

Leadership in Action Project - Medical and Public Health

Humanitarian Assistance in the Belt and Road Region with GX Foundation

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Introduction

GX Foundation is a Chinese medical humanitarian aid organisation which aims to provide medical and public health humanitarian assistance internationally in countries along the Belt and Road Region. This summer, I worked as a summer intern and focused on health-emergency disaster risk management, vector-borne diseases (VBD) and non-communicable disease (NCD). Assistance was given to needy populations in Vanuatu by providing free-of-charge health checks, health education and material distribution over a 2-week outreach program. This LiA project was a great opportunity for me to gain a comprehensive understanding on the daily work of a NGO as well as the preparation, implementation and evaluation of field projects.

An Unforgettable Experience in Vanuatu 🇻🇵

Setting foot in Vanuatu was something I never imagined doing, yet these 2 weeks of working in 4 villages across Port Vila was truly an inspiring and fruitful experience. Along with staff and 10 other students, we managed to deliver 12 sessions consisting of a pre- and post-intervention interview and an interactive health talk on disaster preparedness, VBD and NCD for over 410 participants. We also conducted basic health checks on a voluntary basis and distributed disaster preparedness bags to 4027 households.



It was during the implementation of our planned activities that I truly realized the challenges of conducting foreign field projects. We faced unexpected hiccups of our session time clashing with a local festival, resulting in low participation rate. Moreover, language was also a barrier as some locals do not speak fluent English, leading to communication difficulties when conducting questionnaires and the health talk. We strived to tackle these difficulties with resilience and reaped encouraging results. Many participants remained attentive and engaged during our health talk, with their knowledge improving significantly after our intervention. Interacting with the local people also led me to discover the beauty and joy of connecting with others of differing cultures and experience. Whether



it was the kind words or funny stories villagers shared, the eager children inviting us to play and helping us with our bags or the sincere gratitude and appreciation the village head and volunteers showed, these were the precious moments that served as a great encouragement to continue our work despite the difficulties.

During our trip, we also made meaningful visits to the Chinese Embassy, a village dispensary, the Vanuatu Central Hospital and the Red Cross headquarters to learn more about the healthcare system and diplomatic efforts. We were also able to enjoy the breathtaking views of the tropical island at the Skybridge, Blue Lagoon and Dona Cascade. Even though the people of Vanuatu faced many difficult challenges of political instability and natural disasters, every villager seemed genuinely relaxed and happy. They would often wave and smile at us on the street, treating others with kindness and respect. As our driver said, one of the best ways to live is by creating your own happiness and staying joyful every second of your life. These 2 weeks has been a reminder that happiness often comes in the simplest forms of serving and connecting with others. I am immensely grateful for this invaluable opportunity of self-growth and reflection.



Questionnaire Results

A repeated cross-sectional survey was designed to understand the health knowledge and attitudes of participants. Results before and after the health talk was compared to evaluate the effect of the intervention. Information on the current health status, health attitudes, mosquito eradication practices was also collected for future reference. Data was then analysed and visualized using various graphs. Health check results were also analysed to identify the prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

16 out of 19 questions on knowledge of disaster preparedness, vector-borne diseases and non-communicable diseases yielded statistically significant positive results, showing that the health talk successfully improved participants' understanding. There was a particularly large effect size in questions regarding the items needed in a disaster bag, the attitude towards risk of dengue fever in children and the health consequences of diabetes and hypertension. 98% of participants gave positive feedback on the training content and an improved confidence to prepare for disasters. Although there are limitations of a limited understanding among participants due to language barriers and the confusing design of a few questions, the statistical data obtained supports that the intervention conducted was effective in improving disaster-preparedness and health knowledge of participants.

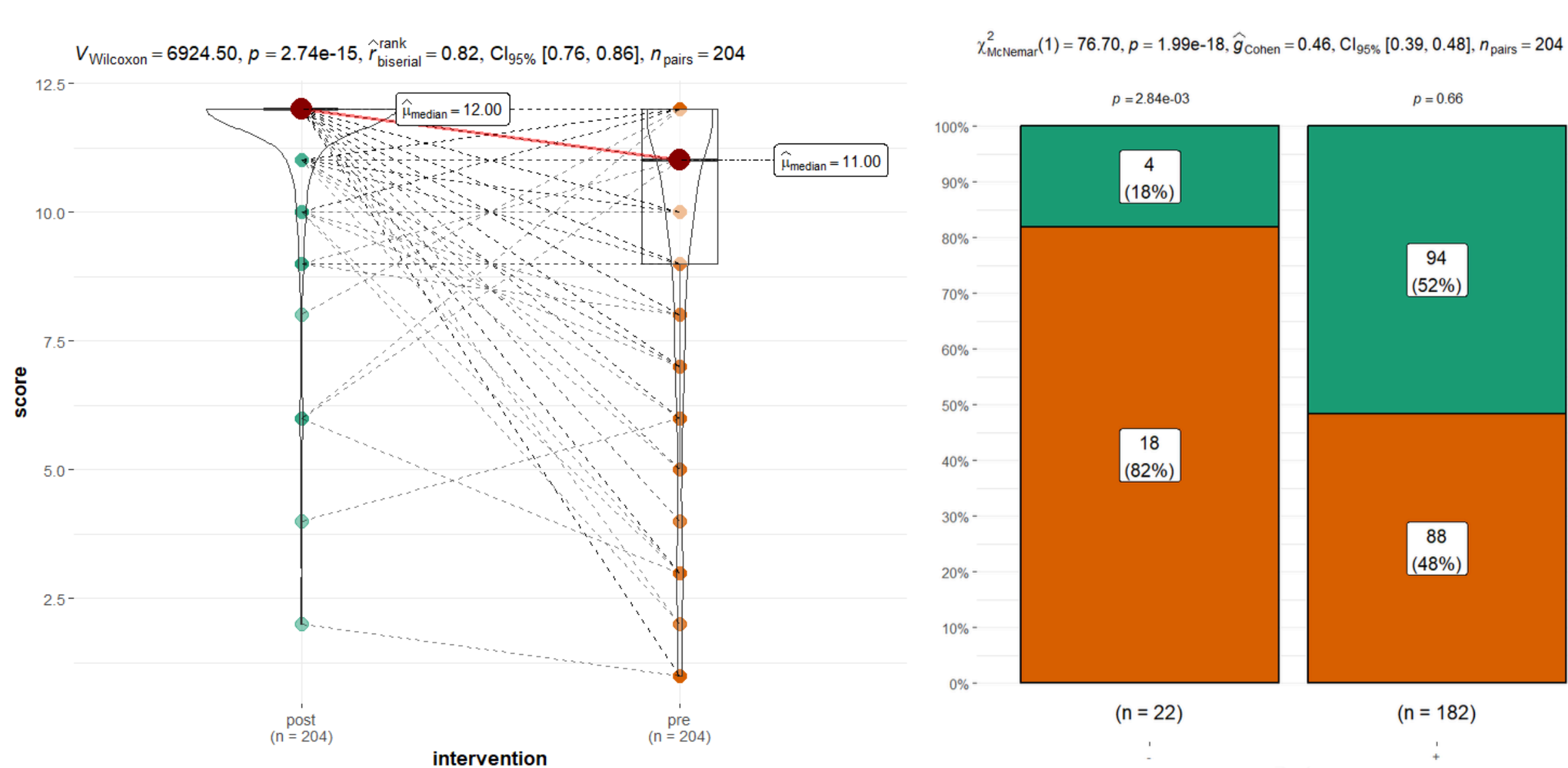


Figure 1: Paired Wilcoxon's Test Violin Plot on Items needed in a Disaster Bag

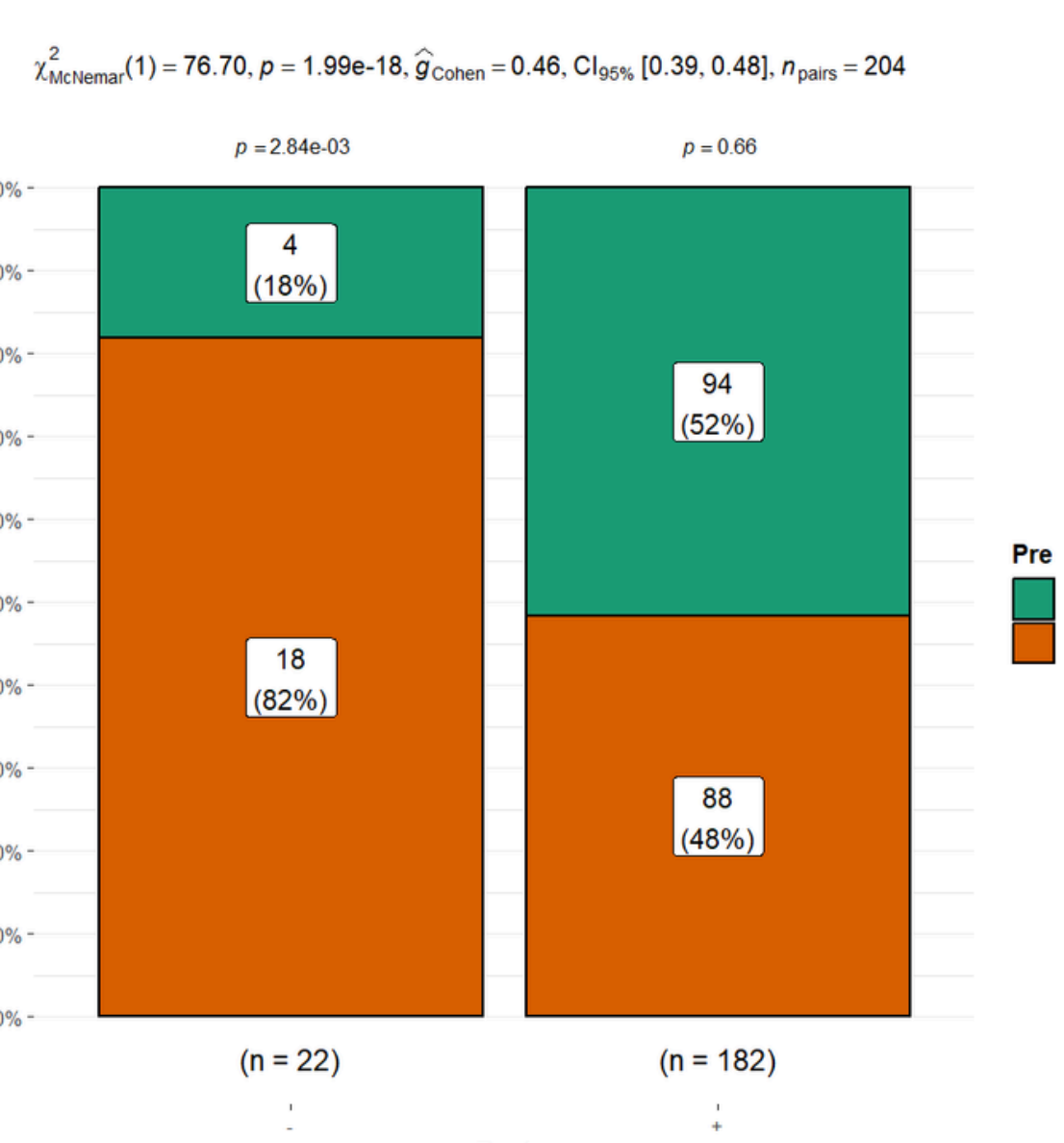


Figure 2: McNemar's Test Plot on the Correct Use of a Sticky Fly Trap

Key Takeaways

1. Be a critical and creative thinker — make effective decisions in unexpected or complex situations; turn ideas into actions; critically evaluate learning experiences and identify areas for improvement
2. Acquire collaboration and team working skills — build supportive relationships and networks; work across social and cultural boundaries with emotional intelligence; communicate with empathy and respect
3. Work with determination and a desire to achieve — utilize available resources or support; staying resilient in face of challenges
4. Develop research and project management skills — acquire statistical skills to analyse and interpret data; work and think independently
5. A lifelong memory with the joy of learning, connecting and exploring



Conclusion

These 6 weeks of my LiA project passed by in a whirl with countless learning opportunities for me to challenge myself and further develop my leadership skills at the overseas placement and local work. This internship has allowed me to grow into a more mature and skillful leader with a broader worldview and a willing heart to serve all those in need around the world. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the Laidlaw Foundation and all of my supervisors at the GX Foundation for facilitating such a meaningful attachment.