

From Education to Social Responsibility: A Bioethical Perspective on Medical Student Volunteering and Sustainable Community Engagement

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Abstract

Introduction: Higher education institutions play a strategic role in promoting sustainability and social accountability through active community engagement, particularly in medical education. Beyond training future healthcare professionals, universities contribute to shaping ethical awareness, civic responsibility, and responsiveness to public health challenges. Community-based volunteering serves as a key educational tool for developing professional identity, social responsibility, and sensitivity to sustainability principles. This study aims to evaluate medical students' perceptions, motivations, and attitudes toward volunteering activities with community impact, and to assess their contribution to professional development, sustainability awareness, and civic engagement.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted among 500 students at Victor Babeş University of Medicine and Pharmacy Timisoara. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire covering five domains: motivational factors, soft skills development, perceived community impact, sustainability orientation, and institutional support. Responses included Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic variables. Data were analysed using descriptive and comparative statistical methods.

Results: The findings indicate high levels of motivation and strong recognition of the educational and societal value of volunteering. Most students viewed volunteering as a valuable complement to formal training, particularly in health promotion and community well-being. Female students reported higher motivation and perceived impact, while prior volunteering experience correlated with stronger engagement. However, respondents identified limited institutional support, including insufficient recognition and coordination mechanisms.

Conclusion: Volunteering plays a significant role in fostering socially responsible and ethically aware healthcare professionals and aligns with sustainability principles. Strengthening institutional frameworks and support systems is essential to enhance long-term impact and integrate sustainability more effectively into medical education.