

Capstone Project

WOMEN RESOURCE CENTER: COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Assessing Women Empowerment



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Term/Semester: Spring 2023

Date: May 15, 2023

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Abstract:

In response to the current dramatically deteriorating situation in Lebanon, DPNA developed the project entitled “Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen” to promote the Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian women and girls’ empowerment and self-reliance on livelihoods and food security levels to raise the standard of living in the Taamir area. The project empowered 20 women with soft and technical skills to conduct income-generating activities, and increase their well-being and psychosocial status. It is required from them to attend women's empowerment and food safety workshops, and participate in the social kitchen operations to ensure the access of 80 vulnerable households to nutritious food meals. The study aims to test the effectiveness of the project in the community through an evaluative survey distributed on the 66 households to understand how the process of women empowerment in the community kitchen is influencing their life. Additionally, individual interviews were done with five women to understand how the empowerment objective of the project is leading to a change in their lives. The results show that women empowerment projects have a positive impact on the individual and community levels, and the study discusses them thoroughly with recommendations for having similar future initiatives in other regions.

List of Abbreviations:

WRC: CK: Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen

DPNA: Development for People and Nature Association

W.E: Women Empowerment

Introduction:

- **Situation in Lebanon**

Due to the Lebanese economic crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, Beirut Blast explosion, and the lack of political actions, the situation in Lebanon has been deteriorated dramatically since 2020, affecting all population groups in Lebanon, especially the most marginalized, to have a reduced access to their basic needs and services such as food, water, education and health care (United Nations Lebanon, 2022). In this context, the Lebanese citizens' situation has been worsening each day.

According to Maalouf (2020), on 17 October 2019, thousands of Lebanese protestors went across the country's streets to call for their economic and social rights after the Lebanese government had announced new tax measures to deal with the country's economic crisis. OCHA (2021) reported that due the economic crisis, the Lebanese pound lost value reached more than 90 per cent in 2019, and lead to an inflation of 120 per cent between May 2020 and May 2021. This caused an increasingly curving food prices, and the records on the revised food survival and minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) showed a 4 times higher cost than the beginning of the crisis, implied as a 21 per cent increase between March and April 2021.

The country's situation became worse on 4 August 2020 due to the port of Beirut explosion that caused an estimated US\$2.9-3.5 billion losses and US\$3.8-4.6 billion in material damage according to The World Bank (2020). Due to the explosion, 218 people were killed, 7,000 were wounded, at least 150 had a physical disability, and 300,000 were left homeless (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Since 2019, the currency devaluation and inflation have impoverished more than half of Lebanon's population and left them vulnerable to food insecurity. According to OCHA (2021), the government interventions and coping mechanisms failed to address the root causes that are influencing the ongoing economic crisis, which left several families struggling for their bare survival with no hope in the future, and threatens to push many others into poverty and food insecurity. Moreover, the multi-sectors documentations reported that based on several indicators, it was revealed that emergency assistance is required since most of the vulnerable households have crossed emergency thresholds.

The start of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in 2022 affected the food security on a global scale leading to skyrocket the food and fuel prices, and disappearance of some basic foodstuffs, where vulnerable populations were left even more vulnerable than before (LCAT, 2023). In Lebanon, the high fuel prices has led to a commensurate increase in basic items and services, and most importantly food. Food accessibility and availability has become a major concern, especially that people's salaries in the Lebanese pounds made them unable to buy high priced food, and the retailers had challenges in restocking food and maintaining their business. Competing for essential main resources increased as the affordable food items become scarcer (OCHA, 2021).

In parallel to the Ukrainian-Russian crisis, the initiatives' support, in particular that of the European Union has shifted dramatically towards responding to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, thus leaving vulnerable families in the MENA region, including Lebanon, without alternative aid to meet their basic needs. For instance, the number of Lebanese households experiencing severe restrictions in accessing food reached more than half of the population (World Food Program, 2021).

In response to the current situation, the Development for People and Nature Association initiated the “Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen” project to work on promoting women's empowerment and self-reliance on living standards and food security in the Al-Taameer area, by ensuring access to nutritious meals for 80 needy families, and empowering 20 women by providing light foods and technology. The participants were offered the necessary skills to carry out income-generating activities and increase their well-being and psychological and social status.

- **Description of the organization**

DPNA is a non-governmental independent organization established in 2003, and is located in Sidon, Lebanon. A non-violent democratic society where all individuals enjoy their rights and freedoms without discrimination is the vision that drives the work of DPNA to promote sustainable development for people and nature in its community service work across the Lebanese community. In all the projects, DPNA bases its work and interventions under the Sustainable Development Goals umbrella to cover the basic needs of the vulnerable populations. DPNA exists for the mission of empowering, mobilizing, and enabling citizens, as individuals and/or groups, to change and meet the needs of the communities, specifically the marginalized communities in rural, bordered, and poverty areas, through human rights-based approach. To achieve the vision and mission, DPNA works on four pillars, which are socio-economic development, good governance, providing service for human dignity, and environment. It demonstrates values and commitment to humanitarian sustainable development and it seeks partnerships to work on projects under different fields including women empowerment.

- **Description of the project**

The “WRC: CK” project is one of the projects DPNA started working on in November 2022. Its duration timeline is 6 months, and is supposed to end in May 2023. The donor of the project is Fondation De France, and its main objective is to promote girls and women empowerment and self-reliance on livelihoods and food security levels.

The project has six activity stages that start with rehabilitation of the center and pass through, equipping the center, outreach for women, capacity-building workshops on food safety and practices and women empowerment, to reach the final two stages of the social kitchen operation and social market. In the phases of rehabilitating and equipping the center, the main aim is to find a suitable place to have the kitchen, and it should be near the residence area of the participants for them to have an easy route to reach it. For the phase of outreaching the participants, women were contacted to check if they are interested in taking part in the project. After that, two workshops, each lasting for four days, were held. The first aimed to teach women all the needed skills to be used in the kitchen while preparing food and the basics of hygiene and sanitation. There is a pre-post survey prepared by DPNA to evaluate the impact of the workshop in developing the knowledge of the participants. The other workshop aimed to teach women about the concept of empowerment, where they knew more about their rights, how to defend for themselves, participate in decision making, and give back to their communities and support their families. The empowerment training sessions were not only to empower women in the workplace, but also to develop their self-confidence and acknowledge skills for their daily lives. Following that, the women are ready to participate in the kitchen work to learn more about work preparations, and be independent in generating their own income. They have to prepare 40 food meals daily to be distributed free to vulnerable families in the region. They are paid per day for

their work in the kitchen in order to feel responsible. The families are of total 80 distributed in two groups A and B; each has 40 households. After the end of this stage, the women are now ready to take part in initiatives, and for that, the social market stage is part of the project for the kitchen to be known, and for the women to market their products.

After the end of project timeline duration, an evaluation assessment will be done to analyze the success story of the project to test its effectiveness to be implemented in other regions. At the same time, the project's importance is in its continuity and sustainability, so that even after the timeframe ends, the project progress is nonstop and everlasting. The kitchen is initiated and will stay open to serve the project's aim, where the women can come and work in preparing food to be sold, so that they continue participating in the workforce, be independent, and generate their own income.

The involved participants in this project are unemployed women aged between 18 and 40 years old, from 3 nationalities: Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian, and they all live in the Taamir area. Additionally, for distributing the food meals in this project, there are 80 households benefiting, and they all live in the Taamir area, and are also from different nationalities.

According to Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development (2021), the resettlement in Al Taamir area in Saida started in 1956 after a destructive earthquake that led the Lebanese state to establish the National Institute for Construction for implementing shelter projects under Law 107/1956 to help the affected people all over Lebanon. Wars and local conflicts in Lebanon, particularly in the South, have affected this area leaving behind instability, physical damage, social grievances, and socio-economic deprivation. Currently, Al Taamir area is marked as one of the most vulnerable, marginalized, crowded and largest Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon,

housing more than 4,000 families from the Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian nationalities (almost 14,000 dwellers) in around 2,500 units. These residents live in deteriorated conditions as they are deprived from their basic services, and are segregated from the rest of the city and its companies and practices. The social and economic status in Al Taamir have been negatively impacted by the 2019's Lebanese economic crisis, which raises the risk of poverty in the area and hostile long-term effects on various aspects including employment and education of the vulnerable families and individuals.

According to the DPNA database, by zooming in on the Saida region in the field of poverty, Al-Taamir area is a neglected poverty area with a population of 18,000 people. The situation is more serious at the level of livelihood and therefore at the level of food security. Previous community needs assessments including women and executed in this area as part of the DPNA work have reflected that women are one the most marginalized groups and that women empowerment is one of the primary needs.

The “WRC: CK” project aims to promote women empowerment through capacity building and ensuring the operation of the social kitchen that will unites women to cook together where the nutritious food meals will be accessed by vulnerable families in the region of the project implementation; Taamir area.

Thus, the general objective of the project is to promote women and girls' empowerment and self-reliance on livelihoods and food security levels.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- a. Ensure the access of 80 vulnerable households located in Saida Taamir area to nutritious food meals.
- b. To empower 20 Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian women with soft and technical skills to conduct income-generating activities.
- c. To increase the well-being and psychosocial status of 20 Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian women.

The project, as well as the study, abides by several sustainable development goals framework, which all-in return will have a wide range of positive effects on individuals involved in the project. Its activities will ensure decreased hunger (SDG #2); through the healthy meals prepared; decent work, and economic growth (SDG #8); through the gained skills and revenues from the products sold; and reduced inequalities (SDG #10); through the involvement of all individuals despite their diversity and differences.

- **Relevance of the research- Significance of the study**

The present study is an evaluative research that attempts to provide fundamental information for establishing and developing social programs on women empowerment, without being primarily concerned with the causes (Marlow, 2010). It considers evaluating the project's women empowerment concept on the individual and community levels through semi-structured interviews and a survey.

- **Role of Social Worker**

As stated in social workers' code of ethics, social workers are responsible for respecting diversity, and protecting and empowering the most vulnerable groups in society. The social workers, especially those who work in the community field, can benefit from this research to address similar initiatives in their working area or can implement other professional development programs and interventions that could be designed to develop the skills of the individuals in the community based on their needs. This means that social workers should understand the needs of the community and address them in the projects they work on for the area. Furthermore, the social workers can be inspired from the project of this research to encourage diversity in the projects they implement, so that they can be more inclusive and target a greater population represented in the community. Moreover, the research can serve the social workers to acknowledge evaluating a project quantitatively and qualitatively to test its effectiveness on the individual and community levels. In addition, they can comprehend further project implementation plans to serve sustainability in the community.

Literature:

- **Description of women empowerment**

According to Delaney (1995), for several centuries in the history, the West argued the monogenetic theory of procreation that discussed only one principle of creation, where the nature is symbolically female, associated with earth, created by God and is both inferior to and dependent on him since God is figured symbolically as masculine. Hence, men are the generative agents and provide the “seed” while women are imagined as “soil” (barren or fertile). Based on this argumentative theory, followed with political procreation that Turkey is born from a union of

Father State (Father of Turk: Mostafa Kamal), symbolic progenitor of the people (Ataturk)) and Motherland (the vast Anatolian heartland). Thus, women may symbolize the nation, through association in the collective imagination with children as well as the familial future, but men represent it since they go to war supposedly for the sake of the 'women and children'. Moghadam (2013) claimed that this representation is a patriarchal gender contract meaning that there is shared collective agreement that men are the breadwinners and are responsible for financially maintaining wives, children, and elderly parents, and that women are wives, homemakers, mothers, and caregivers.

In the 1980s, the term empowerment emerged as a predominant concern for empowering women through the women's welfare approach. Women issues had firstly been brought in the panel discussion in the development policy after the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals initiation, where 193 countries had expressed their commitment to end gender inequality by 2030 depending the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 that is addressed to end gender inequality (SDG Agenda, n.d.).

As such, women who were passive recipients, after their capacities being primarily considered as wives, homemakers, mothers, and reproducers, were eventually reconsidered stakeholders for contributing to the economic development through welfare programs to gender mainstream empowerment and to recognize women's development, potential and contribution.

In this study of the "WRC: CK", empowerment was perceived as developing the self-reliance of women, helping them generate income independently and assure their well-being and psychosocial status. This discussion of women empowerment by psychological research (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010) suggests that empowerment besides being based on individual

achievements; it additionally enables people to improve and act on issues that are important for the community as well. For that, this study was also concerned with evaluating the impact of women empowerment through the project on the community level by assessing the coverage of food security levels of households benefiting from the food meals.

- **Key terms and definitions**

Self-reliance, income generation, and well-being and psychosocial status:

According to Ekesionye and Okolo (2012), their study that examined the self-reliance and development of the Nigerian society based on women empowerment and participation in economic activities concluded that the women major economic activities were women task oriented such as farming, craft, food processing, and hairdressing, and they funded them through personal savings, family, loan and credits. The recorded main obstacles women encountered in their economic activities were lack of government support, corruption by program implementation, cultural restrictions, family burden, husband influence and illiteracy/low level of education. These challenges make women have low levels of self-reliance, and consequently become unable to generate income.

Since the “WRC: CK” project covers this limitation through empowering women and facilitating their access to the work service, the study aims to evaluate how the women empowerment helped them to feel self-reliance, and benefit from generating income independently through familiar work labor, cooking, they do daily in their house as care work for their families.

From another dimension, Batool et al. (2016) reported that the results of the study in Pakistan on economic and psychosocial determinants of women psychological empowerment resulted in

indicating seven significant factors to determine women psychological empowerment. The first four (self-esteem, social support, husband's support and internal locus of control) lie in psychosocial category and the other three (Paid Job, Dowry and Education) belong to the economic determination group. Thus, the psychosocial factors are significant features in determining the well-being of women and empowering them, along with self-reliance, as part of developed self-esteem, and paid job, as part of the economic factor. For the "WRC: CK" project, these categories are issued to assist women to manage situations in their lives more effectively.

Food security levels:

A sustainable food system contributes to food security and nutrition for all and considers the economic, social, cultural, and environmental bases as safeguarded to create food security and nutrition for the future generations top (Braun et al., 2021). According to the "Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations" website (n.d.), several pressures including rapid population growth, urbanization, and growing wealth are challenging the food systems' ability to provide nutritious food, and to contribute to enhanced livelihood opportunities in an environmentally sustainable way.

Local communities in today's global marketplaces are continuously confronted with challenging and complex concerns involving regional food security. In Lebanon, since the beginning of 2021, over 400, 000 people have fallen into poverty as an effect of rising food insecurity, high unemployment, stagnating household incomes, and poor access to health services and education. In the first half of 2021, food insecurity affected 30 percent of the population. This number increasingly curved to reach an average of 46 percent of food insecure families in the second half of the same year (WFP Lebanon, 2022). This concludes that unemployment and unstable

livelihoods, lack of access to health services, education, and inadequate shelter are challenges strongly correlated with food insecurity, but the Lebanese community is not addressing them.

The “WRC:CK” project aims to cover the food needs of the families in the challenging times they are passing through by offering them a nutritious meal daily during the Holy month of Ramadan and by empowering women. As such, this enhances the local food security in Al Taamir area through engaging the talents, resources, and wisdom of women participants that are from the area to end food insecurity, and in the same time, reduce their low-income gap.

- **Literature and gaps**

Mahato and Vardhan (2021) reported that the case study analysis for an initiative in the concept of community kitchen in India during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed four major themes associated with empowerment, which are community, decisions, family and values and that directly highlight the economic and social implications. The authors discussed that community kitchens can represent as a solution for the society in terms of empowering women to add value to their family and community, taking into consideration that this influence of adding value is impacted and shaped through the woman’s own sense of self-esteem and worth for herself. However, the authors claimed that the study’s limitation was that the data was only collected from the empowered women rather from the beneficiaries of the community kitchen in the time the empowerment process includes the empowered women and their beneficiaries.

Other studies on women empowerment argue that a particular strategy for women inclusion is through self-employment in home-based production as traditional craft products (Al-Dajani et al., 2005). The authors report that such enterprise would give women independence as they

combine both the domestic production and the traditional feminized activity that goes with the prevailing norms in the patriarchal culture.

Last, not least, Hendricks (2019) reported the importance of women empowerment basing his analysis on the evidence-based strategy, and relating the results to understand the empowerment impact of the social level. The author reported that it has been found that women in poor households are the ones who absorb the consequences of the economic hardships more than men do; which implies that economic losses and challenges are not equally distributed based on gender. Similarly, the author argued that women are economic actors since their collective action is a tool for social transformation and is important for economic development. Upon women's engagement in economic activities, they are mostly unrecognized; however, coming together is a factor for a common cause, which influences social cohesion.

This study will cover the missing information in the literature (Mahato & Vardhan, 2021) through collecting data from the participating participants in the project, and from those who are benefiting from the project. The project fieldwork goes with Al-Dajani et al. (2005) study analysis since cooking is considered a female activity, and including the women in this type of work follows the traditional work productions. Additionally, the project is aiming to promote women empowerment and help women in generating their own income going with the author's argument (Hendricks, 2019) that women are economic actors. As such, the study results after understanding the impact of empowering women in their community and personal life will promote future research to work on women empowerment projects if the results were positive and outstanding.

- **Research question**

Since this research is evaluations and aims to focus on the women empowerment dimension, hence, the focus will be brought on analyzing this thematic area based on two themes. The first is by assessing and evaluating the satisfaction of the vulnerable families that are a target population in the project to be able to analyze women empowerment's influence on the community. Secondly, the paper aims to understand the effect of empowerment on the participating women's lives and decisions, which is linked to their self-reliance, generating income, and well-being and psychosocial status.

Based on that, the addressed research questions are:

- a. How can the project “WRC: CK” objective of serving the vulnerable families on the food security levels through WE initiatives show change in the community?
- b. Do women through formalized projects and initiatives feel empowered; experience heightened self-reliance, independence economically, and better well-being and psychosocial status?

In this context, the aim of the present study is to determine the impact of the WE initiative on women and their communities through the ability to find corresponding answers to the above two research questions.

Methodology:

The study is an evaluative research for the educational purpose, and its evaluation criteria purpose aims to evaluate the impact, sustainability, relevance and effectiveness of the “WRC:

CK” WE project. For the impact, the study objects to determine the long-term social change contributed by the project of the individual and community levels. For the sustainability, it covers the sustainable development goals framework as part of the sustainability design of the program. For the relevance, it aims to understand what is the new value added by the project to the women’s and community understanding of empowerment, and how it was significant to the community. For effectiveness, it tries to address if the output of the project meets its objective through answering the addressed research questions.

The research was based on using mixed methods for the research design, as it combined elements of the quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Marlow (2010), the quantitative method design is based on collecting numerical data and statistics while the qualitative design method is subjective. The aim behind mixing these two designs is to describe the evaluative results through the interpretism (qualitative) approach acknowledging the project’s impact on participating women, and to generalize them on the community, larger group that was benefiting from the project, through the positivism (quantitative) approach.

For the study population of this research, two categories for the participants are found. The first category is for quantitative data collection through face-to-face meeting to fill the survey, and it was made of 66 vulnerable households/ families, a sample of the total 80 households benefiting from the project to be able to generalize the results in this population (Marlow, 2010, p. 151). These participants were recruited following a simple random sampling selection, and their willingness to participate in the research. This means that all the 80 participating families in the project are the population and they were treated as a unit, for each element (one family) has an equal probability and same chance of being selected in the sample since it is random (Marlow, 2010). The second participants’ category is for the qualitative data collection, and it was made of

five women to conduct semi-structured interviews. The five women who were recruited out of twenty women participating in the project, were also chosen based on a simple random sampling probability method to share their experience in the project based on their willingness and approval to take part in the research and record their words.

At the beginning of the study, the purpose and importance of the study were explained to the participants from both categories before filling the survey or holding the interview by the researcher. Additionally, their voluntary, confidential and anonymous participation was provided so that the study follows a high standard of privacy with no risk and benefits at any stage nor at the level of losing or extra benefiting from any type of service offered by the project or by DPNA, and there would not be any bias information in the research. Moreover, the participants were informed that there will be no ability to link the answers for them nor will there be any attempts for anyone to identify the data responses for the survey and the voice recordings of the interviews since all of that will be saved according to a numerical order with no names nor any identity verification.

The study procedures were carried out in accordance with the DPNA. In the beginning of May 2023, 66 households participated in the survey of this study beside five women participated in the interviews, and that was after receiving the LAU IRB approval on the research.

The survey consisted of nine sentences the participants responded to using five-point Likert-type scales anchored from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree, and this process had to take 7 to 15 minutes. All families participating in the study received food meals as part of the project, and the focus of the survey questions was to understand their satisfaction on the quality, taste, odor, presentation, and quantity levels. Moreover, all families were living in the Al Taamir area to

understand the impact of the project on the rejoin and evaluate its sustainability. In addition, the survey responses measurement for participants' satisfaction was also based on how they acknowledge the role of women in the project and calculating the percentage of these participants as females for their participating in similar initiatives or as males for encouraging their women participate, and this was to test the relevance to the project and its effectiveness. Lastly, the participants were asked if they wished for the project's continuity and that was to understand the importance of the project's sustainable design.

The interview consisted of eight questions the participants had to answer and discuss in 30 to 45 minutes. All of the women participating in the study have attended the project workshops and worked in the kitchen as part of the project stages. The focus of the interview was to understand how participation in the project helped women feel more empowered, and how this change influenced their self-reliance, economic and social independence decisions, and well-being and psychosocial status. For the interviews, the measurement analysis was based on analyzing the change in the women's life before and after participating in the project to address the impact, effectiveness and relevance. The pre-experimental design was applied since using a control group is not feasible. The realist evaluation approach using the qualitative design (interviews) was followed to understand the underlying mechanisms of a project and to recognize whether the program is effective and the desired outcome was achieved (Westhorp, 2014).

Data Collection Process:

- **Survey**

Twenty-five participants filled the survey prepared for this study face to face while the rest 41 surveys were filled through a phone call with the participants since reaching their houses was not easily accessible. The collected data were then coded through Google Excel Sheets.

- **Interviews**

The five interviews were done on the weekdays at the kitchen center based on the women's willingness since they are present there. Their confidentiality was assured that their participation in the study does not affect their participation in the program nor deprive or benefit them from any services at DPNA. The data collected through recording the interviews was transcribed and translated using Microsoft Word into English to determine the meaning units through coding and labeling the reply for every participant alone to understand the linked themes between the responded answers after revising and comparing the codes in terms of similarities and differences (Pope et al., 2002).

Findings and Analysis:

- **Survey**

1. Based on the first research question addressing the impact of the WE project in serving the community and showing change, the findings of the survey are presented under three categories, which are households' satisfaction with the nutritious food meals, impact and sustainability of

the project, and participants' perceptions of WE projects. The corresponding interpretation for each finding is presented after each relative chart.

Finding 1.1: Households' satisfaction with the nutritious food meals

The satisfaction of the households with the nutritious food meals they were benefiting from during the Holy Month of Ramadan 2023 was examined according to various variables for quality level such as taste, odor, presentation and quantity level too. The results concluded are presented in the below table.

Response Statement question	1: Strongly Disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neutral	4: Agree	5: Strongly Agree
The nutritious food meals are of a good taste.	0	0	3	28	35
The nutritious food meals are of a good odor.	0	0	1	19	46

The nutritious food meals presentation is good.	0	0	0	9	57
The nutritious food meals benefit my family.	0	9	10	27	20

Table 1: Households’ satisfaction with the nutritious food meals

For the aspect of the quality of the food meals, the study showed that only 4.5% (3 respondents) of the participants expressed a neutral standing from the taste of the food meals with 0% disagreeing and strongly disagreeing the fact that its taste is not good. The majority 53% (35 respondents) strongly agreed that the taste is good with the remaining 42.5% (28 respondents) agreeing with its taste. Similarly, for the odor of the meals, none of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the food meals is of a good odor with only one participant (1.5%) expressing that the odor is neutral while the majority 69.7% (46 respondents) and 28.8% (19 respondents) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the odor is good. Additionally, the presentation of the food meals gained the majority of the responses (86.4%) from 57 participants to strongly agree that it is good while the rest 13.6% (9 participants) agreeing. None of the 66 participants stated to disagree or strongly disagree or be neutral in anything related to the food meals presentation aspect. However, for the benefit of the food meals for the family, nine respondents (13.6%) disagreed to be benefiting from the meal commenting that one meal is not enough per family while 15.2% (10 respondents) had a neutral response. Still, the majority

40.9% (27 respondents) replied to be agreeing on the family's benefit from the food meal followed by the rest of the percentage (30.3%) of 20 respondents strongly agreeing on the benefit.

Analysis 1.1: Households' satisfaction with the nutritious food meals

The results gathered determine that the study's conclusion for the satisfaction aspect is high since most of the households seem to agree and strongly agree on the quality of the offered food from taste, odor and presentation. Since the quantity is fixed, the opinion behind the benefiting aspect varied, and this is due to the fixed quantity per meal that is not changeable with the household number of members. This is considered as a limitation for the project in the distributing aspect since the quantity is limited to small families. Thus, future projects that aim to distribute food meals per household should take into consideration to cover this gap, maybe by trying to distribute the food meal per every 1-2 people or by trying to offer big families two counted meals instead of only one. However, still the impact of this project per household is considered progressive since the lowest number for the agreeing and strongly agreeing replies per household was 47 responses, which means it is more than 70% believe in the successful impact of the project in achieving food security on the quantity and quality dimensions. As such, it is determined that the WE project is serving positive support for the community.

Finding 1.2: Impact and sustainability of the project

Response \\ Statement question	1: Strongly Disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neutral	4: Agree	5: Strongly Agree
Similar empowerment initiatives positively influence the community.	0	0	2	19	45
The sustainability of the project is important.	0	0	0	18	48

Table 2: Impact and Sustainability of the project

The results collected to acknowledge the impact and the sustainability of the project showed high positive standings. 72.7% (48 respondents) and 27.3% (18 respondents) strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the continuity of the project is important. Similarly, 68.2% (45 respondents) and 28.8% (19 respondents) strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the importance of similar empowerment initiatives for the community while only two participants (3%) had a neutral opinion.

Analysis 1.2: Impact and sustainability of the project

The findings conclude that the project had a positive impact on the community since the participants were encouraging its sustainability and the initiation of similar programs in the area. Hence, the sustainability of this project serves the long-term social-change impact contributed by the project for the community level. This analysis related to the first research question by understanding that the project’s objective of serving vulnerable families on the food security levels in the Al Taamir area leaves a positive impact on the community and that with continuity through the WE initiatives can show further sustainable changes.

Finding 1.3: Participants’ perceptions of W.E projects

Response Statement question	1: Strongly Disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neutral	4: Agree	5: Strongly Agree
The women in my family think about participating in similar projects.	0	5	19	24	18

The family encourages its women to participate in similar initiatives.	0	8	17	21	20
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Table 3: Participants’ perceptions of W.E projects

The findings of the survey showed a variation in the answers upon understanding the participants’ perceptions and interest in the W.E projects. 7.6% (respondents) disagreed that the women in their households thought to participate in similar projects at the time 28.8% (19 respondents) had a neutral opinion. In comparison, the highest percentage (36.4%) by 24 respondents replied to agree that the women in their families think to participate in similar projects with the rest 18 respondents (27.3%) having a strongly agreeing opinion. On the other hand, 12.1% (8 respondents) disagreed that the family encourages the women to participate in similar initiatives, while 25.5% (17 respondents) had a neutral opinion. In contrary, approximately similar averages, 31.8% (21) and 30.3% (20) reported to agree and strongly agree respectively that the family encourages women to participate in empowerment working initiatives.

Analysis 1.3: Participants’ perceptions of W.E projects

Comparing the collected responses, still several women and their families have a neutral opinion with percentages 28.7% and 25.8% respectively in thinking of participation in empowerment initiatives. Due to the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon, this idea is fragile and changeable. This is concluded by the fact that women and families who agree on participation ranged with a

higher percentage than those who strongly agree (36.4% agree for women and 27.3% strongly agree for women while 31.8% agree for families and 30.3% strongly agree for families). At the same time, still five respondents replied that their women do not think of participating while eight respondents stated that their families do not accept their participation.

Analyzing this disagreeing point of view referring back to the comments of the participants on the survey is justifying their answers, it is concluded that the disagreeing and neutral responses for women not thinking of participation in similar initiatives have several explanations. First, it is due to their unpaid care work at homes leading to their inability to participate in any initiative for labor work due to the limited free time and house responsibilities. According to Moghadam (2013), this falls under the patriarchal gender contract where women are considered as wives, mothers and caregivers. As such, what women do across the world under these identities is typically unacknowledged as “work” and is unpaid because it takes place within the homes, private sphere, and is not regulated by the state or the market. Second, women thought of their age and health issues as a main concern, where they think getting older in age and suffering from any health issue can hinder their progressive participation, especially that they are responsible for the family caregiving roles. However, from the families’ perspective, the disagreeing and neutral opinion was based on the traditional patriarchal contract that women should stay at homes since they have homecare duties to do, raise their children, and look after the family’s needs. Additionally, five families commented that their neutral opinion depends on the work atmosphere since their values do not let them accept their women presence in a work environment along with men nor long time durations outside home, considering 2-4 hours as a good average range. On the other hand, both women and families who strongly agreed for women’s participation in empowerment projects believed that it is their right to be present in the

community and practice in the work field if they feel it is good for them. Similarly, the women and families who agreed believed the same; however, the responses were based on the necessity of women working to support the family in the ongoing economic crisis in the country and the importance of her participation for the community as well. As such, the relevance of the project is in its added value to serve the community and influence the Al Taamir residents' perception on women empowerment, especially in the current situation of Lebanon. The families benefiting from the project were influenced by the project positively, which gave a spirit for women to participate in similar projects and for their families to encourage them since due to their vulnerable situation in the rejoin, women empowerment is an appropriate step to positively impact the situation in the community.

2. Based on the second research question, the survey findings responded in concluding one category that implies the participants' perception of importance of women participation in the project.

Finding 2.1: Participants' perception of importance of women participation in the project

Response	1: Strongly Disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neutral	4: Agree	5: Strongly Agree
Statement question					

The participation of women in the project has a positive impact on the family.	0	0	6	33	27
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Table 4: Participants’ perception of importance of women participation in the project

The results showed that none of the 66 participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the women’s participation in the project does not have a positive impact on the family. The majority 50% (33 responses) agreed on the positive impact to the family through women’s participation, with 40.9% (27 participants) strongly agreeing on the idea while only 9.1% (6 respondents) had a neutral opinion.

Analysis 2.1: Participants’ perception of importance of women participation in the project

This high result of people agreeing and strongly agreeing on the positive impact the women participation is offering to the family acknowledges the effectiveness of the project where the achievements led to prove that the planned output is met. The objective of the project stated that it aims to empower women so that this impacts their livelihood, and with the survey responses, the participants have expressed that their participation serves this individual change in serving the family that is also part of the community as well.

Nonetheless, to better understand the effectiveness, impact, relevance and sustainability of the project on the individual level, the study followed another data collection method, which is semi-structured interviews with women participating in the project.

- **Interviews**

In the context of assessing W.E, this study highlights the importance of empowering women on the individual and community levels through highlighting thematically linked answers from the interviews that can respond to the research questions. The first research question is categorized for the responses on the community level while the second describes the research findings in relation to women experiencing heightened self-reliance, independence economically, and better well-being and psychosocial status. The below table represents the characteristics of the women that participated in the study.

Participant	Age	Previous Work Opportunity	Interview Location
1	35	Yes	Women Resource Center
2	29	Yes	Women Resource Center
3	36	Yes	Women Resource Center
4	34	No	Women Resource Center
5	35	No	Women Resource Center

Table 5: Characteristics of the women that participated in the study

3. Findings of the interviews on the community level

For the community level, the individuals during the interview were asked about the challenges and strengths in their community that could be associated with empowerment. As such, two central themes emerged to explain women's empowerment including the family and the community surrounding.

3.1. Women empowerment and the family

Based on the data collected, the women claimed that empowerment does not only help them on a personal scale, rather it also impacts their connections with their surroundings, where one of the participants shared, "Empowerment helps you deal better with your family, children, and husband" (participant 1). In the same aspect, participant five stated, "The empowerment helped me in my personal life in dealing with my children and family". Additionally, some of the women's families were a strength to encourage women to seek the empowerment project, where participant two expressed, "My family was supportive, and they encouraged me to take this step instead of spending my time at home claiming that I should never say no without trying." Similarly, participant 4 stated, "I stopped working when I got married, and my husband is my supporter to come and participate in the project to fill my time."

3.2. Women empowerment and the surrounding community

According to the participants, the project is leaving a positive impact on the community, where participant 5 expressed "The people are happy and thankful for everything you offer for them since they need every single support". Additionally, the women, after participating in the

empowerment program, are more looking to be active in the community, where participant 1 stated, “Being empowered gives me the push to open my own business in the future.”

From another dimension, the strength of the empowerment is in its ability to be transmitted between the women where they encourage each other to learn more. Participant two stated, “Women who participated in the project are influencing other women in their neighborhood to also take their step and try participating in initiatives, and I joined this project after hearing from my neighbors’ stories in taking part in the initiative”. Nonetheless, participant 4 expressed, “Women think that they are barely managing their house duties and for that, they cannot join the project for not enough time for them.” This implies that women share the project experience between each other, but some do not take the step to free their schedules to participate.

In addition, similar to the gathered data from the interviews, the women expressed that the community is benefiting from the food meal, where one of the participants shared, “As I know for my neighbors, the food was of a good quality, but the quantity is not enough for big families. Additionally, the community is happy with the project and looking for its sustainability and continuity.”

3. Analysis of the interviews on the community level

The interviews resulted in concluding that the families of the participants are a center of support for their participation in the project, and the empowerment learning is helping them to give back for their family, houses, and children. Additionally, this project is impacting the community positively since people's reputation on its work is discussed between the women that try to encourage each other to participate. Still, some people in the community try to find barriers;

however, as the women shared, empowerment taught them to defend their opinions in the community.

4. Findings of the interviews on the individual level

For the individual level, the participants during the interview were asked about what are the changes brought to their lives after participating in the project empowerment workshops. Thus, the individual personal development theme emerged under three compromised subcategories: psychological well-being and self-appreciation, relationships and decision-making and time management, based on what was seen in experiences of the five women.

4.1. Psychological well-being and self-appreciation

Based on the data analysis, it is concluded empowerment influences the psychological well-being of the women, where the more empowered they are, the better is their well-being. For instance, participant 4 stated, “The empowerment project taught me to think by myself and for myself before anything else.” As such, the participating women had gained the capability to do self-care, and prioritize their well-being in the first stance. Furthermore, the participants expressed that their well-being is impacted when they look for serving others in the community. Participant 1 claimed that the pressure women are living in due to the challenging situation in the country is increasing their stress level, which is leaving them helpless. She stated, “Volunteering for the community is a therapy for humans, and participating in this project is for our well-being as well, not only for the community”. Women are finding in the empowerment project a space to release their tensions and develop their well-being as well as a chance to share in a community service activity that helps them enjoy spending their time with a team.

From the same aspect, it is concluded that the women after empowerment started to self-appreciate their efforts. For instance, they acknowledged the importance of their participation. The project is serving their personal development and community service, and they took the decision to join. Participant five stated, “Empowerment taught be how to defend for myself, be self-confident and strong.” Moreover, participant one expressed, “Empowerment helped me acknowledge my self-worth, appreciate myself, control my emotions, stress and tension, and deal with the challenges I face with being stronger.” This implies that, when women start to appreciate their self-worth, their well-being is impacted positively and they can feel empowered. For instance, when the women were asked to state a recommendation for the project, one of the participants replied, “I see that the empowerment sessions should be given in parallel to the kitchen work as well since they help the individuals also acknowledge their self-worth, build relationships with other, develop their well-being, express self-confidence, feelings...” (Participant 3).

4.2. Relationships

Another theme introduced by women empowerment was building new relationships with others, since according to the data collected, the women claimed that it is impossible to spend all their lives in their houses, and that they need to build up new relations in life and to spend time worthy. The empowerment project helped them achieve that on a personal scale, where they acknowledged the importance of teamwork and all the women in the project became one family. On the accurate adherence to relation after participating in the project, participant 4 explained, “Due to the challenging situation in the country, we are not leaving our houses as before to spend time with our friends. In this project, we got the chance to break this house routine and meet new people.” Another participant shared, “The project helped us know new people, gain new

experience, and gave us a chance to leave the house. The group of women I worked with in the kitchen became my new friends” (participant 5).

4.3. Decision-making and time management

According to the participants, another outcome of seeking empowerment throughout the project was the capability to participate in decision-making in their personal lives. In this regard, participant 1 stated, “Women usually say that they do not have time, but participating in this project helped me manage my responsibilities and I calculate this as a success since I took the decision of being here and I found time to do that. Now, I can practice decision-making in my life to prioritize my tasks and find time for everything. I finish some of my home duties before coming here and then when I come back I continue to find time for my family”. Similarly, participant 3 stated, “As all women, I have responsibilities, but I took my decision to manage and organize my time to come and join the project since I am being interested and gaining experience”.

Furthermore, on the participation in decision-making, another participant explained, “Previously, I had taken several wrong decisions in my life and had blamed others for the wrong decisions I have taken. The empowerment program taught me to be responsible for the decisions I take since I took it, and thus I should accommodate the consequences, not the others. Currently, due to the empowerment program, I took my decision to fulfill my dream of becoming a tourist guide, and for that, I am searching for a place to study in and receive a certificate in the career I am passionate to work in” (participant 2).

4. Analysis of the interviews on the individual level

Based on the collected data, the results of the interview conclude that women empowerment impacts the personal development of women differently and on various aspects. The sustainable design of the project is covered since according to the responses of the women, they expressed interest and wished for its continuity. From another aspect, women throughout the project acknowledged an added value about the importance of empowerment and how it is relevant to their life in family issues, decision-making, time management and teamwork. This ends up concluding the effectiveness of the project, where women expressed the impact of empowerment in their lives, which is what the objective of the project addresses.

Other data could be analyzed from the interviews and could be discussed in future studies on women empowerment including themes of love, cooperation, teamwork spirit, and moral stability since the women have discussed few ideas in these areas, where empowerment is linked to these concepts, but thematic links were not concluded due to the limited number of the interviews done.

Discussion:

The results of the survey and the interviews concluded several analyses discussed above. The study concludes the importance of the empowerment project on the individual and community levels; nonetheless, for the success of future empowerment initiatives, it recommends a lengthier duration for the project. The six months period was not enough for the women to experience all aspects of the kitchen work in addition that they preferred to continue receiving empowerment sessions throughout the entire project's period. The study concluded no other limitations for the projects, yet, it recommends for similar initiatives to also, include other work categories such as

hospitality, sewing, designing, since some women may prefer other types of work practices. Still, it is important to argue that an empowerment project should not only be limited to aspects of work since as discussed by the women in the interviews, the empowerment is for all aspects of life.

The study was able to find answers to the research questions. The discussed conclusion explored the first research question through understanding how the project is showing change in the community. This study covered the gap in the literature (Mahato & Vardhan, 2021), through being able to evaluate the project's impact on the community. Furthermore, it goes beyond Al-Dajani et al. (2005) perceptions of including women in home-based production employment, where one of the women participants expressed that, “Even though we are familiar with the kitchen work, there were several things to learn as a team. Additionally, it was the first time to work with someone in the kitchen and distribute the tasks among us and share our experience” (participant 1). Lastly, the study shows that the women can help their families during the hardships and economic losses, which contradicts Hendricks (2019) conclusion that women engagement in the economic activities is unrecognized. In the survey, the participants expressed the importance of women empowerment for the family, and the women participants also shared in the interviews that their empowerment helps them in volunteering for the community. However, the study did not cover the gender barrier pressure due to the double burden work as Hendricks (2019) argued in its research.

Conclusion:

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the “WRC: CK” project and explore its impact on women empowerment initiatives on the individual and community levels. Its participants were

formed of two categories; the first 66 families benefiting from the food meals offered by the project and had to fill a 7 to 15 minutes survey while the other from 5 women participated in the project and had to participate in a 30 to 45 minutes interview. According to the results of the survey, the participants reflected the importance of the project on serving the community and acknowledged a good reputation of its sustainability, especially that the participants expressed satisfaction on the quality of the meals, taste, odor and presentation, and most of them agreed to be benefiting from it. Some argued that the quantity is not enough per family. As such, the community level is impacted positively by the project, and the sustainability of similar initiatives in vulnerable communities can benefit the citizens in their lives.

During the interviews, the women participants shared common ideas about how their presence in the project is positively influencing their community claiming that the community they live in is vulnerable, the project is giving hope to their families, and to the families they are serving with the food meals. They also shared that the project is still small and not targeting a big population; however, with its progress and sustainability, it will reach more households and show further impacts and changes , especially that the services meet the people's needs.

On a community-individual scale, the survey resulted in concluding that there is still a gap in accepting the participation of women in similar initiatives due to the double work burden of women and the traditional concept of men as breadwinners and their unacceptance to let their wives work since they are responsible of the house. Nonetheless, the participants expressed an agreeing position that women who work can benefit their families positively. The women participating in the interviews expressed a similar opinion, where they claimed that recently the families in Al Taamir started thinking about the future and importance of empowerment for the

family as a whole not only women; however, before, they used to only think about what they are going to eat today and how will they live this day.

On the individual personal scale, the women shared several strengths for the empowerment project under several developmental categories as well-being, self-appreciation, time management, decision-making, and relationships.

These outcomes result in responding to the explored research questions, and acknowledging the importance of the empowering projects in the community and individual levels, which implies the success of the study in reaching new themes and conclusions.

The study was not able to conclude themes relating empowerment to the aspects of economic independence and serious life decisions. Moreover, another limitation could be the inability to conduct further interviews nor to have all the surveys filled face to face with the participants as planned.

Future researches can delve into the economic and life decision themes through the following case study approach since applying it helps gather detailed biographical data about the participants, and it helps in addressing the “how”, “why”, and “what” (Crowe et al., 2011). Additionally, future studies could work on understanding the importance of empowerment in serving gender inclusion in the community since the present study determined the community’s perception of women empowerment from the women and family levels, but did not investigate the gender inclusion impact on the community.

Undoubtedly, empowerment of women through acquiring importance of their participation in initiatives increases the chances to have a positive impact on their personal development and

consequently, their involvement will bring change to their families and communities as well and facilitates the achievement of favorable outcomes on the individual and community levels.

[Appendix:](#)

- **LAU IRB Approval:**

To: Ms. Assma Awkal

To: Dr. Lina Abi Rizk, Visiting Lecturer, School of Arts & Sciences

Date: April 27, 2023

RE: IRB #: LAU.SAS.LA2.27/Apr/2023

Protocol Title: Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen; Assessing Women Empowerment

Review Type: Expedited - Initial

Approval Issued 27 April 2023

Expiration Date: 27 April 2024

The above referenced research project has been approved by the Lebanese American University,

Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the

Approved Research Protocol and all submitted documents listed:

LAU IRB Exempt Protocol Application: Received 10 April 2023

Research Proposal: Received 10 April 2023

Letter to DPNA: Received 13 April 2023

Informed Consent–Interviews–English & Arabic: Received 10 April 2023, amended 13 April 2023

Interview Questions: Received 10 April 2023

IRB Comments sent: 11 April 2023, 18 & 26 April 2023

PI response to IRB’s comments dated: 13 April 202, 27 April 2023

CITI Training – Lina Abi Rizk Cert. # 52767230 Dated (26 April 2023)

CITI Training - Assma Awkal Cert. # 52806399 Dated (18 November 2022)

- **Consent form: (Applicable in English and Arabic)**

. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW WOMEN RESOURCE CENTER:
COMMUNITY KITCHEN; ASSESSING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project by completing an interview.

I am Assma Awkal, a student at the Lebanese American University and I am completing this research project as part of my senior capstone study. The purpose of this interview is to understand the influence women empowerment has on the community, and individual women's decisions, particularly at the social and economic levels. You, as a beneficiary/participant benefiting from an empowering women project, are the best person to describe these experiences.

There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The information you provide will be used to enhance and improve the understanding of women empowerment and influence the women's lives and the community they live in. You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. The study will involve 66 survey responses gathering, each lasting approximately 5 to 10 minutes, from families receiving food meals as part of the project and 5 interviews, each lasting for approximately 30 to 45 minutes, with women participating in the project empowering activities.

By continuing with the interview, you agree with the following statements:

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project.
2. I understand that my answers will not be released to anyone and my identity will remain anonymous. My name will not be written on the questionnaire nor be kept in any other records.
3. When the results of the study are reported, I will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer my identity. Only researchers will have access to view any data collected during this research however, data cannot be linked to me.
4. I understand that I may withdraw from this research any time I wish and that I have the right to skip any question I do not want to answer.
5. I understand that my refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which I otherwise am entitled to.

6. I have been informed that the research abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes and that the research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Lebanese American University

7. I understand that if I have any additional questions, I can ask the research team listed below.

8. I have read and understood all statements on this form.

9. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project by completing the following interview.

. CONSENT TO ALLOW AUDIO RECORDING DURING INTERVIEW

I freely give my consent to allow the research team to record my interview. All of my questions regarding the recordings have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to allow my input today to be recorded in any way and that I may withdraw from the session at any time. I freely give my consent to allow my input to be recorded through audio recordings.

I agree to have my interview audio recorded

I do NOT agree to recording, and request note-taking only

. CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

I have carefully read the above information about this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to take part in or withdraw from the study at any time. I freely approve the content of this form and give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in the study. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date (dated by the participant)

. STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

I certify that I have fully explained to the person taking part in the study the nature of the above research study, the potential risks and benefits and I have offered to answer any question that he/she may have.

Signature of Principal Investigator/Designate

Date

Name of Principal Investigator/Designate

. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact:

Name (PI): Assma Awkal

Phone number: 71 487 489

Email address: Assma.awkal@lau.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

Institutional Review Board Office,

Lebanese American University

3rd Floor, Dorm A, Byblos Campus

Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext. (2546)

irb@lau.edu.lb

. نموذج موافقة للمشاركة في مقابلة مركز الموارد النسائية: المطبخ المجتمعي؛ تقييم تمكين المرأة

أود أن أدعوكم للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي من خلال استكمال المقابلة.

أنا، أسما عوكل، طالبة في الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية، وأنني أقوم بهذه الدراسة كجزء من بحثي في مشروع التخرج، وتهدف هذه المقابلة لجمع معلومات مرتبطة بتأثير تمكين المرأة على المجتمع والقرارات الفردية، وخاصة الاجتماعية والاقتصادية. أنت، بصفتك مستفيدة/ أو مشارك/ من مشروع تمكين المرأة، تعتبر أفضل شخص لوصف هذه التجارب.

لا توجد مخاطر معروفة، أو أي ضرر مرتبط بهذه الدراسة خارج تلك التي توجهونها في الحياة اليومية العادية.

يُستفاد من المعلومات التي ستقدمونها في فهم وتحليل تأثير تمكين المرأة على النساء ومجتمعاتهم، وستشمل هذه الدراسة البحثية 66 إجابة استقصائية، كل منها ما يقرب من 5 إلى 10 دقائق، من العائلات التي تتلقى طعامًا كجزء من المشروع. وهناك أيضا 5 مقابلات، تدوم كل منها حوالي 30 إلى 45 دقيقة، وستشارك بها النساء التي تقوم بأنشطة التمكين الخاصة بالمشروع.

من خلال الاستمرار في المقابلة، فإنك توافق مع العبارات التالية:

1. لقد أعطيت ما يكفي من المعلومات حول هذا المشروع البحثي.

2. لن يتم التصريح او الإفراج عن اجاباتي إلى أي شخص، وسوف تبقى هويتها مجهولة. لن يكتب اسمي على الاستبيان ولن يحفظ في أي سجلات أخرى.

3. عندما يتم تقديم نتائج الدراسة، لن يتم التعرف إلى بالاسم أو أي معلومات أخرى يمكن أن تستخدم للاستدلال على هويتي. الباحثون فقط لديهم الحق في الاستطلاع على البيانات التي تم جمعها خلال هذا البحث لكن البيانات لا يمكن أن تكون مرتبطة بي.

4. أدرك أن مشاركتي طوعية وبإمكاني الانسحاب من هذا البحث في أي وقت أشاء أو تخطي أي سؤال لا اشعر بالرد عليه.

5. أنا أدرك بأن رفضه للمشاركة لا ينتج عنه أي جزء أو فقدان أي من الحقوق التي أنا مؤهل لها.

6. لقد تم ابلاغي ان البحث يلتزم بجميع القوانين الأخلاقية المعترف بها، وبأن هذه الدراسة تمت مراجعتها والموافقة عليها من قبل مكتب اللجنة الأخلاقية في الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية.

7. أنا أفهم أنه إذا كان لدي أي أسئلة إضافية يمكنني ان اطلب من فريق البحث المدرجة أسماؤهم في القائمة أدناه.

8. لقد قرأت وفهمت كل البيانات الواردة في هذا النموذج

9. أنا أوافق طوعا للمشاركة في هذا المشروع البحثي من خلال استكمال المقابلة التالية.

. الموافقة على السماح لتسجيل صوت أثناء المقابلة:

أعطي موافقتي بحرية للسماح لفريق البحث بتسجيل مقابلي. تم الرد على جميع أسئلتي المتعلقة بالتسجيلات بما يرضي. أعلم أنني قد أرفض السماح بتسجيل مداخلاتي اليوم بأي شكل من الأشكال وأنتني قد انسحب من الجلسة في أي وقت. أمنح موافقتي بحرية للسماح بتسجيل مداخلاتي من خلال التسجيلات الصوتية أو المرئية.

- أوافق على تسجيل مقابلي صوتيا فقط

- لا أوافق على التسجيل، وأطلب تدوين المقابلة خطيا

. الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة:

لقد قرأت الوصف أعلاه من هذه الدراسة. وقد تمت الاجابة على جميع أسئلتني بشكل مُقنع لي. وأنا أعلم أنه يمكنني ان ارفض المشاركة في أو الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت. أعطي موافقتي بحرية على مضمون هذا الطلب وعلى المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. أنا أفهم أنه من خلال التوقيع على هذا النموذج أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة. وقد تلقيت نسخة من هذا النموذج لأخذها معي.

اسم المشترك

التاريخ

توقيع المشترك

.....

. بيان موافقة الشخص الحاصل على الموافقة

أؤكد بأنني شرحت للشخص المشارك في الدراسة طبيعة الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه و مخاطرها المُحتملة ومنافعها، وقد عرضت أن أجيب على أية أسئلة قد يكون/تكون له/ا عن الدراسة.

التاريخ

توقيع الباحث الرئيسي/المعين

اسم الباحث الرئيسي/المعين

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة يمكنك الاتصال:

الاسم: أسما جهاد عوكل

رقم الهاتف: 489 487 71

البريد الإلكتروني: Assma.awkal@lau.edu

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة حول حقوقك كمشارك في هذه الدراسة، أو كنت تريد التحدث إلى شخص خارج البحث،

يرجى الاتصال:

مكتب لجنة الأخلاقيات،

الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية

.Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext

(2546)

irb@lau.edu.lb

تم الموافقة على هذا الاستبيان من قبل مكتب اللجنة الأخلاقية في الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية

- **Survey Form: (Applicable in English and Arabic)**

Description: The response on this survey will help the principal investigator, Assma Awkal, understand and analyze the impact the distribution of the nutritious food meals by the Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen leaves on your life as part of the community.

.....

Date: _____

Number of participating individual: _____

Number of members in the house: _____

Nationality: _____

.....

Please use the following Likert scale to respond to the below sentences.

1: strongly disagree

2: disagree

3: neutral

4: agree

5: strongly agree

.....

Please respond to the following.

The nutritious food meals are of a good taste.

1 2 3 4 5

The nutritious food meals are of a good odor.

1 2 3 4 5

The nutritious food meals presentation is good.

1 2 3 4 5

The nutritious food meals benefit my family.

1 2 3 4 5

The participation of women in the project has a positive impact on the family.

1 2 3 4 5

Similar empowerment initiatives positively influence the community.

1 2 3 4 5

The women in my family think about participating in similar projects.

1 2 3 4 5

The family encourages its women to participate in similar initiatives.

1 2 3 4 5

The sustainability of the project is important.

1 2 3 4 5

.....

Are there any further comments you like to share?

Thank you for your participation

الوصف: الرد على هذا الاستطلاع يساعد المحققة الرئيسية، أسما عوكل؛ في فهم وتحليل تأثير توزيع وجبات الطعام المغذية

من قبل مركز الاستعانة بالنساء: المطبخ المجتمعي على حياتك كجزء فرد وجزء من المجتمع.

.....

التاريخ: _____

رقم المعني بالمشاركة: _____

عدد أفراد الأسرة: _____

الجنسية: _____

.....

التالي للرد على الجمل أدناه. Likert الرجاء استخدام مقياس

1. أعارض بشدة / لا أوافق أبدا

2. أعارض / لا أوافق

3. محايد

4. أوافق

5. أوافق بشدة

.....

الرجاء إبداء رأيك في العبارات التالية.

وجبات الطعام ذات مذاق جيد.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

وجبات الطعام ذات رائحة طيبة.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

طريقة تقديم وجبات الطعام جيدة.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

وجبات الطعام تعود بالنفع إلى عائلتي.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

مشاركة المرأة في المشروع لها أثر إيجابي على الأسرة.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

مبادرات التمكين المماثلة لها تأثير إيجابي على المجتمع.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

النساء في عائلتي يحبذن المشاركة في مشاريع مماثلة.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

تشجع الأسرة نساءها على المشاركة في مبادرات مماثلة.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

استدامة المشروع أمر مهم.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

هل لديك ملاحظات أخرى؟

شكرا على المشاركة

- **Interview Questions: (Applicable in English and Arabic)**

1. How would you describe the experience of participating in this project?
2. What are the changes that happened in/ brought to in your life after participating in the project?
- / **add;** Does the project influence your decisions in life? If yes, is this influence positive or negative when it comes to making decisions? (In case, the responded answer did not cover the section of decision-making)
3. Does the project lead to changes in your community, if there are any, what are they?
4. What are the advantages of this project?
5. What is your plan after the end of this project?
6. What is your understanding of empowerment?

7. What are your recommendations for improvement for future initiatives?

* Note: these questions will be asked for the participants during the interview that is assigned to be approximately 30-45 minutes, and are not shared with them as a form to check and read. The participants can skip answering a question if they do not feel okay to answer it.

الأسئلة:

1. كيف تصف تجربة المشاركة في هذا المشروع؟

2. ما هي التغييرات التي حدثت في حياتك بعد المشاركة في المشروع؟ / هل يؤثر المشروع على قراراتك في الحياة؟ إذا كانت

الإجابة بنعم، فهل هذا التأثير إيجابي أم سلبي عندما يتعلق الأمر باتخاذ القرار؟

3. هل يؤدي المشروع إلى تغييرات في مجتمعك، إن وجدت، ما هي؟

4. ما هي مزايا هذا المشروع؟

5. ما هي خطتك بعد انتهاء هذا المشروع؟

6. ما هو مفهومك عن التمكين؟

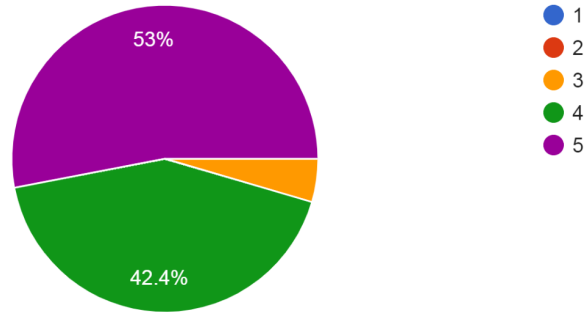
7. ما هي توصياتك لتحسين المبادرات المستقبلية؟

* ملحوظة: ستطرح هذه الأسئلة على المشاركين أثناء المقابلة التي تم تخصيصها لحوالي 30-45 دقيقة، ولم يتم مشاركتها معهم كنموذج للمراجعة والقراءة. يمكن للمشاركين أن يطلبوا تخطي الإجابة على سؤال إذا لم يشعروا بخير للإجابة عليه.

- **Survey Pie-Chart Responses:**

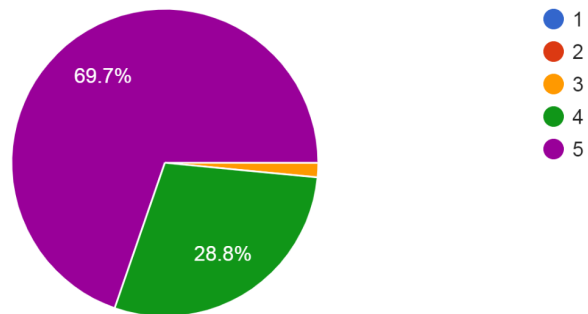
Question 1. The nutritious food meals are of a good taste.

66 responses



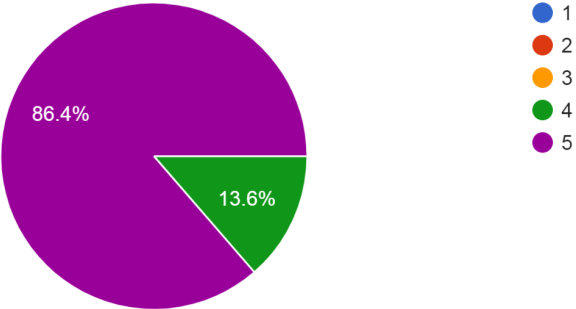
Question 2. The nutritious food meals are of a good odor.

66 responses



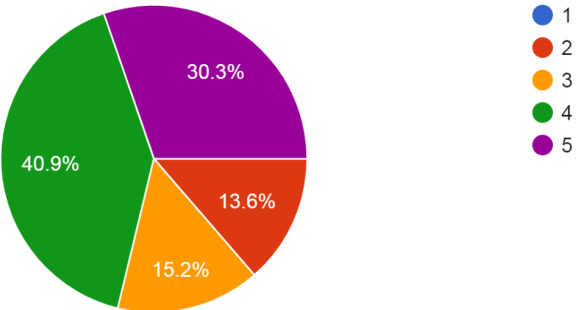
Question 3. The nutritious food meals presentation is good.

66 responses



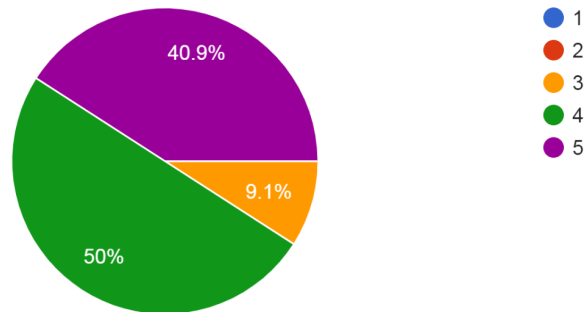
Question 4. The nutritious food meals benefit my family.

66 responses



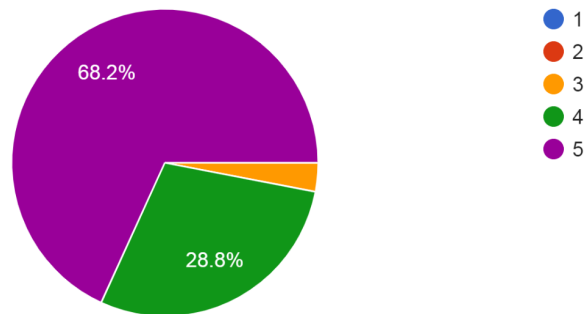
Question 5. The participation of women in the project has a positive impact on the family.

66 responses



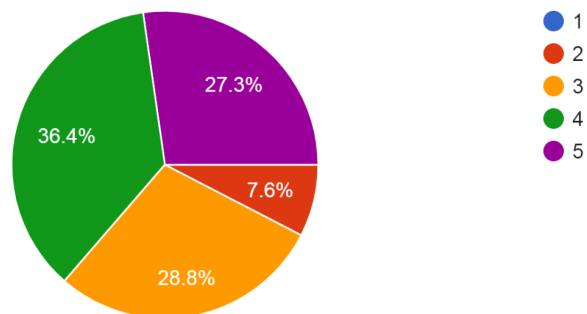
Question 6. Similar empowerment initiatives positively influence the community.

66 responses



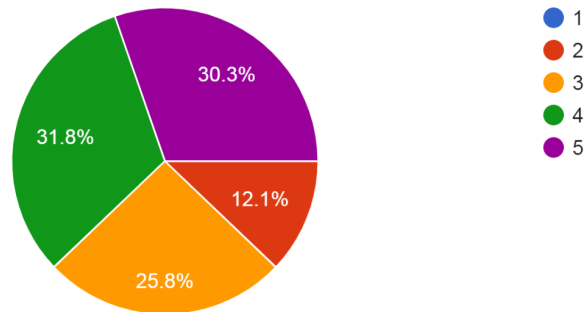
Question 7. The women in my family think to participate in similar projects.

66 responses



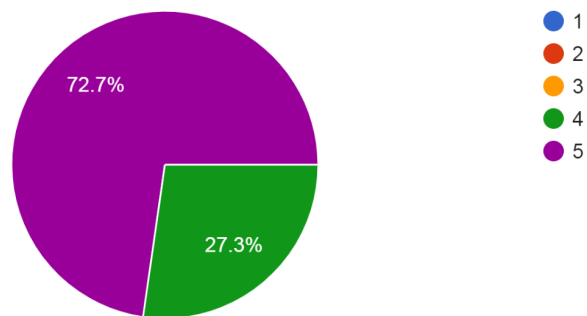
Question 8. The family encourages its women to participate in similar initiatives.

66 responses



Question 9. The sustainability of the project is important.

66 responses



Comments 38 responses

Everything is fine

I love the sustainability of the project and participating in it

Love continuity of the project

No time, good initiative

Project supports women and the vulnerable families

Meal not enough for the family of 5 people, it is known from the presentation and taste of the food that women prepared it with love, supporting others is 100% a needed act

Clean food

Similar initiatives are important in Lebanon due to the current situation

No time for his wife to join, he has no problem for their girls to participate, but they decide not to go outside home

Old in age, suffer from diseases which deprive her from joining, she knows her neighbor joins

Sustainability of the project is important as it will be targeting a bigger group with its progress, personal reasons prevent participation

Medical reasons deprive participation

People are benefiting from the project

Not enough food meal, women participation is crucial as without her the project will not succeed

Due to families, don't like to participate, husband and son does not allow

Important, benefit people

Women work help the husband, dynamics, help vulnerable families

Few food

Not imp, good initiative, against participation

Sick woman

Sustainability of project imp

Husband against working for fam issues

Husband does not accept her to work

Good meal, made people happy

Husband has no problem of women participation even as a volunteering work for limited time

Situation in community is demanding

Few meal, life challenges makes situation hard

Positive for community,

Pressure since has children

Important project

Without women participation , the project would not be successful and the people would not have received the food

Community needs similar projects

Discussing the project in the community for its sustainability and reaching all the lebanese communities

Reduces the family expenses

Cannot work

Benefiting needy people in a good timing

Good atmosphere at work for girls only, no boys

Women participation reduces the pressure of work on the husband since she helps him in the income generation

- **Interviews Coded Data:**

Table 6: Participant 1

Answer	Coding
The experience was full of many new things to learn.	knowledge
We all work alone in our houses in cooking, and in this kitchen, we worked as a group. As a group, we all learned from each other and this developed our teamwork and team spirit.	teamwork
I think that the empowerment workshops should continue to be offered throughout the project duration in all stages and not only for a limited workshop stage.	Progress of project
The empowerment is not only restricted to the kitchen work as part of the project since it is comprehensive to several roles a woman plays either personally, with her family...	Empowerment wider framework
Empowerment helped me acknowledge my self-worth, appreciate myself, control my emotions, stress and tension, and deal with the challenges I face with being stronger.	Importance of empowerment of a personal level
Empowerment helps you deal better with your family, children, and husband.	Importance of empowerment on a family level

<p>Being empowered gives a push to open your own business in the future and you can acknowledge preparing a project study for it.</p>	<p>Importance of empowerment on a community level</p>
<p>Women usually say that they do not have time, but participating in this project helped me manage my responsibilities and I calculate this as a success since I found time to come since I want to be here and I am interested in being here. I find time now for everything. I finish some of my home duties before coming here and then when I come back I continue to find time for my family.</p>	<p>Benefits on personal level: time management- taking decisions</p>
<p>Volunteering for the community is a therapy for humans, and participating in this project is for our well-being as well.</p>	<p>Importance of community service- well-being and psychologically</p>
<p>The pressure we are living in due to the current situation, makes us search for something to release our tension. Community services are a good option since a woman can enjoy spending her time with a team.</p>	<p>Importance of community service- manage tension in life</p>
<p>The idea of helping others in the project makes you feel that you are giving something good.</p>	<p>Impact on community</p>

<p>In the community, some may tell you that you are useless spending your time, especially if you are leaving your house and children to come, but no one can tell you not to come since you are doing a good job for the sake of the community and giving back to the family as well.</p>	<p>Others' opinions impact</p>
<p>Hoteling course to teach cooking in details; beneficial for all women</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>The project should not with a limited duration, it should be sustainable with non-stopping period</p>	<p>Recommendation- duration</p>
<p>Continue to hold the empowerment sessions continuously</p>	<p>Recommendation- empowerment sessions</p>

Table 7: Participant 2

<p>Answer</p>	<p>Coding</p>
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<p>Teamwork, cooperation</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>Being strong</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>Empowerment sessions for everyone not only as part of the project</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>Importance of cooperation, volunteering as a group and one hand to serve the community</p>	<p>knowledge</p>
<p>Previously, I have taken several wrong decisions in my life and have blamed others for the wrong decisions I have taken. The empowerment program taught me to be responsible for the decisions I take since I took it and thus I should bare the consequences, not the others.</p>	<p>Taking decision</p>
<p>My family was supportive and they encouraged me to take this step and try participating in this project instead of only spending my time at home.</p> <p>Never say no without trying.</p>	<p>Other's opinion-family</p>

<p>It is beneficial for the women morally and financially.</p> <p>A woman can work and earn her living, and at the same time, going outside her community rejoin zone is comfortable for her.</p> <p>She is experiencing and learning new things. It is hard for them to gain insight from their vulnerable community.</p>	<p>Impact on individual- financial and moral volunteering</p>
<p>Women who participated in the project are influencing other women in their neighborhood to also take their step and try this participating in initiatives</p>	<p>Impact on women in the community</p>
<p>As I know from my neighbors, the food is of a good quality but the quantity is not enough for big families. I heard from some to have a variety in the food, and not to keep only rice food.</p>	<p>Comments on the food meals</p>
<p>The community is happy with the project and looking for its sustainability and continuity.</p>	<p>Sustainability of the project</p>
<p>I heard from one of my neighbors about the project, and they encouraged me to join. We will also encourage others to join as</p>	<p>Personal experience</p>

<p>well in the future. It is an anecdotal experience between the women in one community.</p>	
<p>The traditional thinking that the wives and mothers should stay at home is being broken. Before the families in this vulnerable rejoin used to think day by day as what are they going to do and eat today and never thought about the future.</p> <p>Now, this idea is changing and they have started to be aware of how to deal with the future and raise their children to integrate in society for a better life.</p>	<p>Changing ideas in community</p>
<p>I was so interested in the sessions, and what I liked the most about it is that I learnt how to be stronger with a higher self-esteem and self-reliance.</p>	<p>Empowerment sessions</p>
<p>I started things about my plans, as this will affect only today but will also shape my future.</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>The empowerment returned me to my dream to be a tourist guide. I am searching for a place to study in and receive a certificate in the career I am passionate to work in.</p>	<p>Future plan</p>

<p>The duration is short and was not enough to learn all the kitchen basics and still in empowerment it is continuous; average time 1 month every day present in kitchen</p>	<p>Recommendation for project</p>
<p>The kitchen project can be done separately from the empowerment sessions, but the empowerment sessions are very important on the social level and gives women a chance to develop their characteristics, which can benefit them in their work as in a kitchen project.</p>	<p>Kitchen and empowerment</p>
<p>We learnt how to defend our opinion in the community when we face rejection, so if we face people refusing our participation in the kitchen project, we are empowered to defend our position.</p>	<p>Empowerment and community</p>
<p>Volunteering is interesting, especially since it was during the holy month of Ramadan and you were doing something helpful for the people.</p>	<p>Impact of individual and community</p>
<p>Even if there is no financial benefit from the project now, participating in it is important for the future so you might have your own business.</p>	<p>Income-generation</p>

<p>My father has no problem if my mother also participates in the project, but the only requirement is that there is no dereliction on the part of finalizing her house responsibilities.</p> <p>She should manage between the housework and the presence in the project work (double burden).</p>	<p>Participation of mother ; family perception</p>
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Table 8: Participant 3

Answer	Coding
<p>First time I participate in a project, and I am so happy with the experience since it benefited me as well as other people in the community</p>	<p>New experience</p>
<p>Make the project with broader dimensions and time framework</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>As a woman, I became stronger since I can generate my own living and I am no more at home with nothing to do</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>I get something to do in order to spend my time.</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>

<p>I advise them to keep the kitchen open for us to have access to meet again since this helps us psychologically and we can leave our houses to breathe.</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>I, as all women, have responsibilities, but I managed and organized my time to come and join the project.</p>	<p>Personal decision</p>
<p>We cannot spend all our life in our houses. We need to build up new relationships in life and spend our time wisely.</p>	<p>relationships</p>
<p>If the need of the people in other communities is met by the served meals of the project, then it will surely be leaving the same positive impact there as what has been seen in Al Taamir.</p>	<p>Impact on other communities</p>
<p>I have no plans not because I am not empowered but due to the situation, it is hard to find a job easily. Additionally, this kitchen is near our resident area, which does not cost us any transportation fees and make it easily accessible.</p>	<p>Future plans</p>
<p>I wish the continuity of empowerment workshops to learn more.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p>

<p>I see that the empowerment sessions should be given in parallel to the kitchen work as well since they help the individuals also acknowledge their self-worth, build relationships with others, develop their well-being, express self-confidence, and feelings...</p>	<p>Recommendation</p>
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Table 9: Participant 4

Answer	Coding
<p>Project is broader on the aspect of empowerment</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>It is the unique project and first time to be held for the Al Taamir community. In saida, several projects have similar ideas.</p>	<p>Impact on community</p>
<p>Due to the challenging situation, we are not leaving our houses as before to spend time with our friends. In this project, we got the chance to break this house routine and meet new people.</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>The empowerment project taught me to think by myself and for myself before anything else.</p>	<p>Well-being</p>

<p>Women think that they are barely managing their house duties and for that, they cannot join the project for not enough time for them.</p>	<p>Women in community</p>
<p>I stopped working when I got married, and my husband is my supporter to come and participate in the project to fill my time.</p>	<p>Family support</p>
<p>The project is for the vulnerable families, so wherever it is found in the presence of needy people, it will change their lives positively. In all communities, there are groups of poor people that need this support.</p>	<p>Impact on the community</p>
<p>If the project does not open the kitchen again, I have no other thing to do. Here, I felt comfortable and I know all the women, and I do not think I will find a better opportunity to participate in.</p>	<p>Future plans</p>
<p>I have no problem learning new skills other than cooking to work on such crafting, making accessories in order to work in.</p>	<p>Recommendation</p>

<p>It taught us to love others and express love, with no fear of emotions nor hatred. If we hate any one for their success, we will stay in our place. However, if we show love we grow together.</p>	<p>Meaning of empowerment</p>
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Table 10: Participant 5

Answer	Coding
<p>Lengthening period of the project to get a better chance to participate in it, especially that 20 women is not a small number and this is not giving enough chance for us to acknowledge everything in depths</p>	<p>recommendation</p>
<p>The project helped us meet new people, gain new experience, and gave us a chance to leave the house.</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>We need to work in order to live.</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>I talk to others about our work to encourage them to join us as well.</p>	<p>Impact for community</p>

<p>The people are happy and thankful for everything you offer for them since they need every single support. / seeing it as Wow</p>	<p>Impact on community</p>
<p>If I find a job in a company with a good salary, I have no problem being employed.</p>	<p>Future plans</p>
<p>I have this power of being productive after participating in the project</p>	<p>Personal impact</p>
<p>Empowerment taught me how to defend myself, be self-confident and strong.</p>	<p>Meaning of empowerment</p>
<p>The empowerment helped me in my personal life in dealing with my children, and family.</p>	<p>Empowerment</p>

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NOTICE OF APPROVAL

To: Ms. Assma Awkal
Dr. Lina Abi Rizk
Visiting Lecturer
School of Arts & Sciences

APPROVAL ISSUED: 27 April 2023
EXPIRATION DATE: 27 April 2024
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED - INITIAL

Date: April 27, 2023

RE: **IRB #:** LAU.SAS.LA2.27/Apr/2023

Protocol Title: Women Resource Center: Community Kitchen; Assessing Women Empowerment

The above referenced research project has been approved by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the Approved Research Protocol and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Enclosed with this letter are the stamped approved documents that must be used.**

APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

LAU RESEARCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES: All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. **PARTICIPANTS must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB approval date or after the expiration date.**

PROTOCOL EXPIRATION: The LAU IRB approval expiry date is listed above. The IRB Office will send an email at least 45 days prior to protocol approval expiry - Request for Continuing Review - in order to avoid any temporary hold on the initial protocol approval. It is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the research project. Failure to send Request for Continuation before the expiry date will result in suspension of the approval of this research project on the expiration date.

MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS: All protocol modifications must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTIFICATION OF PROJECT COMPLETION: A notification of research project closure and a summary of findings must be sent to the IRB office upon completion. Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of notification of project completion.

IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE IRB ADMINISTRATORS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB APPROVAL CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at irb@lau.edu.lb



The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:

LAU IRB Exempt Protocol Application	Received 10 April 2023
Research Proposal	Received 10 April 2023
Letter to DPNA	Received 13 April 2023
Informed Consent – Interviews – English & Arabic	Received 10 April 2023, amended 13 April 2023
Interview Questions	Received 10 April 2023
IRB Comments sent: 11 April 2023 18 & 26 April 2023	PI response to IRB's comments dated: 13 April 2023 27 April 2023
CITI Training – Lina Abi Rizk	Cert. # 52767230 Dated (26 April 2023)
CITI Training - Assma Awkal	Cert. # 52806399 Dated (18 November 2022)

