



Community Service and its Impact on High school Students

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Abstract

There is a growing insensitivity towards social issues- people joke about them and declare themselves apolitical. This attitude has affected school-going children, where islamophobia, casteism, sexism, racism and queerphobia are joked about, often with a nagging apathy. As a student myself, it is not rare to see communities be targeted under the guise of banter. Miseducation, propaganda and polarisation are relevant concerns. Muslim students became the victims of bullying post the bomb threats in Delhi schools, and slurs are commonly used. Community service then becomes a useful tool. It is not about sporadic food donation or plantation drives, rather, it is about regular community outreach and integration, especially those in a different strata of society. It is about power sharing and pooling our resources to extract maximum benefit for all. It is important to note that concentration of privilege and resources leads to polarisation and insensitivity in the first place. Lastly, community service is a two-way street. It is not just the 'disadvantaged' that are being helped, it is also those who perform the act of community service- learning how to be more sensitive and empathetic. We take as much as we give, thereby establishing a relationship of mutual benefit.

Keywords: Autarky; Community Service; High School Students; Impact; Privileges; Inequality

Introduction

Community Service and its Impact on Highschool Students

This paper is being written to explore what community services looks within the larger framework of society and how it can be utilised by the education system to create sympathetic, aware and well-rounded students. I will be doing so by understanding the student perspective on the same through their first-hand accounts. This paper is largely anecdotal, due to my experiences as a student at a school that is located in New Delhi and places an emphasis on community service and the ideals of active

citizenship. I will be doing so by charting out the activities undertaken for the same, and the kind of impact it has created on me and my peers.

Community Service and its Definition

Community service has gained a considerable amount of traction in the past few years. American colleges and universities prioritise intake of students with community impact, and it has also been added to various legal initiatives to reduce the burden on prison systems and to aid reformation of criminals, especially those having done low-level crimes. As a result, community service has come to be defined in various ways to suit the needs of society.

As per Cambridge Dictionary, community service is “work done without payment to help other people”. Some define it in a strictly legal sense and define it to be a legal consequence for convicted individuals as a form of restitution and rehabilitation (Prasath & Charumathi, 2024). For school students however, it is often an activity first introduced to them in school, through a rare donation drive or workshop.

However, unless a consistent practice of community-related service is not established, the impact itself is endangered. Thus, for anything to qualify as community service, it must be consistent and constantly evolving, with a specific goal or target in mind. In the school setting, this means that community service must actively be made a part of the curriculum for it to be considered community service in the first place. A rare plantation drive or event thus does not count.

Goals, timeframe of each project and other such details must also be clarified. Unless the impact that is intended to be created is not clear, a guided community service programme cannot actually be created.

Thus, a routine needs to be established, where a planned timeline is in place for the expected goal to be reached. Community service then can be defined as work done for the benefit of communities and society without payment or retribution, where goals and expected impact is clarified and a plan to achieve the impact is in place.

Extent of Initiatives that Can Be Undertaken in Community Service in Schools

As an eleventh grade student in 2024-25, I have seen the initiatives undertaken under the community service programme at my school. This has included routine visits during which we participated in a cleanliness drive, obtaining signatures for a petition for the Municipal Corporation to regularly clean the area and provide accessible dustbins. A letter was also written and given to the Deputy Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation, South Zone. We were also involved in collecting data for a survey for compilation of a detailed report of the demographic status and problems faced by the community. We discovered that members often faced problems filling out forms and paperwork for income, caste and disability certificates, as well as for admissions into private schools. We also realised that there were issues within the community in terms of satisfaction with the *pradhan* and fights over water and cleanliness.

Some students also raised funds to buy wheelchairs for disabled members of the community, and a library was also created through a book donation drive being conducted. Admissions forms for some children in the community were also filled for our school.

It is important to understand that these initiatives are not taken to merely look good on paper. Firstly, this description has merely been given to outline the extent of engagement that can occur under a

community service programme. Depending on the needs of the community, a variety of steps can be taken to increase impact and create change.

The first and foremost priority must be to understand the micro and macro issues in the community. In our case, these tended to be issues of hygiene, cleanliness, access to healthcare and education, along with internal tensions within the community. Similarly, all community service programmes must make it a priority to become a part of the everyday development of a community.

Secondly, a lot of larger issues within communities can only be solved if concerned authorities are contacted. For example, issues of sanitation and cleanliness can only be solved if municipal corporations are available to aid the community in the process. This is because these issues become deeply entrenched after an extended period of time, and complete solvency can only be achieved if adequate resources are given. Additionally, alerting authorities can also lead to policy change at the local level, which caters to these specific communities that require the help. Often, these communities are unable to contact the authorities on their own due to lack of awareness and diminished bargaining power as a result of their often negative perception in society. When people with surplus resources who are higher up in the social hierarchy help these communities reach the authorities, change can be created.

Thirdly, sharing of resources and knowledge must be a goal community service programmes aim to achieve. When such kinds of integration happen, various social groups intermix, allowing for us to step out of our social bubbles. This is the ideal space for knowledge and resources to be shared. For example, knowledge about education and healthcare can be shared with the community. Those going for the programme thus also learn about how to use their privilege for good, while bettering their skills of communication and leadership.

The extent to which community service programmes can be conducted is massive, where a lot of scope for transformation of communities and people exists.

Literature Review

A study by Hoefer (1998) highlights the importance of community service in the psyche of a teenager. Most adolescents are viewed as dependent and passive, leading them to internalise some of these ideas. When teenagers engage in community service, they take on roles of responsibility and learn new skills such as critical thinking while becoming more sensitive. These ultimately impact their perception of self, and has significant impact on them in adulthood. This happens due to increased interactions with adults, allowing these models to become integrated with the education system. Meanwhile, they also form new relationships, get exposed to a variety of ideas, communities and people, aiding them in career exploration, accepting cultural differences and motivating them to be better learners.

A research by Killias et al. (2000) aims to understand the differences in behaviour after punishment in the form of prison sentences versus community service for 14 days. This controlled experiment in the Swiss Canton of Vaud found that reconviction rates in the prison control group were higher after the point of reference. There was maximum improvement in the experimental group in the period before and after the point of reference. This suggests that alternative routes such as community service often lead to higher retribution from the offenders, and may be more useful, especially for less serious offences.

In human rights education programmes in Tamil Nadu, India, research found that when children were educated in human rights and how to exercise them, children developed four mechanisms against

injustice- they would intervene themselves, they would report to authorities, they would change their behaviour and mindset, and they would spread awareness about the same. Also, the impact was greater in schools that regularly enforced HRE, and spaces with violence or traditional hierarchies were less likely to reform. This was observed by Bajaj (2010).

Certain studies aim to study the impact felt by the communities themselves as the result of certain service learning programmes, such as one by Miron & Moely (2006). The study found that those who are at the receiving end of service learning programmes conducted by universities benefited from them, and were more likely to have a positive view of the university if they benefited from the programme. The more students involved, the more positive the perception of the university was likely to be.

The correlation between harsh use of punishment by parents in the younger years and behavioural and conduct problems has been studied by Henningham and Fracis (2018). They found poorer communication skills and social skills, attention problems while writing tests, along with poor conduct in classroom settings. The study spanned multiple years, and was able to adjust for gender, socio-economic condition and age. The study concluded with the remark that there was a need to train parents in anger management techniques along with non violent disciplinary methods.

Research Gap

While studies on the relevance of community service have been conducted, they are mostly centred around prison and community service as a punishment, and not as a necessary mechanism in educational institutions. Researches focused on impact on students also lack personal interaction with students, and rarely involve them deeply. Many lack personal accounts, or a good amount of qualitative data collection. The aim of this research is to explore this gap and understand the importance of community service for students who have been regularly involved in it through their firsthand experiences.

Research Questions

The main question that is asked through this paper is about the importance of community service in the education system, especially as a mechanism to change mindsets and influence growth within students. This paper also questions the role community service plays in broadening outlook and developing sensitisation within students.

Method

The methodology of this research is mixed method approach; qualitative and quantitative data has been used. It has involved students of the ages 15-17 from Grade 11 2024-25.

Participants

A survey was conducted where 43 responses from grade 11 from the Commerce and Humanities groups of 2024-25 were recorded. The Science group had not been included due to limited participation in community service. There were 21 boys and 22 girls, and all respondents were engaged in community service for the duration of one academic year, for about 9-10 months. All students had engaged in community service and related activities at least once a week for over an hour.

Assessments and Measures

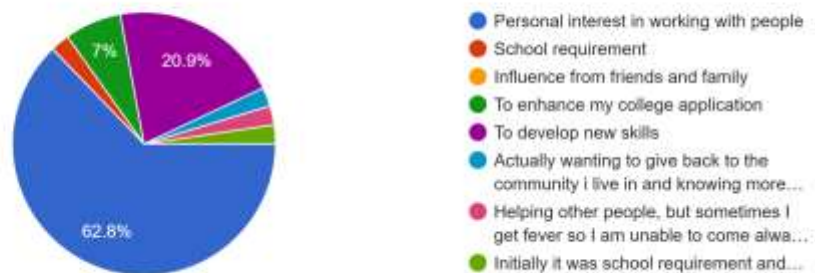
This study had been conducted through a questionnaire. The questionnaire followed a mix of quantitative and qualitative forms of questioning, however, most questions on the questionnaire were close ended. 22 research questions were asked, with 14 close ended questions and 5 open ended questions, where 3 were for gathering student information. The questionnaire was not made by me, eliminating the possibility of bias or prejudice.

Findings of the Research

Quantitative Data

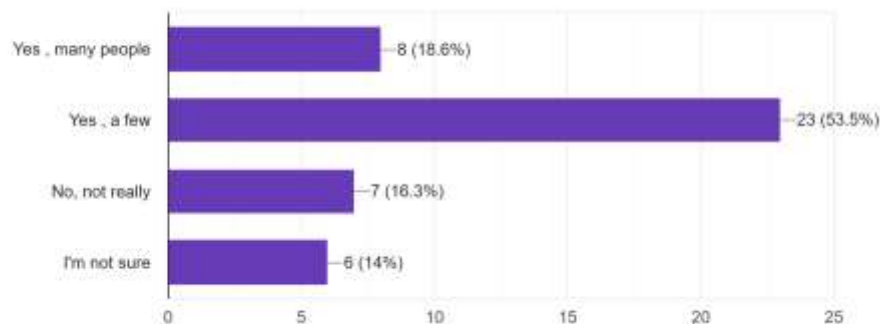
Through this research, we found that over 62.8% of students participate in community service due to a personal interest in working with people, while 20.9% said that they do so because of the new skills that it helps them acquire. This reflects the positive impact community service has on student personality.

What motivates you to participate in community services?
43 responses



Students also revealed participation in a variety of activities, such as making a library, cleanliness drives, surveying and teaching, which reflects the same. 72% of respondents also said that they had inspired others to participate in community service.

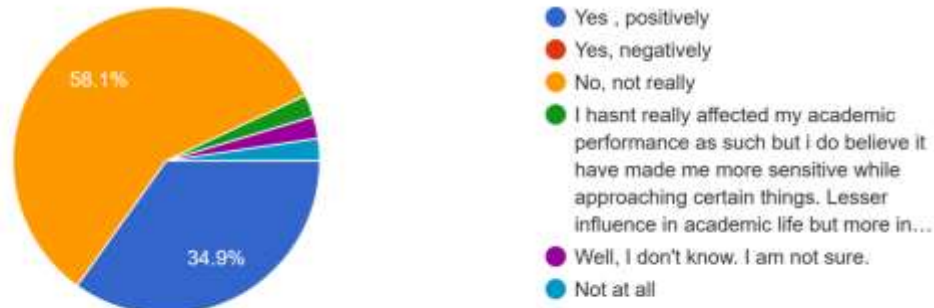
Have you inspired others to participate in community service?
43 responses



A sizable majority of 93% respondents said that community service had either no effect, or a positive effect on their academics.

Has community services affected your academic performance?

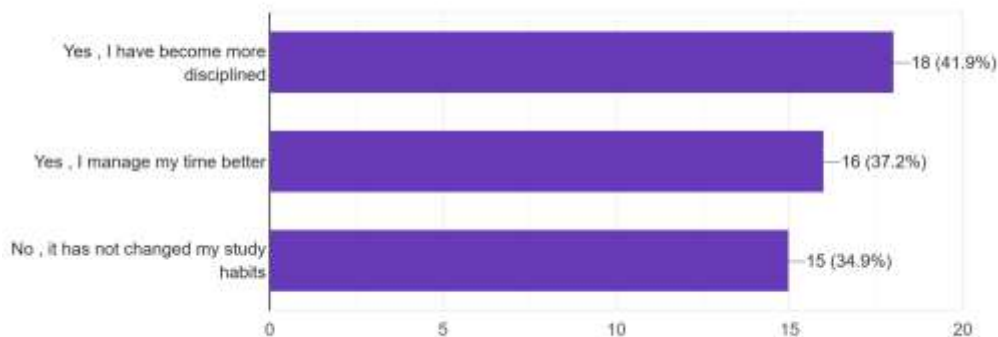
43 responses



Meanwhile, 79% say that they have seen positive effects such as better discipline and time management due to community service participation, while others say that it has helped them to interact and communicate better, along with critical thinking, analysis and problem solving.

Has your participation in community services influenced your study habits?

43 responses



They also feel that they have become more sensitive and empathetic. 92% say they have become more empathetic or outgoing socially. 93% also say that they have become better leaders.

Have you developed any leadership skills through community service? How?

43 responses



Has your community services affected your social interaction with others ?

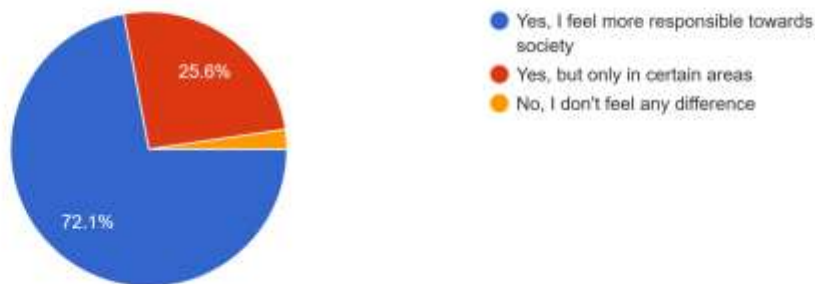
43 responses



Also, 97% said that they feel a greater responsibility to society after community service, and 95% of respondents feel more confident as people. Nearly 98% of respondents said that they enjoyed working with people and that it was a good experience.

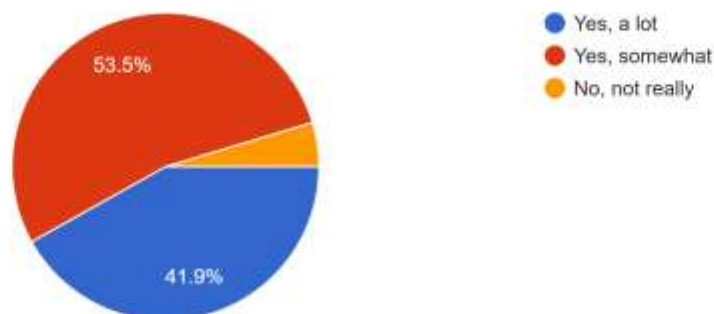
Do you feel greater sense of responsibility towards society after participating in community service? Why or why not

43 responses



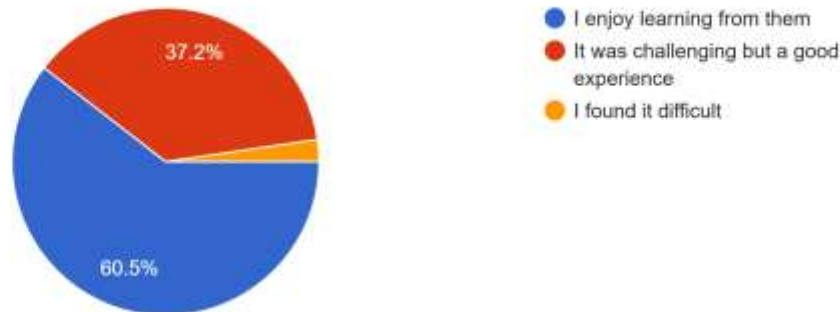
Has volunteering helped you become more confident? In what ways

43 responses



How did you feel about working with the people from different backgrounds?

43 responses



The research was successful in finding answers to the quantitative data. Answers did not seem contradictory or conflicting, and decisive results could be obtained.

Qualitative Data

From the qualitative responses, we were able to gauge how student perception had shifted through community service. Nadiya Sarwar says, *“Before I started volunteering, I saw society in a more generalized and surface-level way. I was aware of social issues, but I mostly understood them through news, books, or indoor discussions. Volunteering gave me firsthand experience and a deeper, more personal perspective on these issues. Now, I see society as more interconnected; every action, privilege, or disadvantage affects someone else. I’ve realized that structural inequalities run deeper than they seem, and change requires consistent effort, not just one-time aid. Meeting people from different backgrounds showed me the resilience and strength of these communities, but also the systemic barriers they face.”*

Arjun Magar says that community service has taught him responsibility and the power of community support, while Anshi says that the idea of sharing privilege had never struck her before this endeavour, and she has witnessed a transformation in how she witnesses society.

A lot of students also faced ethical dilemmas. Riddhi Aggarwal says, *“Young children, especially girls, are forced to drop out of schools after the age of 10-14 and are forced to work as maids or help with the house work. We could blame the families for not providing education to their children because of which they don't have good jobs & suffer financially, but if we dig deeper we realise why the family couldn't provide education.”*

Aaliya Gulati said, *“Initially when we started there was a dilemma of understanding the community because we have always been isolated from such places as they are supposed to be 'dirty' and 'uncivilised'.”*

“At times, when we have just a limited supply of stuff (food, clothes, books), how do we decide who gets it and conduct a fair distribution amongst all? Most importantly, even though we might do it out of empathy and our societal duty to give back to the community, could they think that we are exploiting, manipulating, and using their hardships and situations for selfish purposes (institutional goals, college resumes, etc)?”, says Jia Juneja.

Students also shared their personal stories and experiences from community service throughout the year. *“Personally, I love going for community service as it gives us the time to engage with people who might be suffering from some issues that we get to know about while interviewing or surveying them. The library is loved by all the children, they go there, draw, read, study etc. The events are organized for every occasion which sets a very good impact on the kids and their family members. The surveys have helped us understand family conditions and we’ve helped them as much as we could by donation drives of clothes, toys and wheelchairs. It was a great experience with the COHAS members! I would love to visit them more often, the kids over there have become my friends too as we played and engaged together every time we met them,”* says Saiba Chugh.

Aditi said, *“Something new which everyone should be exposed to. You get to work with people from different backgrounds and know their perspective. You start taking ownership and responsibility for things happening around you. You get to work with children whom it’s not easy to explain things but we eventually did and that’s also one skill I enhanced during community service. Also, I learnt that don’t give false hopes by saying or promising something to the people there if you can’t really make it happen.”*

The qualitative data was affected by sometimes an inability to give a straightforward or clear answer by respondents, however, a large majority are substantiated with personal anecdotes, experiences and learnings, allowing for information to be obtained regarding the research questions.

Discussion

From these findings, we can understand that community service has a positive impact on those who engage in it. The impact is reflected in personality shifts, growth of mindset and expansion of worldview and a widened understanding of concepts such as power sharing, accountability and active citizenship. Community service seems to be an enriching activity that allows students to gain alternative experiences through interaction with people outside their social bubble. Not only does it affirm the role they play in society and validate their efforts to make a difference, it also aids their social skills and understanding of the world. Once they branch out of their usual circles and interact with new people through community service, they feel more confident, responsible and interact more openly with people. Since they take initiatives themselves and often lead groups for certain activities, they become better leaders. Community service also makes them more empathetic by helping them understand the nature of privilege and inequality- it is possible to create a society that is fairer, more understanding, empathetic and more tolerant of differences. Not only that, but community services exposes students to how stark disparities can be, which creates a desire to change the situation- be it through crowdfunding a wheelchair or setting up a library. Community service can also have a positive impact on academics. Most people believe that it is a distraction, while the questionnaire seems to reveal that community service can be beneficial, especially with the time management, discipline, critical thinking and problem solving it seems to foster.

While it is true that students are already aware of social hierarchies before they participate in community service, doing so helps them to realise the extent of them, and place them in relation to their activities, experiences and learning. It also changes how they view the ‘othered’ community. Instead of being a monolith, they come to understand the complexities prevalent in the community. They no longer believe poverty or lack of education to be individual problems, but rather, a systematic lack of access and inaction that enables such problems. They are also able to break the stereotypes associated with such areas, and tackle their own patterns of thinking.

Such activities also help students understand the problem of unequal resource distribution. When faced with the question of how to allocate limited funds and resources in places where a seemingly unlimited amount is required to provide people with basic necessities, students understand the importance of every resource.

Overall, most students enjoy community service for the skills it teaches them and the experiences it gives them. They believe it to be beneficial, necessary and a crucial part of their schooling years.

Limitations

Despite the care taken to ensure a study devoid of prejudice or biases, certain limitations cannot be denied.

Due to the small sample size, it is possible that answers might be skewed. Since the survey was not mandatory and only interested participants filled the form, it is possible that responses are towards the extremes, especially for quantitative questions. Because this study was conducted with school students, the possibility of exaggeration due to fear of school authorities does exist. However, the likelihood of this having skewed answers in the opposite direction is unlikely, as respondents have been free in giving critique or disagreeing if need be.

Recommendations

Through this study, it has become clear that community service is an important mechanism that drives positive change within students and communities. Through this paper, I would like to give the following recommendations-

1. It would be a step in the right direction for schools to mandate or at the very least, extensively promote community service, not just in private, but also state funded schools such as Kendriya Vidyalayas and MCD schools.
2. We must also realise that these state funded schools are not a form of community service themselves, rather the responsibility of the state due to social welfare being an important goal the state assumes. Thus, it is pertinent to develop community service programmes in all schools, regardless of where they derive funding from.
3. It is also important to consider- what is the right age to start community service? Active engagement and routine interaction can be started from 11th grade to ensure adequate understanding of what community service entails, but younger students can do small acts of community service- donation drives, peer learning, activities and workshops to avail its benefits while they are still young. This will also help in broadening their worldview and seeing new perspectives, which can positively impact their mindsets and thought processes- even as children.
4. Community service should not be just for Commerce and Humanities students. Students from the Sciences also stand to benefit from community service. They can also use these real world experiences just as well as students from other streams can.
5. Community service programmes must be student-centric- utmost care must be taken to ensure concerns are addressed, questions are answered and viewpoints are engaged with. Viewpoints that may seem controversial must also be accommodated- critique of social structures and systems

must be welcomed, along with problem solving abilities. Students must be given the space to apply their textbook learnings to the real world through community service. Academic learning must be complimented, and ideas of justice, accountability and equality must be adequately engaged with. Community service must become an inclusive, thoughtful and tolerant space, and not one to censor and control. Without this, the impacts of community service cannot be felt.

- 6.A community service programme without clear goals and a guided plan cannot be created, as it hinders the ability of students to work to the best of their ability.
- 7.Efforts must be made to ensure that community service programmes allow for maximum interaction with people outside the social bubble of the partaking students, so that new perspectives and ideas can be exchanged.

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Annexure

1. The questionnaire consisted of the following questions-

- 1.Name
- 2.Sex
- 3.Class
- 4.What motivates you to participate in community services?
- 5.Has your perception on social issues changed since you started volunteering?
- 6.What type of community service activities have you been involved in?
- 7.Have you inspired others to participate in community service?
- 8.Has community services affected your academic performance?

9. Do you think participating in community service improves time management skills?
10. Have you learned any skills in community service that helped you with your studies Give examples
11. Has your participation in community services influenced your study habits?
12. Has your community services affected your social interaction with others ?
13. Have you developed any leadership skills through community service? How?
14. Do you feel greater sense of responsibility towards society after participating in community service? Why or why not
15. Has volunteering helped you become more confident? In what ways
16. Have you faced any ethical dilemmas while volunteering?
17. Describe some ethical dilemmas you faced during community practice
18. How do you see society now compared to before you started volunteering
19. Did you face any difficulty in balancing school and community service?
20. Did you face any cultural barrier?
21. How did you feel about working with the people from different backgrounds?
22. Reflect on your overall community service experience and describe it in 5 sentences.

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