

# Assessing the Impact of a Collaborative Training Program for Sociology and Social Service Specialists on Their Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes towards Community Development in Hafr Al-Batin: A Cross-Sectional Survey Study

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Received: 16.08.2024

Revised: 19.09.2024

Accepted: 27.10.2024

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## ABSTRACT

Community development is a crucial aspect of social work and sociology, requiring professionals to possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This study aims to assess the impact of a collaborative training program for sociology and social service specialists on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards community development in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with a sample of 120 specialists who participated in the training program. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed significant improvements in participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes following the training program. The study highlights the importance of collaborative training initiatives in enhancing the competencies of social work and sociology professionals, ultimately contributing to effective community development practices. Recommendations for future research and practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** community development, sociology, social service, collaborative training, knowledge, skills, attitudes

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Community development is an essential aspect of social work and sociology practice, focusing on empowering communities to address their needs and improve their well-being (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016). Effective community development requires professionals to possess a comprehensive understanding of community dynamics, relevant skills, and positive attitudes towards engaging with communities (Weyers, 2019). Collaborative training programs that bring together professionals from different disciplines, such as sociology and social service, can foster a shared understanding and enhance their competencies in community development (Ife, 2016).

In Saudi Arabia, there has been a growing emphasis on community development initiatives to address social issues and promote sustainable development (Alharbi, 2020). However, limited research has been conducted on the effectiveness of collaborative training programs in enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of social work and sociology professionals towards community development in the Saudi context. This study aims to address this gap by assessing the impact of a collaborative training program for sociology and social service specialists on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards community development in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Community Development

Community development is a process that involves working with communities to identify their needs, mobilize resources, and implement strategies to improve their social, economic, and environmental well-being (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016). It is based on the principles of empowerment, participation, and social justice, aiming to build the capacity of communities to address their own challenges and create positive change (Ife, 2016). Community development practices encompass a wide range of activities, including needs assessment, community organizing, project planning and implementation, and evaluation (Weyers, 2019).

Effective community development requires professionals to have a deep understanding of community dynamics, power structures, and cultural contexts (Kenny, 2016). They need to possess skills in facilitation,

communication, problem-solving, and project management to engage communities effectively and facilitate their active participation in the development process (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016). Moreover, professionals' attitudes towards communities, such as empathy, respect, and a commitment to social justice, are crucial in building trust and fostering meaningful partnerships (Weyers, 2019).

## **2.2 Collaborative Training in Community Development**

Collaborative training programs that bring together professionals from different disciplines have been recognized as an effective approach to enhance competencies in community development (Ife, 2016). These programs provide opportunities for professionals to share knowledge, exchange experiences, and develop a shared understanding of community development principles and practices (Kenny, 2016). Collaborative training can foster interdisciplinary collaboration, break down silos, and promote a holistic approach to addressing community needs (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016).

Studies have shown the positive impact of collaborative training programs on professionals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in various contexts. For example, a study by Mafile'o et al. (2019) found that a collaborative training program for social workers and community health workers in Tonga significantly improved their understanding of community development principles and their ability to engage with communities effectively. Similarly, a study by Chigbu (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of a collaborative training program in enhancing the skills and attitudes of urban planners and community development practitioners in Nigeria.

## **2.3 Community Development in Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, community development has gained increasing attention in recent years as a means to address social issues and promote sustainable development (Alharbi, 2020). The government has launched various initiatives and programs to support community development, such as the National Transformation Program 2020 and the Vision 2030 (Alshuwaikhat & Mohammed, 2017). These initiatives aim to empower communities, enhance social cohesion, and improve the quality of life for citizens (Alharbi, 2020).

However, there are challenges in implementing effective community development practices in Saudi Arabia, including limited professional expertise, inadequate resources, and cultural barriers (Alshuwaikhat & Mohammed, 2017). Social work and sociology professionals in Saudi Arabia often lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to engage with communities effectively and facilitate their active participation in the development process (Alharbi, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for collaborative training programs that can enhance the competencies of these professionals and equip them with the tools to address the unique challenges of community development in the Saudi context.

## **3. METHODS**

### **3.1 Study Design and Setting**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to assess the impact of a collaborative training program for sociology and social service specialists on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards community development in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia. The study was conducted in the context of a collaborative training program organized by the Department of Sociology and Social Work at King Faisal University in partnership with local community organizations.

### **3.2 Participants and Sampling**

The study population consisted of sociology and social service specialists who participated in the collaborative training program in Hafr Al-Batin. A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants. All specialists who completed the training program were invited to participate in the study. A total of 120 specialists agreed to participate, representing a response rate of 80%.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire developed by the researchers based on a review of relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) demographic information, (2) knowledge of community development, (3) skills in community development, and (4) attitudes towards community development. The knowledge section included 10 multiple-choice questions assessing participants' understanding of community development concepts and principles. The skills section included 15 Likert-scale items assessing participants' perceived competence in various community development practices. The attitudes section included 10 Likert-scale items assessing participants' attitudes towards community engagement, empowerment, and social justice.

The questionnaire was piloted with a sample of 20 specialists to assess its clarity, relevance, and internal consistency. Based on the pilot results, minor modifications were made to improve the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The final version of the questionnaire was distributed to participants in person at the end of the

training program. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researchers.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and their responses to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes sections of the questionnaire. Inferential statistics, including paired t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), were used to examine differences in participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes based on their demographic characteristics and professional background.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The majority of participants were male (65%), and the mean age was 32.5 years (SD = 5.7). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (78%), while 22% held a master's degree. Participants' professional backgrounds were evenly distributed between sociology (50%) and social service (50%). The average years of experience in community development was 4.2 years (SD = 2.5). Table 1 presents the detailed demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 120)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	78	65.0
Female	42	35.0
Age (years)		
< 30	35	29.2
30-39	68	56.7
≥ 40	17	14.2
Education Level		
Bachelor's	94	78.3
Master's	26	21.7
Professional Background		
Sociology	60	50.0
Social Service	60	50.0
Experience in Community Development (years)		
< 3	42	35.0
3-6	56	46.7
> 6	22	18.3

### 4.2 Knowledge of Community Development

Participants' knowledge of community development was assessed using 10 multiple-choice questions. The mean score was 7.8 (SD = 1.4), indicating a high level of knowledge. The majority of participants (85%) answered at least 7 out of 10 questions correctly. There were no significant differences in knowledge scores based on participants' gender, age, education level, professional background, or years of experience ( $p > .05$ ).

### 4.3 Skills in Community Development

Participants' skills in community development were assessed using 15 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The mean score was 4.2 (SD = 0.5), indicating a high level of perceived competence in community development practices. Participants reported the highest competence in community needs assessment (M = 4.5, SD = 0.6) and the lowest competence in project evaluation (M = 3.9, SD = 0.8). There were no significant differences in skills scores based on participants' gender, age, or education level ( $p > .05$ ). However, participants with a social service background reported significantly higher skills scores compared to those with a sociology background ( $t(118) = 2.45, p < .05$ ).

### 4.4 Attitudes towards Community Development

Participants' attitudes towards community development were assessed using 10 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The mean score was 4.6 (SD = 0.4), indicating highly positive attitudes towards community engagement, empowerment, and social justice. Participants reported the most positive attitudes towards community participation (M = 4.8, SD = 0.4) and the least positive attitudes towards power-sharing

with communities ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ). There were no significant differences in attitudes scores based on participants' gender, age, education level, professional background, or years of experience ( $p > .05$ ).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study assessed the impact of a collaborative training program for sociology and social service specialists on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards community development in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that the training program was effective in enhancing participants' competencies in community development, as evidenced by their high scores in knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The high level of knowledge reported by participants indicates that the training program successfully conveyed the key concepts and principles of community development. This is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the effectiveness of collaborative training programs in improving professionals' understanding of community development (Mafie'o et al., 2019; Chigbu, 2019). The lack of significant differences in knowledge scores based on participants' demographic characteristics suggests that the training program was accessible and relevant to a diverse group of professionals.

Participants' high level of perceived competence in community development practices reflects the training program's success in equipping them with the necessary skills to engage with communities effectively. The finding that social service specialists reported significantly higher skills scores compared to sociology specialists highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in community development training. Social service specialists may have had more practical experience in community engagement, which could have contributed to their higher perceived competence. This finding underscores the value of bringing together professionals from different disciplines to share knowledge and expertise in community development.

The highly positive attitudes towards community development reported by participants suggest that the training program fostered a strong commitment to community engagement, empowerment, and social justice. This is crucial, as professionals' attitudes towards communities can significantly impact the effectiveness of community development interventions (Weyers, 2019). The lack of significant differences in attitudes scores based on participants' demographic characteristics indicates that the training program successfully promoted positive attitudes across a diverse group of professionals.

Despite the positive findings, this study has some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences about the impact of the training program on participants' competencies. Future studies could employ a pre-post design to examine changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes before and after the training program. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could incorporate objective measures of competencies, such as performance-based assessments or community feedback, to triangulate the findings.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on collaborative training in community development, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia. The findings highlight the potential of collaborative training programs to enhance the competencies of social work and sociology professionals, ultimately contributing to effective community development practices. The study also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in community development training, as it allows for the sharing of knowledge and expertise across different disciplines.

The findings of this study have several implications for practice and policy. First, collaborative training programs should be promoted and supported as a means to enhance the competencies of social work and sociology professionals in community development. Such programs should be designed to be accessible and relevant to a diverse group of professionals, taking into account their educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and cultural contexts. Second, interdisciplinary collaboration should be encouraged in community development training and practice, as it allows for the sharing of knowledge and expertise across different disciplines. This can be achieved through joint training programs, cross-disciplinary workshops, and collaborative projects.

Third, the study highlights the need for ongoing professional development opportunities for social work and sociology professionals in Saudi Arabia to keep abreast of emerging trends and best practices in community development. Professional associations and academic institutions should play a leading role in providing such opportunities, through workshops, seminars, and online courses. Finally, policymakers should recognize the importance of community development in promoting sustainable development and social well-being in Saudi Arabia. They should allocate adequate resources and support for community development initiatives, including collaborative training programs for professionals.

In conclusion, this study assessed the impact of a collaborative training program for sociology and social service specialists on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards community development in Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that the training program was effective in enhancing participants' competencies in community development, highlighting the potential of collaborative training programs to promote effective community development practices. The study underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in

community development training and practice and offers valuable insights for practitioners, educators, and policymakers in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

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