B. (2004). *Indicators to Help with Capacity Building in Health Promotion: User Guide*. Sydney: NSW Health Department.
- Horstmeier, R. P., & Ricketts, K. G. (2009). Youth leadership development through school-based civic engagement activities: A case study. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 8(2), 238-253.
- Islam, M. R. (2023). Navigating the health and wellbeing landscape in South Asia: Assessing progress, addressing challenges, and charting a path forward. *The Eastern Journal of Health Care (EJHC)*, 3(1), 8-17.
- Islam, M. R., & Hossain, D. (2014). Island char resources mobilization (ICRM): Changes of livelihoods of vulnerable people in Bangladesh. *Social Indicators Research*, 117, 1033-1054.
- Islam, M. R., & wa Mungai, N. (2016). Forced eviction in Bangladesh: A human rights issue. *International Social Work*, 59(4), 494-507.
- Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Hilfinger-Messias, D. K., & McLoughlin, K. (2006). Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14(1-2), 31-55.
- Kim, S., Koniak-Griffin, D., Flaskerud, J. H., & Dixon, E. L. (2018). Community Engagement in Health-Related Research: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, 35(4), 189–200.
- Komives, S. R., Wagner, W., & Associates. (2015). *Leadership for a better world: Understanding the social change model of leadership development* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Lash, M. J., & Kroeger, J. (2018). Seeking justice through social action projects: Preparing teachers to be social actors in local and global problems. *Policy Futures in Education*, 16(6), 691-708.
- Lee, L., Currie, V., Saied, N., & Wright, L. (2020). Journey to hope, self-expression and community engagement: Youth-led arts-based participatory action research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104581.
- Liang, B., Farkas, G., Valenzuela, J. M., & Scalise, K. (2015). The Effect of Leadership Programs on Graduation Rates: Building the Body of Evidence. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 14(4), 34–47.

- Libby, M., Sedonaen, M., & Bliss, S. (2006). The mystery of youth leadership development: The path to just communities. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2006*(109), 13-25.
- London, J. K., Zimmerman, K., & Erbstein, N. (2003). Youth-Led research and evaluation: Tools for youth, organizational, and community development. *New Directions for Evaluation, 2003*(98), 33-45.
- Mathur, S. R., & Clark, H. G. (2014). Community engagement for reentry success of youth from juvenile justice: Challenges and opportunities. *Education and Treatment of Children, 37*(4), 713-734.
- McPherson, C., McGibbon, E., & Smith, M. (2001). Community Capacity Building: An Evidence-Based Framework. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 92*(S1), S11-S14.
- Murphy, S. E., & Reichard, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Early development and leadership: Building the next generation of leaders*. Routledge.
- Oxfam. (2016). Social Action Program: Young people as agents of change in Myanmar. https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bn-myanmar-social-action-program-young-people-281116-en.pdf
- Percy-Smith, B. (2015). Negotiating active citizenship: Young people's participation in everyday spaces. Springer.
- Plan International. (2017). Social Action Program: Changing the lives of young people in Myanmar. <https://plan-international.org/publications/social-action-program-changing-lives-young-people-myanmar>
- Reza, M. M., Subramaniam, T., & Islam, M. R. (2019). Economic and social well-being of Asian labour migrants: A literature review. *Social Indicators Research, 141*, 1245-1264.
- Roman, M., Roşca, V. I., Prada, E. M., & Manafi, I. (2023). From migration aspirations to integration: contrasting pioneer and recent moldovan migrants in Romania. *Eastern European Journal for Regional Studies (EEJRS), 9*(1), 32-47.
- Russell, S. T., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A., & Laub, C. (2009). Youth empowerment and high school gay-straight alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 891-903.
- Skogan, W. G., Pickett, J. T., & Wilson, J. Q. (1999). Community Policing in Chicago: Year Two Evaluation. Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research.
- Suboticki, I., Heidenreich, S., Ryghaug, M., & Skjølsvold, T. M. (2023). Fostering justice through engagement: A literature review of public engagement in energy transitions. *Energy Research & Social Science, 99*, 103053.
- Suleiman, A. B., Soleimanpour, S., & London, J. (2006). Youth action for health through youth-led research. *Journal of Community Practice, 14*(1-2), 125-145.
- The British Council (2014). Active citizen- facilitator toolkit. The British Council.

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). Principles of Community Engagement. Retrieved from <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/index.html>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2018). Empowering young people through the Social Action Program in Myanmar. <https://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/library/youth/empowering-young-people-through-the-social-action-program-in-mya.html>
- Wheeler, W., & Edlebeck, C. (2006). Leading, learning, and unleashing potential: Youth leadership and civic engagement. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2006(109), 89-97.
- Wray-Lake, L., Syvertsen, A. K., Briddell, L., Osgood, D. W., & Flanagan, C. A. (2010). Exploring the Effects of Youth Volunteering: New Directions for Youth Development, 2010(128), 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.367>
- Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51, 385-397.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2015). Participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) for community engagement: A theoretical framework. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 4(1), 5-25.

PAVING THE WAY: MIGRANT WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES REGARDING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION ON THE ROMANIAN LABOR MARKET

Vlad I. ROȘCA¹
Georgiana-Virginia BONEA²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.02>

***Abstract:** Through qualitative research conducted with migrant women, this study is relevant for analyzing their perceptions and experiences of gender-based discrimination against them, when looking for a job, for marriage and family reunification, or for studying. It is about a series of difficulties encountered by migrant women in the process of integration in Romania. The study is structured as follows: I) The first part offers an analysis of empirical data extracted from specialized literature and relevant studies to highlight the main defining aspects regarding gender-based discrimination criteria in relation to migrant women's access to the labor market; II) The second part of the study consists in explaining the research methodology; III) The third part provides an analysis of the findings from oral history six interviews conducted on Zoom with migrant women, between June 2021 and January 2022; IV) The last part offers a set of relevant conclusions on the subject.*

***Keywords:** migration, gender-based discrimination, women, labor market*

¹ Assistant Professor, Ph.D., UNESCO Department for Business Administration, The Faculty of Business Administration, in foreign languages (FABIZ), The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, e-mail: vlad.rosca@fabiz.ase.ro

² Scientific Researcher III (CS III), Ph.D., Research Institute for Quality of Life, the Romanian Academy, e-mail: georgiana.bonea@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The labor market is built around competition regarding the selection of workers according to certain qualities that employers consider desirable and valuable. Consequently, some people have limited access based on considerations of gender and nativity, age and skills, education and experience (Kraal et. al., 2009). The integration of migrant women into the labor market is a complex process that involves, among others, the elimination of gender-based discrimination in employment and in determining the monthly salary amount (Syed and Murray, 2009). Also, the integration of migrant women, not only on the labor market, but also in society, requires capturing the socio-cultural and economic elements of the gender dynamics regarding the phenomenon of migration and, at the same time, the identification and application of effective specific pro-integration social policies.

Both men and women migrate in order to access a quality education and to increase their financial and professional opportunities, but also for family reunification and marriage (Fleury, 2016). It was only between the 1970s and 1980s that research on migrant women began to take shape, thus changing the views of the phenomenon of migration (Gabbacia, 1991; Bevelander, 2005). In this way, the notion of gender appears in discussions about migrants, along with the problems faced by migrant women (Benería et.al., 2012; Sinke, 2006). The notion of gender studies in migration research has been developed later during the 1990s and 2000s, being also encouraged by decision-making policies of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) (Collins, 1998; Parreñas, 2000).

The term "gender" refers to the roles, behaviors, and identities traditionally associated with women and men in a given society or culture. Gender is not just a matter of biology (sex) but is a complex social and cultural construct that influences how people behave, perceive themselves and are perceived in society. Gender can include aspects such as gender stereotypes, social norms, expectations, gender identity and more.

Discrimination against migrant women and migrant men, in general, refers to the unfair treatment or favoring of one category of migrant over another based on their gender. Discrimination can take many forms and vary according to the society and culture in which it occurs (Pokharel, 2008; Aigner and Cain, 1977). In other words, discrimination against

migrant women and migrant men may have some differences and also similarities, but it is important to emphasize that both migrant women and men can be victims of discrimination in different contexts and for different reasons. However, differences between discrimination against migrant women and migrant men may depend on several factors, including culture, legislation, history and the specific context of migration. There are some elements related to discrimination against migrant women. The first element could relate to the fact that migrant women may be subjected to gender-specific discrimination, which means that they are discriminated based on their sex. This may include employment discrimination, lower wages for the same work, limited access to educational opportunities, or reproductive health discrimination. Of course, migrant men may also be subject to gender discrimination, but in a different way (Ellemers, 2018). Also, related to gender discrimination is gender violence, to which migrant women can be more vulnerable. Furthermore, both migrant women and migrant men can be discriminated because of their migratory status, especially where legal documents regarding this status are missing. The cultural norms and values promoted in the host country may have more conservative attitudes towards women, which may lead to additional discrimination for migrant women. Regarding discrimination at the workplace of migrant women, things are more complicated, in the context of discriminatory trends that may vary depending on the work sector. For example, certain sectors may have more pronounced discrimination against male migrants, while others may discriminate against female migrants (Heilman and Caleo, 2018). Also, migrant women may experience difficulties accessing sexual and reproductive health services or exercising their reproductive rights, such as access to contraception or abortion (Allotey et.al., 2004).

Discrimination based on gender and ethnicity on the labor market of migrant women contribute to their marginalization and implicitly to keep them in poverty, denying them free and unconditional access to basic services such as education or primary preventive medicine. Career progress for both migrant men and women is full of obstacles and difficulties, as they are forced to accept inconsistent positions, even inferior to their training (Schrover et. al., 2007). Therefore, migrants have been illustrious as victims of a discriminatory culture and policy based on gender and ethnicity (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007).

The present study proposes an analysis of the perceptions of discrimination experienced by migrant women upon labor market labor market access. Thus, the study starts from an examination of the specialized literature in order to build a complete picture on the subject and continues with a presentation of the research findings. The six oral history interviews were selected out of a set of 21 interviews with third country nationals in Romania, carried out as part of a doctoral research investigating access and inclusion mechanisms of migrants in Romania. The six were selected as, out of the 21 interviews, these were the women who had labor experience in Romania. The interviews were conducted in the period between June 2021 and January 2022. Thus, the scope of the current study is to reveal the lived experiences of migrant women and their perceptions regarding labor market integration.

2. General theoretical approaches and a short policy review

By and large, the term integration is often associated with social cohesion and migration, in the sense of the integration of migrants in the receiving country. Thus, the integration of migrants is a process developed in time and space, involving assimilation, inclusion and adaptation (Favell, 2010). Also, special attention must be paid to the problem of the integration of migrant women in the labor market, which most often takes into account factors such as: gender, ethnicity, age, spoken language, experience and education, which most often become disadvantages for employment (Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021).

Gender-based discrimination is a form of violence against women, regardless of ethnicity, age or social status. According to the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence, dated 12 April 2011, gender-based violence against women is translated by abuse and violence against women only on the basis of being a woman, or that affects women directly, being a serious violation of Human Rights and, at the same time, it is a gender-based discrimination against women. Acts of a physical, economic, sexual, psychological or social nature, in the public or private space, as well as the limitation of women's access to the labor market or the educational system, which is meant to bring damage and suffering to the victims, are therein included. Non-discrimination,

according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Article 21), implies (1) "the prohibition of discrimination of any kind, based on reasons such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic characteristics, language, religion or beliefs, political or other opinions, membership of a national minority, wealth, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation"; (2) "Within the scope of the treaties and without prejudice to their special provisions, any discrimination is prohibited on grounds of citizenship".

Further, according to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (Article 1), United Nations, gender-based discrimination represents "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field".

In other words, the limitation of women's access to the labor market implies the violation of the fundamental rights promoted at the international level and causes damage not only to the victims, but to the economic and social system of the receiving country, ignoring the advantages of the integration and use of this important human capital (Alfarran et.al., 2018; Behtoui, 2008). In the global context of population aging and taking into account the multiple difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalizing on the labor force of migrant women can be a beneficial solution for both sides.

As far as Romania is concerned, through a legislative set, the observance of some basic principles regarding gender equality is guaranteed, as it is: Law no. 202, April 19, 2002, on equal opportunities between women and men; Emergency ordinance no. 45/2020 for completing Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination. Also, Romania has a National Immigration Strategy regarding Migration for the period 2021-2024, which consists of a set of public policies designed to effectively manage the reception and integration of migrants.

There are several factors that contribute to the women's desire and subsequently, to their decision to migrate to another country, such as: age and ethnicity; the level of education and the profession practiced; the

marital status and existence of children etc. (Boyd and Grieco, 2014; Hiralal, 2017). In addition to gender, age and place of birth, migrant women face discrimination based on body weight when hiring. For health and economic reasons, body weight is sometimes taken into account by employers (Busetta et.al., 2020). Thus, the socio-economic and political dimension of discrimination against migrants on various grounds, in the receiving country, acquires new values.

In general, there are several factors that influence the labor market in a country, such as: the integration policy of migrants; policy favorable to the employment of women and the elderly; the moment in which the economy of the respective country is located; fiscal policies; the degree of fraud in the fiscal system; the openness that employers have towards other ethnicities and the training possibilities they have and can offer to employees etc. Depending on such factors, migrants face more or less difficulties in finding a job according to their training (Borjas, 2001; Damm, 2009). For example, for purely economic and logistical reasons, employers prefer to check the health status of their future employees, and also being overweight becomes a clear disadvantage at the time of employment. Body weight is most often associated with the physical state of health and with the work potential and resistance of the employee. Some employers even provide their employees with access to various gyms or monthly subscriptions for this purpose, being a good way to prevent various cardiovascular diseases. So, body weight is a very important factor for the employer, not only regarding migrants, but also all other categories of employees and future employees. Consequently, this form of discrimination is based on purely economic considerations taken into account by employers (Busetta et.al., 2020; Busetta et.al., 2018a).

Therefore, there are some main key elements regarding the integration process of migrants on the labor market and in society. It is important to emphasize that each of these key elements can become a disadvantage for migrants who want to find a job and integrate in the host country. For example, a considerable disadvantage for migrants in terms of employment can be the age. Age is often taken into account by employers, not only in the case of migrant women, but also in the case of natives. It is considered that with advancing age, the speed of adaptation and response to new challenges decreases, but above all, the degree of performance in the field of activity decreases (Balch and Scott, 2011; Stypińska and Gordo, 2018). Migrant

women are doubly disadvantaged from this perspective, so that, in addition to specific vulnerabilities, they could face preconceptions regarding the link between gender and work performance; speed of learning and adaptation; the degree of endurance and response to challenges. It must be clarified that gender difference highlights the advantages granted to men when employed on the labor market compared to women (Raghuram, 2008; Ballarino and Panichella, 2018).

Likewise, gender and race are part of the socially constructed categories meant to create notable differences between individuals in terms of identity, interrelationship with those around them and positioning in society. Multiracial feminist theory has its roots in the approaches and the feminist movement, based on the implementation and application of the principles of gender equality and racial non-discrimination. Since migrant women face, in some cases, integration difficulties caused by discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and social class, multiracial feminist theory can be applied in this case as well, to analyze, from certain points of view, both the factors and the consequences of discrimination and marginalization. In essence, the consequences fall not only on the victims of discrimination and marginalization, but also on society as a whole (Zinn and Dill, 2016; Browne and Misra, 2003).

Knowing the language of the host country by migrants, in general, is an advantage in finding a job faster. At the same time, the migrant's place of origin can be accompanied by a series of preconceptions, which only complicate the process of assimilation and integration. Natives of that country may be at an advantage in terms of employment due to their knowledge of the language, acquired experience or educational level. All these aspects, in general, are predictable signs of good integration in the work team, and employers take these aspects into account (Kaas and Manger, 2012; Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021).

The level of assimilation and integration capacity of the receiving country is a very important aspect, because each state has its own policy regarding the integration of migrants on the labor market, with more or less disadvantages for them. Preventing and combating the marginalization of migrants is crucial in facilitating free access to education and finding a suitable job (Brell et.al., 2020; Dustmann, 1996). Also, many times, in the case of migrant women, the level of education and experience are not taken into account by the employer. Migrant women present a series of

adaptation problems, and at the same time, their ability to adapt and integrate, is being underestimated. Thus, the migrant woman is employed in a position inferior to her training and experience accumulated over time, having to demonstrate repeatedly that she can have good results at work (Piracha et.al., 2012; Buzdugan and Halli, 2009).

Another disadvantage can be the socio-cultural differences between the country of origin and the receiving country translate into difficulties in accepting and adapting to new social and legislative rules, different customs, etc. The process of accommodation and integration is different for each individual migrant, depending on the life history; level of education and experience; the cultural similarities between the country of origin and the host country; whether or not there are family relatives in the host country etc. (Fokkema and De Haas, 2015; Diehl et.al., 2016).

A very important aspect is the socioeconomic status of the migrants can be an advantage in the process of integration in the receiving country, in the conditions where they come from a higher class, or it can be a disadvantage, in the case of a lower class. Among other things, socioeconomic status shows the degree of access to education, health, culture, etc. Also, the lower social class and the precarious material situation shows an increased degree of marginalization and it can force the members of a family to separate and migrate in search of new sources of income and for a better life (Chen et.al., 2020; Rose, 1958).

In order to ensure proper integration, migrants need several guarantees and actions from the host country's government, starting from general human rights, up to facilitating access to education and participation in the labor market, such as: eliminate all forms of discrimination based on gender, culture, age and ethnicity by promoting equal rights and legal protection against discrimination; guarantee free access to social, educational and medical services in the receiving country; respecting and facilitating migrants access to the labor market; capitalizing as much as possible on this new source of experience and manpower; offering legal and material support to migrants in order to integrate them as quickly and easily as possible; adapting the relevant legislation to the new challenges of the period regarding the needs of migrants nowadays; the existence of centres that offer support in order to learn the language of the receiving country, to identify a suitable job and a home that the migrant can afford; ensuring respect for women's rights and human rights, through the state

apparatus and the competent institutions; promoting tolerance towards other cultures and ethnicities (Merrouni and Machak, 2019; Velluti, 2007).

3. Gender-based discrimination of migrant women on the labor market

Gender-based discrimination of migrant women on the labor market is defined as unequal treatment that migrant women may experience in employment and work-related opportunities due to their gender (Pustulka, 2015). It is obvious that this form of discrimination intersects with both gender discrimination and discrimination based on migration status. Gender-based discrimination against migrant women in the labor market, in general, reveals a series of disadvantages and difficulties such as: language and cultural barriers; discriminatory hiring practices favoring native-born candidates over migrants; also, migrant women may face barriers to accessing benefits such as maternity leave; sometimes, migrant women may not be aware of their rights or may fear reporting discrimination due to concerns about immigration status; language barriers in general; some migrant women may be vulnerable to precarious work conditions, including long hours, low pay, and lack of job security; some migrant women often face a wage gap compared to both male migrants and native-born women; occupational segregation, where migrant women are concentrated in certain industries; and last, but not least, migrant women may have difficulties accessing skilled or professional job opportunities, even if they possess the qualifications because of gender and ethnic stereotypes (Irastorza, 2020; Phillion, 2003; Tastsoglou and Preston, 2005).

The general process of integration of migrant women in the new country involves efforts regarding learning the language, accepting the culture, getting used to the customs, familiarizing with the history and geography (Boyd and Grieco, 2014). The integration of migrant women on the labor market is perceived from several perspectives like: the gender angle regarding the migrant woman's ability to adapt and obtain satisfactory results with performance at work; market indicators; training and application for the job - most of the time, they are not related to each other because the studies in the native country of the migrants are not taken into account; the migrants' labor experience; integration policies in the receiving country etc. (Schieckoff and Sprengholz, 2021; Foroutan,

2008). The vast majority of migrant women face difficulties in finding a job and, moreover, against the background of the precarious material situation, they are forced to accept positions inferior to their educational training in their country of origin (Man, 2004; Misztal, 1991).

For migrant women, ethnicity and gender are two defining characteristics of the migration dimension, while the occupational structure within the labor market of the receiving country reflects the integration policies of migrants (Misztal, 1991).

The frustration of migrant women looking for a job is directly proportional to their efforts to participate in the labor market of the host country and integrate into society. Thus, the indicators of integration difficulties relate to the high unemployment among migrant women, to the situations in which they are forced by circumstances to accept low-paid, part-time or temporary jobs and below their professional qualification and training. Also, the educational level and the desire to find a job, as well as the existence of children or other family obligations, determine to a certain extent the salary level of migrant women (Rubin et. al., 2008).

Gender-based wage discrimination makes a clear difference between men and women on the labor market. In this way, women are in a lower position than men. At the same time, migrant women are discriminated against native women in the same positions and with similar experience regarding the monthly salary. Thus, on the one hand, there is ethnic discrimination between native women and migrant women, and on the other hand, gender discrimination between migrant women and migrant men (Nicodemo and Ramos, 2012). In other words, for a similar position, men are remunerated better than women. Gender-based discrimination takes place, especially in patriarchal societies, but also in developed countries, where women's rights are promoted. This form of discrimination is extended to a multidimensional level, including the family, society and the labor market. In the absence of equal employment opportunities for women and men, the maintenance of discrimination against women is promoted, creating disadvantages at every step, thus limiting women's access to a decent living and accentuating poverty based on gender, but also age, or ethnicity. A dual structure can be observed, with a double standard of employment opportunities and salary (Agrawal, 2014; Padhi et.al., 2019).

Labor market discrimination of migrant women is important in order to identify the most appropriate strategies for the integration of this category, especially since it is an underutilized workforce. Therefore, the intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity and gender of migrant women on the labor market is a challenge and represents an important point of work for future specific social policies. Migrant women face this double discrimination not only regarding their integration in the labor market, but in all aspects of their life in the receiving country. Discrimination leads to marginalization and, implicitly, to the increase of their poverty (Duran, 2018).

In general, migrants need active support from the institutions of the receiving state in order to be able to integrate into society and the labor market. Also, the flexible schedule and transparent, secure labor contracts are necessary in order to use properly this workforce. It is important to respect the principles of gender equality and to promote and implement a balanced lifestyle between work schedule and rest time. The state, through its specific policies, is responsible for equalizing employment opportunities on the labor market between natives and migrants, especially among women, because they face more difficulties compared to men.

In conclusion, the integration of migrants into the labor market represents a challenge for the host country and for migrants alike. The gender factor places migrant women at a disadvantage compared to men when integrating into the labor market. Thus, gender equality regarding the labor force of migrants is a first condition for a good integration and the reduction of the risk of marginalization (Schneider, 2018; Duran, 2018).

4. Methodology

This research study builds upon six oral history interviews with migrant women employed in Romania. The interviews were important tools for exploring the in-depth experiences of migrant women regarding their access onto the labor market. The interviews were conducted online, on Zoom, over an extended period of six months, between June 2021 and January 2022 and were part of a doctoral research regarding social inclusion mechanisms of third country nationals in Romania. The selection of the six interviews for this research was based on gender and

labor market status determinants. The six participants were all women who had labor experience on the Romanian labor market at the moment or interviewing, or have had it previously. Convenience sampling was used for the research, with the participants to the interviews were recruited either with the help of informal networks (i.e., through NGOs dealing with the integration of migrants, such as the Migrant Integration Centre Brasov; contact with this NGO was established after the participation of the researchers at a conference on migration, then the head of the NGO provided contacts of the migrants), or through snowball sampling, where interviewees recommended other participants. The shortest interview lasted for 55 minutes, while the longest for 100 minutes; in general, though, the rest of the interviews lasted for about one hour. Overall, a total of 410 minutes of recording were available for this study. The oral history interviews targeted dimensions both before and after the migration to Romania, and encouraging participants to provide detailed responses about their experiences.

All six women whose interviews have been selected for this study were third country nationals who settled in Romania for various reasons (education, work, family reunification), but who all had labor experiences in the destination country. They resided in four different cities in Romania. The language of the interviews was chosen by the participants, either English or Romanian. Pseudonyms were used to replace the real names of the participants.

Darcelle (20 years of age at the moment of the interview, from Cameroon), felt that her life completely changed after she moved to Romania to pursue university studies. Learning Romanian, although not perfectly, helped her integration process, as did the friendship with a small group of her nationals which she met in Bucharest. She worked for several days, but has quit because of the the poor payment and the harsh labor conditions;

Gloria (45, Dominican Republic), moved to Romania with her husband. Trained physician with a PhD in Medicine and vast research experience in her native country and the United States of America, Gloria couldn't find employment in the Romanian medical sector because her degrees and

diplomas were not recognized. She accepted employment in two non-medical businesses, during which time she pursued a specialization course as nutritionist, which allowed her to obtain a position at a private clinic;

Milena (36, Belarus) graduated from university in her home country, then moved on to work in the cruise ship leisure industry, where she also met her future husband, with whom she moved to Romania. Once in Romania, Milena found a job with ease in the shared services / call-center industry, thanks to her native language skills. The job was not related to her university degree. She had to quit the job in order to provide mother care to her son. At the moment of the interview, only the husband was employed, while Milena was taking care of the child.

Ramiza (24, Sudan) moved to Romania to pursue her education. Upon arrival, she started looking for jobs to earn her own money and not depend that much any longer on the financial aid from her parents back home. After many rejections, she found employment in a blue-collar vending job.

Stephanie (37, The Philippines) graduated in business administration in her native country and also worked in real estate there. She moved to Romania to marry her partner whom she met on the internet. She was pregnant at the moment of the interview, her greatest wish being to become a mother. Also, at the moment of the interview, she was employed in a call-center, after similar experiences both in Romania and in her native country.

Valeria (22, the Republic of Moldova) moved to Romania for her studies. She splits her time between going to university, going to the library for studying, doing the house chores and also working. Her first labor experience in Romania was in a blue-collar job, but she had to give it up as she felt it was exhausting her and she could not handle both university and work. She then found a project-based employment that gives her the possibility to combine study and labor.

Table 1 summarizes the biographic and labor-related characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Biographic and labor-related characteristics of participants

Migrant	Age	Country of origin	Number of years and place of settlement in Romania	Employment status
Darcelle	20	Cameroon	2 years, Bucharest	Student, unemployed, had a brief labor experience
Gloria	45	Dominican Republic	8 years, Brasov	Employed, nutritionist at a private clinic
Milena	36	Belarus	8 years, Brasov	Unemployed, worked in a call centre, had to quit to take care of the child
Ramiza	24	Sudan	1 year, 2 months, Cluj-Napoca	Student, employed in a store
Stephanie	37	The Philippines	2 years, 4 months, Ghimbav	Employed in a call centre
Valeria	22	The Republic of Moldova	5 years, Brasov	Student, employed on a project, work basis

Source: Own representation

One of the methodological drawbacks of the research is that the sample is characterized by heterogeneity, which negatively impacts upon the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not accurately represent broader population groups. Since the external validity of the findings is challenged by heterogeneity, this article only takes an exploratory form, with further in-depth research being necessary to consolidate generalizations. Sources of heterogeneity in this research occur from variations in age (three respondents in their twenties, two in their thirties and one in her forties), ethnicity (all six respondents coming from six different countries, with most diverse cultures and habits), social status in Romania (some of them married, others not; some students, other already graduated etc.) etc. This heterogeneity occurred as a result of the snowball sampling used for data collection, as well as following the subgroup analysis: the six interviews were selected out of the total sample of 21 interviews used in the doctoral research, based on gender and employment status. The presence of such a subgroup also leads to less consistent effects of the findings, potentially masking trends or realities regarding labor market discrimination in the case of larger groups of migrants.

5. Research Findings and Discussions

The statements from the interviews indicate several patterns pertaining to the migration reasons which have had an impact on the labor experiences of the interviewed migrant women in Romania. Two of these patterns stand out, namely that family reunification migration and educational migration have had considerable effects on the labor opportunities and labor experiences of women. Box 1 offers the statements of the migrant women based on the transcriptions of the interviews. Mentions from Ramiza were informal, hence not transcribed.

Box 1. Transcripts from the interviews

Milena (36, Belarus)

„Unfortunately, I couldn't resist anymore. The health problems had already started and I resigned, then I got pregnant and then I went into lockdown and then I stopped looking for work because it's just my husband and myself and I don't have anyone to take care of the baby. Now, who wants to have you if you stay at home every two weeks, with the child, with the kindergartens closed?!”

Stephanie (37, The Philippines)

„Although I was able to get a job - my first company in Romania was Psych, one of the call centers here in Romania, I used to work with them for I think if I could recall five months... Problem is, because of the pandemic... And I also got pregnant but I had miscarriage, you know, so it was quite tough for me adjusting with language, culture, people general in general and then I had a miscarriage and then the Covid hit. So, my first year here in Romania was quite challenging, and somehow affected my emotional being or psychological being, you know what I mean.”

Gloria (45, Dominican Republic)

„Yes. I felt [that I was vulnerable], especially in the beginning. Not any longer now. For example, I looked for a job in a call centre, because I wanted to do something [until solving the issue with the diplomas and the job at the hospital]. My husband told me not to [worry], but I, who have been used to working for a long time, did not feel well with just sitting at home and doing nothing. I went twice, to two different call centres, in two jobs, and I saw that internationals were sometimes paid even less than half of what Romanians received. Let me tell you something: it was the only time in eight years that I felt like someone tried to humiliate me. About five years ago, I was at a table with several people, and I was very happy that I had a job. I have been working for six years already in a fixed job. Before that, I was a volunteer, I also taught Spanish, so that I could do something, not sit around. And someone [at the table] told me that he is very nationalistic and that he does not agree to give a job to an international. But I asked him what he did for Romania, one thing he did? And he remained silent. He probably thought I was going to sit with my head buried in the ground. But at the same time I also gained confidence in myself. I don't know if you have gone through this experience, but to change the country, to change the language, to change many small details that add up to a big mass.”

Darcelle (20, Cameroon)

“From all the colleagues in the group of students, I was the only one who could not find an internship, although I have applied in many, many companies.”

Valeria (22, the Republic of Moldova)

„It was easy for me to get hired, it wasn't a problem [...]. It wasn't hard for me to get hired because, again, [a friend, n.a.] helped me. On Saturday and Sunday I had to do my four hours a day. I spent Saturdays and Sundays cleaning, eating, shopping, especially on Saturdays, and on Sundays I studied all day. I also studied on school days, in the afternoon. I couldn't handle the fatigue. Maybe I wasn't mentally tired, but I was physically tired, I was sleepy.”

Source: Transcripts of the Zoom interviews

Research results indicate that migrant women had to deal with an inadequate work-life balance and had challenges in finding a balance between private lives and employment. Milena had to quit her job to take care of the child, while Stephanie did the same after she gave birth (after our interview). Also, Darcelle, Valeria and Ramiza had struggles to find a balance between university studies and employment.

Many of the migrants had to accept positions they considered as being inferior to their education and qualification. Milena, Stephanie and Gloria are all university graduates, who, for shorter or longer periods of time after arriving in Romania, took on jobs in call-centres. For Gloria it was only a temporary position until she finished her qualification course as nutritionist (despite being a MD with vast labor experience), while Milena and Stephanie had a longer-period employment in call centres. Darcelle, Valeria and Ramiza worked part-time, this also because they are students and the law does not allow them to work full-time.

Almost all women interviewed (except Milena and Valeria) had difficulties in finding a job, which they only obtained after several attempts. Milena reported that she had an employment interview which was „piece of cake”, while Valeria found it easy because she knew the language and was also directed towards the job by a member of her informal network, yet these seem to have been exceptions. Darcelle, who had to pursue a mandatory three weeks internship as part of her university curriculum, mentioned that she was the only one in her group of students who could not find an internship, although she made several attempts. Ramiza as well was aware that had it not been for the hint from her informal network, it would have been much more difficult for her to access the labor market. Having difficulties in accessing the labor market puts migrant women at risk and diminishes their opportunities of labor integration. While labor integration is acknowledged as a resilience mechanism for migrants (Fernández Guzmán Grassi and Nicole- Berva, 2022), facing difficulties as the ones previously shown can slow down or reduce the effects of this mechanism. Reasons for the difficult access the labor market are the reluctance of employers to hire internationals (Ramiza, Darcelle), maternal situations (Milena, Stephanie), the lack of willingness to employ students, or the non-recognition of studies (Gloria).

Another barrier to better employment opportunities identified in the research was pregnancy. For Milena and Stephanie, the pregnancies

reduced their chances of active participation in the labor market. For Milena, the lack of help in taking care of the child (both because she has no other family members here in Romania and because she cannot financially afford to hire a nanny) negatively affected her participation in the labor market, so she had to quit her job in order to take care of the child. Valeria, as well, found it exhausting to have a job and take care of the household chores at the same time, not to mention she was also a student who had to learn. Yet Valeria, as well the other women interviewed, had to take on the job to gain what was needed for making a living. Valeria mentioned that, at some point, she couldn't handle the fatigue any longer and had to quit.

Gloria felt humiliated (the one and only time when she felt this way in Romania, as she mentioned) when she understood that internationals were paid less than the locals at one of her employers, even half of the amount. Valeria found employment quite easily because, coming from the Republic of Moldova, she shared a common language with the natives. Still, both Valeria and Ramia were helped to find their jobs by acquaintances in the informal network.

Research results also indicate that the pathways towards accessing the labor market differ depending on age or stage of life. While young migrant women and students mainly depended on hints received from their informal networks, elder women, who could prove an existing labor experience (either in the home society or in the host society) had more chances of securing a job through direct applications.

Another idea arising from the statements of the migrants was the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic crisis had on their labor status. Both Milena and Stephanie were impacted by the effects of Covid-19. Stephanie suffered from the disease, which forced her into medical leave and affected her labor capacities, while for Milena, the Covid-19 pandemic struck while she was at home with her child and forced her into having even more time for mother care at the cost of potential labor opportunities, because she had to supplement for services that would have otherwise been provided by other institutions: „Now, who wants to have you if you stay at home every two weeks, with the child, with the kindergartens closed?!“.

6. Conclusions

This article analysed the perceptions of gender-based discrimination against migrant women looking for a job in the host country, as they were reproduced by the experiences of the respondents included in the research. Through the six interviews, the study provided an overview of the difficulties that migrant women face in the integration process. Unequivocally, the problem of the integration of migrant women influences the relevant policies around Europe, creating the necessary framework for the reconfiguration of the entire paradigm.

Many times, women who are victims of gender-based discrimination are discouraged in the process of integration into society and in finding a job appropriate to their training and experience. Thus, often, they are forced to accept poorly paid jobs and far below their training. Practically, gender-based discrimination pushes the migrant woman to make various compromises in order to survive in the host country, to which various difficulties of adapting to the culture and language are added. This bares the risk of a route towards poverty and marginalization of migrant women. Although the risk of poverty was not an issue with our interviewees, marginalization, loss of dignity and humiliation were aspects reported in the interviews. These can also lead to social inequalities so often discussed when it comes to the integration of migrant women (Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007). Therefore, migrant women face multidimensional discrimination simultaneously, based on criteria of gender, ethnicity, their minority in the receiving country, age, class, educational level, culture practiced by them etc. (Pio and Essers, 2014). In other words, gender-based segregation on the labor market and in payroll creates difficulties and a series of vulnerabilities for migrant women, making it difficult for them to integrate in the host country (Fleury, 2016). In conclusion, the gender factor is still an element that constitutes a considerable disadvantage for migrant women who try to integrate into the labor market of the receiving country. In conclusion, employment opportunities for migrant women are limited.

It should be emphasized that migrant women are an important resource and a workforce that must be valued by the receiving country and in no way viewed as a burden. The offer of existing workers on today's labor market is in a continuous metamorphosis, and unilateral approaches no longer make sense, as it is a matter of complexity that involves both women and men; both natives and migrants. Thus, at the moment,

concerns regarding the situation of migrant women occupy a central place in understanding the mechanisms of socio-economic integration. Recognizing the experience and educational level of migrant women who want to integrate into the labor market, means the correct use of this labor force and its valorization (Tastsoglou and Preston, 2005; Raghuram, 2008). On the other hand, it must be admitted that in the hiring process, discrimination can be justified from economic perspectives, especially when it comes to age or weight (Busetta et al., 2018b).

Authorship

Materials and methods, V.I.R.; formal analysis, V.I.R., G.V.B.; investigation, V.I.R., G.V.B.; review and theoretical conceptualization, V.I.R., G.V.B.; data collection, V.I.R. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

N/A

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

References

- Agrawal, T. (2014). Gender and caste-based wage discrimination in India: some recent evidence. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 47(4), 329-340.
- Aigner, D. J., & Cain, G. G. (1977). Statistical theories of discrimination in labor markets. *Ihr Review*, 30(2), 175-187.
- Alfarran, A., Pyke, J., & Stanton, P. (2018). Institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 37(7), 713-727.
- Allotey, P., Manderson, L., Baho, S., & Demian, L. (2004). Reproductive health for resettling refugee and migrant women. *Health Issues*, 78(2004), 12-17.

- Balch, A., & Scott, S. (2011). Labour market flexibility and worker security in an age of migration. In: Bommers, M., & Sciortino, G. (Eds.): *Foggy Social Structures: Irregular Migration, European Labour Markets and the Welfare State*. IMISCOE Research, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam (pp. 143-168).
- Ballarino, G., & Panichella, N. (2018). The occupational integration of migrant women in Western European labour markets. *Acta Sociologica*, 61(2), 126-142.
- Behtoui, A. (2008). Informal recruitment methods and disadvantages of immigrants in the Swedish labour market. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(3), 411-430.
- Benería, L., Diana Deere, C., & Kabeer, N. (2012). Gender and international migration: Globalization, development, and governance. *Feminist Economics*, 18(2), 1-33.
- Bevelander, P. (2005). The employment status of immigrant women: The case of Sweden 1. *International Migration Review*, 39(1), 173-202.
- Borjas, G. J. (2001). Does immigration grease the wheels of the labor market?. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2001(1), 69-133.
- Boyd, M., & Grieco, E. (2014). Women and migration: Incorporating gender into international migration theory. Migration Information Source, available online at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory>, retrieved on June 5th, 2023.
- Brell, C., Dustmann, C., & Preston, I. (2020). The labor market integration of refugee migrants in high-income countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(1), 94-121.
- Browne, I., & Misra, J. (2003). The intersection of gender and race in the labor market. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29(1), 487-513.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2018a, April). Weight-based discrimination in the Italian Labor Market: how do ethnicity and gender interact?. In 50th Scientific meeting of the Italian Statistical Society.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2018b). Immigrants and Italian labor market: statistical or taste-based discrimination?. *Genus*, 74(1), 1-20.
- Busetta, G., Campolo, M. G., & Panarello, D. (2020). Weight-based discrimination in the Italian Labor Market: an analysis of the interaction with gender and ethnicity. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, 18(4), 617-637.
- Buzdugan, R., & Halli, S. S. (2009). Labor market experiences of Canadian immigrants with focus on foreign education and experience. *International Migration Review*, 43(2), 366- 386.
- Chen, H., Wang, X., Liu, Y., & Liu, Y. (2020). Migrants' choice of household split or reunion in China's urbanisation process: The effect of objective and subjective socioeconomic status. *Cities*, (102), 102669.
- Collins, P. H. (1998). Intersections of race, class, gender, and nation: Some

implications for Black family studies. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 29(1), 27-36.

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in Article 1, United Nations, available online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>, retrieved on October 21th, 2022, 14:48.
- Damm, A. P. (2009). Ethnic enclaves and immigrant labor market outcomes: Quasi-experimental evidence. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 27(2), 281-314.
- Diehl, C., Lubbers, M., Mühlau, P., & Platt, L. (2016). Starting out: New migrants' socio-cultural integration trajectories in four European destinations. *Ethnicities*, 16(2), 157-179.
- Duran, N. (2018). Dual Discrimination of Syrian Refugee Women in the labour markets in Europe and Turkey: Identifying the challenges. *Journal of Social Policy Conferences*, (75), 43-67.
- Dustmann, C. (1996). The social assimilation of immigrants. *Journal of Population Economics*, 9(1), 37-54.
- Ellemers, N. (2018). Gender stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 275-298.
- Emergency ordinance no. 45/2020 for completing Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination, available online at: <https://www.cncd.ro/legislatie/>, retrieved on October 11th, 2022, 12:46.
- European Institute for Equal Opportunities Between Men and Women, Gender discrimination, available online at: <https://eige.europa.eu/ro/taxonomy/term/1161>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 10:31.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Article 21), Non-discrimination, available online at: <https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/article/21-nediscriminare>, retrieved on October 11th, 2022, 13:18.
- Favell, A. (2010). Integration and nations: the nation-state and research on immigrants in Western Europe. *Selected Studies In International Migration And Immigrant Incorporation*, 1, 371-404.
- Fernández Guzmán Grassi, E., & Nicole-Berva, O. (2022). How perceptions matter: Organizational vulnerability and practices of resilience in the field of migration. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33(5), 921- 935.
- Fleury, A. (2016). Understanding women and migration: A literature review. KNOMAD Working Paper, Washington, DC, 55.

- Fokkema, T., & De Haas, H. (2015). Pre-and post-migration determinants of socio-cultural integration of African immigrants in Italy and Spain. *International Migration*, 53(6), 3-26.
- Foroutan, Y. (2008). Migration differentials in women's market employment: An empirical and multicultural analysis. *International Migration Review*, 42(3), 675-703.
- Gabaccia, D. (1991). Immigrant women: nowhere at home?. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10(4), 61-87.
- Heilman, M. E., & Caleo, S. (2018). Gender discrimination in the workplace. *The Oxford handbook of workplace discrimination*, 73-88.
- Hiralal, K. (2017). Women and migration-challenges and constraints—A South African perspective. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 26(2), 18-18.
- <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/245996>, retrieved on October 23rd, 2022, 15:31.
- <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/245996>, retrieved on October 23rd,
- In: *International handbook on the economics of migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Irastorza, N. (2020). The labour market integration of Migrant Women. Canada-EU Migration Platform on the Integration of Migrant Women, 6.
- Istanbul Convention, 12 April 2011, on combating violence against women and domestic violence, available online at: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 10:12.
- Kaas, L., & Manger, C. (2012). Ethnic discrimination in Germany's labour market: A field experiment. *German Economic Review*, 13(1), 1-20.
- Kraal, K., Wrench, J., Roosblad J. & Simon, P. (2009). The ideal of equal opportunities and the practice of unequal chances. In: Wrench, J., Roosblad, J., & Kraal, K. (Eds). (2009). *Equal opportunities and ethnic inequality in European labour markets: discrimination, gender and policies of diversity* (p. 124). Amsterdam University Press, pp. 9-22.
- Law no. 202, April 19, 2002, on equal opportunities between women and men, available online at: <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Legea-202-din-2002.pdf>, retrieved on October 21st, 2022, 11:37.
- Man, G. (2004, June). Gender, work and migration: Deskilling Chinese immigrant women in Canada. In: *Women's studies international forum* (Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 135-148). Pergamon.
- Merrouni, S. A., & Machak, S. (2019). Migrant women in Morocco: a gender-based integration strategy?. *La Revue Marocaine de Droit d'asile et Migration*, (4), 74-91.
- Misztal, B. A. (1991). Migrant women in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 12(2), 15- 34.

- National Immigration Strategy regarding Migration, 2021-2024.
- Nicodemo, C., & Ramos, R. (2012). Wage differentials between native and immigrant women in Spain: accounting for differences in support. *International Journal of Manpower*, 33(1), 118-136.
- org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/Challenges-and-opportunities-of-refugee-integrationin-turkey-full-report.pdf (01.10. 2018).
- Padhi, B., Mishra, U. S., & Pattanayak, U. (2019). Gender-based wage discrimination in Indian urban labour market: An assessment. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 62(3), 361- 388.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2000). Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor. *Gender & Society*, 14(4), 560-580.
- Phillion, J. (2003). Obstacles to accessing the teaching profession for immigrant women. *Multicultural Education*, 11(1), 41-45.
- Pio, E., & Essers, C. (2014). Professional migrant women decentring otherness: A transnational perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 25(2), 252-265.
- Piracha, M., Tani, M., & Vadean, F. (2012). Immigrant over-and under-education: The role of home country labour market experience. *IZA Journal of Migration*, 1(1), 1-21.
- Pokharel, S. (2008). Gender discrimination: Women perspectives. *Nepalese journal of Development and Rural Studies*, 5(2), 80-87.
- Pustulka, P. (2015). Escaping workplace gender discrimination through mobility? Labor-market experiences of Polish female migrants in the West. *InterDisciplines. Journal of History and Sociology*, 6(1).
- Raghuram, P. (2008). Migrant women in male-dominated sectors of the labour market: a research agenda. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(1), 43-57.
- Riaño, Y., & Baghdadi, N. (2007). Understanding the labour market participation of skilled immigrant women in Switzerland: The interplay of class, ethnicity, and gender. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, 8(2), 163-183.
- Roggeband, C., & Verloo, M. (2007). Dutch women are liberated, migrant women are a problem: The evolution of policy frames on gender and migration in the Netherlands, 1995–2005. *Social Policy & Administration*, 41(3), 271-288.
- Rose, A. M. (1958). Distance of migration and socioeconomic status of migrants. *American Sociological Review*, 23(4), 420-423.
- Rubin, J., Rendall, M. S., Rabinovich, L., Tsang, F., van Oranje-Nassau, C., & Janta, B. (2008). Migrant women in the European labour force. Current situation and future prospects. RAND Europe Technical Report, Santa Monica, CA.
- Schieckoff, B., & Sprengholz, M. (2021). The labor market integration of immigrant women in Europe: context, theory, and evidence. *SN Social Sciences*, 1(11), 1-44.

- Schneider, T. (2018). *The Integration of Migrants Into the Labor Market: An Analysis of Germany and the United States* (Doctoral dissertation, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin).
- Schrover, M., Van der Leun, J., & Quispel, C. (2007). Niches, labour market segregation, ethnicity and gender. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(4), 529-540.
- Sinke, S. M. (2006). Gender and migration: Historical perspectives. *International Migration Review*, 40(1), 82-103.
- Stypińska, J., & Gordo, L. R. (2018). Gender, age and migration: an intersectional approach to inequalities in the labour market. *European Journal of Ageing*, 15(1), 23-33.
- Syed, J., & Murray, P. (2009). Combating the English language deficit: The labour market experiences of migrant women in Australia. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(4), 413-432.
- Tastsoglou, E., & Preston, V. (2005). Gender, immigration and labour market integration: Where we are and what we still need to know. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, 30(1), 46-59.
- Velluti, S. (2007). What European Union strategy for integrating migrants? The role of OMC soft mechanisms in the development of an EU immigration policy. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 9(1), 53-82.
- Zinn, M. B., & Dill, B. T. (2016). Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism. In *Race, gender and class* (pp. 76-82). Routledge.

NEGATIVE INFORMATION LEADS TO A DECLINE OF TRUST IN SCIENCE: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA USES AND VACCINATION CONSPIRACY BELIEFS

Željko PAVIĆA¹
Emma KOVAČEVIĆB²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.03>

Abstract: *Although vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon, the emergence of social media has led to growing concerns about the media's role in its perpetuation. In this study, hypotheses about the direct and indirect connections between media use and the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy beliefs were tested. The data were collected on an online quota sample of the general population of the Republic of Croatia (N = 1,500) and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results showed that the total amount of television use, and television as a source of vaccination information were associated with lower vaccination conspiracy beliefs. The connection of social media and vaccination conspiracy beliefs was the opposite, that is, the more frequent use of social media is connected with the increased vaccination conspiracy beliefs. Internet news channels as a source of vaccination information were also associated with a lower level of vaccination conspiracy beliefs. Almost all hypothesized mediation mechanisms were confirmed, given that the use of a certain type of media leads to more (less) positive information about vaccination, which increases (reduces) trust in science credibility, and ultimately reduces (increases) conspiratorial beliefs.*

Keywords: *Keywords: vaccine hesitancy, vaccination conspiracy beliefs, media, social media, science credibility, television, Internet, Covid-19*

¹ Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Lorenza Jagera 9, 31 000 Osijek, Croatia, zpavic@ffos.hr

² Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia, Lorenza Jagera 9, 31 000 Osijek (Croatia), ekovacevic1@ffos.hr

Introduction

Vaccine hesitancy is not a new phenomenon, but the possibility of spreading unverified information about vaccination through social media and other Internet channels has given new vehicles for promoters of vaccine skepticism (Cascini et al 2022; Garrett and Young 2021; Numerato et al 2019; Wilson and Wiysonge 2020), and the Internet is often considered a key space for perpetuating ideas related to anti-vaccination movements (Dubé et al 2021). The emergence of the COVID-19 health crisis has increased concerns about reluctance to get vaccinated and about the influence of the Internet and social media in this respect. The Internet and social media provide additional space for vaccination skeptics to express alternative opinions, especially blaming the mainstream media for being a voice of corrupt elite political and economic interests, as a research study conducted in Croatia reported (Pavić et al 2022). An amount of information available on the Internet and social media that is difficult for an ordinary person to process supported the introduction of the concept of the COVID-19 “infodemic”, as the rapid spread of information about the current health pandemic (World Health Organization 2022).

The Internet has been considered a significant source for seeking health-related information over the recent decades (Cotten and Gupta 2004; Jia et al 2021; Obasola and Agunbiade 2016; Percheski and Hargittai 2011; Tan and Goonawardene 2017). The research has highlighted the role of social media in the rapid spread of health information and misinformation to the public and even to healthcare workers (Dyar et al 2014; Smith 2019; Williams et al 2018). A large number of research studies aimed to determine whether the overall amount of use of different types of media and informational reliance on media when seeking health information are connected with vaccine hesitancy. On the whole, recent research studies have indicated somewhat differing impacts of the traditional media (television, print media, radio) in comparison to social media, even though the results are far from conclusive. The measurement of vaccine hesitancy in these studies was very diverse, and its antecedents (such as vaccination conspiracy beliefs) as well as consequences (such as vaccination behaviour) were commonly used. For instance, Allington et al (2021) demonstrated a positive association between the intention to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and the overall amount of broadcast and print media use, but only informational reliance on social media was

negatively connected with the willingness to get vaccinated. Romer and Jamieson (2021) found that the use of mainstream print and broadcast television media was negatively correlated with the vaccination conspiracy beliefs and positively correlated with the intention of getting vaccinated against COVID-19, while the frequency of social media use was positively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs. Al-Uqdah et al (2022) detected that more frequent use of social media for reading news was associated with lower vaccine hesitancy, while the use of social media as a source of vaccine information without any other trusted source was associated with higher vaccine hesitancy. Ijioma and Nze (2022) found that the average use of social media negatively impacted the willingness to get COVID-19 vaccines. Similarly, Piltch-Loeb et al (2021) established that social media were connected with a lower likelihood of vaccine uptake, while the use of traditional media such as television for obtaining health information was positively correlated with the willingness to receive COVID-19 vaccines. Wilson and Wiysonge (2020) found that, on a country level, the use of social media to organize offline action and the prevalence of online foreign misinformation predicted negative attitudes towards vaccines as well as the drop in vaccination rates. Brailovskaia et al (2021), on the online samples from nine countries, found that television reports as a COVID-19 information source positively predicted the willingness to get vaccinated against COVID-19 in six countries, while the use of print media was positively correlated with the willingness only in one country. On the other hand, the use of social media as a COVID-19 information source was a significant negative predictor in three countries and non-significant in others. Some other research studies also brought null or mixed results. For example, Brodziak et al (2021) demonstrated that neither the time spent watching TV and surfing the Internet nor the overall amount of use of social media significantly predicted uncertainty and unwillingness to vaccinate against COVID-19. Alley et al (2021) found that social media use as such was not connected, whereas the frequency of traditional media use was positively connected with the willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Another group of research studies sought to determine whether the hypothesized media influence depends on the valence (positive or negative) of the information being used. Zhang et al (2021) found that the type of information mattered – exposure to pro-vaccine information on social media – was positively correlated to positive attitudes and behavioral

intentions toward COVID-19 vaccination. Similarly, Xin et al (2023) demonstrated the association between exposure to negative vs. positive information and vaccine hesitancy, while Pierrri et al (2022) linked exposure to low-credibility websites with COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and vaccination refusal. In an experimental study, Betsch et al (2010) determined that accessing vaccine-critical websites increased the perception of vaccination risk and decreased the perception of the risk of omitting vaccinations as well as the intentions to vaccinate.

Traditional and Social Media and Vaccine Hesitancy

In this study, we aim to situate the possible media effects on vaccine hesitancy into a more general discussion about media effects, and the possible different effects of the traditional and social media. Namely, it is possible to assume that social media do not have the same cultivation influence that existed with the traditional media. Traditional media, such as television, radio, and print media, lead to the mainstreaming effect (Gerbner and Gross 1976), that is, they reinforce the established image of the world based on social institutions, including science. Simply put, the information available on traditional media usually follows the scientific consensus on certain issues. In contrast to them, it can be assumed that the new media pluralism leads to the crumbling of the unified worldviews, that is, to the possibility that different concepts of reality, among them those that carry with them pseudoscientific beliefs and a low level of trust in established science, come to the fore and reach a wider audience. On the other hand, new media environments are very heterogeneous among themselves. Internet news sources are often credible because they represent the online version of established offline media, and online sources of information as such are increasingly taking precedence due to their lower price and the new habits of media consumers. In other words, it cannot be simply assumed that the Internet as a new media platform necessarily offers less credible news, that is, that it cultivates the media audience in a completely different way. In contrast, social media as a source of information probably indeed have completely different effects. They comprise unverified and unreliable sources of information that often marginalize and dismiss mainstream media sources (Phillips and Milner 2017; Rogers 2021). Additionally, social media users with similar attitudes are also more likely to interact with one another, and to share similar

content, thus creating “epistemic echo chambers” and “epistemic bubbles” (Mønsted and Lehmann 2022; Nguyen 2020). For instance, even though the majority of online information is pro-vaccine, vaccine-hesitant online communities are largely disconnected from the pro-vaccine content and sources of information (Getman et al 2017). As Skafle et al (2022) noted, COVID-19 anti-vaccination echo chambers usually contain medical misinformation (side-effects and other harmful effects), conspiracy claims (secret power structures, corrupt elites, etc.) and vaccine development misinformation (faulty procedures, vaccine content, etc.).

Given the characteristics described above, the new media environment represents a fertile ground for vaccination conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories can be understood as alternative explanations to the officially announced version of an event, and such alternative versions usually assume the existence of secret societies and conscious manipulation by invisible powerful individuals who attempt to change or conceal the truth of an event (Brotherton et al 2013). Although belief in conspiracy theories has remained widespread for many years, it is observed that they, as a rule, become more prominent during times of social turmoil since they provide alternative explanations for events when there is a lack of authoritative expert explanations (Prooijen and Douglas 2017). Among others, the dangers arising from the endorsement of conspiracy theories stem from the possibility that, based on such beliefs, some members of society will make potentially harmful health decisions (Prooijen and Douglas 2018). Using an experimental approach, Warner and Shepard (2014) found that media echo chambers increase belief in conspiracy theories, regardless of participants' prior beliefs. A study on the impact of using YouTube and belief in vaccine conspiracy theories emphasizes that echo chambers and filter bubbles occur when a YouTube user develops a watch history, meaning that the subsequent YouTube content will be like the previous one (Hussein 2020). Different types of media platforms differ in the proliferation of belief in conspiracy theories in terms of the amount, dynamics, and strength of such content (Stempel et al 2017; Theocharis et al 2021). For example, Walter and Dronchon (2022) detected a positive link between non-mainstream media and social media use and conspiratorial predispositions, while there was a negative link between newspaper use and conspiratorial predispositions, and no link with television and radio. Hollander (2018) found that general media use was

not, but the use of specific media outlets was related to the endorsement of conspiracy theories.

Research Goals and Hypotheses

In this study, we aimed to test the model of serial mediation to discover whether the overall amount and the types of use of various media sources will be connected with the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy beliefs, as one of the causes of vaccine hesitancy. In other words, the serial mediation tested in the current study assumes that the frequency of media uses and the type of media employed for vaccine information (credible vs. non-credible) significantly influence the content of vaccine-related information consumed (positive/negative), which can determine varying levels of trust in scientific credibility, subsequently impacting beliefs in vaccine conspiracy theories. Therefore, this study aims to address the research question regarding the association between different types of media used to monitor vaccine-related topics and vaccine conspiracy theories while exploring the extent to which this association is mediated by trust in scientific credibility and the valence of the content followed by the respondents.

This study contributes to the field in four ways. First, the hypotheses outlined in the paper stem from the need to test connections that have been inconclusive in previous research and from the premise that social media play a negative role when it comes to increasing vaccine hesitancy. Second, it is necessary to differentiate between social media and credible Internet news sources, such as online newspapers, which in recent years have become somewhat as credible as offline sources since the role of gatekeeping is not significantly different from the “traditional” media. Third, based on previous research, the total media use amount needs to be distinguished from the specific media use amount related to vaccination information. And fourth, the valence of vaccination information and science credibility as a possible mediation link needs to be accounted for in order to provide a more complex explanation of the effects.

Therefore, the general and specific hypotheses were as follows:

- H1. The amount of television use and Internet use will be negatively correlated, while the amount of social media use will be positively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs.
- H2. The reliance on television and the Internet as a source of vaccination information will be negatively correlated, while the reliance on social media will be positively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs.
- H3. The type of consumed media content (positive/negative) and trust in scientific credibility will be serial mediators of the relationship between media usage frequency and belief in vaccination conspiracy theories.
- H4. The type of consumed media content (positive/negative) and trust in scientific credibility will be serial mediators of the relationship between reliance on media as a source of vaccination information and belief in vaccination conspiracy theories.

Sample and measures

A survey was conducted in July 2022 using an online questionnaire on an opt-in panel quota sample of the Croatian general population (N = 1,500), while the data were collected by a public opinion polling company. Quotas were determined based on gender, age, and region within Croatia. The sample consisted of 50.33% women, 61.33% of the sample members lived in urban areas, and 29.93% completed higher education. The average age was 42.61 years, with a standard deviation of 13.10.

The predictor variables in the study included the frequency of the average daily overall use of a) television, b) Internet, and c) social media. All three variables were measured on a scale ranging from 0 – not at all to 13 – more than 10 hours. The frequency of consuming information related to vaccination on the aforementioned media (television, credible Internet sources such as online newspapers, and social media) was measured on a scale ranging from 1 – never to 10 – very often. Age (in years), gender (1 – male; 2 – female), and level of scientific literacy were included as control variables. As a measure of scientific literacy, the Oxford scale (Miller 1998) was used. The scale contains 13 items that assess textbook knowledge, derived from statements about scientific facts that an average citizen

should have encountered during primary education (Stockmayer & Bryant 2012). The scale has been frequently used in Eurobarometer surveys and other vaccine hesitancy studies (Motoki et al 2021; Stockmayer and Bryant 2012).

Mediator variables included the measures of the valence of information related to vaccination and the science credibility scale. The valence was measured by asking whether the respondent on average follows the media sources which are predominantly critical or predominantly affirmative toward vaccination. To measure the level of trust in scientific credibility, we utilized the Credibility of Science Scale (CoSS) (Hartman 2017), which comprises six items rated on a five-point Likert scale. This scale aims to evaluate the degree to which individuals have a default inclination to trust in the scientific method and the research findings, as well as their overall positive perception of scientists. It is worth noting that the authors emphasized the CoSS scale's validity in relation to different topic-specific beliefs about science (Hartman 2017), and that the scale has been subsequently validated (Tavani et al 2021) and used in other studies (Dieckman and Hartman 2022; Johnson and Dieckmann 2020; Lobato et al 2020).

As for the outcome variable, a seven-item scale was used to assess the extent to which individuals believe in vaccine conspiracy beliefs (Shapiro et al 2016). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale. A higher score on the scale indicated a higher belief in vaccine conspiracy theories. The Croatian and Serbian versions of the scale have been validated and used in several studies to investigate the relationship between vaccine conspiracy beliefs and their association with vaccination behavior (Jovanović et al 2023; Milošević Đorđević et al 2021; Pavić and Šuljak 2022).

In Table 1, descriptive statistics of the measures are shown. We can note that the overall amount of Internet use is higher than television use and that the Internet was also the most used source of vaccination information. In terms of science literacy, given that the maximum attainable score was 13, the mean score ($M=9.2$, $SD=2.73$) indicated a relatively high level of scientific literacy among the participants. Given that higher levels of science credibility typically imply skepticism, the results of this study suggest that, on average, participants have trust in science ($M=27.4$, $SD=7.69$). Regarding vaccine conspiracy beliefs, participants, on

average, hold a relatively low belief in vaccine conspiracy theories (M=26.86, SD=12.03). As for media consumption, participants' average use of television (M=3.44, SD=2.33), Internet news sources (M=3.65, SD=2.35), and social media (M=3.26, SD=2.34) for vaccine-related information were relatively similar. The proportion of participants who more often visit vaccine-affirmative information sources is higher than those who visit critical information sources (56.67% and 43.33%, respectively).

Table 1. Measurements – descriptive statistics

Measure	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
TV - total use	1	13	4.29	1.80
Internet - total use	1	13	5.85	2.28
Social media - total use	1	13	3.60	1.87
TV - vaccination info use	1	10	3.44	2.33
Internet - vaccination info use	1	10	3.65	2.35
Social media - vaccination info use	1	10	3.26	2.34
Negative valence	1	2	1.43	.496
Science literacy	0.00	13.00	9.20	2.74
Science credibility	6.00	42.00	27.38	7.69
Vaccination conspiracy beliefs	7.00	49.00	26.83	12.03

Analytical approach

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis, as a method that combines factor analysis and regression analysis. It is considered an appropriate analytical tool for testing theoretical models and hypotheses, as its advantage lies in an ability to account for measurement error of multiple dependent and independent variables that are simultaneously analyzed in the overall model (Blunch 2008; Hair et al 2021, Tarka 2018).

As noted in the hypotheses outline, the tested models incorporated theoretical assumptions and empirical findings based on the literature review. Five manifest variables (TV total use, Internet total use, social media total use, gender, and age) and one latent variable (scientific literacy)

served as predictors of the latent outcome variable (conspiracy beliefs) in the first structural model. The variables of valence and trust in science credibility served as serial mediators between the predictor variables and the dependent variable (vaccination conspiracy beliefs). The second model included the same structural specification and the same outcome variable as the first model but the predictors included the amount of use of TV, Internet news sources, and social media for obtaining vaccination information.

Results

Both models exhibited acceptable index values for the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), exceeding 0.95, which is considered a well-fitting model (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values up to 0.05 are considered acceptable for a good model fit. The AIC and BCC values of the first model are 1958.487 for the AIC and 1963.934 for BCC. The second model values of AIC and BCC are 1941.410 and 1946.858. Overall, considering the satisfactory values of CFI, TLI, and RMSEA, and a relatively low Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the fit indices indicated a good model fit.

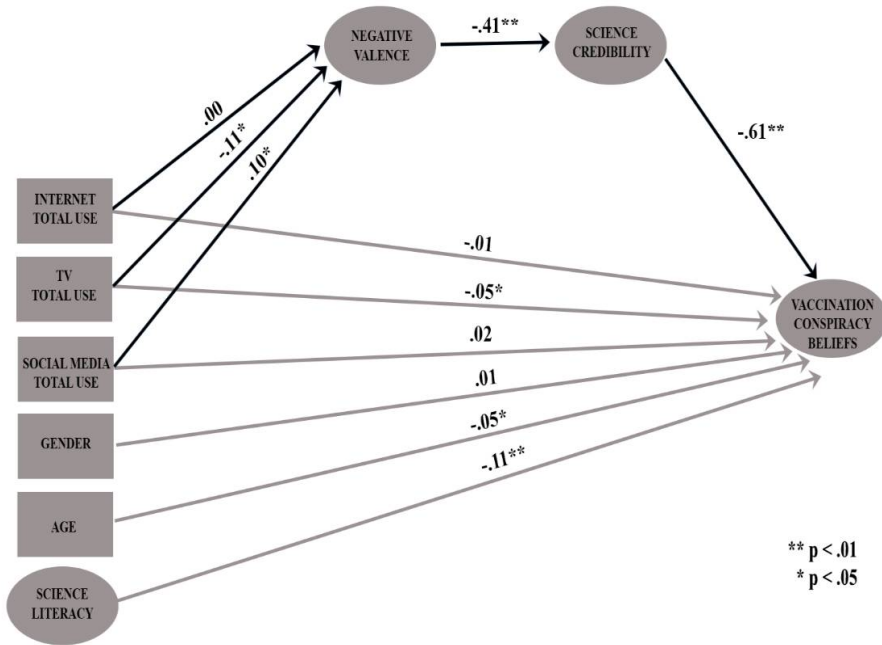
Table 2. Model fits

	x2	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	90% CI lower	90% CI upper	SRMR
Model 1	1716.487	439	.000	.938	.930	.044	.042	.046	.0824
Model 2	1699.410	439	.000	.945	.938	.044	.042	.046	.0800

Model 1 results (Figure 1 and Table 3) indicate that the total amount of television use was significantly associated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs, i.e. that total, direct, and indirect effects of television use were significant and negative in sign. In other words, television use consistently lowered the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy beliefs, both directly, and indirectly through the serial mediation of negative valence and science credibility. Therefore, the overall amount of television use was related to the lower vaccination conspiracy beliefs both directly and through the lower amount of negative information about vaccination, which then in

turn led to higher trust in science credibility, thus ultimately lowering the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy beliefs.

Figure 1. Model 1 (standardized coefficients)



As for the overall amount of Internet use, no total, direct, or indirect effects were detected. In other words, overall Internet use was not connected with the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy beliefs.

Regarding social media use, the indirect effect was significant, while direct and total effects were not significant. Therefore, while the total effect could not be confirmed, the overall social media use was connected with consuming more negative information about vaccination and ultimately with higher vaccination conspiracy beliefs. This seemingly inconsistent result is not uncommon when structural equation modeling is used and arises from the fact that the test of the indirect effect is more statistically powerful than the test of the total effect (Kenny and Judd 2014; O'Rourke and MacKinnon 2015). Therefore, since there was an a priori

hypothesized indirect effect, we can confirm its existence even in the case of the insignificant total effect (Aglar and De Boeck 2017).

As for control variables, scientific literacy is significantly negatively correlated with beliefs in conspiracy theories, indicating that individuals with higher literacy levels had lower levels of vaccination conspiracy beliefs. The results showed that gender had an insignificant relationship with vaccination conspiracy beliefs, while age was significantly negatively correlated, meaning that younger respondents on average had higher levels of vaccination conspiracy beliefs.

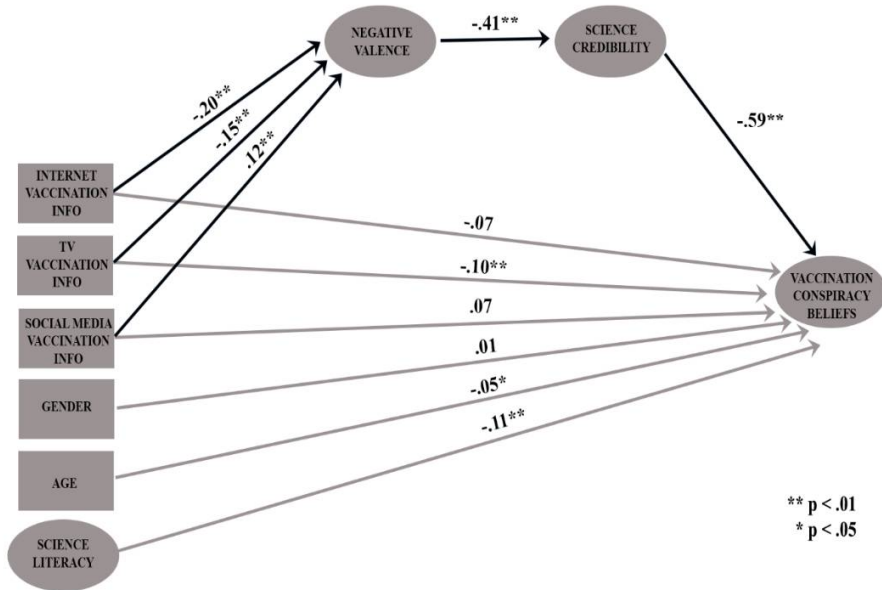
Table 3. Mediation analysis (Model 1)

Total effect					
	Coefficient	p	SE	LL	UL
TV – total use	-.072	.003	.023	-.117	-.027
Internet – total use	.010	.679	.022	-.035	.053
Social media – total use	.044	.113	.027	-.019	.098
Direct effect					
TV – total use	-.046	.027	.020	-.086	-.005
Internet – total use	.009	.675	.020	-.030	.047
Social media – total use	.021	.419	.025	-.028	.069
Indirect effect					
TV – total use	-.026	.000	.006	-.039	-.015
Internet – total use	.001	.937	.005	-.010	.011
Social media – total use	.023	.001	.007	.010	.037

The results of the second model (Figure 2 and Table 4) revealed that all three total effects were significant, i.e. the reliance on television and Internet news sources as the sources of vaccination information lowered vaccination conspiracy beliefs, while the reliance on social media for

obtaining vaccination information was connected with higher conspiracy beliefs.

Figure 2. Model 2 (standardized regression coefficients)



As visible in Table 4, the direct and indirect effects of television were significant, thus indicating a partial mediation. The direct effects of the Internet and social media were not significant, thus indicating full mediation. In other words, the reliance on Internet news sources and television for vaccination information led to receiving less negative information, higher trust in science credibility, and lower vaccination conspiracy beliefs. On the other hand, obtaining vaccination information through social media led to more negative information, lower trust in science credibility, and higher vaccination conspiracy beliefs. Aside from the mediation path, only the direct effect of television was detected, while the remaining two were non-significant.

Table 4. Mediation analysis (Model 2)

Total effect					
	Coefficient	p	SE	LL	UL
TV vaccination info	-.097	.004	.033	-.159	-.031
Internet vaccination info	-.086	.021	.038	-.162	-.013
Social media – vaccination info	.071	.015	.029	.014	.127
Direct effect					
TV vaccination info	-.072	.015	.028	-.126	-.013
Internet vaccination info	-.052	.106	.033	-.117	.011
Social media – vaccination info	.050	.052	.026	.000	.099
Indirect effect					
TV vaccination info	-.025	.001	.008	-.041	-.010
Internet vaccination info	-.034	.000	.009	-.053	-.017
Social media – vaccination info	.023	.004	.007	.008	.036

In Table 5, we summarized the implication of the results on the hypotheses that were put forward in this study. We can note that H1 and H3 were partially confirmed, while H2 and H4 were fully confirmed. In other words, the effect of the overall amount of media use was confirmed only in the case of television, while the indirect effects of overall use were confirmed only in cases of television and social media. The reliance on television, the Internet, and social media for obtaining vaccination information was connected with vaccination conspiracy beliefs, and the same goes for the hypothesized mediation paths/indirect effects.

Table 5. Summary of the hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Conclusion
H1. The amount of television use and Internet use will be negatively correlated, while the amount of social media use will be positively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs.	This hypothesis is partially confirmed since only the total amount of television use is negatively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs, while the total effect was not confirmed with regard to the Internet and social media.
H2. The reliance on television and the Internet as a source of vaccination information will be negatively correlated, while the reliance on social media will be positively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs.	This hypothesis is fully confirmed since the total effect of all three predictors was significant. The reliance on television and the Internet was negatively correlated with vaccination conspiracy beliefs, while the connection of social media reliance was positive.
H3. The type of consumed media content (positive/negative) and trust in scientific credibility will be serial mediators of the relationship between media usage frequency and belief in vaccination conspiracy theories.	This hypothesis is partially confirmed since the indirect effects of television and social media were significant, while the indirect effect of the Internet was non-significant. The mediation direction was in accordance with the hypothesis.
H4. The type of consumed media content (positive/negative) and trust in scientific credibility will be serial mediators of the relationship between reliance on media as a source of vaccination information and belief in vaccination conspiracy theories.	The hypothesis is fully confirmed since all three indirect effects were significant and the mediation direction was in accordance with the hypothesis.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the content consumed on different media platforms is connected with the acceptance of vaccination conspiracy beliefs. To investigate these relationships, we employed the model of serial mediation using SEM analysis. Such a model assumed a significant correlation between the frequency of media use or reliance on the media for vaccination information, the type of media relied upon for vaccine information (credible vs. non-credible), the content of vaccine-related information consumed (positive/negative) on these media platforms, and the varying levels of trust in scientific credibility and endorsement of conspiracy

theories. Our findings confirmed a significant difference in explaining vaccination conspiracy endorsement between credible and non-credible media sources.

Specifically, we found a negative correlation between the overall amount of television use and reliance on television as a source of vaccination information and the beliefs in vaccination conspiracy theories, while in both cases this relationship was partially mediated through the valence of information (less negative information received) and the trust in science credibility (higher trust) as serial mediators. On the other hand, we detected a positive indirect effect between the overall amount of social media use and vaccination conspiracy beliefs, as well as positive total and indirect effects of the reliance on social media for vaccination information, and the belief in vaccination conspiracy theories. Therefore, social media use for obtaining vaccination information leads to higher conspiracy beliefs, mainly through consuming more negative information, which leads to a decline in trust in science credibility. When it comes to Internet use, there was no connection between the overall amount of Internet use and vaccination conspiracy beliefs, but the reliance on the Internet for obtaining vaccination information was negatively connected in total and indirectly with vaccination conspiracy beliefs. Overall, the impact of the Internet as an information source was partially confirmed.

These findings should be interpreted considering the distinctions between credible and non-credible media sources. It is noteworthy that the reliance on both the Internet and television is negatively connected with the endorsement of vaccination conspiracy theories. In this regard, the results support the argument made by Dutta-Bergman (2004) that traditional and credible online media are complementary when the same content is consumed across them. Even though there has been some tension between traditional media journalism and online journalism, mostly related to professional interests and the question of who is entitled to qualify as a “journalist” (Cassidy 2007; Poler Kovačić et al 2010), online news media sources are increasingly seen as equal and credible sources of information. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Croatia, online news sources provided similar information as offline ones. A media framing analysis of Croatian print media during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (Holy 2021) revealed overwhelmingly positive reporting with scientists and politicians involved in fighting the pandemic framed within the hero

archetype. Similarly, a study conducted by Pavić et al (2022) using human-coding content analysis determined that online news sites in Croatia provided mostly affirmative information about vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beliga et al (2021) using natural language processing showed that online news media in Croatia concentrated mostly on the statements of people from the state administration and those scientists who were members of the state bodies dedicated to fighting the pandemics. On a more general note, the overwhelming majority of online news consumption is still related to mainstream news outlets (Flaxman et al 2016). The absence of a connection between the total amount of Internet use and conspiratorial beliefs indicates the vagueness of the Internet as a global information and communication network, that is, the variety of influences that can result from its use. It can be said that the Internet as such is a neutral tool that can be used to distribute information whose impact on trust in the scientific mainstream is unclear. In the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, however, online sources mostly provided information that supported the scientific mainstream. Therefore, overall, media sources with a high level of credibility, regardless of whether they are offline or online, as a rule, conveyed the official picture of reality, i.e. they supported the official narrative about the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways to fight it.

On the other hand, social media provide the opportunity to present information that is not in accordance with the accepted epistemic mainstream, so it is understandable that people who seek vaccination information on social media are more often exposed to negative information. This mechanism is recursive, considering that already accepted beliefs influence the adoption of new ones. Traditional and social media operate using different logic, since traditional media rest upon the gatekeeping role of professional journalists, while social media content is produced by a diverse group of creators, it is more personalized and subjective (Van den Heijkant et al 2023), whereas its selection and consumption are heavily influenced by social contacts and opinion leaders (Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage 2018). Notwithstanding the fact that social media users are somewhat exposed to passive and incidental learning, social media still represent a high-choice media environment (Bode 2016; Dutton 2009) in which lower trusting individuals more often consume non-mainstream news sources (Fletcher and Park 2017). Nguyen (2020) points out the existence of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers

that differ in their mechanisms of action and ways of battling them but lead to similar outcomes. Epistemic bubbles, mainly operating through content search algorithms, act in such a way as to unintentionally exclude alternative sources of information, that is, by multiplying the same sources of information, creating the illusion of epistemic authority. However, it is debatable whether the bubble is created by the algorithms or the users themselves through intentional selective exposure. On the other hand, echo chambers work in such a way that alternative voices are systematically discredited, which makes it impossible to build a system of trust in credible sources of information based on accepted scientific results. These conclusions are supported by the results of research studies that showed that people expressed less trust in news that was distributed through social media channels in comparison to the one that is retrieved from an original news website (Karlsen and Aalberg 2023), rate lower credibility of news articles when they were shared by their own Facebook friends in comparison to those shared by a news organization (Tandoc 2018), and trust social media significantly less in comparison to traditional news media (Lu et al 2022; Salaudeen and Onyechi 2020). In other words, people trying to find objective and credible information generally will not look for it on social media, at least when the source of information is not a credible organization, assuming that unverified and biased choices are behind them. Therefore, the findings of this study strongly suggest that social media can act as catalysts in facilitating the widespread dissemination and acceptance of narratives that often contradict scientifically confirmed facts. Such narratives can be particularly harmful as they may influence individuals to make detrimental health decisions based on their belief in conspiracy theories (Prooijen and Douglas 2018), while simultaneously fostering extreme distrust in the scientific process and the beneficial effects of scientific advancements.

Conclusion

This study aimed to expand upon the assumption of a connection between media use and vaccine hesitancy by placing more emphasis on the distinction between credible and non-credible media, instead focusing on the distinction between “old” and “new” media. Additionally, in the study, mediation mechanisms that translate the characteristics of the particular

media type were examined. It was determined that the use of credible media leads to more positive information about vaccination, thus increasing trust in the science's credibility and decreasing vaccination conspiracy beliefs, while the effect of social media proved to be the opposite. By considering these aspects, a more comprehensive understanding of the media's role when explaining vaccine hesitancy can be attained, which can guide effective strategies to reduce belief in vaccine conspiracy theories.

As for the study limitations, given that our research design is cross-sectional, it was not possible to unequivocally confirm the direction of causal relationships. Namely, people with initial high trust in science as an institution may choose those sources that offer precisely such information (television and credible online Internet news), as opposed to those with lower levels of trust who look for information on social media. Future studies should differentiate even more precisely between certain types of online information sources (online sources with and without counterparts in traditional media), as well as distinguish between certain types of social media because, given the differences in style, formality, and content, they may not have the same effect on the spread of misinformation and increasing vaccine hesitancy.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under Grant IP-2019-04-7902.

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request in the Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek at <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:277056> reference number 142:277056

Funding

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek approved the study (Ethical approval code: 2158-83-02-19-2).

References

- Agler, Robert and Paul de Boeck. (2017). "On the Interpretation and Use of Mediation: Multiple Perspectives on Mediation Analysis." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01984>
- Alley, Stephanie, Robert Stanton, Matthew Browne, Quyen G. To, Saman Khalesi, Susan Williams, Tanya Thwaite, Andrew Fenning and Cornel Vandelanotte. (2021). "As the Pandemic Progresses, How Does Willingness to Vaccinate against COVID-19 Evolve?" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), 797. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020797>
- Allington, Daniel, Siobhan McAndrew, Vivienne Moxham-Hall and Bobby Duffy. (2021). "Media usage predicts intention to be vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 in the US and the UK." *Vaccine*, 39(18), 2595–2603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2021.02.054>
- Al-Uqdah, Lola, Abron Franklin, F. A., Chu-Chuan Chiu and Brianna Boyd. (2022). "Associations Between Social Media Engagement and Vaccine Hesitancy." *Journal of Community Health*, 47(4), 577–587. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-022-01081-9>
- Beliga, Slobodan, Sanda Martinčić-Ipšić, Mihaela Matešić, Irena Petrijevcćanin Vuksanović and Ana Meštrović. (2021). "Infoveillance of the Croatian Online Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic: One-Year Longitudinal Study Using Natural Language Processing." *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 7(12), e31540. <https://doi.org/10.2196/31540>
- Bergström, Annika and Maria Jervelycke Belfrage. (2018). "News in Social Media." *Digital Journalism*, 6(5), 583–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1423625>
- Betsch, Cornelia, Frank Renkewitz, Tilman Betsch and Corina Ulshöfer. (2010). "The Influence of Vaccine-critical Websites on Perceiving Vaccination Risks." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15(3), 446–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105309353647>
- Blunch, Neill. (2008). *Introduction to Structural Equation Modelling Using SPSS and AMOS*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249345>

- Bode, Leticia. (2016). "Political News in the News Feed: Learning Politics from SocialMedia." *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(1), 24–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1045149>
- Brailovskaia, Julia, Silvia Schneider and Jürgen Margraf. (2021). "To vaccinate or not to vaccinate!?" Predictors of willingness to receive Covid-19 vaccination in Europe, the U.S., and China. *PLOS ONE*, 16(12), e0260230. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0260230>
- Brodziak, Anna, Dawid Sigorski, Malgorzata Osmola, Michal Wilk, Angelika Gawlik-Urban, Joanna Kiszka, Katarzyna Machulska-Ciuraj and Pawel Sobczuk. (2021). "Attitudes of Patients with Cancer towards Vaccinations-Results of Online Survey with Special Focus on the Vaccination against COVID-19." *Vaccines*, 9(5), 411. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines9050411>
- Brotherton, Robert, Christopher French and Alan Pickering. (2013). "Measuring Belief in Conspiracy Theories: The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00279>
- Cascini, Fidelia, Ana Pantovic, A. Yazan Al-Ajlouni, Giovanna Failla, Valeria Puleo, Andriy Melnyk, Alberto Lontano and Walter Ricciardi. (2022). "Social media and attitudes towards a COVID-19 vaccination: A systematic review of the literature." *EClinicalMedicine*, 48, 101454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2022.101454>
- Cassidy, William P. (2007). "Online News Credibility: An Examination of the Perceptions of Newspaper Journalists." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(2), 478–498. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00334.x>
- Cotten, Shelia R. and Sipi S. Gupta. (2004). "Characteristics of online and offline health information seekers and factors that discriminate between them." *Social Science & Medicine*, 59(9), 1795–1806. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.02.020>
- Dieckmann, Nathan F. and Robert O. Hartman. (2022). "Conspiracist and paranormal beliefs: A typology of non-reductive ideation." *International Journal of Personality Psychology*, 8, 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.21827/ijpp.8.38006>
- Dubé, Ève, Jeremy K. Ward, Pierre Verger and Noni E. MacDonald. (2021). "Vaccine Hesitancy, Acceptance, and Anti-Vaccination: Trends and Future Prospects for Public Health." *Annual Review of Public Health*, 42(1), 175–191. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-102240>
- Dutta-Bergman, Mohan Jyoti. (2004). "Complementarity in Consumption of News Types Across Traditional and New Media." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48(1), 41–60. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4801_3

- Dutton, William H. (2009). "The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks." *Prometheus*, 27(1), 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08109020802657453>
- Dyar, Oliver J, Enrique Castro-Sanchez and Allison H Holmes. (2014). "What makes people talk about antibiotics on social media? A retrospective analysis of Twitter use." *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*, 69(9), 2568–2572.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jac/dku165>
- Flaxman, Seth, Shree Goel and Justin M. Rao. (2016). "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 298–320.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006>
- Fletcher, Richard and Sora Park. (2017). "The Impact of Trust in the News Media on Online News Consumption and Participation." *Digital Journalism*, 5(10), 1281–1299.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1279979>
- Garett, Renee and Sean D. Young. (2021). "Online misinformation and vaccine hesitancy." *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 11(12), 2194–2199.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibab128>
- Gerbner, George and Larry Gross. (1976). "Living with Television: The Violence Profile." *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 172–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x>
- Getman, Rebekah, Mohammad Helmi, Hal Roberts, Alfa Yansane, David Cutler and Brittany Seymour. (2018). "Vaccine Hesitancy and Online Information: The Influence of Digital Networks." *Health Education & Behavior*, 45(4), 599–606.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198117739673>
- Hair, Joseph F., Tomas M. Hult, Christian M. Ringle, Marko Sarstedt, Nicholas P. Danks and Soumya Ray. (2021). An Introduction to Structural Equation Modeling. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80519-7_1
- Hartman, Robert O., Nathan F. Dieckmann, Amber M. Sprenger, A. M., Bradley J. Stastny and Kenneth DeMarree. (2017). "Modeling Attitudes Toward Science: Development and Validation of the Credibility of Science Scale." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 39(6), 358–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2017.1372284>
- Heijkant, Linda van den, Martine van Selm, Lina Hellsten and Rens Vliegthart. (2023). "Framing pension reform in the news: Traditional versus social media." *Communications*, 48(2), 249–272. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2021-0058>

- Hollander, Barry A. (2018). "Partisanship, Individual Differences, and News Media Exposure as Predictors of Conspiracy Beliefs." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(3), 691–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699017728919>
- Holy, Mirela. (2021). "Media Framing of the Coronavirus in Croatia." *In Medias Res*, 10(18), 2813–2828. <https://doi.org/10.46640/imr.10.18.3>
- Hu, Li-tze and Peter M. Bentler. (1999). "Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives." *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), pp. 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
- Hussein Eslam, Perna Juneja and Tanushreitra Mitra. (2020). "Measuring Misinformation in Video Search Platforms: An Audit Study on YouTube." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 4(48), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3392854>
- Ijioma, Nnaemeka E., Chinwe Nze. (2022). "Evaluating the Influence of Social Media Use in COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy of Residents of Owerri Metropolis." *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 10(01), 10–24. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2022.101002>
- Jia, Xiaoyun, Yan Pang and Linagni Sally Liu. (2021). "Online Health Information Seeking Behavior: A Systematic Review." *Healthcare*, 9(12), 1740. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9121740>
- Johnson, Brandwin B. and Nathan F. Dieckmann. (2020). "Americans' views of scientists' motivations for scientific work." *Public Understanding of Science*, 29(1), 2–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662519880319>
- Jovanović, Veljko, Milica Lazić, Vesna Gavrilov-Jerković, Marija Zotović-Kostić and Vojana Obradović. (2023). "Vaccine Conspiracy Beliefs Scale: Validation and Measurement Invariance in a Youth Sample." *Evaluation & the Health Professions*, 016327872311702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01632787231170237>
- Karlsen, Rune and Toril Aalberg. (2023). "Social Media and Trust in News: An Experimental Study of the Effect of Facebook on News Story Credibility." *Digital Journalism*, 11(1), 144–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1945938>
- Kenny, David A. and Charles M. Judd. (2014). "Power Anomalies in Testing Mediation." *Psychological Science*, 25(2), 334–339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613502676>

- Lobato, Emilio J.C., Maia Powell, Leace M.K. and Colin Holbrook. (2020). "Factors Predicting Willingness to Share COVID-19 Misinformation." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.566108>
- Lu, Linqi, Jiawei Liu, Connie Yuan, Kelli S. Burns, Enze Lu and Dongxiao Li. (2021). "Source Trust and COVID-19 Information Sharing: The Mediating Roles of Emotions and Beliefs About Sharing." *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(2), 132–139.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198120984760>
- Milošević Đorđević, Jasna, Silvia Mari, Milica Vdović and Ana Milošević. (2021). "Links between conspiracy beliefs, vaccine knowledge, and trust: Anti-vaccine behavior of Serbian adults." *Social Science & Medicine*, 277, 113930. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113930>
- Miller, Jon D. (1998). "The measurement of civic scientific literacy." *Public Understanding of Science*, 7(3), 203–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1088/0963-6625/7/3/001>
- Motoki, Kosuke, Toshiki Saito and Yuji Takano. (2021). "Scientific Literacy Linked to Attitudes Toward COVID-19 Vaccinations: A Pre-Registered Study." *Frontiers in Communication*, 6.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.707391>
- Mønsted, Bjarke and Sune Lehmann. (2022). "Characterizing polarization in online vaccine discourse—A large-scale study." *PLOS ONE*, 17(2), e0263746.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263746>
- Nguyen, C Thi. (2020). "Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles." *Episteme*, 17(2), 141-161. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32>
- Numerato, Dino, Lenka Vochocová, Vaclav Štětka and Alena Macková. (2019). "The vaccination debate in the “post-truth” era: social media as sites of multi-layered reflexivity." *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 41(S1), 82–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12873>
- Obasola, Oluwaseun and Ojo Melvin Agunbiade. (2016). "Online Health Information Seeking Pattern Among Undergraduates in a Nigerian University." *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 215824401663525.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016635255>
- O’Rourke, Holly P and David P MacKinnon. (2015). "When the test of mediation is more powerful than the test of the total effect." *Behavior Research Methods*, 47(2), 424–442. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-014-0481-z>
- Pavić, Željko, Adrijana Šuljok and Juraj Jurlina. (2022). "Balanced Reporting and Boomerang Effect: An Analysis of Croatian Online News Sites Vaccination

- Coverage and User Comments during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Vaccines*, 10(12), 2085. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines10122085>
- Pavić, Željko and Adrijana Šuljok. (2022). "Vaccination conspiracy beliefs among social science & humanities and STEM educated people—An analysis of the mediation paths." *PLoS ONE*, 17(3): e0264722. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0264722>
- Percheski, Christine and Eszter Hargittai. (2011). "Health Information-Seeking in the Digital Age." *Journal of American College Health*, 59(5), 379–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2010.513406>
- Phillips, Whitney and Ryan M. Milner. (2017). *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pierri, Francesco, Brea L. Perry, Matthew R. DeVerna, Kai-Cheng Yang, Alessandro Flammini, Filippo Menczer and John Bryden. (2022). "Online misinformation is linked to early COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy and refusal." *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 5966. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-10070-w>
- Piltch-Loeb, Rachael, Elena Savoia, Beth Goldberg, Brian Hughes, Tanner Verhey, Juliette Kayyem, Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Marcia Testa. (2021). "Examining the effect of information channel on COVID-19 vaccine acceptance." *PLOS ONE*, 16(5), e0251095. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251095>
- Poler Kovačič, Melita, Karmen Erjavec, and Katarina Štular. (2010). "Credibility of Traditional vs. Online News Media: A Historical Change in Journalists' Perceptions?" *Medijska istraživanja*, 16 (1), 113-130.
- Rogers, Richard. (2021). "Marginalizing the Mainstream: How Social Media Privilege Political Information." *Frontiers in Big Data*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdata.2021.689036>
- Romer, Daniel and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. (2021). "Patterns of Media Use, Strength of Belief in COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories, and the Prevention of COVID-19 From March to July 2020 in the United States: Survey Study." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(4), e25215. <https://doi.org/10.2196/25215>
- Salaudeen, Mistura and Ngozi Joy Onyechi. (2020). "Digital media vs mainstream media: Exploring the influences of media exposure and information preference as correlates of media credibility." *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 1837461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1837461>
- Shapiro, Gilla K., Anne Holding, Samara Perez, Rhonda Amsel and Zeev Rosberger. (2016). "Validation of the vaccine conspiracy beliefs scale." *Papillomavirus Research*, 2, 167–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pvr.2016.09.001>

- Skafle, Ingjerd, Anders Nordahl-Hansen, Daniel S. Quintana, Rolf Wynn and Elia Gabarron. (2022). "Misinformation About COVID-19 Vaccines on Social Media: Rapid Review." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(8), e37367. <https://doi.org/10.2196/37367>
- Smith, Naomi and Timothy Graham. (2019). "Mapping the anti-vaccination movement on Facebook." *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(9), 1310–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1418406>
- Stempel, Carl, Thomas Hargrove and Guido Stempel. (2007). "Media use, social structure and belief in 9/11 conspiracy theories." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(2), 353–372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900708400210>
- Stockmayer, Susan M. and Chris Bryant. (2012). "Science and the Public—What should people know?" *International Journal of Science Education, Part B*, 2(1), 81–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2010.543186>
- Strömbäck, Jesper, Elena Broda, Salma Bouchafra, Sofia Johansson, Gregor Rettenegger and Elina Lindgren. (2023). "Conspiracy thinking and the role of media use: Exploring the antecedents of conspiratorial predispositions." *European Journal of Communication*, 38(3), 255–271 <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231221122951>
- Tan, Sharon Sween-Lin and Nadee Goonawardene. (2017). "Internet Health Information Seeking and the Patient-Physician Relationship: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 19(1), e9. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.5729>
- Tandoc, Edson C. (2019). "Tell Me Who Your Sources Are." *Journalism Practice*, 13(2), 178–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1423237>
- Tarka, Piotr. (2018). "An overview of structural equation modeling: its beginnings, historical development, usefulness and controversies in the social sciences." *Quality & Quantity*, 52 (1), 313–354.
- Tavani, Jean Louis, Anthony Piermattéo, Gregory lo Monaco and Sylvain Delouvé. (2021). "Skepticism and defiance: Assessing credibility and representations of science." *PLOS ONE*, 16(9), e0250823. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250823>
- Theocharis, Yannis, Ana Cardenal, Soyeon Jin, Toril Aalberg, David Nicholas Hopmann, Jesper Strömbäck, J., Laia Castro, Frank Esser, Peter van Aelst, Claes de Vreese, Nicoleta Corbu, Karolina Koc-Michalska, Joerg Matthes, Christian Schemer, Tamir Sheafer, Sergio Splendore, James Stanyer, Agnieszka Stępińska and Vaclav Štětka. (2021). "Does the platform matter? Social media and COVID-19 conspiracy theory beliefs in 17 countries." *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211045666>

- Van Prooijen, Jan-Willem and Karen M. Douglas. (2017). "Conspiracy theories as part of history: The role of societal crisis situations." *Memory Studies*, 10(3), 323–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017701615>
- Van Prooijen, Jan-Willem. and Karen M. Douglas. (2018). "Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(7), 897–908. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2530>
- Walter, Annemarie and Walter H. Drochon. (2022). "Conspiracy Thinking in Europe and America: A Comparative Study." *Political Studies*, 70(2), 483–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720972616>
- Warner, Benjamin R. and Ryan Neville-Shepard. (2014). "Echoes of a Conspiracy: Birthers, Truthers, and the Cultivation of Extremism." *Communication Quarterly*, 62(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2013.822407>
- Wilson, Steven Lloyd and Charles Wiysonge. (2020). "Social media and vaccine hesitancy." *BMJ Global Health*, 5(10), e004206. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004206>
- Williams Abimbola, Jennifer Warren, Lauren Kurlander and Mafudia Suaray. (2018). "Critical Communications: A Retrospective Look at the Use of Social Media among American Sierra Leoneans during the Ebola Outbreak." *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 7(1), 366–380.
- World Health Organization. (2022). Official infodemic definition, accessed at 17th may 2023. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic>
- Xin, Meiqi, Sitong Luo, Suhua Wang, Junfeng Zhao, Gouhua Zhang, Lijuan Li, Liping Li, and Joseph Lau. (2023). "The Roles of Information Valence, Media Literacy and Perceived Information Quality on the Association Between Frequent Social Media Exposure and COVID-19 Vaccination Intention." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 37(2), 189–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08901171221121292>
- Zhang, Ke Chun, Yian Fang, He Cao, Hongbiao Chen, Tian Hu, Yaqi Chen Xiaofeng Zhou and Zixin Wang. (2021). "Behavioral Intention to Receive a COVID-19 Vaccination Among Chinese Factory Workers: Cross-sectional Online Survey." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(3). e24673. <https://doi.org/10.2196/24673>

THE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA PROVINCE OF PAKISTAN

Muhammad NAZEER¹

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.04>

Abstract: *One of the objectives of sustainable development is water, sanitation, and hygiene, or WASH. Developing countries, however, continue to face the difficulty of sophisticated WASH. There are disparities regarding how the WASH project for sustainable development is being implemented among different administrative units. In the three central districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan – Charsadda, Mardan, and Nowshera – the current study sought to evaluate the relative WASH conditions. Using a structured questionnaire and simple random sample, data in the knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) domains about WASH was gathered. Composite indices for each domain (knowledge, attitude and practices) and an overall composite WASH index were calculated. Based on the WASH index values, the results showed that Nowshera had a relatively better WASH status than Mardan and Charsadda. The study's findings suggested that while a sizable section of the study region may have access to enough water and toilets, attention should also be paid to the water's quality and the toilets' outlets.*

Keywords: *Clean water; Escherichia coli; Diseases; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Sanitation*

1. Introduction

All people have a right to access clean water, yet only a few have that entitlement (Qamar et al. 2022). The United Nations (UN) through a resolution of the General Assembly, explicitly recognized water and sanitation as a right for all (United Nations, 2010). It is reported that more

¹ Department of Geography, Government Post Graduate College, Nowshera, Pakistan, e-mail: muhammad_nazeer1@yahoo.com

than 2 billion people reside in water-stressed countries, which are predicted to get worse in some areas due to population expansion and climate change (World Health Organization, 2022). In 2030, 1.6 billion people will lack access to safely managed drinking water, 2.8 billion people will lack access to access to adequate sanitation, and 1.9 billion people will lack even the most basic facilities for performing hand hygiene (United Nations, nd). Pakistan is one of the countries that also facing the issue of not only water scarcity and adequate hygiene. The WaterAid Organization (2021) reported in its policy paper that despite Pakistan's significant progress in the areas of water supply and sanitation while ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, a sizeable portion of the population, particularly the marginalized and poor, continue to lack access to necessary water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. Over 79 million people in Pakistan lack access to decent toilets, and there are still significant gaps in access to basic WASH services among the rural, poor, and marginalized populations. Pakistan continues to rank among the top 10 countries with the highest percentage of people without access to safe water. Salman (2021) posits that Pakistan used to have a surplus of water (nearly 6000 cubic meters per capita in 1960), but today suffers a water shortage (1017 cubic meters per capita). The Pakistan's water supplies are under tremendous strain due to rapid population growth, urbanization, ongoing industrial development (Soomro et al. 2011), climate change, and ineffective management (Salman 2021). It is evident that WASH and health are interconnected. Millions of the world's impoverished die each year from preventable diseases as a result of poor hygiene, inadequate amounts and quality of drinking water, and a lack of sanitation facilities (The World Bank, 2003). Soomro et al. (2011) posits that a serious water scarcity is the outcome of the growing gap between water supply and demand. Due to growing demands, Pakistan's water and sanitation department has been emphasizing water quantity over water quality (Daud et al. 2017). As a result, the quality of the water is impacted negatively and hence water is a factor in the majority of reported health issues, either directly or indirectly (Soomro et al. 2011). In Pakistan, only 20% of the total population has access to clean drinking water. Due to the lack of clean and healthy drinking water sources, the remaining 80% of the population is forced to use contaminated water. Waterborne diseases account for around 80% of all diseases and 33% of mortality and are brought on by human activities (Daud et al. 2017). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

is one of the four provinces of Pakistan that has quite diverse geographical, geological, climatic, hydrological, social and economic setups (Nazeer, 2019). The province is facing severe issues regarding WASH. The bad drinking water quality, sanitation and hygiene issues have resulted in the outbreak of several water-borne diseases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), water-borne diseases account for 60% of the total diseases in the province (WHO 2018). According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the infant mortality rate in the province is 74 deaths per 1,000 live births (UNICEF, 2021). The bad drinking water quality and sanitation have also resulted in economic losses in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The outbreak of water-borne diseases has led to increased healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and loss of income (Khalid, 2017).

Finding out what people know, think, and do about a particular problem of interest can be accomplished through conducting studies using the Knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) survey (Hosen et al. 2022). The KAP is utilized in different part of the world for COVID-19 (Noreen et al. 2020; Sujarwoto 2022; Anaam & Alshali 2023), Dengue infection (Hairi et al. 2003; Chng et al. 2022), education (Heck et al. 2023), WASH (Sridhar et al. 2020; Berhe et al. 2020) and so on. However, disparities exist between and within communities that need to be identified for appropriate policy development. In order to assess the current situation amongst various administrative units and to devise sustainable WASH plans or programs, there is a need of a holistic approach for the comparative analysis. Composite indicators can be a useful tool for comparative analysis, as they provide a more comprehensive view of complex phenomena and allow for meaningful comparisons across different entities. According to OECD (2008), a composite indicator is a tool for reducing complexity by summarizing various implications or indicators into a single variable, making information easier to manage and enabling decision-makers to concentrate on the most crucial elements. Composite indicators are important for several reasons as they provide a more comprehensive and nuanced assessment of complex phenomena, allow for comparison and evaluation of different entities (regions, states, communities and so on), assist policy-makers and raise public awareness and accountability (OECD 2008; Hurdlikova 2013; Kroll and Scholz, 2014; Baptista 2014; Greco et al., 2019; Nazeer and Bork 2019). The aim of the current study to assess the WASH situation in the central Khyber

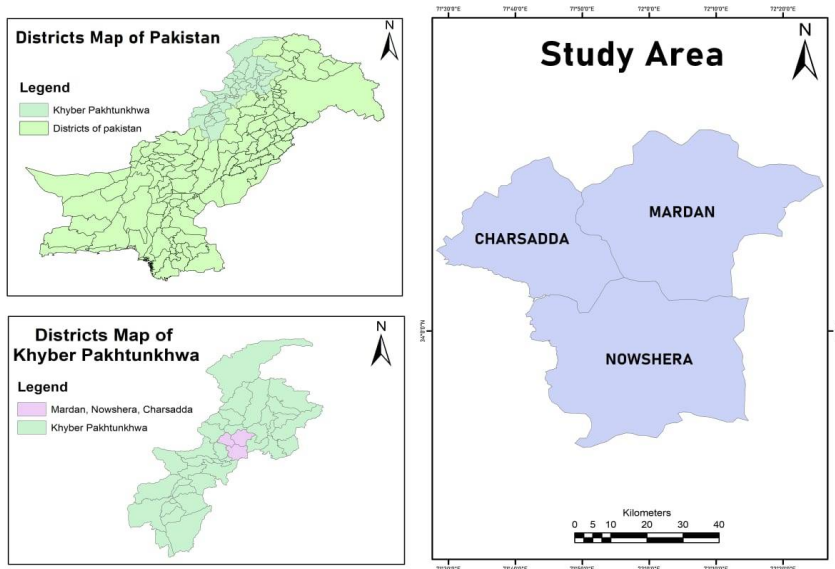
Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan through KAP survey and composite indices for to assist the policy makers in devising best management practices in WASH sector.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

Pakistan is a country in South Asia that borders India to the east, China to the north, Afghanistan to the northwest, Iran to the west, and the Arabian Sea to the south. Its approximate latitude and longitude ranges are 24-37° N and 62-75° E, respectively. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the four provinces and lies northwest of Pakistan. The province covers an area of approximately 74,521 km². The exact location of the province is 31°15'–36°57' North and 69°5'–74°7' East (Kruseman & Naqvi, 1988; Khan, 2012, Nazeer 2019). The study area of the current study is the three main towns of Central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including the Charsadda, Nowshera, and Mardan (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of the Study Area



Source: Author's contribution

2.2. Data Collection

Solvin's approach (Nazeer and Bork, 2021) was used for the determination of the appropriate sample size, as shown in Eq.1:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)} \quad (\text{Eq.1})$$

Where

n= sample size

N= Population, and

e= Margin of error (that is 5% in our case)

Based on the 2017 Government of Pakistan's latest census, the sample size was determined. The urban population of district Charsadda, district Mardan, and district Nowshera were 1,610,960; 2,373,399, and 1,520,995 respectively. The margin of error was kept at 5%. The appropriate sample sizes were discovered to be 117, 172 and 111 for the Charsadda, Mardan and Nowshera, respectively. The household' head was the targeted person to be interviewed, where the second elder was considered in case of his absence. Similarly, in case of combined family only the eldest person was interviewed. The data was collected through hired personal that was trained by the principal investigator. All ethical considerations were taken into account during data collection process. The study borrowed the Berhe et al.'s (2020) questionnaire, which was modified to fit local conditions. Extraneous items that weren't relevant to the study area were removed, and new items were added whenever required. The three main components of the questionnaire were the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) related to WASH. Except the attitude component of the questionnaire that was composed on 4 Likert scale (as opposed to the study of Berhe et al. (2020) that used the 5 Likert scale) included strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1), the knowledge and practices components were composed on binary questions.

2.3. The Index Development

As concerned to the WASH indices for knowledge and practices part of the study, the simple arithmetic additive function (Nazeer and Bork, 2019; Nazeer and Bork 2020) is used as given in Eq.2;

$$WASH_{(K,P)} = \frac{\sum X}{N} \quad (\text{Eq.2})$$

Where X stands for percent of respondents for the “yes” answers, and N for the total number of questions.

Whereas, for the attitude part, that is in ordinal form, the current study adopted the approach of relative important index (Raja et al. 2018) as given in Eq.3;

$$WASH_{(A)} = \frac{\sum W}{AN} \quad (\text{Eq.3})$$

Where W is the respondent's weighting of each factor (question in this case) on a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 stands for strongly disagree to 4 for strongly agree). The total number of respondents is N (100 in this case using percentage) and the maximum weight is A (in this case, 4). The Relative Importance Index is a number between 0 and 1, which is multiplied by 100 to get the percentage.

The final WASHI is the arithmetic mean of the composite indices of knowledge, attitude and practices domains as shown in Eq.4;

$$WASHI = \frac{\sum WASH_{(K,A,P)}}{3} \quad (\text{Eq.4})$$

3. Results

3.1. Socio-economic characteristics

The socio-economic characteristics of the study' respondents has been shown in Table 1. No significant variation has been observed in the mean age, education and family size in all the three selected areas. Noted that all the respondents of the study are male.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Characteristics (Field Survey: 2023)

Variables	Charsadda	Mardan	Nowshera
Mean Age (years)	52.19	55.06	49.52
Mean Education (years)	6.48	7.42	7.49
Mean Family Size (number)	8.67	8.78	7.49

Source: Prepared by the author.

3.2. Knowledge

Table 2 shows the finding of the respondents' knowledge in the selected three districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. 71% in Charsadda, 80% in Mardan and 77% of respondents in Nowshera are aware that water could get contaminated. Similarly, 83%, 89%, and 81% of respondents in Charsadda, Mardan and Nowshera, respectively, knew that diseases are caused by fluid waste exposure. As compared to Nowshera (79%) and Charsadda (74%), respondents in District Mardan had a considerably higher level of knowledge (91%) of the potential health risks associated with animal' waste exposure. In Mardan as well as Nowshera, 98% of respondents indicated they were more cognizant of the need to wash their hands after using toilets. Similarly, 99% of people in Nowshera, 98% in Mardan, and 88% in Charsadda have knowledge of the significance of clean water for washing their hands. In each of the three districts that were chosen, almost all of the residents are aware of the need of good hand hygiene in preventing disease.

Table 2: The Respondents' Knowledge (Field Survey 2023)

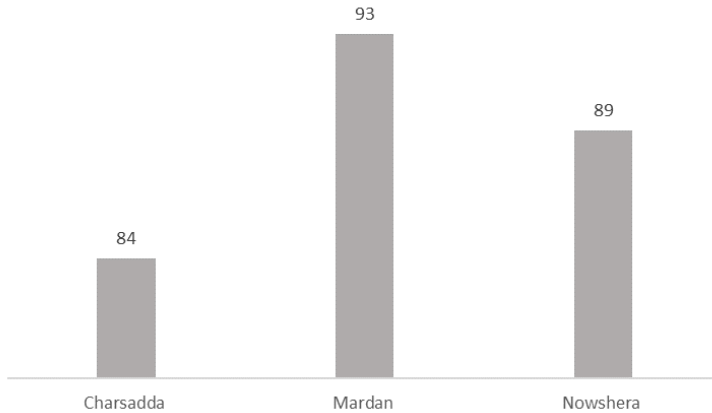
Variables	Charsadda	Mardan	Nowshera
Water get contaminated	71	80	77
Liquid waste exposed to diseases	83	89	81
Animal waste causing diseases	74	91	79
Hand wash is necessary after toilet	92	98	98
Clean water is necessary for hand wash	88	98	99
Not washing hands can cause diseases	98	99	100

Source: Prepared by the author.

Based on the average knowledge scores across various factors the regions of Charsadda, Mardan, and Nowshera, the water, sanitation and hygiene

index for knowledge (WASHK) was computed as shown in Figure 2. It was found that people in district Mardan has comparatively high level of awareness related to WASH followed by Nowshera and Charsadda.

Figure 2: Comparative Scores for WASHK



Source: Prepared by the author.

3.3. Attitude

Table 3 shows the results of attitude domain in the three selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. 88%, 90% and 95% respondents showed positive attitude that safe and sufficient water can prevent waterborne diseases. Almost all respondents in all the three selected region are in the view that boiling water before consumption eliminate the diseases causing agents. Sizable proportion of 94%, 92% and 97% of the respondents in Charsadda, Mardan and Nowshera, respectively, were agreed and strong agreed that disposing liquid waste inside the compound causing health problems. 100% respondents in Charsadda, 91% in Mardan and 97% Nowshera considered that poor personal hygiene and sanitation caused diarrhea. 100% respondents in all the selected districts considered that diarrhea is transmitted from one person to other. Except Charsadda where only 5% respondents considered that the purpose of latrine is only privacy, a sizeable portion of respondents in Mardan (73%) and Nowshera (62%) considered privacy is the sole purpose of a house' latrine. Similarly,

83% respondents in Charsadda, 94% in Mardan and 95% in Nowshera considered that the improper waste disposal in the community is a risk factor for their family members. In Charsadda, Mardan, and Nowshera, respectively, 97%, 100%, and 99% of respondents agreed that washing hands after using toilets helps avoid diarrhea. Only 2% of respondents in Nowshera stated that water alone could sterilize hands after using toilets, compared to 7% in Charsadda and 7% in Mardan. In Charsadda and Nowshera, none of the respondents considered that the children's stool was germ-free, whereas 95% of the respondents in Mardan disagreed with this statement.

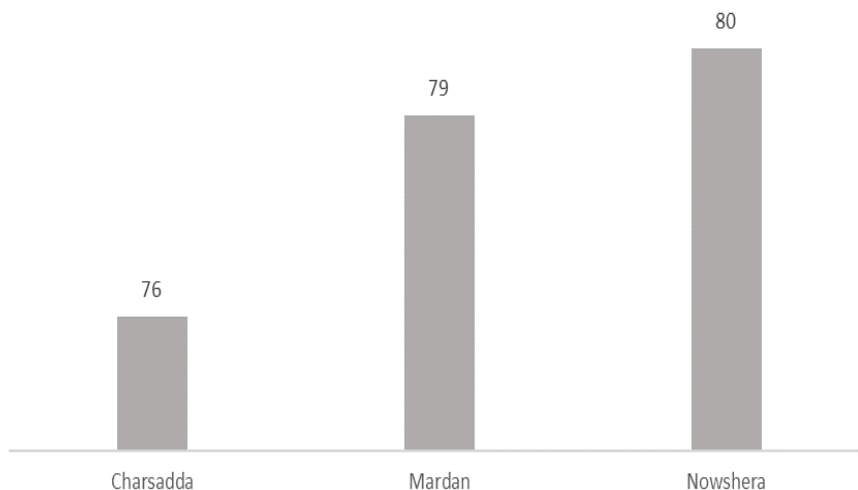
District Nowshera has comparatively higher value of WASHA followed by Mardan and Charsadda as shown in Figure 3.

Table 3: The Respondents' Attitude (Field survey 2023)

Variables	Charsadda				Mardan				Nowshera			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Safe and enough water can prevent waterborne diseases	70	18	10	2	70	20	8	2	91	4	2	3
Boiling water before consumption helps to remove disease causing microorganisms	100	0	0	0	89	10	1	0	95	5	0	0
Disposing liquid waste inside the compound does cause health problems	79	15	5	1	83	9	5	3	89	8	3	0
Diarrheal diseases are caused by poor personal hygiene and sanitation	90	10	0	0	80	11	8	1	84	13	2	1
Diarrheal diseases are transmittable	50	50	0	0	76	8	13	3	90	10	8	8
The significance of latrine is for privacy only	4	1	23	72	13	14	40	33	21	17	39	23
Improper waste disposal of neighbours is risk factor for the respondent' family	33	50	15	2	71	23	4	2	31	54	10	5
Washing hand after using latrine prevents diarrheal diseases	93	4	3	0	89	11	0	0	90	9	1	0
Washing hands with water alone is enough to sanitize hands	0	7	34	59	3	4	46	47	0	2	49	49
Children's stool is free from disease causing germs	0	0	80	20	0	5	78	17	0	0	58	42

Source: Prepared by the author.

Figure 3: Comparative Scores for WASHA



Source: Prepared by the author.

3.4. Practices

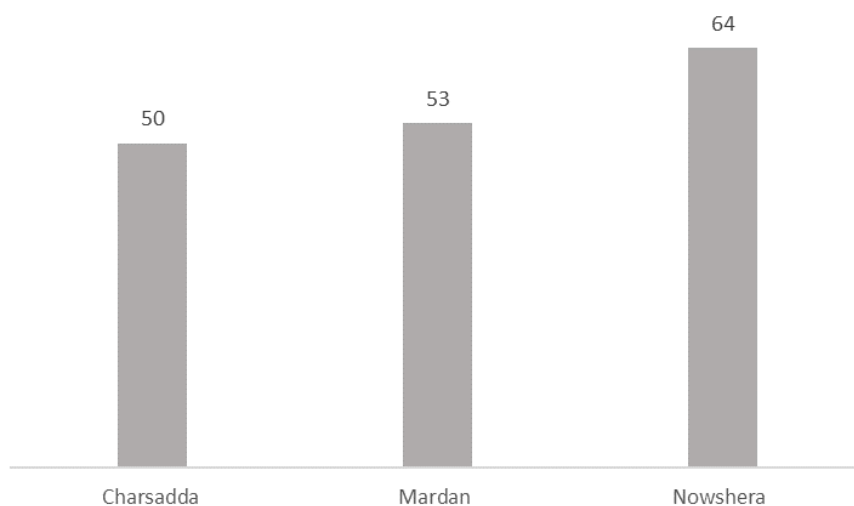
Table 4 presents the practices component of the WASH in the three selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. 54% respondents in Charsadda, 64% in Mardan and 71% in Nowshera had their own water sources while majority rely on government tube-wells. Similarly, 49%, 51% and 67% respondents in Charsadda, Mardan and Nowshera, respectively, disposing their household' waste in a proper manner. Interestingly, a sizeable proportion of 67% in Charsadda, 61% in Mardan and 45% in Nowshera had their latrine connected with the open drains. 52%, 56% and 63% respondents in Charsadda, Mardan and Nowshera, respectively, had sophisticated wash basins installed in their houses.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Index for practices component (WSSI_p) was computed as shown in Figure 4. Respondents in Nowshera has comparatively the highest level of good WASH' practices followed by Mardan and Charsadda.

Table 4: The Respondents' Practices (Field Survey 2023)

Variables	Charsadda	Mardan	Nowshera
Own source of water supply	54	64	71
Proper disposal of household' waste	49	51	67
Latrine connected with proper septic tank	43	39	55
Sophisticated hand wash basin system	52	56	63

Source: Prepared by the author.

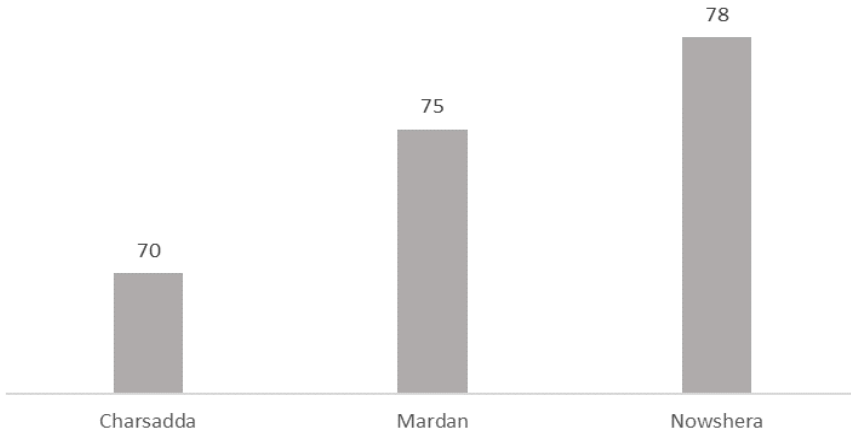
Figure 4: Comparative Scores for WASHP

Source: Prepared by the author.

3.5. Overall Situation

Figure 5 illustrates the overall WASH situation in the selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The comparatively higher WASH index value indicates robust approach towards water, sanitation in hygiene. The value of WASH index is Mardan is comparatively higher than Charsadda and lesser than Nowshera imply that efforts are needed to improve the WASH situation in Mardan. While the comparatively less value of WASH index in Charsadda means that much is needed in this sector for sustainable development.

Figure 5: Comparative Scores of WASHI



Source: Prepared by the author.

4. Discussions

Evaluating the WASH is one of the important issues for devising the target-oriented policies. The main aim of this study to find the comparative WASH situation in the three selected districts of central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It was confirmed that water supply and sanitation is not a critical issue in the central part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as like other parts of the province. These results are in agreements with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2020) that 97% of urban Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has accesses to improved drinking water and 87% to flush toilets. Comparatively higher good situation of WASH is found in district Nowshera followed by district Mardan and Charsadda. Such results are not unexpected as the socio-economic factor is one of the main reason for these variations. The district-wise human development index (HDI) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province indicated that Nowshera has comparatively higher HDI than Mardan and Charsadda having the values of 0.58, 0.56 and 0.53, respectively (Haroon, 2021). However, questions are arising that the water is sufficient in the area either it is also of good quality? And sizeable portion of the area' people has flush toilets in their houses so are these toilets are hygienically covered?

There is plethora of research studies that indicated that the water quality in all the selected districts are not quite good for human consumption. For instance, Awan, et al. (2022) reported that *Escherichia coli* (*E. Coli*) positive samples were high in Mardan District. Ali, et al. (2014) posits that majority of the water sample in the Mardan city are contaminated with different types of micro-organisms and considered unfit for human consumption. Similarly, another study conducted by Rahman, et al. (2021) described that *E.coli* is a problem in the water of Mardan district. The findings of Khan, et al. (2012) is not different than others in terms of faecal contamination in the district of Mardan and they linked this to the contamination sources nearby the water sources or unimproved sanitation system for the proper disposal of sewage sludge, garbage, animal wastes and so on. Khan, et al. (2012) reported that the major part of water from different sources in Charsadda has physical, chemical and biological impurities quite larger in quantities than the prescribed standards set by different well-known organizations like World Health Organization, Environmental Protection Agency of the US and so on. They further added that different kind of diseases are linked with the bad quality of water in Charsadda. Improper disposal of solid waste, sludge and sewage were also one of the main reason in their study for water contamination. The situation of water quality in district Nowshera is not different than the other selected districts. High level of turbidity, nitrates, fluorides and microbes were detected in the water samples of district Nowshera (Naveed, et al. 2020). The finding of only a minor portion of latrines connected with septic tanks is in agreement with the earlier studies (Cooper 2018; Asian Development Bank 2021) that effluent from toilets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is discharged into open drains that implying poor hygiene (Figure 6).

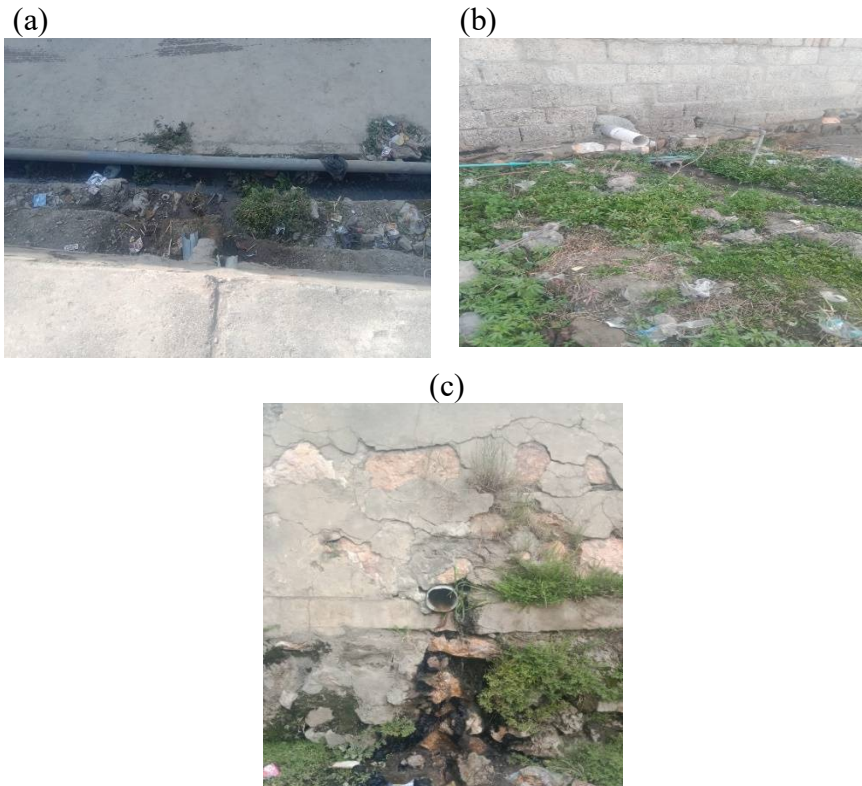
The study has some limitations. For instance, omitting an important and sizable part of the community, the female gender, due to cultural norms might influence the study results. In similar way, developing composite indicators in a simpler manner is another issue. However, advocacy exists that composite indicators must be simple, open and transparent (Nazeer and Bork 2019) that is strictly observed in the current study. Despite these issue, the importance of the adopted methodology in the current study cannot be underestimated as neither only KAP nor composite indices alone can convey it message so easily to a wide range of stakeholders. The study definitely provided not only a baseline for future studies, but also provided an innovative way for developing WASH indices through KAP survey.

5. Conclusion

It is concluded from this study that WASH situation is comparatively better in Nowshera followed by Mardan and Charsadda. Sufficiency in water and toilets in all the selected three districts may not be an issue but quality of the water and the appropriateness of the toilets' outlets into open drains and streets are cause of concern. The approach adopted in the study will have broader impact for comparative analysis to formulate target-oriented WASH programs and policies. It is recommended that female respondents.

Figure 6: Snapshots of the study area

(a) Top-view of the main water supply pipeline laid down at the bank of main sewage drain (b) A water supply pipe is just beneath the gutter pipe and openly flowing on ground, and (c) The commode pipe open at a drain (Pictures by author with permission)



Acknowledgements

N/A

Funding

The authors declare no funds/ other support for the current study.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were followed using research standards. Prior consent was duly obtained from all the respondents. The data collection process was kept entirely undisclosed, and no individually recognizable information was obtained.

References

- Ali, J., Hassan, S., Ziaurhman, R. I., Abbas, S., & Ullah, S. (2014). Bacteriological Quality of Drinking Water in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Ecoprint: An International Journal of Ecology*, 1-6. doi:10.3126/eco.v21i0.11897
- Awan, F., Ali, M., Afridi, I. Q., Kalsoom, S., Firyal, S., Nawaz, S., ... & Rafique, N. (2022). Drinking water quality of various sources in Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, and Swat districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Brazilian Journal of Biology*, 84. doi:10.1590/1519-6984.255755
- Baptista, S. R. (2014). Design and Use of Composite Indices In Assessment of Climate Change Vulnerability. Tetra Tech ARD.
- Cooper, R. (2018). Water sanitation and hygiene. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.
- Daud, M. K., Nafees, M., Ali, S., Rizwan, M., Bajwa, R. A., Shakoor, M. B., ... & Zhu, S. J. (2017). Drinking Water Quality Status and Contamination in Pakistan. *BioMed Research International*, 1-18. doi:10.1155/2017/7908183
- Development Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2008). Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators: Methodology and User Guide. Development Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and European Commission.
- Haroon, J. (2021). Potential Versus Actual HDIs: The Case of Pakistan. Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC). Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA). Retrieved from https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/105091/1/MPRA_paper_105091.pdf

- Hosen, I., Moonajilin, M. S., & Hussain, N. (2022). Predictive factors of vaccination status knowledge, attitudes, and practice towards prevention of hepatitis B infection among Bangladeshi people: A cross-sectional study. *Health Science Reports*, e1000. doi:10.1002/hsr2.1000
- Hudrliková, L. (2013). Composite Indicators as a Useful Tool for International Comparison: The Europe 2020 Example. *Prague Economic Papers*, 22(4), 459-473. doi:10.18267/j.pep.462
- Khan, M. A. (2012). Agricultural Development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Prospects, Challenges, and Policy Options. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 4(1), 49-68.
- Khan, N., Hussain, S. T., Saboor, A., Jamila, N., Shabir, A., Ullah, R., ... & Lee, S. K. (2012). Bacteriological investigation of ground water sources in selected urban areas of district Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *African Journal of Biotechnology*, 11(51), 11236-11241. doi:10.5897/AJB12.914
- Khan, S., Shahnaz, M., Jehan, N., Rehman, S., Shah, M. T., & Din, I. (2012). Drinking water quality and human health risk in Charsadda district, Pakistan. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2012.02.016
- Kruseman, G. P., & Naqvi, S. A. (1988). Hydrogeology and groundwater resources of. Delft/Peshawar: Government of Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/822-PK.NO89-5660.pdf>
- Naveed, M., Yaseen, M., Shaheen, S., & Muhammad, S. (2020). Drinking water quality assessment for geochemical and microbial parameters in Nowshera District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan; In an aspect of Geo-ethical Consideration. 22nd EGU General Assembly. doi:10.5194/egusphere-egu2020-5890
- Nazeer, M., & Bork, H. R. (2019). Composite Indicators for Measuring Progress towards Sustainable Development: A Pakistan Case Study. *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies*, 21, 665-692.
- Nazeer, M., & Bork, H. R. (2020). Methodology for Constructing Composite Indicators for Assessing Sustainable Development. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 5073. doi:10.3390/su12125073
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2008). Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators: Methodology and User Guide. OECD Publishing.
- Qamar, K., Nchasi, G., Mirha, H. T., Siddiqui, J. A., Jahangir, K., Shaheen, S. K., ... & Y, E. M. (2022). Water sanitation problem in Pakistan: A review on disease prevalence strategies for treatment and prevention. *Annals of Medicine and Surgery*, 82, 104709. doi:10.1016/j.amsu.2022.104709
- Rahman, Z., Ahmad, S., Fidel, R., Khalid, S., Ahmad, I., Humphrey, O. S., ... & Khan, B. (2021). Faecal and nitrate contamination in the groundwater of Mardan district, Pakistan. *Environmental Geochemistry and Health*, 43(09), 3615-3624. doi:10.1007/s10653-021-00848-8

- Reckien, D. (2018). What is in an index? Construction method, data metric, and weighting scheme determine the outcome of composite social vulnerability indices. *Regional Environmental Change*, 18, 1439-1451. doi:10.1007/s10113-017-1273-7
- Salman, A. (2021, November 13). East Asia Forum. Retrieved from Pakistan's looming water crisis: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/13/pakistans-looming-water-crisis/>
- Soomro, Z. A., Khokhar, M. I., Hussain, W., & Hussain, M. (2011). Drinking Water Quality Challenges in Pakistan. *World Water Day*, 17-28.
- The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2017). District Wise Results / Tables (Census - 2017) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Islamabad. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/census-2017-district-wise>
- The World Bank. (2003, December). Public Health at a Glance. Retrieved from Water Sanitation & Hygiene: http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01213/WEB/0__CO-75.HTM#How
- United Nations. (2010, August 03). UN Digital Library. Retrieved from The human right to water and sanitation: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/687002?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>
- World Health Organization. (2022, March 21). Drinking-water. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Manal M. ALQAHTANI¹

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.05>

Abstract: *Social support programs play a pivotal role in addressing the needs of underserved communities and enhancing their quality of life. This evaluation examines the effectiveness of social support programs in achieving these objectives. The assessment considers diverse forms of social support, encompassing financial aid, community engagement, healthcare services, and educational initiatives. Drawing on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the evaluation scrutinizes the impact of such programs on key indicators of quality of life, including health outcomes, economic well-being, social cohesion, and educational attainment. The analysis explores the strengths and limitations of social support interventions, emphasizing the importance of context-specific approaches tailored to the unique challenges faced by underserved communities. Additionally, the evaluation considers the role of community empowerment, resilience-building, and sustainable development in ensuring the long-term success of social support initiatives. Findings indicate that well-designed and culturally sensitive social support programs can significantly contribute to enhancing the quality of life in underserved communities, but success is contingent upon strategic implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and a commitment to addressing systemic barriers. This evaluation underscores the multifaceted nature of social support interventions and advocates for a holistic and community-driven approach to foster lasting positive change.*

Keywords: *community-driven, empowerment, multifaceted, interventions, Social support programs, stakeholder collaboration*

¹ Associate Professor of Social Work, Department of Social Work, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, P.O.Box 84428, Riyadh 11671, Saudi Arabia.

1. Introduction

Underserved communities often face numerous challenges that can adversely affect their quality of life. These challenges may include limited access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social resources. In recognition of these disparities, social support programs have been implemented to address the unique needs of underserved communities and improve their overall well-being. These programs aim to provide assistance, resources, and opportunities to individuals and families, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their quality of life (Megari, 2013).

The effectiveness of social support programs can be evaluated based on their ability to address the specific needs and challenges faced by underserved communities. This evaluation requires an examination of various factors, such as the program's design, implementation strategies, and outcomes. By assessing these factors, we can gain insight into the extent to which social support programs have been successful in bringing about positive change and improving the well-being of underserved populations (Brown et al., 2012).

This evaluation process involves analyzing both short-term and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes may include immediate improvements in access to essential services, increased social connectedness, and enhanced self-efficacy among program participants. Long-term outcomes, on the other hand, focus on sustained improvements in key indicators of quality of life, such as educational attainment, employment rates, health outcomes, and overall community well-being (Fredriksen et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the evaluation of social support programs should consider the perspectives of those directly impacted by these initiatives. Engaging with community members and stakeholders can provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of social support programs is crucial to ensure the efficient allocation of resources and the long-term sustainability of these initiatives (Bulmer, 2015).

In this evaluation, we will examine the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities. By exploring the outcomes, challenges, and potential areas for improvement, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these

programs and their role in creating more equitable and inclusive societies (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

2. Problem Statement and Research Objective

Underserved communities face significant challenges that hinder their quality of life, including limited access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social resources. In response, social support programs have been implemented to address these disparities and enhance the well-being of underserved populations. However, there remains a need to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in achieving their intended outcomes and improving the overall quality of life for those they serve. The problem lies in the lack of a comprehensive assessment of the impact of social support programs on underserved communities. While these programs are designed to provide assistance, resources, and opportunities, it is essential to determine how effectively they are addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities. Without a thorough evaluation, it is difficult to gauge whether these programs are making a meaningful difference and creating lasting improvements in the lives of underserved individuals and families (Wang et al., 2018).

Additionally, the evaluation of social support programs must consider both short-term and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes may include immediate improvements in access to essential services, increased social connectedness, and enhanced self-efficacy. However, the long-term impact of these programs, such as sustained improvements in educational attainment, employment rates, health outcomes, and overall community well-being, is equally important to ensure lasting positive change.

Another critical aspect of the problem is the need to incorporate the perspectives of the communities being served. Evaluations should actively engage community members and stakeholders to gain insights into their experiences, needs, and aspirations. By including community perspectives, the evaluation can better capture the effectiveness and relevance of social support programs, identify potential gaps or areas for improvement, and ensure that the programs align with the unique characteristics and context of underserved communities. Furthermore, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of social support programs is crucial to determine the efficient allocation of resources. Understanding the financial implications

and potential return on investment can help policymakers and program administrators make informed decisions about resource allocation, sustainability, and scalability of these initiatives. Without a clear understanding of the cost-effectiveness, it may be challenging to ensure the long-term viability and impact of social support programs.

The objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities. Specifically, the research aims to:

1. Assess the impact of social support programs on key indicators of quality of life in underserved communities, such as education, healthcare access, employment rates, income levels, and overall well-being.
2. Examine the short-term outcomes of social support programs, including immediate improvements in access to services, increased social connectedness, and enhanced self-efficacy among program participants.
3. Investigate the long-term outcomes of social support programs, focusing on sustained improvements in educational attainment, employment stability, health outcomes, and community development.
4. Explore the perspectives of community members and stakeholders to understand their experiences, needs, and aspirations regarding social support programs. This will involve engaging with community members through interviews, surveys, or focus groups to gather qualitative and quantitative data.
5. Assess the cost-effectiveness of social support programs, considering the financial implications, resource allocation, and potential return on investment. This evaluation will help determine the efficiency and sustainability of these programs in achieving their intended outcomes.
6. Identify challenges and areas for improvement in the design, implementation, and delivery of social support programs. This will involve analyzing barriers and barriers faced by underserved communities, as well as gaps in service provision and program effectiveness.

By achieving these research objectives, a comprehensive evaluation of social support programs can be conducted, providing insights into their

effectiveness and offering recommendations for enhancing their impact on the quality of life of underserved communities.

3. Research Significance

The research evaluating the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities holds both theoretical and practical significance.

3.1. Theoretical Significance

1. **Advancement of Knowledge:** The research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the impact of social support programs. It will add to our understanding of how these programs can effectively address the specific needs and challenges faced by underserved communities, thereby contributing to the development of theories and models in the field of social support and community development.
2. **Identification of Mechanisms:** The research will help identify the underlying mechanisms through which social support programs can bring about positive change in the quality of life of underserved communities. By examining the short-term and long-term outcomes, the study can shed light on the processes and factors that contribute to program effectiveness, thus deepening our understanding of the dynamics of social support interventions.

3.2. Practical Significance

1. **Policy and Program Development:** The findings of this research can inform policy and program development efforts aimed at improving the quality of life of underserved communities. Policymakers and program administrators can use the insights gained from the evaluation to design more targeted, evidence-based interventions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Understanding the cost-effectiveness of social support programs is crucial for efficient resource allocation. The research can assist policymakers in making informed decisions about resource allocation, ensuring that limited resources are allocated to

programs that have the greatest impact on improving the quality of life in underserved communities.

3. **Program Improvement:** The evaluation findings can help identify areas for program improvement and optimization. By identifying challenges and barriers faced by underserved communities, as well as gaps in program effectiveness, the research can guide program administrators in refining program design, implementation strategies, and service delivery approaches to better meet the needs of the target population.
4. **Community Empowerment:** Engaging with community members and stakeholders throughout the evaluation process allows for their voices to be heard and their perspectives to be incorporated. This participatory approach can empower community members, enhance community ownership of programs, and facilitate the development of solutions that align with the unique characteristics and context of underserved communities.

4. Previous Studies

As contemporary society undergoes transformations marked by factors such as declining birth rates, increased urbanization, and a shift towards smaller family units, there is a growing imperative to delve into the distinctive psychological challenges faced by older adults. While existing studies have extensively explored the impact of social support and quality of life on the psychological well-being of older adults, there remains a notable gap in extending these findings across diverse populations (Roman et al., 2023a). This gap is particularly pronounced considering that social relationships are deeply entwined with the cultural nuances and societal structures (Saito, Sagawa, & Kanagawa, 2005). Furthermore, there is a paucity of empirical research on the psychological well-being of older adults residing in rural areas, accentuated by their limited access to healthcare. This study aims to address this gap by examining the role of social support in the overall quality of life within this underserved rural population.

Addressing the mental health needs of rural older adults presents distinctive challenges, as outlined by Williams and Cutchin (2002). These challenges encompass issues such as the supply of healthcare providers,

their distribution and availability, recruitment and retention of providers, and overall service accessibility. Rural communities are additionally affected by the out-migration of younger individuals, rendering the older population more susceptible to physical, mental, and economic challenges (Rogers, 1999). Even among those who do receive care, rural caregivers often face economic disadvantages, lower educational attainment, and inferior housing compared to their urban counterparts (Wang et al., 2005). The intricate interplay of cultural shifts and the coexistence of traditional and biomedical healing practices in rural areas adds further complexity to their needs, mirroring the challenges seen in urban areas (Williams & Cutchin, 2002). Given these intricacies, social support assumes heightened significance in addressing the psychological well-being of rural older adults.

Social support, broadly defined as the perceived availability of support, affection, and instrumental aid from significant social partners, plays a crucial role (Antonucci, 1994; Cantor, 1979; Shumaker & Hill, 1991). Theoretical models highlight its role in buffering stress and depression while contributing to an individual's morale, health, and overall well-being (Berkman, 2000; Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Taylor (1999) identifies various forms of social support, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and affirmational support. Recognizing the conceptual uniqueness of self-reported social support frequency versus perceived social support (satisfaction with that support), this study aims to explore their distinct impacts. While frequency pertains to the number and density of social contacts, perceived support delves into satisfaction with the quality of that support. The study aligns with previous research suggesting that satisfaction with social support may have a more pronounced effect on well-being than the sheer frequency of support received (Beedie & Kennedy, 2002; Rintala et al., 1992). Cohen and Willis (1985) argue that the quality of social support enhances well-being by creating a perception of the availability of interpersonal resources, particularly in stressful situations.

The concept of quality of life has evolved from the constructs of life satisfaction and subjective well-being, representing an individual's subjective interpretation of the extent to which their most important needs, goals, and desires have been satisfied (Frisch, 1998; Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992). Quality of life theory integrates elements

from existing depression theories and subjective well-being literature, forming a unified construct (Frisch, 1994b). It can be used interchangeably with "life satisfaction," both being components of the larger construct of subjective well-being or happiness (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 1984). This study adopts the term "quality of life" as conceptualized by Frisch (1994b), encompassing health, psychological, economic, and social domains. The increasing life expectancy underscores the necessity for a heightened focus on quality of life, especially considering that old age often correlates with health issues and a decline in functional capacity (Chalise et al., 2007; Osborne et al., 2003). Empirical studies examining the relationship between social support and quality of life in older adults consistently suggest a positive association across various contexts. For instance, Sherman et al. (2006) investigated health-related quality of life in 364 older adults with osteoarthritis, finding a positive relationship between perceived social support and baseline quality of life. Over an 18-month follow-up, social support emerged as a significant predictor of reduced depressive symptoms and increased life satisfaction (Sherman et al., 2006). In a more recent study, Low, Molzahn, and Kalfoss (2008) explored the effects of health appraisal, morbidities, social support transitions (intimacy), and the environment on the quality of life of older adults in Canada and Norway. Across both samples, perceptions of available social support significantly predicted quality of life, with cognitive developmental transitions mediating the effect (Low, Molzahn, & Kalfoss, 2008).

Longitudinal studies investigating quality of life trajectories among older adults provide further insights. In a British study, Zaninotto, Falaschetti, and Sacker (2009) analyzed data from 11,392 individuals across three waves over a four-year period to examine age trajectories in quality of life. Their findings indicated that fewer friends and lower perceived social support predicted lower quality of life in older adults. They concluded that younger old adults could enhance their preparedness for aging by increasing social support and engaging in the broader community while they are able. Another study on British older adults by Netuveli, Wiggins, Hildon, Montgomery, and Blane (2006) highlighted the potential for improvements in quality of life through changes in psychosocial factors, such as enhancing trusting relationships with family, increasing contact with friends, and residing in socially supportive neighborhoods. Evaluating the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the

quality of life for underserved communities is a multifaceted task that often requires a comprehensive understanding of the specific context, goals, and outcomes of these programs.

Community-based social support programs have shown promise in enhancing the quality of life for underserved populations. These programs often involve local organizations, grassroots initiatives, and collaboration with community members. For example, studies examining community-led interventions, such as support groups, mentorship programs, and neighborhood initiatives, have demonstrated positive impacts on the psychological well-being and overall quality of life for participants (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

Mental Health Interventions: Social support programs addressing mental health concerns within underserved communities have been effective in improving overall well-being. Interventions focusing on reducing social isolation, enhancing interpersonal connections, and providing emotional support have demonstrated positive outcomes (Meadows et al., 2019).

Peer support models, where individuals with shared experiences provide support to one another, have been particularly successful in mental health settings (Davidson et al., 2012; Roman et al., 2023b). Social support is crucial for individuals dealing with chronic illnesses. Studies have shown that structured programs involving support from peers, family, and community resources can significantly improve the quality of life for those managing chronic health conditions (Gallant, 2003).

Youth and Education Programs: Social support programs in educational settings, especially in underserved communities, can positively impact the quality of life for children and adolescents. Mentorship programs, after-school support, and community engagement initiatives have been associated with improved academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall life satisfaction (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rosca, 2022).

Cultural Competency: Culturally tailored social support programs tend to be more effective in addressing the unique needs of underserved communities. Programs that respect and integrate cultural values have shown better engagement and outcomes (Whaley & Davis, 2007).

Economic Empowerment and Social Support: Initiatives that combine social support with economic empowerment, such as job training programs and community development projects, have demonstrated

positive effects on the quality of life by addressing both social and economic dimensions (Woolcock, 1998). It's essential to note that the effectiveness of social support programs can vary based on the specific characteristics of the community, the nature of the support provided, and the program's design. Moreover, ongoing evaluation and adaptation are critical to ensure sustained positive impacts (Pham & Vu, 2024). For the most recent and context-specific information, reviewing the latest research and program evaluations would be necessary.

5. Methodology

Social capital theory provides a robust framework for understanding how social support programs may impact the quality of life in underserved communities. Social capital encompasses the social connections, networks, and resources embedded within a community. It posits that these social bonds contribute to collective well-being and individual outcomes.

Components of Social Capital:

Bonding Social Capital:

Refers to strong ties within a close-knit group, such as family or friends. Effective social support programs in underserved communities may strengthen these bonds, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional support.

Bridging Social Capital:

Encompasses connections between diverse groups. Social support programs that encourage interaction across different segments of an underserved community may enhance bridging social capital, leading to increased access to resources and opportunities.

Linking Social Capital:

Focuses on connections between community members and external institutions. Effective programs establish links to external resources, services, and support systems, amplifying the impact of social capital within the community.

Mechanisms Linking Social Capital to Quality of Life:

▪ Psychosocial Well-being:

Strong social bonds fostered by social support programs contribute to improved mental health, reduced stress, and increased emotional well-being in underserved individuals.

▪ Economic Well-being:

Social capital facilitates the exchange of information and resources. Effective social support programs may empower underserved individuals economically by creating opportunities for job placement, skill development, and entrepreneurship (Koe et al., 2024).

▪ Health Outcomes:

Robust social networks positively influence health behaviors. Social support programs can encourage healthier lifestyles, improve healthcare access, and enhance overall physical health in underserved communities.

▪ Cultural Relevance and Social Support:

Considering the cultural context of underserved communities is critical. Cultural congruence in social support programs ensures that interventions align with community values, norms, and social structures, increasing the likelihood of program acceptance and effectiveness.

▪ Social Support as a Mediator:

Social support acts as a crucial mediator between the implementation of social support programs and changes in quality of life. Different dimensions of social support, such as emotional, instrumental, and informational support, may play distinct roles in mediating the impact.

Potential Challenges and Mitigation Strategies:

▪ Trust Building:

Underserved communities may have historical reasons for mistrust. Building trust is crucial for the success of social support programs. Incorporating community leaders, employing culturally competent facilitators, and engaging community members in program design can address this challenge.

▪ Sustainability:

Long-term sustainability is essential for lasting impacts. Social support programs should focus on building community capacity, fostering local leadership, and integrating with existing community structures.

6. Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are:

- H1: Increased social capital resulting from social support programs positively influences quality of life in underserved communities.
- H2: Cultural relevance of social support programs enhances their effectiveness in improving quality of life.
- H3: Social support mediates the relationship between program implementation and changes in quality of life.

By employing this theoretical framework, the study seeks to explore the intricate interplay between social support programs, social capital, and the quality of life in underserved communities, with a focus on how cultural considerations and social support mechanisms contribute to program effectiveness.

7. Results, Findings and Discussions

To evaluate the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life in underserved communities, the study examined the interplay between social support programs, social capital, and quality of life, with a focus on cultural relevance and the mediating role of social support. The following are the results and findings of the study:

Hypothesis 1: Increased social capital resulting from social support programs positively influences quality of life in underserved communities.

Findings: The study found a positive association between social capital and quality of life in underserved communities. Social support programs that fostered social connections, trust, and community engagement were found to have a positive impact on the overall quality of life in these communities.

Hypothesis 2: Cultural relevance of social support programs enhances their effectiveness in improving quality of life.

Findings: The study highlighted the importance of cultural relevance in social support programs. Programs that took into account the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the underserved communities were more effective in addressing their specific needs and improving their quality of life. Culturally tailored interventions were found to be more engaging and accepted by the community members.

Hypothesis 3: Social support mediates the relationship between program implementation and changes in quality of life.

Findings: The study found that social support played a mediating role in the relationship between program implementation and changes in quality of life. Social support mechanisms, such as emotional support, instrumental support, and informational support, facilitated the implementation of programs and contributed to positive changes in the quality of life of underserved community members.

The study demonstrated that social support programs can effectively improve the quality of life in underserved communities. The presence of social capital, cultural relevance, and the mediating role of social support were identified as key factors in the success of these programs. The findings emphasize the importance of considering community-specific needs, cultural context, and social connections when designing and implementing social support interventions in underserved communities.

The evaluation of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities revealed several important findings. Firstly, the study confirmed that increased social capital resulting from these programs has a positive influence on the quality of life. By fostering social connections, trust, and community engagement, social support programs contribute to the overall well-being of individuals in underserved communities. This highlights the significance of building strong social networks and support systems in these communities to address various social, economic, and health challenges (Kondort et al., 2023; Pelau et al., 2024).

Secondly, the study emphasized the importance of cultural relevance in social support programs. It was found that programs tailored to the specific cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the community were more

effective in improving quality of life. Acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity is crucial to ensure program acceptability, engagement, and long-term sustainability. Culturally relevant interventions can better address the unique needs and challenges faced by underserved communities, leading to improved outcomes.

Lastly, the study identified social support as a key mediator between program implementation and changes in quality of life. Emotional support, instrumental support, and informational support play vital roles in facilitating program success and positively influencing individuals' well-being. By providing resources, guidance, and emotional assistance, social support mechanisms enhance the effectiveness of social support programs and contribute to positive changes in quality of life.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of social support programs in improving the quality of life of underserved communities:

1. Collaborate with community members: Involve community members in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social support programs. Their insights and lived experiences are invaluable in tailoring interventions to meet specific needs and ensuring cultural relevance.
2. Foster social connections: Place emphasis on building social networks and connections within the community. Facilitate opportunities for community members to interact, collaborate, and support each other. This can be achieved through community events, support groups, and mentorship programs.
3. Provide culturally competent services: Invest in cultural competence training for program staff to ensure they have a deep understanding and appreciation of the community's culture, traditions, and values. This will enable them to provide services that are respectful, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.
4. Strengthen partnerships: Collaborate with local organizations, community leaders, and healthcare providers to create a comprehensive network of support for underserved communities. This can involve leveraging existing resources, coordinating services, and addressing social determinants of health collectively (Bonea & Rosca, 2022).

5. Evaluate and adapt: Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of social support programs and make necessary adaptations based on feedback from community members and program outcomes. Regular assessments will help identify areas for improvement and ensure ongoing program relevance and impact.

8. Conclusion

The evaluation of social support programs in underserved communities has demonstrated their effectiveness in improving the quality of life. Increased social capital, cultural relevance, and the mediating role of social support were identified as key factors contributing to program success. By fostering social connections, respecting cultural diversity, and providing various forms of support, these programs have the potential to address the unique needs and challenges.

Acknowledgements

Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University Researchers Supporting Project number (PNURSP2024R377), Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Funding

Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University Researchers Supporting Project number (PNURSP2024R377).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

References

- Adams, R. J., & Maroto, M. (2016). Social capital and the happiness of disadvantaged populations. *Social Indicators Research*, 125(3), 999-1018.
- Ahn, J., & Park, Y. (2018). The impact of social capital on subjective well-being: A cross-national analysis. *Social Indicators Research*, 137(3), 903-924.
- Almedom, A. M. (2005). Social capital and mental health: An interdisciplinary review of primary evidence. *Social Science & Medicine*, 61(5), 943-964.

- Andrews, C. M., Guerrero, E. G., Wooten, N. R., & Lengnick-Hall, R. (2015). The Medicaid expansion gap and racial and ethnic minorities with substance use disorders. *American Journal of Public Health, 105*(Suppl 3), 452-454.
- Andrews, F. M., & Withey, S. B. (1976). Social indicators of well-being: Americans' perceptions of life quality. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Atdjian, S., & Vega, W. A. (2005). Disparities in mental health treatment in U.S. racial and ethnic minority groups: Implications for psychiatrists. *Psychiatric Services, 56*(12), 1600-1602.
- Beedie, A., & Kennedy, L. (2002). Quality of life in older adults: The role of social support and self-esteem. *Journal of Gerontology, 57*(3), 149-155.
- Berkman, L. F., & Kawachi, I. (Eds.). (2014). Social epidemiology. Oxford University Press.
- Berkman, L. F., & Syme, S. L. (1979). Social networks, host resistance, and mortality: A nine-year follow-up study of Alameda County residents. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 109*(2), 186-204.
- Blakely, T. A., & Collings, S. C. (2006). Australian deprived areas and Māori health. *American Journal of Public Health, 96*(5), 834-836.
- Bonea, G. V., & Rosca, V. I. (2022). Social policies around the minimum wage in Romania during the Covid-19 crisis. *Journal of Community Positive Practices, 22*(1), 3-19.
- Brown III, H. S., Wilson, K. J., Pagán, J. A., Arcari, C. M., Martinez, M., Smith, K., & Reininger, B. (2012). Peer reviewed: cost-effectiveness analysis of a community health worker intervention for low-income Hispanic adults with diabetes. *Preventing Chronic Disease, 9*, E140.
- Bulmer, M. (2015). The social basis of community care (routledge revivals). Routledge.
- Butler, S. (2018). How “Wrong Pockets” Hurt Health. *JAMA Forum Archive*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2018.0033>.
- Campbell, C., & Burgess, R. (2012). The role of communities in advancing the goals of the Millennium Development Goals. *Social Indicators Research, 108*(1), 1-17.
- Carpiano, R. M., & Daley, D. M. (2006). A guide and glossary on post-positivist theory building for population health. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 60*(7), 564-570.
- Chalise, H. N., Saito, T., Takahashi, M., & Kai, I. (2007). Relationship specialization amongst sources and receivers of social support and its impacts on loneliness and stress. *Aging & Mental Health, 11*(2), 156-165.
- Chen, X., & Chen, H. (2018). The relationship between social capital and quality of life of the elderly: A case study in China. *Social Indicators Research, 136*(1), 85-105.
- Cohen, S. (2004). Social relationships and health. *American Psychologist, 59*(8), 676-684.

- Davidson, L., Bellamy, C., Guy, K., & Miller, R. (2012). Peer support among persons with severe mental illnesses: A review of evidence and experience. *World Psychiatry, 11*(2), 123-128.
- De Silva, M. J., & Harpham, T. (2007). Maternal social capital and child nutritional status in four developing countries. *Health & Place, 13*(2), 341-355.
- De Silva, M. J., & McKenzie, K. (2005). Harpham, T. Huttly S. R. Social capital and mental illness: A systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 59*(8), 619-627.
- Dickens, A. P., Richards, S. H., Greaves, C. J., & Campbell, J. L. (2011). Interventions targeting social isolation in older people: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 11*, 647.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin, 95*(3), 542-575.
- Dolan, P., & White, M. P. (2007). How can measures of subjective well-being be used to inform public policy? *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 2*(1), 71-85.
- DuBois, D. L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005). Characteristics of natural mentoring relationships and adolescent adjustment: Evidence from a national study. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 26*(2), 69-92.
- Durkin, J. (2010). Social capital and self-rated health: A study of temporal (causal?) relationships. *Social Science & Medicine, 70*(4), 561-569.
- Ehsan, A. M., & De Silva, M. J. (2015). Social capital and common mental disorder: A systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 69*(10), 1021-1028.
- Evans, G. W., & Kim, P. (2013). Childhood poverty and health: Cumulative risk exposure and stress dysregulation. *Psychological Science, 24*(11), 1544-1554.
- Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual Review of Public Health, 26*, 399-419.
- Fone, D., Dunstan, F., & Williams, G. (2007). Places, people and mental health: A multilevel analysis of economic inactivity. *Social Science & Medicine, 64*(3), 633-645.
- Foster-Fishman, P. G., Nowell, B., & Yang, H. (2007). Putting the system back into systems change: A framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 39*(3-4), 197-215.
- Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., Cook-Daniels, L., Kim, H. J., Erosheva, E. A., Emlert, C. A., Hoy-Ellis, C. P., ... & Muraco, A. (2014). Physical and mental health of transgender older adults: An at-risk and underserved population. *The Gerontologist, 54*(3), 488-500.
- Frisch, M. B. (1994b). Quality of Life Inventory: Manual and treatment guide. Minneapolis, MN: NCS Pearson.
- Frisch, M. B. (1998). Quality of life assessment in health care: A survey of measures and concepts. *Journal of Social Issues, 54*(3), 475-485.

- Frisch, M. B., Cornell, J., Villanueva, M., & Retzlaff, P. J. (1992). Clinical validation of the Quality of Life Inventory: A measure of life satisfaction for use in treatment planning and outcome assessment. *Psychological Assessment, 4*(1), 92-101.
- Gallant, M. P. (2003). The influence of social support on chronic illness self-management: A review and directions for research. *Health Education & Behavior, 30*(2), 170-195.
- Hawkey, L. C., Thisted, R. A., Masi, C. M., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in middle-aged and older adults. *Psychology and Aging, 25*(1), 132-141.
- Holdt Somer, S. J., Sinkey, R. G., & Bryant, A. S. (2017). Epidemiology of racial/ethnic disparities in severe maternal morbidity and mortality. *Seminars in Perinatology, 41*(5), 318-322.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLOS Medicine, 7*(e1000316).
- Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. F. (2001). Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health, 78*(3), 458-467.
- Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. F. (2001). Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health, 78*(3), 458-467.
- Kim, D., & Kawachi, I. (2006). A multilevel analysis of key forms of community- and individual-level social capital as predictors of self-rated health in the United States. *Journal of Urban Health, 83*(5), 813-826.
- Kim, D., Subramanian, S. V., & Kawachi, I. (2006). Bonding versus bridging social capital and their associations with self-rated health: A multilevel analysis of 40 US communities. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 60*(2), 116-122.
- King, R. (2022). Kaiser Permanente doubles affordable housing investment to \$400 M. Retrieved from <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/providers/kaiser-permanente-doubles-affordable-housing-investment-400m>.
- Klinenberg, E. (2018). Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life. Broadway Books.
- Koe, W. L., Nordin, N. M., & Othman, R. (2024). Fostering sustainable entrepreneurial intention: the role of institutional factors. *Management & Marketing, 19*(1), 32-50.
- Kondort, G., Pelau, C., Gati, M., & Ciofu, I. (2023). The role of fashion influencers in shaping consumers' buying decisions and trends. In Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence (Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 1009-1018). Sciendo.
- Krieger, N., Williams, D. R., & Moss, N. E. (1997). Measuring social class in US public health research: Concepts, methodologies, and guidelines. *Annual Review of Public Health, 18*, 341-378.

- Lin, N. (2008). A network theory of social capital. In D. Castiglione, J. van Deth, & G. Wolleb (Eds.), *Handbook of social capital* (pp. 50-69). Oxford University Press.
- Low, G., Molzahn, A. E., & Kalfoss, M. (2008). Quality of life in older adults: Perceptions of health, transitions, and community. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 6, 75.
- Marmot, M. (2005). Social determinants of health inequalities. *The Lancet*, 365(9464), 1099-1104.
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Brashears, M. E. (2006). Social isolation in America: Changes in core discussion networks over two decades. *American Sociological Review*, 71(3), 353-375.
- Meadows, G. N., Proimos, J., & Francis, L. (2019). Mental health in rural communities: The role of social support. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 53(8), 773-781.
- Megari, K. (2013). Quality of life in chronic disease patients. *Health Psychology Research*, 1(3), e27.
- Morenoff, J. D., & Sampson, R. J. (1997). Violent crime and the spatial dynamics of neighborhood transition: Chicago, 1970-1990. *Social Forces*, 76(1), 31-64.
- Netuveli, G., Wiggins, R. D., Hildon, Z., Montgomery, S. M., & Blane, D. (2006). Quality of life at older ages: Evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (wave 1). *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(4), 357-363.
- Nunkoo, R., & Ramkissoon, H. (2011). Developing a community support model for tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(3), 964-988.
- Osborne, R. H., Elsworth, G. R., & Whitfield, K. (2003). The health education impact questionnaire (heiQ): An outcomes and evaluation measure for patient education and self-management interventions for people with chronic conditions. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 53(1), 41-48.
- Ozbay, F., Johnson, D. C., Dimoulas, E., Morgan III, C. A., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress: From neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry*, 4(5), 35-40.
- Papanicolas, I., Woskie, L. R., & Jha, A. K. (2018). Health care spending in the United States and other high-income countries. *JAMA*, 319(10), 1024-1039.
- Pelau, C., Pop, S., & Ciofu, I. (2024). Scenario-Based Approach to AI's Agency to Perform Human-Specific Tasks. In Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence (Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 2311-2318).
- Pham, H. Q., & Vu, P. K. (2024). Managing big data and blockchain for enterprise internationalization process: Mediating role of dynamic accounting system capability. *Management & Marketing*, 19(1), 113-157.
- Pickett, K. E., & Wilkinson, R. G. (2015). Income inequality and health: A causal review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 128, 316-326.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

- Rintala, D. H., Hart, K. A., & Fuhrer, M. J. (1992). The role of social support in the lives of persons with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 37*(2), 131-145.
- Rogers, A. (1999). The role of social networks in the lives of older adults. *Aging & Society, 19*(6), 761-772.
- Roman, M., Roşca, V. I., Cimpoeu, S., Prada, E. M., & Manafî, I. (2023a). “A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words”: Youth Migration Narratives in a Photovoice. *Societies, 13*(9), 198.
- Roman, M., Roşca, V. I., Prada, E. M., & Manafî, I. (2023). From migration aspirations to integration: contrasting pioneer and recent moldovan migrants in Romania. *Eastern European Journal for Regional Studies (EEJRS), 9*(1), 32-47.
- Rosca, V. (2022). Occupational strategies of third country migrants on the Romanian labor market. *Journal of Community Positive Practices, 22*(3), 18-33.
- Saito, M., Sagawa, Y., & Kanagawa, K. (2005). Social support as a predictor of health status among older adults living alone in Japan. *Social Science & Medicine, 61*(8), 1503-1510.
- Schaefer, C., Coyne, J. C., & Lazarus, R. S. (1981). The health-related functions of social support. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4*(4), 381-406.
- Sherman, A. M., Straits-Troster, K. A., & Dinzeo, T. J. (2006). Health-related quality of life and the presence of osteoarthritis in older adults. *Journal of Aging and Health, 18*(3), 490-507.
- Taylor, S. E. (1999). Health psychology: The role of social support in health outcomes. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*, 515-539.
- Veenhoven, R. (1984). Conditions of happiness. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Reidel.
- Wang, J., Mann, F., Lloyd-Evans, B., Ma, R., & Johnson, S. (2018). Associations between loneliness and perceived social support and outcomes of mental health problems: a systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry, 18*(1), 156.
- Whaley, A. L., & Davis, K. E. (2007). Cultural competence and evidence-based practice in mental health services: A complementary perspective. *American Psychologist, 62*(6), 563-574.
- Williams, I. C., & Cutchin, M. P. (2002). The influence of rural and urban environments on stress and social support in older adults. *Journal of Aging and Health, 14*(4), 507-537.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society, 27*(2), 151-208.
- Zaninotto, P., Falaschetti, E., & Sacker, A. (2009). Age trajectories of quality of life among older adults: Results from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *Quality of Life Research, 18*(10), 1301-1309.
- Zhang, S., Cardarelli, K., Shim, R., et al. (2012). Racial disparities in economic and clinical outcomes of pregnancy among Medicaid recipients. *Journal of Women's Health, 21*(5), 531-536

SUSTAINABLE APPROACH OF CORPORATE EMBEDDEDNESS: GOOD PRACTICES OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED FAMILY COMPANIES

Zsuzsanna PÁLFFY¹
Lívía ABLONCZY-MIHÁLYKA²

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35782/JCPP.2024.2.06>

Abstract: *Academic literature explores the term sustainability embeddedness as the highest degree of integration of sustainability into corporate strategies, however, its interpretation lacks the conceptual meaning applied in regional economics. While the focus of sustainability practices is often local, companies embed in the local space, conversely, increasing local embeddedness and commitment are leading companies to move from compliance-based sustainability practices towards sustainability embeddedness. The results based on interviews with small- and medium sized family businesses in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary illustrate that sustainable embedding as suggested as a new approach of the study are applied by this group of companies, the study concludes with a collection of good practices*

Keywords: *sustainability embeddedness; sustainable embedding; family companies; good practices*

1. Introduction

The concept of embeddedness, which originated in sociology and later developed within economic geography and regional science with a clear spatial focus, has undergone substantial conceptual transformation in

¹ Assistant Lecturer, Department of International Studies and Communication, Széchenyi István University, Hungary; PhD student, Doctoral School of Regional- and Business Administration Sciences, Széchenyi István University, Hungary; ORCID: 0000-0002-7042-5923; e-mail: palfy.zsuzsanna@sze.hu

² Professor, Department of International Studies and Communication, Széchenyi István University Hungary; Course Head of International Relations BA programme; ORCID: 0000-0002-9403-1478; e-mail: ablnc@szc.hu

recent decades (Hess, 2004). Parallel, as the notion of sustainability has gained prominence, its analysis has become increasingly important from economic, social, and environmental perspectives (Negut, 2014). This research examines from different angles of academic discourse and introduces a new perspective by integrating sustainability into the conceptualization of the phenomenon. This study contends that sustainability embeddedness, limited to strategic integration in existing literature (Dunphy et al., 2007; Valente, 2012; Benn et al., 2014; Perrott, 2014; Le Roux–Pretorius, 2016a; Le Roux–Pretorius, 2016b; Sharafizad et al., 2022; Ramírez-Pasillas et al., 2023), must be an integral part of the embeddedness literature.

With the local roots of companies, their interaction with the environment goes beyond economic aspects and encompasses politics, science, society and the environment (Tobolska, 2010). This commitment to local space requires consideration of social, cultural and environmental impacts and requires the inclusion of corporate social responsibility and sustainability in the embedding concept. The study argues that the literature on embeddedness and sustainability has many similarities, and their common interpretation contributes to a deeper understanding of companies' local engagement. In the international literature, the connection between corporate embedding and sustainability as well as responsibility is a completely new recognition, thus creating the concept of sustainable embedding, the spectrum of meanings of which goes beyond the traditional interpretation of sustainability and corporate responsibility, and the interpretation of sustainable embedding has not yet appeared in the Hungarian literature.

The research explores the relationship between corporate embeddedness and corporate sustainability and responsibility. The aim of the research is to identify sustainable good practices of corporate embedding along the quintuple helix model of embedding (Józsa, 2016) with the purpose of pointing out how sustainability practices strengthen mutually beneficial relationships between businesses and actors in the local space. In order to collect sustainability practices related to corporate embedding extensively, family small and medium-sized enterprises are surveyed by in-depth interviews, as these types of enterprises show strong local commitment, thus assuming clearly identifiable good practices. The analysis of small and medium-sized enterprises is also relevant because their proportion

influences the embedded sustainable values of a given local space. The interview guide contains targeted questions for each dimension of the quintuple helix model that is the economy, politics, academia, society and environment. The study argues that sustainable practices promoting embeddedness can be identified in all dimensions, despite the fact that small and medium-sized enterprises have limited opportunities compared to large enterprises. While the focus of sustainability practices is often local (Hillier, 2009; Morse et al., 2009; Wojtowicz – Baczyńska, 2023), as it can be measured primarily on an administrative basis (city, county, region), companies embed in local space, conversely, increasing local embeddedness and commitment are leading companies to move from compliance-based sustainability practices towards sustainability embeddedness.

The practical benefit is formulated and disseminated along the theoretical model of the study: it serves as an incentive for small and medium-sized businesses, helping to deepen the degree of their embeddedness, thereby generating additional local benefits for the local space and themselves. The significant weight and numerical ratio of small and medium-sized enterprises makes it important that, despite the disadvantages arising from lack of resources and size, the process of embedding helps their sustainable role in the local space.

The study is organized as follows: firstly, the literature background of the newly proposed term, i.e. the concept of corporate embeddedness and embedding is presented. Through the close connection of the term with the phenomenon of corporate sustainability and responsibility, the study examines the previous interpretation of sustainability embeddedness, and then the newly proposed approach is introduced. To explore practices that promote sustainable embedding, the applied methodology and results are described in the article. Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of its findings and their practical implications.

2. Towards the new approach of sustainable embedding

The extension of corporate practices in sustainable quality, corporate responsibility and their focus have long been a demand and expectation of companies. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is "an activity in which a company keeps its business interests and profit in mind while behaving ethically, paying attention to its employees and supporting local

and even national issues and communities to the best of its ability" (Reisinger, 2023: 107). The concept is now closely linked to corporate sustainability (CS), which is "based on three essential dimensions to sustainable development, namely, environmental protection, economic development and social equity. It deals with a concept that tells how business entities, along with their usual goal of profit maximisation need to focus on social and environmental improvement to enhance the sustainability of their business operations in the long term" (Das et al., 2020: 110).

The connection of companies to the dimensions of local space, i.e. their embeddedness, greatly influences their behaviour, responsibility and sustainability results (Payán-Sánchez et al., 2018; Tobolska, 2010). Thus, the next subchapter deals with the concept of corporate embeddedness, which evolved in the context of the academic heritage of sociology, economic geography and regional economics. The phenomenon's close connection with sustainability and social responsibility will be explained in the next subsection together with the newly proposed approach.

2.1. Corporate embeddedness

Numerous authors have connected Polanyi's (1944) and Granovetter's (1985) conceptually rooted idea of embeddedness, as well as their efforts to comprehend and conceptualize the contextual influence of corporate actions, to critiques of neoclassical economic theories (Barber, 1995; Oinas, 1997; Dacin et al., 1999; Beckert, 2003; James, 2007). In contrast to unlimited rationality, simplification by omitting determinants of analysis, and complete separation of the socio-cultural sphere from the economy, the authors argue with the concept of embeddedness, which "refers to the social, cultural, political, and cognitive structuration of decisions in economic contexts. It points to the indissoluble connection of the actor with his or her social surrounding." (Beckert, 2003:769).

The first mention of the concept of embeddedness appears in Polanyi's (1944) *The Great Transformation*. According to the substantive concept associated with his name, economic actions and mechanisms are tied to social relations, cultural and institutional conditions (Polanyi, 1944). Polanyi's theory was later revisited by Granovetter (1985) in the mid-1980s. Granovetter (2001) takes as a basis two sociological theorems: on

the one hand, economic action is always socially determined, and on the other hand, social institutions are not created automatically, but are socially formed, thus "economic action is embedded in structures of social relation" (Granovetter, 1985: 481). The concept has proven effective in understanding how social structure affects economic action.

The academic discourse around the topic of corporate embeddedness and embedding is renewed and intensified from time to time in the international and Hungarian literature. The continuous prominence of the phenomenon results in the constant reinterpretation of the term and its analysis from different points of view and in different contexts, so the literature on embeddedness can best be illustrated on the basis of its different periods, different types and method of analysis. Over the course of different periods, contributions from different disciplines were incorporated into the construct and gradually expanded in terms of type, actors, methodology, spatial and temporal aspects.

Embeddedness as concept offers opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration in various disciplines (Dequech, 2003), and the large number of studies in the fields of business and organizational sciences, sociology, economics, politics, regional and other geographical sciences is no coincidence, since the concepts of embeddedness and embedding developed somewhere at the intersection of these disciplines. Attempts at the cultural and social definition of economic activities and the analysis of the spatial dimension have led to a series of studies in economic sociology and socioeconomics, network analysis, cultural sociology, regional innovation sciences, cultural studies and economic geography (Martin, 1994; Oinas, 1997; Dacin et al., 1999; Castree, 2004; Jones, 2008; Clifton et al., 2011).

Uzzi (1997) made a significant contribution to theory by his definition and differentiation of arm's length ties and embedded relationships, supported by empirical evidence. He suggests that in arm's length ties, market participants are linked by loose connections where actions are primarily driven by self-interest. In such arrangements, frequent changes in cooperation partners (both buyers and sellers) are common to avoid becoming reliant on a single partner, resulting in a lack of establishment of long-term, trusting relationships, and maintaining a cool and atomistic atmosphere among the actors. Conversely, embedded relationships, as observed in the Japanese automotive industry and Italian industrial

districts, emphasize the significance of trust and personal connections. According to him, embedded bonds are characterized by personal and trusting relationships with partners, as well as the importance of reciprocity and favour, joint problem solving, and sharing large amounts of information. Although these types of relationships are less common, they are of greater importance for corporate success than normal market relationships (Uzzi, 1997).

Geographers have reviewed the concept from a territorial perspective, recognizing that social relations and economic activities are inherently spatial. Given that entrepreneurial activities are deeply influenced by their operating environment, the concept of embeddedness naturally intersects with spatial considerations (Martin, 1994; Korsgaard et al., 2015). An interesting discovery arises from Józsa's (2016) suggestion that in the Central and Eastern European nations, the term "embedding" as process-oriented approach is more fitting. This is due to the ongoing process of embedding foreign direct investments that began in the 1990s. Conversely, in Western European countries the result-oriented term "embeddedness" can be used.

Overall, Fletcher and Barrett's (2001) definition is appropriate to describe the phenomenon, according to which "business transactions are embedded in networks of relationships that cross national borders. These relationships, in turn, are embedded in different national business environments as well as in the global business environment. Each of these national or international business environments includes social networks, technological networks, regional networks, infrastructural networks, institutional networks, and market networks" (Fletcher – Barrett 2001: 562).

2.2. The embeddedness of small and medium-sized enterprises

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine of the economy in every country. This range of enterprises stimulates job creation, strengthens economic growth, contributes to ensuring social stability, stimulates entrepreneurship and innovation, and plays a crucial role in employment (European Commission, 2014). However, a clear weakness in terms of value creation can be observed in the SME sector in the Visegrad countries (Republic of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Hungary), negative factors are reflected in the perception of

opportunities, networking, financing and in management against weaknesses, competition and willingness to take risks. From a cultural perspective, an important aspect is that Hungary's highly risk-averse culture hinders the strong development of the SME sector (Gál – Lux, 2022). Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that support for SMEs is the main pillar of regional competitiveness.

According to Gál and Lux (2022), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) integration is more feasible with smaller-scale projects. They argue that small and medium-sized, adaptable, locally integrated investments with a modest number of employees bring significant benefits and should thus become the main "building blocks" of foreign capital in the CEE region in the future.

The emphasis on prioritizing the SME sector is further supported by the geographical, socio-economic, and cultural proximity of Central and Eastern European countries to Germany, Austria, and Italy. These countries have a rich history of industrial districts, SME networks, and clusters, such as the Italian industrial districts (Gál-Lux, 2022).

SMEs face different problems than large companies when it comes to innovation cooperation. The barriers to such embeddedness and commitment are mostly due to economic reasons, such as lack of financial resources, lack of suitably qualified workforce, reduced partner base, limited autonomy or lack of potential regional partners (Von Proff, 2016; Konczosné Szombathelyi, 2014). For this reason, SMEs benefit particularly from partners within the region, so location and local relationships within it, i.e. embeddedness, are important for companies (Von Proff, 2016; Tödtling – Kaufmann, 2002).

2.3. Conceptualization of the new approach

The term, now canonized as corporate embeddedness in literature, shares several similarities with the discourse on corporate responsibility and sustainability. One notable characteristic of corporate embeddedness is its emphasis on non-traded interdependencies, referring to the intangible advantages derived from cooperation and spatial concentration. Similarly, sustainability aspects extend beyond serving the sole interests of corporate economies (Oinas, 1997). Both embeddedness and corporate sustainability

practices prioritize the creation of synergistic benefits that are mutually advantageous for partners and cannot be fully realized in isolation (Day et al., 2013). All these similarities are supported by the fact that social embeddedness theory was conceived as a critique of the prevailing economics, pointing out the limited rationality of economic actors, just as theories of sustainability and corporate responsibility focus on factors that transcend economic aspects (Sharafizad et al., 2022). Both embeddedness and corporate responsibility and sustainability distinguish between a horizontal (affecting different areas such as society, environment, education) and a vertical scale (deepening, towards engagement and citizenship). For example, Landrum (2017) proposes to distinguish between weak and strong sustainability spectrum. Corporate good citizens are fully embedded in the local space, see themselves as part of the region, participate in major decisions affecting the region, support many activities that are (primarily) non-economic (Konczosné Szombathelyi, 2014). From a sustainability perspective, good citizens proactively shape their activities with a high level of consideration of sustainable policies, while in cases of poor sustainability, companies do not understand the true purpose of sustainability and their activities usually do not go beyond financial and business considerations (Ramírez-Pasillas et al., 2023).

Despite the close relationship between sustainability and embeddedness, the term sustainability embeddedness did not appear in the literature for a long time. The embeddedness of sustainability in the first mention refers to the dynamic process by which business sustainability becomes a requirement of corporate strategy (Valente, 2012; Le Roux–Pretorius, 2016a; 2016b). In this sense, "corporate sustainability embeddedness" refers to the sustainability approach that a company adopts. It denotes worldviews, interpretations, ways of thinking, types or phases. Therefore, the embeddedness of sustainability in the company indicates the level of awareness, understanding and operationalization of ecological and social sustainability" (Ramírez-Pasillas et al., 2023: 9). To embed sustainability, an organization must integrate sustainability into organizational goals, core leadership processes, and functions and responsibilities (Le Roux–Pretorius, 2016a).

Adding to this a longitudinal scale, Perrott (2014) and Arvidsson (2023) see sustainability embeddedness as a result of a process, in which companies internalize sustainability into the way of thinking, strategies and

decision-making processes. The longitudinal approach was first introduced into the sustainability embeddedness literature by Perrott (2014), who distinguishes six stages of companies' commitment to sustainability practices ranging from rejection to a sustaining corporation. The second level of sustainability in a corporation is the so called non-responsiveness, which stems from a lack of awareness among companies as a limiting factor. The third level is compliance, where CEOs are already striving to be honest employers, but the motivation behind this is solely external expectations, social compliance and legal requirements. Beyond this level is efficiency, where there is a growing awareness among managers of the adoption of proactive sustainable practices, although the implementation of these policies is mostly driven by economic interests. The author's concept of strategic proactivity aligns with the depth of sustainability integration within corporate strategy, as evidenced by the term "sustainability embeddedness." At the highest level of corporate commitment, sustaining corporations, both managers and most organization members are internally motivated to behave in a resourceful and sustainable manner. In these companies, a culture of sustainability is formed, in which organizational members share common assumptions and beliefs about the importance of balancing economic efficiency, social fairness, and environmental accountability (Bertels, 2010).

The current study's interpretation aligns closely with Sharafizad et al.'s (2022) approach, which draws upon Granovetter's concept of embeddedness, however, they stay largely consistent with existing literature on sustainability embeddedness, only integrating a local dimension into their analysis by differentiating locally embedded sustainability values, spatially driven and locally adapted sustainability. The embeddedness of sustainability in their study [...] means that "when the owner of a small firm embeds sustainability into their values, practices, decision-making, strategies, and policies ...their roles and responsibilities and those of the organisation are inseparable from the interests of the wider community of stakeholders. This definition highlights that sustainability embeddedness is also a sub-type of social embeddedness and local embeddedness" (Sharafizad et al., 2022: 61).

Table 1. The most significant contributions to the sustainability embeddedness literature

Author	Novelty
Valente, 2012	Embedding sustainability considerations into corporate strategy
Le Roux–Pretorius, 2016a; 2016b	
Payán-Sánchez et al., 2018	The impact of embedded connections on sustainability
Sharafizad et al., 2022	Local dimension
Ramírez-Pasillas et al., 2023	Examination of family businesses
Perrott, 2014	Longitudinal approach
Arvidsson, 2023	

Source: The authors' own elaboration based on the references indicated in the table

In contrast, the present study focuses on the role of local space. Based on these contexts, the study provides its own interpretation of the relationship between embedding and sustainability, which can be provided by expanding the oft-quoted wording of the Brundtland Commission's report *Our Common Future* (1987): The sustainable embedding of companies at local level is the ability to be embedded in the local environment and local space in such a way that it consciously and responsibly uses local resources, taking into account local characteristics, without exhausting them or prolonging their capacity for renewal and without compromising the access of future generations of local society to these resources. (Pálffy – Ablonczy-Mihályka – Kecskés, 2023). The focus of the definition is on the local level, in which integration (emphasizing the process approach) the company has the ability to carry out its operational activities taking into account the needs of the place, using environmental, cultural, built environmental, intellectual and human resources in a broad sense, responsibly, contributing to long-term survival and development.

3. Aim and method of research

The primary objective of the study is to investigate opportunities for enhancing the embedding of companies while simultaneously promoting sustainability and responsibility. Research questions were formulated regarding the sustainable practices of the examined companies. When companies are embedded in a sustainable way, the question arises, what

lessons and good practices can be derived from the experiences of small- and medium-sized family businesses in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary regarding sustainable embedding, as well as how do these practices contribute to local economic development and environmental, social sustainability?

To answer those questions, a qualitative research method was used. This research is conducted through interviews with companies actively engaged in local communities, using the newly outlined theoretical framework. The focus on SMEs on the issue of embeddedness in the literature is welcome, as informal relations, trust and reciprocity are key to SME competitiveness. However, the importance of the territorial scale is differentiated according to company size, i.e. small and medium-sized enterprises are determined more by the intraregional network of contacts, whereas large companies are determined by local formal and informal cooperation (Málovics, 2009) and local ownership consequently leads to a strong embeddedness of SMEs. One of the primary advantages of embeddedness for small and medium-sized enterprises is their access to local collective goods, innovation and knowledge capital through the establishment of long-term relationships of trust (Spence et al., 2003).

Other factors make it interesting to examine the local embeddedness of family businesses. Research shows that family businesses have different sustainability practices (Ramírez-Pasillas et al., 2023). Ahmad et al.'s (2020) study emphasizes that CSR is a path to sustainable survival of family businesses, and therefore socially responsible behaviour is a strategically important factor for these business groups, while the results of Ramírez-Pasillas et al. (2023) show that family businesses are more likely to adopt strategies involving ethical behaviour and thus CSR activities, mostly through family commitment to sustainability. It can also be observed that the owner of a family business is most likely to set up a business where he lives or has ties, so there is a high chance that his commitment to the given municipality is also higher.

In contrast to multinational corporations, which primarily consider production factors and tangible location selection criteria when operating in a particular area, family businesses are often motivated by the sense of place. For them, the family's history and connection to the locality play crucial roles. Consequently, supporting the local community, generating employment opportunities, and delivering high-quality products and

services hold greater significance for local society compared to companies with weaker ties to the region (Reisinger, 2021).

During the compilation of the interview questions, the research methods and results found in the national and international literature have been taken into account, which were synthesized in the theoretical review. In addition to demographic issues, the interview explored the possibilities of family businesses, the degree of their embeddedness and their sustainability aspects in relation to the local government, companies, scientific and educational institutions, local society, and the built and natural environment along the quintuple-helix model outlined in the theoretical part. The interview ended with a sustainability question block.

The results of the study are not representative, but the initial study of a larger research is the research goal, and the conclusions provide useful data both for the companies studied and for subsequent research. Accordingly, the respondents were selected by convenience sampling (Babbie, 2013), the main criteria was that their site should be located in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, in North-Western Hungary. The responses were recorded from October to December 2023. More than half of the respondent family businesses (8 companies) were established between 1990 and 2000, 5 companies started operations between 2001 and 2010, and one company was established after 2011. In terms of company size, 5 enterprises have less than 10 employees (micro-enterprises), another 5 enterprises have between 11 and 49 employees (small enterprises), while 4 companies have between 50 and 249 employees (medium-sized enterprises). Based on the classification by industry, the main activities of the companies were manufacturing (4 companies), electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning (2 companies), trade and repair of motor vehicles (2 companies), construction, catering, information and communication and other sectors.

4. Results of the empirical research

The interview with family businesses started with the definition of local embeddedness and embeddedness. The fact that only three interviewees could not or did not want to define embeddedness suggests that the meaning of the terms is also clear for small and medium-sized enterprises and that they use them correctly. The interviewees described the phenomenon as follows:

- "Establishing, maintaining and developing mutually beneficial relations with local enterprises (industrial, economic, commercial, financial etc.), cooperation for good causes and the establishment of mutually beneficial positions. Within this framework, identifying and managing common agglomeration benefits. Building relationships with educational, cultural, artistic, social, etc. institutions, mutually beneficial cooperation, supporting and sponsoring their activities." (small business)
- "In the life of a city, the participation of companies operating there is an extremely important and obligatory role. Therefore, everything must be done by both the company and the city to ensure a strong connection between the two." (small business)
- "Together and with the city!" (medium-sized enterprise)
- "Integration into the local complex system." (micro-enterprise)
- "To participate in local economic public life, to have an active relationship with the local government." (medium-sized enterprise)
- "From local to local." (micro-enterprise)
- "Most of our customers are local companies." (micro-enterprise)
- "Local businesses provide jobs for many people and pay significant taxes to help them develop." (medium-sized enterprise)
- "The relationship of the enterprise with its environment and its participation in the development of the region. A family business has international connections, but I think typically in the long run the current location will remain the centre of business." (small business)

It is clear from the formulations that small and medium-sized family enterprises are aware that local embeddedness means a complex system of relationships, their mutual and trust-based nature, which generate positive returns for both the company and the host environment. Sustainability aspects are also included in the definitions, such as prioritising local workforce and corporate engagement in a broad sense. Overall, the companies examined feel that their businesses are moderately embedded, most strongly in the economy (3.2 on a scale of 1 to 5) and the relationship with local government (2.8) and society (2.8), while less embedded in the environment (2.5) and the educational and academic sphere (2.2).

The collaboration between the interviewed companies and municipalities (self-governments) remains largely consistent, with only one company noting an improvement. However, it emerges from the interviews that, in contrast to large corporations, SMEs feel that they have limited influence over decisions concerning local economic development. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the small and medium-sized enterprises interviewed being largely unaware of both the local development strategy of the municipality in which they operate and its current objectives. Only five companies felt they knew the municipality's goals, but all respondents felt it was important to become familiar with these goals. It can be clearly stated that the companies mostly interact with municipalities in legal interactions: "In the case of developing our own premises, we have found that the process of obtaining building and other permits is a lengthy, multi-stage process, during which economic conditions and circumstances can change significantly."

However, the companies' relationships with local businesses are exceptional, and they perceive a demand for cooperation. Most companies consider skilled local workforce as the most crucial aspect of the local economy, while the presence of local suppliers and a local market for their products are equally significant. The companies' relations with educational institutions and research centres remain mostly minimal, but all companies examined see an improving trend. This minimal cooperation mostly consists of hosting trainees, offering dual training opportunities and actively participating in research to help meet the information needs of the academic world. The low connection is also due to the fact that most of the small and medium-sized family businesses examined do not carry out any research and development activities. A significant link between enterprises and society can be found, with the majority of enterprises feeling that they have an impact on the life of the local community, mostly through improving living conditions, looking after employees, creating a healthy workplace, maintaining a work-life balance.

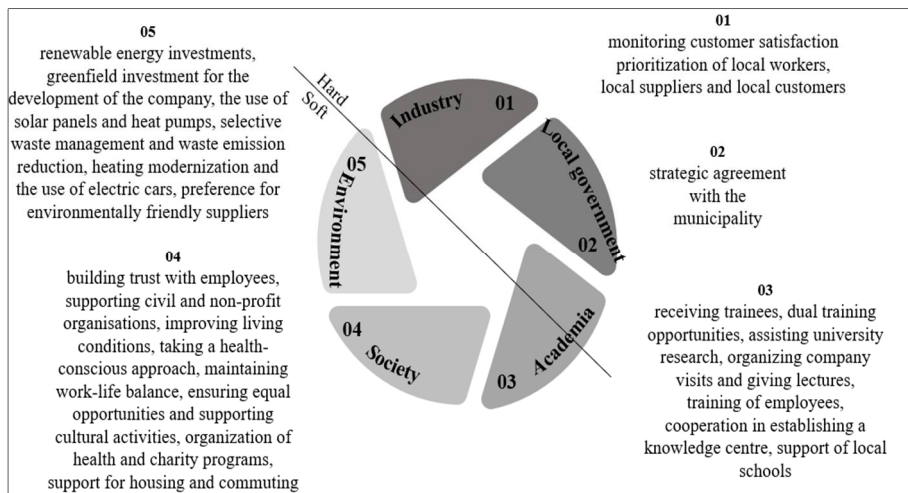
However, the most positive feedback from companies is related to their relationship with the built and natural environment, with companies being appropriately and prominently involved in greenfield investments, solar panel investments, the use of renewable energy sources and the installation of heat pumps.

The local embeddedness and integration of the companies examined has a significant impact on the municipality where the company operates. Their embedding leads to positive changes, particularly in terms of increased employment of local workers, but respondents also see positive impacts in terms of improved workforce health, increased income and employment, stronger local suppliers and improved education. Nevertheless, they assume that they can have a smaller but still significant impact on the diversification of the economic structure, the improvement of the urban social fabric (growing middle class), the development of the cultural, natural and built environment, the promotion of job opportunities for young professionals entering the workforce, the maintenance of local culture and the reduction of environmental pollution. However, their influence on research, development, and innovation is minimal, and they do not contribute to the improvement of infrastructure and road transportation.

In terms of sustainability aspects, companies mostly considered it important to integrate sustainability into their corporate strategy, yet just over a third of respondents have a formal sustainability plan. On the positive side, more than a third of respondents said they planned to develop a sustainability plan. However, a particularly high proportion of the examined companies (71%) consider local (regional, county, municipal) goals and needs when planning their sustainability and responsibility actions, which would strengthen their local commitment.

Companies predominantly attribute the limited impact of their local context to factors such as insufficient financial and human resources, the nature of their activities, and a lack of knowledge capital. The two companies also see the evolution of local political directions and the rapid change of decisions as obstacles to long-term development and building relationships.

Concerning the sustainable integration of companies, over 80% of respondents have outlined plans for environmental or renewable energy investments. These encompass various initiatives such as greenfield investments to advance company development, the adoption of solar panels and heat pumps, implementation of selective waste management to reduce emissions, modernization of heating systems, and transitioning to the use of electric vehicles.

Figure 1. Sustainable embedding practices based on interviews

Source: The authors' own elaboration based on Pálffy – Ablonczy-Mihályka – Kecskés (2023) and authors' research

In our previous study, based on the literature, we synthesized practices that contribute to the sustainability embeddedness of companies (Pálffy – Ablonczy-Mihályka – Kecskés, 2023). Based on the interviews it can be stated that despite the size and the lack of resources of the SMEs, the connection with industry, the local government, the academic sphere, the society and the environment can be detected through various practices. The sustainability activities of the surveyed companies clearly go beyond environmental aspects. Development of supplier networks, training of employees, monitoring customer satisfaction, organization of health and charity programs, prioritization of local workers, local suppliers and local customers, support of local schools, preference for environmentally friendly suppliers, activities preserving tradition and culture, strategic agreement with the municipality, cooperation in establishing a knowledge centre, support for housing and commuting are practices mentioned by all companies interviewed (Figure 1).

5. Conclusions

In recent decades, sustainability has become the subject of research in all scientific areas, mostly with an ecological focus, but the other two newly

defined economic and social pillars of the concept are also receiving increasing attention. The influence of an organization, a company or an institution on the local economy or the development of a municipality has long been part of the scientific discourse in the field of social sciences (economics, sociology, regional science). There are a number of approaches in the literature for assessing local economic impacts. However, there are hardly any cases in which these impacts are not accompanied by cultural, social, demographic, political, educational, infrastructural, tourism, environmental and other impacts that go beyond the economic effects.

One of the main topics of the literature on the impact of companies is corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate sustainability (CS), while interaction studies also show a close correlation with the topic of corporate embeddedness. Nevertheless, there are only a few examples in the literature of the joint analysis of the two thematic areas, i.e. local involvement of companies and embeddedness, which may result from the different interpretation and application of the terms. The concept of sustainability embeddedness has been introduced into the literature in recent years, but the term embeddedness is interpreted exclusively as a synonym for integration and describes the adaptation of sustainability aspects into corporate strategy. Thus, the concept does not use the term that goes back to the original foundations of Polanyi and Granovetter, which refers to the context of economic events.

The main objective of the study was to contribute to the literature on sustainability embeddedness by creating its own definition, which adapts the term corporate embeddedness and embedding rooted in regional science and economic geography. Based on empirical research, the study presents the sustainability practices of small and medium-sized family businesses participating in the interview, which contributes to the embedding of companies.

A further result of the study is a list of sustainable practical recommendations based on empirical research conducted based on interviews with small and medium-sized family businesses in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary. Along the quintuple helix model the results showed that family businesses understand the concept of embeddedness and, through their local commitment, are able to implement sustainability practices taking local interests into account

despite limited resources. The limitations of the study are clear, but the small number of companies interviewed suggests the introduction of a new, empirically based interpretation, along which further professional discourses are possible. From a practical point of view, the concept of sustainable embedding is recommended for companies to form part of the corporate strategy and reports, because along the quintuple helix model, it is possible to monitor the extent to which the company embeds itself into the local fabric through the implementation of sustainability and responsibility practices.

Authorship

Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

N/A

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicting interests.

References

- Ahmad, S., Siddiqui, K. A., Aboalsamh, H M., (2020). Family Smes' Survival: The Role of Owner Family and Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 27(2), 281–297.
- Arvidsson, S. (2023). CEO Talk of Sustainability in CEO Letters: Towards the Inclusion of a Sustainability Embeddedness and Value-Creation Perspective. *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*, 14(7), 26–61.
- Babbie, E. (2013). *The Practice of Social Research*. Wadsworth Publishing
- Barber, B. (1995). All Economies are “Embedded”: The Career of a Concept, And Beyond. *Social Research*, 62(2), 387–413.
- Beckert, J. (2003). Economic Sociology and Embeddedness: How Shall We Conceptualize Economic Action? *Journal of Economic Issues*, 37(3), 769–787.

- Benn, S., Dunphy, D., Griffiths, A. (2014). *Organizational Change for Corporate Sustainability*. Routledge, New York, NY.
- Bertels, S. (2010). *Embedding Sustainability in Organizational Culture*. Network for Business Sustainability, Ontario.
- Castree, N. (2004). Economy and Culture are Dead! Long Live Economy and Culture! *Progress. Human Geography*, 28(2), 204–226.
- Clifton, N., Gärtner, S., Dieter, R. (2011). Companies, Culturs, and the Region: Interactions and Outcomes. *European Planning Studies*, 19(11), 1857–1864.
- Dacin, M. T., Beal, B. D., Ventresca, M. J. (1999). The Embeddedness of Organizations: Dialogue & Directions. *Journal of Management*, 25(3), 317–356.
- Das, M., Rangarajan, K., Dutta, G. (2020). Corporate Sustainability in SMEs: an Asian Perspective. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 14(1), 109–138.
- Day, M., Fawcett, S. E., Fawcett, A. M., Magnan, G. M. (2013). Trust and Relational Embeddedness: Exploring a Paradox of Trust Pattern Development in Key Supplier Relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(2), 152–165.
- Dequech, D. (2003). Cognitive and Cultural Embeddedness: Combining Institutional Economics and Economic Sociology. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 37(2), 461–470.
- Dunphy, D., Griffiths, A., Benn, S. (2007). *Organizational Change for Corporate Sustainability: A Guide for Leaders and Change Agents of the Future*. 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, NY.
- European Commission (2014). *Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs*, Belgium.
- Fletcher, R., Barrett, N. (2001). Embeddedness and the Evolution of Global Networks an Australian Case Study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 30(7), 561–573.
- Gál, Z., Lux, G. (2022). FDI-Based Regional Development in Central and Eastern Europe: A Review and an Agenda. *Tér és Társadalom*, 36(3), 68–98.
- Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3), 481–510.
- Hess, M. (2004). 'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness. *Progress. Human Geography*, 28(2), 165–186.
- Hillier, B. (2009). Spatial Sustainability in Cities: Organic Patterns and Sustainable Forms. In: Koch, D., Marcus, L., Steen, J. (eds.). *Proceedings of the 7th International Space Syntax Symposium*. (pp. p. 1). Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm, Sweden.
- James, A. (2007). Everyday Effects, Practices and Causal Mechanisms of 'Cultural Embeddedness': Learning from Utah's High Tech Regional Economy. *Geoforum*, 38(2), 393–413.
- Jones, A. (2008). Beyond Embeddedness: Economic Practices and the Invisible

- Dimensions of Transnational Business Activity. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(1), 71–88.
- Józsa V. (2016). Corporate Embeddedness from a New Perspective. *Contemporary Research on Organization Management and Administration*, 4(1), 1–15.
- Konczosné Szombathelyi M. (2014). A regionális és a vállalati kultúra kölcsönhatásának vizsgálata. *Tér és Társadalom*, 28(1), 84–98.
- Korsgaard, S., Ferguson, R., Gaddefors, J. (2015). The Best of Both Worlds: How Rural Entrepreneurs Use Placial Embeddedness and Strategic Networks to Create Opportunities. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*, 27(9-10), 574–598.
- Landrum, N. E. (2017). Stages of Corporate Sustainability: Integrating the Strong Sustainability Worldview. *Organization and Environment*, 31(4), 287–313.
- Le Roux, C., Pretorius, M. (2016a). Navigating Sustainability Embeddedness in Management Decision-Making. *Sustainability*, 8(5), 1–23.
- Le Roux, C., Pretorius, M. (2016b). Conceptualizing the Limiting Issues Inhibiting Sustainability Embeddedness. *Sustainability*, 8(4), 1–22.
- Málovics Gy. (2009). A vállalati fenntarthatóság érintettközpontú vizsgálata. Doktori értekezés, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Pécs.
- Martin, R. (1994). Economic Theory and Human Geography. In Gregory, D., Martin, R., Smith, G. (eds.). *Human Geography*, London, 21–53.
- Morse, S., Vogiatzakis, I., Griffiths, G. (2009). Space and Sustainability. Potential for Landscape as a Spatial Unit for Assessing Sustainability. *Sustainable Development*, 19(1), 30–48.
- Negut, A. (2014): Introductory aspects on the sustainability of social enterprises. *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, 14(4), 21–33.
- Oinas, P. (1997). On the Socio-Spatial Embeddedness of Business Firms. *Erdkunde*, 51(1), 23–31.
- Pálffy, Zs., Ablonczy-Mihályka, L., Kecskés, P. (2023). A Sustainable Model of Corporate Embeddedness Based on Good Practices of Small- and Medium Sized Family Firms. *Chemical Engineering Transactions*, 107, 163–168.
- Payán-Sánchez, B., Plaza-Úbeda, J. A., Pérez-Valls, M., Carmona-Moreno, E. (2018). Social Embeddedness for Sustainability in the Aviation Sector, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 25(4), 537–553.
- Perrott, B. (2014). The Sustainable Organization: Blueprint for an Integrated Model. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 35(3), 26–37.
- Polányi K. (1944). *The Great Transformation – The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*, New York.
- Ramírez-Pasillas, M., Saari, U. A., Lundberg, H. (2023). Business Groups Owned by Family and Sustainability Embeddedness: Understanding the Family

- Sustainability Spectrum. In Rautiainen, M., Parada, M. J., Pihkala, T., Akhter, N., Discua Cruz, A., Mukherjee, K. (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Managing Family Business Groups*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 429–457.
- Reisinger A. (2023). A CSR és versenyképesség kapcsolatának elemzési kihívásai a szakirodalom alapján. *Hitelintézeti Szemle*, 22(1), 105–126.
- Reisinger A. (2021). A tér szerepe a vállalatok működésében. *Tér Gazdaság Ember*, 9(2), 37–49.
- Sharafizad, J., Redmond, J., Parker, C. (2022). The Influence of Local Embeddedness on the Economic, Social, and Environmental Sustainability Practices of Regional Small Firms. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 34(1), 57–81.
- Spence, L. J., Schmidpeter, R., Habisch, A. (2003). Assessing Social Capital: Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Germany and the U.K. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 47(1), 17–29.
- Tobolska, A. (2010). Zróżnicowanie postaw społeczności lokalnych wobec inwestorów zagranicznych. *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, 39(1): 69–88.
- Tödtling, F., Kaufmann, A. (2002). SMEs in Regional Innovation Systems and The Role of Innovation Support - The Case of Upper Austria. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 27, 15–26.
- Valente, M. (2012). Business Sustainability Embeddedness as a Strategic Imperative. *Business & Society*, 54(1), 126–142.
- Von Proff, S. (2016). The Predominance of Social Proximity for Innovation Collaboration of SME. *Working Papers on Innovation and Space*, Philipps, Universität Marburg.
- Wojtowicz, D., Baczyńska, A. (2023). The Spatial Patterns of Sustainable Development at the Local Level. *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, 94(4): 20–37.
- World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): *Our Common Future*, Oxford.



JCPP

Year XXIV •
No. 2/2024

EDITURA
Expert

ISSN 1582-8344

