

Debunking the Myth: The Involvement of Malaysian Retirees in Volunteerism¹

**SURJIT SINGH S/O UTTAM SINGH, RAHIM M. SAIL, BAHAMAN ABU SAMAH,
RAJA AHMAD TAJUDIN SHAH & LINDA A. LUMAYAG**

*Institute for Community and Peace Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

Keywords: Retirees, older adults, volunteerism, ageing, Malaysian public service, community development

ABSTRAK

Ini adalah satu kajian rintis yang melibatkan pesara Malaysia dari peringkat atasan, pengurusan dan profesional daripada sektor Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia. Ia menilai sejauh mana penglibatan, motivasi dan keutamaan pesara melibatkan diri dengan kerja sukarela di negara ini. Secara metodologinya, borang soal-selidik telah digunakan di kalangan 261 pesara di seluruh Malaysia termasuk Sabah dan Sarawak bagi mendapatkan maklumat dan pendapat. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa, pesara adalah lebih dari sanggup untuk melibatkan diri secara sukarela di dalam organisasi keagamaan, sosial, pendidikan atau komuniti terutamanya yang memerlukan kepakaran mereka. Para pesara menyuarakan kebimbangan mereka terhadap tanggapan orang ramai bahawa mereka tidak lagi produktif dan dirasakan kurang penting.

ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study involving the Malaysian retirees from the Premier and Managerial and Professional sectors of the Malaysian Public Service. It examined the extent of the retirees' involvement, motivation and preference in relation to engaging in volunteerism in the country. Methodologically, a mailed-survey questionnaire was conducted to elicit the information and opinion of 261 retirees throughout Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. Based on the findings, these retirees were more than willing to volunteer in religious, social, educational or community type of organization especially to those who needs their expertise. These retirees expressed concerns about the widely-accepted public conditioning that they were no longer productive and could therefore be relegated to the background as far as their relevance was concerned.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism is an intrinsic social value of a community and does not exist in a vacuum. This means that in any given community there is bound to be unselfish, selfless and altruistic actions that individuals demonstrate as products of their own social conditioning. It

is apparent that volunteerism exists in more ways than one and it is portrayed differently from one culture to another, depending on the economic and social development of certain communities. Volunteerism comes in many forms, depths and dimensions (Wilson 2000) and these circumstances largely depend

¹ This research was funded by IRPA, 8th Malaysia Plan, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, under Project No.: 07-02-04-0540-EA001.

on whether there are conditions that facilitate or hinder the growth of the voluntary actions of the individuals in the society. It is also believed that practically the nature of volunteerism changes as the society evolves from that of peasant economy to cash-crop economy (Foner and Schwab 1983). As the body of literature would show, there is a clear connection between the changing economy and the extent people engage in volunteerism in their social relations with the members of the community (see for example, Cherline 1983). For example, in the Philippines, the concept of *bayanihan* [mutual helpfulness] is an age-old practice that involves the participation of the members of the local people in community-based actions e.g. lifting/transporting a wooden house using human hands and requires that all able-male members of the village must participate (www.worldvolunteerweb.org). Another example is among peasant farming households, there is *hunlos* —a bisayan term which means ‘alternate’, to emphasise the strength of the community helpfulness reflective of the fact that farming households are dependent on another to be able to continue the farming cycle from weeding and plowing to planting and harvesting. In many respects, the nature of volunteerism is engaged in these two forms of community practices in the sense that one’s involvement is crucial in the overall functioning of the local peasant community, and only in the selfless form of service to the community that it is able to sustain its ‘life’.

Indeed, volunteerism is common among most communities, for example, it is *yi wu* among the Mandarin-speaking Chinese or *yi mo* among the Cantonese Chinese or *sewa* among the Indian communities. Both Indonesian (www.worldvolunteerweb.org) and Malaysian rural communities share the same meaning of *gotong royong* which means “working together hand in hand”. While *sukarela* speaks of the spirit of volunteerism, *gotong-royong* is the concrete manifestation of that spirit. However, how does volunteerism as a selfless form of action become really wanting in these modern times? Some theorists argue that altruism and volunteerism

remain a feature in most communities though they are no longer as prominent as a pro-social behaviour in the sense that individuals have various “avenues” over which they could search for assistance henceforth volunteerism becomes a “dormant” feature in the community. To illustrate, it is noted that before the advent of the Green Revolution in the early 70s and the cash economy even before this period, peasant farmers were dependent on the manual labours to sustain their farming activity; *gotong royong* and *bayanihan* enriched and beautify the cultural and economic life of the village communities in the sense that, in literal term, one farmer could not live without the other. This refers to the constant, cooperative and coordinated farm labour that each household engages in the survival of another. That was when “use” labour was primarily the dictating element in both the social and economic relations. However, the introduction of the mechanised farming gradually changed the farming landscape of the village communities in most Asian countries in a manner that the traditional form of labour was no longer in tandem with the existence of machines. This led to the gradual erosion of the spirit of *bayanihan*, *gotong royong* or *hunlos* as farmers’ roles in the farm economy diminished.

The central thesis of this paper is influenced by the argument that the involvement of individuals in altruistic and pro-social action such as those that reflect voluntary actions hinges on whether the social system readily recognizes their positive contributions, especially those contributive roles that ageing or older individuals provide in the local community. As argued by Merriam and Mazanah (2000) the older persons, for instance, the public service retirees, must be viewed as a social capital in the social system and that their productive function must be viewed in relation to their cultural, social and economic contributions. This article specifically examines the involvement of public service retirees in voluntary work in the community and the retirees’ own perception towards their contributions. It is in their invaluable contribution that one needs to

examine the extent of their present involvement in the local community affairs, their motivations, potential and preferences. In as much as they are highly-skilled and English-proficient Malaysian retirees, their contributions may be sought after by both a number of social and charity groups and the non-government organisations (NGOs) that are in need of volunteer service. This paper also provides recommendations on how to encourage the future involvement of retirees in the community development.

Volunteerism Defined

As mentioned earlier, volunteerism is viewed differently from one situation to another. However, the common feature is that it is a form of service or help to others without expecting any reward or payment. Snyder and Omoto (2000) describe volunteerism "as a form of pro-social action in which people seek out opportunities to help others in need, make considerable and continuing commitments to offer assistance, and they may do so in stressful circumstances without any bonds of prior obligation to the recipients of the services". Volunteering is related to the motive or desire to volunteer. The motivation for volunteering varies from one person to another. Based on 41 references to the theory and research for the period 1982-1991, Fischer and Schaffer (1993) identified "eight categories of motivation for volunteering: altruistic, ideological, egoistic, material/reward, status/reward, social relationship, leisure time, and personal growth motivations." Riley and Riley (1994) argue that "all older people, everywhere," want to remain contributing, productive members of society and will be able to do so if the social norms and structures allow for their participations". Indeed this is a very significant argument to follow considering the situation of the ageing population in many countries today where the social system fails to understand the role of the ageing persons.

In this paper, volunteerism is defined as an act of providing unpaid service or helping regularly or occasionally in the form of time, service or skills to a non-governmental, non-

profit formal organizations (e.g. societies, community, welfare, educational, political party, service clubs) by retirees from the Malaysian public service who may or may not be engaged in paid jobs for other organizations during their retirement life. The term does not include informal voluntary work of care-giving or helping of individuals on one-on-one basis, in the form of service or charity among friends and relatives on a long term or temporary period of time. In this study, the involvement of volunteerism is measured in terms of time contributed, responsibility held and the number of organizations served, for the voluntary service rendered.

Myths About Retirement and Old Age

An important assumption about life transitions at any point in the life course is that such transitions will be accompanied by stress, especially if they entail major changes in the person's life. The evidence indicates that many types of changes can affect mental and physical functioning (Foner and Schwab 1983). Older persons do not react to change in their lives at retirement in isolation from the social and economic context in which retirement occurs; they are affected by the climate of opinion in the society and by the economic, political as well as social environment. True decisions are made by individuals, but the calculation of costs and benefits and attitudes regarding work and leisure are developed within a field of influence that in itself continuously changing (Foner and Schwab 1983).

Myths are the products of social conditioning and are as common as they are practised and reinforced by both the beliefs and everyday social actions. Myths surrounding the retirement and ageing are abundant both in advanced and developing countries (Foner and Schwab 1983) and Malaysia is not an exception to this. It is argued that myths precisely mirror our own articulation of certain social reality and, more often than not, are not based on the objective understanding of the reality. It is when this social conditioning inculcates a certain view that retirement and old age are equated with

unproductivity, "silence", "passivity," "exit", dependency or ill-health, words which strongly suggest their becoming "surplus" and a "bundle of needs" that retirement issue becomes muddled and loses its real value and significance. When this prevailing notion of old age becomes a guiding compass in education, social policy and in the intervention agenda of the government, then it loses its usefulness *ab initio*. Both advanced and developing economies are guilty of this false consciousness that older populations are a bundle of needs citing from the fact that the development agenda caters only to the children, youth and adults, and the cycle stops there. It fails to capture the whole spectrum of the human development which includes, of course, the ageing sector. It implies that the elderly no longer needs a continuing education after reaching a certain age. This development bias is reminiscent of most intervention policies affecting the older population in the world today (Foner and Schwab 1983).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study involved the retirees in the Premier and Managerial and Professional groups (PMP) in the Malaysian public services who had retired between 1989 and 2000 representing all the states in Malaysia including Sabah, Sarawak and the Federal Territories. It is assumed that between the time they had started retiring and when the research was conducted, the respondents would be around the age of 60 or 70 and were nearing the life expectancy year ceiling of Malaysians. Of the 21,242 retirees falling under this group, a cross-sectional sample was taken randomly from the monthly clusters (Maxim 1999) within 12 years. The Pension Division of the Public Services Department of Malaysia provided the complete list of mandatorily-retired personnels and out of whom 613 names were identified including their addresses, year of retirement, month, gender, type of service and position held prior to retirement.

A survey questionnaire was utilised based on the research objectives. In addition to available literature, exploratory interviews with selected respondents and interviews with prominent non-government organisation representatives were carried out to substantiate the paucity of available materials on local volunteerism. The findings of the interviews and the literature material were merged and an instrument comprising nine sections with 215 items was developed. The questionnaire was then pre-tested using randomly selected respondents from the sample and a validity test using the Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and factor analysis.

Data collection was conducted through a mail-survey. From the list of 613 retirees, a mailing list of 576 names were prepared, excluding those who that participated in the preliminary interview and pilot study. The response rate was 45.3 percent, a rather high turn-out for a mail-survey mode of data collection. Data in the completed questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted to further analyse the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Retirees

Of the 261 retirees involved in this study, 136 or 52.1% were volunteers with 32.3% belonging to the early retirees while 67.5% from the later retirees. There seems to be a wide gap in term of the percentage distribution of retirees within the 12-year's period alluding to the fact that as the age of retirees advances, their participation to voluntary work becomes limited. Age also predicts the level of volunteering for both men and women. This is in consonance with the findings of the Independent Sector survey of 1992, a U.S. based group in charged of promoting volunteerism initiatives, which showed that 42% of people aged 65-74 said that they had volunteered in the previous year. Other studies also showed the comparable rates of decline (Chambre' 1987; Herzog & Morgan 1992). It seems that increasing age

TABLE 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of retirees

Characteristics	Volunteer (%)	Non Volunteer (%)
Gender		
Male	82.4	91.2
Female	17.6	8.8
Race		
Malay	66.8	50.4
Chinese	17.8	35.2
Indian	8.8	11.2
Kadazan	1.5	.8
Iban	.7	.8
Others	4.4	1.6
Educational Qualification		
HSC/Diploma	12.5	20.2
Bachelor's Degree	55.9	49.2
Master's Degree	16.1	16.1
Doctorate or equiv.	3.7	.8
Professional/Technical	5.9	3.2
Others	5.9	10.5
Residence/Location		
Peninsular Malaysia	70.6	68.8
Sabah	5.9	7.2
Sarawak	6.6	6.4
Federal Territories	16.9	17.6
Marital Status		
Married (with children)	89.0	91.2
Married (no children)	2.2	3.2
Single (widowed, divorced, separated)	4.4	3.2
Never married	4.4	1.6
Religion		
Islam	68.4	50.4
Buddhism	8.1	15.2
Christianity	15.4	13.6
Hinduism	5.2	8.0
Non-believer	.7	6.4
*Other	2.2	6.4

influences volunteering independently of health status. However, the decline in volunteering seems to be occurring at much later ages, i.e. after the age of 75 or 80 (Chambre' 1987; Fischer & Schaffer 1993). One study found that the rate of volunteerism after 80 declined much more sharply for men than it did for women: with 14% of women

were still participating in volunteering as compared to only 7% of men (Chambre' 1987). It has been pointed out that it may not be age itself that influences the rate of volunteering.

Table 1 shows the social and demographic profile of both the volunteer and non-volunteer retirees. A majority of the retirees were male, Malay, married, Muslim, residing in Peninsular Malaysia and possessed a bachelor's degree. As these ex-public servants were from the Professional and Managerial Group, their educational qualifications were rather high, noting that 50% were holders of a bachelor's degree while others even have master's (16.1%) and doctorate (3.7%) degrees. In other studies, the level of education has been indicated as the most consistent predictor of volunteering as it boosts volunteering because it heightens the awareness of problems, increases empathy and builds self-confidence. Educated people are also more likely to be asked to volunteer which is partly a function of the fact that they belong to several organizations where they develop more civic skills, such as the ability to run a meeting (Brady *et al.* 1995). The 50% rate of volunteerism among the retirees clearly shows this trend.

The role of gender in volunteerism has yet to be established as there is a scarcity of local materials on this. However, research studies in the West showed that women tend to be more active in both organised and unorganised voluntary work simply because women are more numerous than men. This has implication on the local scenario in Malaysia considering that the life expectancy for women is higher by five years as compared to men. In contrast looking at the labour force participation of women in the professional and managerial level in the country, it is safe to argue that women should be given both equal access and opportunity so that future retirees of women will most likely to involve in volunteer work. Studies which were conducted on both local and abroad point to the fact that those who engaged in voluntary work are more likely those who have high education and

income. The case of Hong Kong's case supports the earlier studies with regards to the extent of the gender difference affects volunteerism. Among the respondents in Hong Kong, "female volunteers tend to slightly outpace the ones in participation rate of both organized volunteering and mutual aid.

TABLE 2
Percentage distribution based on number of dependent family members

Characteristics	Volunteer (%)	Non Volunteer (%)
Dependent children		
None	49.3	60.8
One child	24.3	19.2
Two children	14.7	8.0
Three or more	11.7	12.0
Dependent parent/s		
Yes	27.2	21.6
No	72.8	78.4

Tables 2 and 3 show the size of the family after retirement and the financial, employment and health status of the retirees, respectively. It is clearly shown in Table 2 that about 50% of the retirees still have one or more dependent children and this speaks well of the domestic and financial condition of the nuclear unit. It is noted that the three aspects, i.e. finance, employment and health are "well-taken care of" by the retirees and this means a positive development of their overall status as retirees. At this point, both volunteers and non-volunteers could boast of a healthy lifestyle and this bodes well for them.

Table 3 suggests that the retirees do not face any financial burden as reflected in the fact that even if they have already retired about 50% are either fully, partially or are self-employed. Similarly, as far as their health is concerned, more than 80% have satisfactory and good health. It is also noted that almost half of the respondents of the study reported that they were 'free and easy', reflecting a considerable large number of retirees who were not working and or in any way engaged

TABLE 3
Financial independence, employment and health status of retirees

Items	Volunteers (%)	Non Volunteers (%)
Financial Status		
Not satisfactory	1.5	3.2
Satisfactory	56.6	69.9
Good	35.3	24.8
Excellent	6.6	2.4
Job Status		
Full-time paid job	13.2	14.5
Part-time paid job	14.0	8.9
Self-employed	25.0	15.3
Looking for job	3.7	8.1
Free and easy	44.1	53.2
Health Condition		
Not satisfactory	4.4	6.4
Satisfactory	43.4	46.8
Good	44.9	41.6
Excellent	7.4	5.6

in private work. Those who were 'free and easy' retirees could be translated into free time that could be utilised for volunteer service. However, it also depends on the extent whether these retirees have the access to information.

Motivation to Volunteer

David McClelland differentiates three types of volunteer motivation (as cited in Wood 1998) which includes achievement, power and affiliation. According to him, volunteers who are motivated by achievement are looking for a sense of accomplishment and need to get feedback. They like to have goals to work towards and to know they are getting things done. They are great workers, can be relied on to see their jobs through and like to feel useful. Volunteers who are motivated by power, McClelland further clarifies, like to lead and have people follow their advice. They are good at planning and seeing the long term consequences. They appreciate the status and sense of identity that volunteering may give them. Finally, volunteers who are motivated

TABLE 4
Reasons for volunteering

Reasons	Volunteer (n=136)			Non-Volunteer (n=125)		
	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)
a. The opportunity to share one's expertise/skill	3.7	12.5	83.8	3.2	19.2	77.6
b. The good feeling of giving something back to society	3.7	13.2	83.1	2.4	18.4	79.2
c. Meaningful use of spare time.	6.6	21.3	72.1	7.2	28.0	64.8
d. Volunteering experience during working career	14.7	29.4	55.9	23.2	36.0	40.8
e. To join friends in the organization	23.6	28.7	47.7	20.8	36.8	42.4
f. Influence of volunteering experience during school days.	19.8	33.1	47.1	29.6	38.4	32.0
g. Responding to someone's request to join	33.8	33.1	33.1	34.4	37.6	28.0

NI – Not Important; SI – Somewhat Important; I - Important

by affiliation enjoy working in small groups where they can have lots of interaction with others. They like to help other people and develop a sense of belonging. Constant socialization with others especially their friends and peers is in itself a motivating factor in volunteerism.

The 261 Malaysian retirees were assessed on their motivation to engage in voluntary work. The five-point Likert-scale responses were scaled into three categories, namely, "Not Important" (NI), "Somewhat Important" (SI) and "Important" (I) for the thirteen items on motivation. The retirees were asked as follows: (a) If you are a current volunteer, how important do you think are the following reasons for your involvement in volunteerism? (b) If you are not a volunteer, how important do you think are the following reasons for the involvement of retirees in volunteerism?

The three highest scores and the four lowest scores have been selected for discussion in respect of both the volunteers and non-volunteers as shown in Table 4. The following three factors were considered the most important reasons: (a) the opportunity to share one's expertise/skills (83.8% and 77.6%, respectively); (b) the good feeling of giving something back to society (83.1% and 79.2%); and, (c) meaningful use of spare time (72.1%

and 64.8%). The above findings are in consonance with other studies done by Hellebrandt (1990) and Herzog & House (1991). The findings suggest a great deal of information as far as motivation of retirees is concerned. It is worthy to note that volunteer-retirees are willing to share their expertise and skills in the community which means that sharing of experiences, usually to the less fortunate in the society, reflects a positive role-model for the ageing population. In the study of Moen (1997), it is shown that retired personnel would rather continue working i.e., though unpaid after retirement, in order to maintain their social network and friendship relations.

However, the factors not considered as important by both volunteers and non-volunteers were: responding to someone's request to join, joining friends in the organization, and as influenced by their volunteering experience during school days. It is noted that among the volunteer retirees, their experience as volunteer during their younger days does not seem to relate to their perception towards volunteerism in later life. Thus, in contrary to some existing research findings (e.g. Park and Smith 2000) that prior voluntary experiences during their younger days did influence their propensity to get

TABLE 5
Percentage distribution of respondents' sustaining factors for volunteerism

Sustaining factors	Volunteer (n=136)			Non-volunteer (n=125)		
	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)
The joy of success in voluntary work	5.1	18.4	76.5	7.2	23.2	69.6
Congenial environment	6.6	36.8	56.6	7.2	40.8	52.0
Opportunities to socialise	9.5	30.9	59.6	12.8	37.6	49.6
Feeling of being wanted	10.3	24.3	65.4	12.0	26.4	61.6
Treated well by others	10.3	34.6	55.1	9.6	35.2	55.2
Accepted as a team member	4.4	21.3	74.3	4.0	27.2	68.8
Contribution is appreciated	9.6	19.9	70.6	8.6	31.2	63.2
Family supports volunteerism	9.6	33.8	56.6	14.4	36.8	48.8
Belief in the cause/mission of voluntary organization	5.9	16.9	77.2	1.6	21.6	76.8
Having been in the voluntary service for a long time	12.5	34.6	52.9	35.2	34.4	30.4

NI - Not Important; SI - Somewhat Important; I - Important

involved in voluntary work in later life. Nevertheless, the volunteer-retirees' participation in voluntary work during their career may have left an imprint of influence as far as continuing to provide service to the community is concerned.

Table 5 reflects the retirees' responses, with regards to issues affecting the factors that sustain their volunteerism spirit. It is interesting to note that both the volunteers and non-volunteers believe in the sanctity of the mission of voluntary organization (77.2% and 76.8%, respectively) followed by the sheer joy of having contributed to the success of any voluntary work (76.5% and 69.6%).

It is interesting that the findings above are similar to the survey conducted in 1995 and 1996 in New Zealand's by Volunteering Canterbury (www.cvc.org.nz/paper) showing more or less common reasons for choosing to do voluntary work. These were:

- To do something useful in the community (87%)
- To meet people (69%)
- To use experience and skills (66%)
- To have fun (65%)
- To use spare time (65%)

Preference of Retirees in Voluntary Work

Both volunteers and non-volunteers seemed to have the same choice pertaining to the organization they would work for or wish to work. These types of organizations include religious, education, social or community-based groups. Bearing in mind the availability of volunteers and prospective volunteers to work on critical areas – religious education, training and education and community development – that concern the Malaysian society, relevant agencies and authorities must take note of this vast untapped resources who are simply waiting to be called to –“active” service. Based on the informal interviews with the selected retirees, they are willing to share their time and expertise to the community. They are however reluctant to engage in voluntary work once they experience certain glitches in the management of organizations, and thus preferring a high standard of management to manage them. Volunteer-retirees also disliked the idea of other retirees who used their voluntary work as a platform to advance their personal and political interests and argued that politics and vested interests should not interfere with any selfless form of voluntary work. The retirees'

TABLE 6
Organizational preferences of retirees
in voluntary work

Preferred type of organization	Volunteer (n=136) (%)	Non Volunteer (n=125) (%)
Religious	34.6	28.8
Education	33.8	28.0
Social	22.1	18.4
Community	18.4	27.2
Welfare	16.9	21.6
Health	10.3	16.8
Political	7.4	5.6
Recreational	7.4	7.2
Work-related	5.1	10.4
Societal benefit	3.7	8.0
Sports	3.7	7.2
Service clubs	2.9	2.4
Youth	2.2	3.2
Arts & Culture	0	2.4

preference in community work also indicates a positive attitude towards helping the broader community of which retirees and their families are a part. The verbal expressions “giving back” and “it’s high time to give back” presuppose a very strong connection between the retirees and their immediate local community where they are a part, suggesting that economic productive work has somehow “detached” them from the local community and it is only during retirement that they want to return or “give back” what they feel they have owed to the broader community. Nevertheless, it is not definite what it is that they want to give back and/or what they have received during their “working” life but it is surmised that now they want now to spend time with the people in their neighbourhood or charity groups in need of their experience and skills. It is heartening to note that retirees, after having been through with their fair share in working in the public sector, are a ready resource to work in the community where their expertise can be tapped. Looking at the social problems drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, sexual permissiveness and the

like (see Azimi 2005) – that Malaysian society is confronted with in the recent times, it is best to avail of the services of the retirees and acknowledge their experience and wisdom. It is when they are recognised as a valuable resource that other retirees lurking in their homes are also emboldened to take part in assisting others to transform our community.

Why volunteers tend to converge in religious and social activities is explained by the influence of the eastern cultural values system that puts overriding importance of the community and “personal relationships”. This is consistent with the qualitative study conducted by Merriam and Mazanah (2000) on the role of cultural values in shaping their learning on older adulthood. Furthermore, emphasis on dependence, community, family and relationships take a frontseat as people approach retirement. Learning is both communal and informal and is usually embedded in social interaction, whether it is with their families or with the larger community. The preference for religious social activities could be an indication of retirees’ preference for less stressful working environment after having spent most of their working lives in the formal organizations where time, skills and energy are requisites.

Potential of Retirees as Volunteer Workers

Table 7 provides a clear picture of retirees who are engaged in voluntary work. It is noted that they are willing to accept more responsibilities by participating in voluntary work should another one comes along. However, the non-volunteers are non-committal as far as their willingness to join in voluntary work is concerned though they may still be “free and easy” (53.2%) and do not have any form of productive employment (see Table 3). Volunteers who were also giving their free service to the community gave an ambiguous position as far as discontinuing their service; nonetheless, only 3.7% of the volunteer-retirees responded that they wished to discontinue their voluntary work. In the comments they shared, it showed that they had experienced some form of disappointments

TABLE 7
Percentage distribution of retirees as potential volunteers (N=261)

Statements	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Response (%)
Volunteers willing to accept more voluntary work.	48.5	42.6	8.9
Volunteers wishing to discontinue from voluntary work.	3.7	35.3	61.0
Non-volunteers willing to do voluntary work.	3.7	8.8	87.5

TABLE 8
Frustrations in volunteerism as perceived by respondents (N=261)

Statements	DS* (%)	ASW (%)	AS (%)
Absence of expected rewards.	70.6	22.8	6.6
Service effort is not appreciated.	42.7	29.4	28.0
Mismatch of individual needs to tasks.	23.5	43.4	33.1
Inability to carry out the tasks successfully.	22.7	40.4	36.7
The spirit is willing; the flesh is weak.	25.8	27.2	47.0
Lack of adequate resources	19.9	43.4	36.7
Lack of dynamic leadership	21.3	30.1	48.6
Personal agenda not fulfilled.	52.9	33.1	14.0
Burnout from workload overload	47.8	28.7	23.5

* DS-Disagree Strongly; ASW-Agree Somewhat; AS-Agree Strongly

and frustration implying that they may have expectations of a better-run voluntary organization prior to engaging in voluntary work.

The Hong Kong study on the reception and perception of the volunteer services would point to the fact that non-volunteers were willing takers of the future voluntary work provided they were well-informed of the activity. The present research however strongly shows that non-volunteer retirees have non-committal response when asked of their propensity to engage in voluntary work in the future giving an ambiguous position with regards to volunteerism.

Of the nine statements related to volunteer's frustrations, the lack of dynamic leadership seemed to be the main issue followed by the apparent physical inability of some to carry out volunteer work, especially those who might have experienced some health problems or when the place of work was far from their place of residence. There

seems to be a strong indication that one of the negative factors that discourages retirees from volunteering is the lack of dynamic leadership in the organisation that they wish to work in or have already worked and these frustrations do not bode well for both parties. While it shies away potential volunteers, it also stifles enthusiasm of other people who are now working within the organisation. On another level, volunteers indicated that rewards for engaging in voluntary work was the least of their concerns and thus, it implies that their personal agenda or interest in this matter takes a backseat.

Table 9 shows volunteers' and non-volunteers' perception of their satisfaction towards volunteerism. While volunteer retirees stressed the importance of sharing their experiences as a source of satisfaction, the non-volunteers, on the other hand, stressed the issue of "creating a sense of civic responsibility" as an important criterion in measuring satisfaction. This however is not consistent with

TABLE 9
 Respondents' satisfaction on voluntary work (N=261)

Satisfaction items	Volunteer (n=136)			Non-volunteer (n=125)		
	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)	NI (%)	SI (%)	I (%)
Provides a sense of purpose.	1.5	14.0	84.6	2.4	19.2	48.4
Contribution to national unity.	2.2	16.2	81.6	7.2	17.6	75.2
Reduces feeling of isolation.	5.1	28.7	66.2	14.4	27.2	58.4
Maintains satisfactory mental health.	.7	24.3	75.0	12.0	21.6	66.4
Sharing of experiences.	1.5	9.6	88.9	4.8	19.2	76.0
Enhancing self-esteem.	10.3	32.4	57.3	15.2	34.4	50.4
Spending free-time usefully.	.7	23.5	75.8	4.8	26.4	68.8
Creating a sense of civic responsibility	.7	14.0	85.3	1.6	15.2	83.2

the non-volunteers' non-committal attitude if they were to be given the opportunity to do any voluntary work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Most of the retirees were Malay males and are from peninsular Malaysia and the majority of them were from the education sector. The retirees were generally in fairly good health and had a comfortable financial standing. Being more or less financially sound, the search for rewards for their service was not really wanting. The volunteer retirees were involved in volunteerism not for the financial gain but more as a selfless service to the society taking note that they felt duty-bound to give back what that society had given to them during their "productive" years.

Slightly more than half of the retirees were engaged in voluntary work and said to be productive with more than 50% were still having full, partial or self-employment while others were "free". This finding alone contradicts the prevailing myth that once the productive Malaysian workers pass their "prime" i.e. 55/56 years old, they are now considered a "rocking chair relics" or, to use the colloquial expression, as a "household decoration". In the same vein, knowing that a majority of them are still working productively with specifically about 25% are self-employed,

it is safe to say that they have actually not left employment at all. It also reflected the satisfactory health status of retirees dispelling further a predominant notion that once they reached the retirement age, were faced with numerous health problems and therefore become a 'liability' in the organization rather than a productive asset. This finding also, strongly suggests that perhaps what have made them real healthy, at least, during the time of the survey, due to the fact that they have been working productively and this in itself impresses the community that active work brings with it a healthy lifestyle. A rather common expression and also carries some truth is, 'alzheimer's disease is the best partner of a non-working elderly.'

Retirees' propensity to get involved in voluntary work which has religious, educational or social nature has been indicated. As shown in the study of Merriam and Mazanah (2000), the cultural values greatly influenced this tendency, arguing that as compared to the western values, with the former stresses on the importance of the community and personal relationships and close friendships, not to mention the aim for spiritual fulfillment as reflected in the retirees' tendency to get involved in religious activities.

Based on the findings, a number of recommendations on how to attract more retirees towards volunteerism are proposed

how government and NGOs could help advance the issue of volunteerism and how retirees could make the right choice of organization.

1. In attracting more retirees to volunteer, the present volunteers themselves should play an active role in getting more members. This is dependent on whether volunteers are happy with their current work.
2. In as much as most of these volunteers are working for religious entities, these can be utilised as the communication channels on the information regarding retirees, pensioners, senior citizens and the like.
3. A systematic recruitment, selection and placement of volunteers can aid in determining the motivation, abilities and skills, the type of work preferred and availability of time of the retirees vis-a-vis the need of various organizations.
4. There should be a national policy on providing healthy and meaningful living for all categories and gender of the ageing population in the country. As the retirees tend to withdraw from their active life as age advances, it is important to provide appropriate geriatric facilities to cater for their ageing needs and to enhance their productive lifestyle.
5. As a large number of retirees are from the education service, they can be engaged in coaching or tutorial classes organised by the Government; while others in managerial and consultancy work within the community.
6. There is a need to change the attitude of the public towards retirees as unproductive or inactive. The formation of the Pensioners' Association and the Senior Citizens Association could assist in finding/matching suitable and meaningful activities for retirees.
7. Educational institutions should give prominence to voluntary work by incorporating service learning in the curriculum.
8. Organizations should encourage voluntary work among the staff by giving recognition to those who join NGO voluntary work.
9. There is a need for the Government to set up a special task force to review the social policy for the ageing population and to incorporate among others their concerns and needs and how the government bodies can enhance and attract retirees to contribute to voluntary work.

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(Received: 29 August 2005)