

Profiling Youth Participation in Volunteer Activities in Malaysia: Understanding the Motivational Factors Influencing Participation in Volunteer Work among Malaysian Youth

Nur Aishah Hamizah Abdullah Sahimi^{1*}, Turiman Suandi², Ismi Arif Ismail² and Siti Raba'ah Hamzah²

¹*Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Department of Professional Development & Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

The involvement of youth in volunteer work is essential as it enables them to contribute to society (Checkoway, 2011). However, profile studies on Malaysian youth participation in volunteer activities are scarce and the subject warrants further research (Siti Raba'ah et al., 2011; Turiman et al., 2009). What is the level of participation of youth in volunteer activities? What hinders or motivates them to participate in volunteering work? This research profiles youth participation in volunteer activities in Malaysia. Specifically, it is aimed at profiling: 1) factors that motivate youth to participate in volunteer work; 2) the level of motivation towards participation in volunteer work among Malaysian youth; and 3) the most dominant motivation factor of youth participation in volunteer work. A total of 342 Malaysian youths participated in this nationwide study. A Youth Motivation on Participation in Volunteering Questionnaire was administered to Malaysian youth. Data were analysed and interpreted to provide the key findings on Malaysian youth engagement and participation in volunteer work. This study shows that the relationship between motivation and participation in volunteer work is positively significant. It shows that almost

all the respondents in this study participating in voluntary activities were influenced by a number of motivating factors. The study ends with recommendations for policy makers and practitioners on how to attract youth to participate and to engage more effectively in volunteer work.

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E-mail addresses:

aishahsahimi@gmail.com (Nur Aishah Hamizah Abdullah Sahimi)

turiman@upm.edu.my (Turiman Suandi)

ismi@upm.edu.my (Ismi Arif Ismail)

srh@upm.edu.my (Siti Raba'ah Hamzah)

* Corresponding author

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism and community services started in Malaysia in the years between the 1960s and the 1980s (Mohamed, 1986) to seek helps and supports from youth in many aspects ranging from politics to economic and social activities (Faizli, 2013). The youth were called on as they are always expected to define the national vision and elevate the status and image of the country to the higher level. However, it is important to understand the youth and Malaysian youth, especially, before delving into the role of youth and their participation in volunteer work in Malaysia. The definition of youth varies according to country and culture, especially in terms of the actual age range of youth. The United Nations Association (2012) outlines the ages of 15 to 24 years old as the age of the individual youth, while the Commonwealth Youth Programme Youth (CYP) in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 defines youth as individuals ranging from 15 to 29 years old. According to Gale and Fahey (2005), each country has its own definition of youth; in Japan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the United States, the range is 15 to 24 years old, while in Singapore and India it is 15 to 35 years old, in Bangladesh it is 18 to 35 years old, in European countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Denmark it is 16 to 29 years old and in China it is 15 to 29 years old. Specifically in Malaysia, youth are defined as those within the age group of 15 to 40 years old (Dzulhailmi et al., 2012). Statistically, youth represents the largest portion of Malaysians population compared

with other age groups such as children and adults. In 2012, youth numbered 46% of the population, which was equivalent to 13.3 million people out of the total Malaysian population at the time (Kasim, Zulkharnain, Hashim, Ibrahim, & Yusof, 2014).

According to Kim (2014), youth play an important part as they are seen to be a key element of future development for the country. They are the driving force of social transformation and can exert social pressure on demanding rights and priorities for the betterment of society as a whole (Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network, 2003). Research also stressed that "youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but the partners of today." Acknowledging the significance of youth contribution to society and nation building, the Malaysian government has clearly shown their concern and support for youth participation in volunteer activities by launching the 1 Malaysia for Youth (1M4U) with funds amounting to more than RM100 million (Carvalho & Ahmad, 2012). Besides, the Malaysian Youth Council (MBM) has underlined the role of youth organisations in many aspects such as cultivating a sense of responsibility, patriotism and volunteerism among youth, encouraging and inducing youth to play a positive and effective role in society and the nation, and working in close collaboration with the bodies responsible for youth affairs in the interest of the youth movement (Haslinda et al., 2012).

In the meantime, the awareness of the government and the community on the importance of volunteerism can also

be seen through the increasing in the establishment of voluntary organisations in Malaysia (Nawi & Asmuni, 2013) that actively seek the participation of youth such as Majlis Sukarelawan Universiti Malaysia (MASKUM), Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS), Malaysian Association of Youth Clubs (MAYC), Federation of Peninsular Malay Students Association (GPMS) and Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM). According to Azimi and Turiman (1996, 1997), youth organisations in Malaysia have not changed much since the 1970s. However, Azizan (2007) found that volunteerism practised in Malaysia nowadays is so much different from before. This is because various efforts have been made by various parties, including the government and non-governmental organisations, to inculcate the culture of volunteerism with high number of active participation from youth in volunteer activities in Malaysia. In addition, volunteerism has been given prominence as a basic element of higher education by being included in Malaysia's tertiary education system through co-curricular activities. Higher Learning Institutions (IPTs) in Malaysia also have been urged to give special credits for student involvement in voluntary activities (Mansor, 2010).

Nonetheless, a study involving 3,816 respondents found that the spirit of volunteerism among the students was only moderate (Julinawati et al., 2012). The involvement and the spirit of volunteerism should be increased as volunteerism gives added value to youth and it helps in

producing quality future leaders (Julinawati et al., 2012). Therefore, research into the involvement of youth in volunteer work through motivation is essential to help increase youth involvement in volunteer activities.

Past studies showed that volunteer participation was motivated by certain factors defined by the context of particular research studies (South, Purcell, Branney, Gamsu, & White, 2014; Von Bonsdorff & Rantanen, 2011). Other studies indicated that individuals participated in volunteer activities because they chose to do so on their own out of the spirit of altruism (Ali, Russ, Grarib, & Hadrami, 2014; Carpenter & Myers, 2010; Kahana, Bhatta, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Midlarsky, 2013; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Research by Houle, Sagarin and Kaplan (2005) found that individuals' participation in volunteer work had different motivation and expectations; the factors varied depending on the context of the study, sample profile and socio-demography of the subjects (Grönlund et al., 2011; Hobbs & White, 2012; Hustinx et al., 2010).

Although research by Turiman et al. (2011) found that 74.6% of their total sample were involved in voluntary activities, other researchers did not find such a high number of volunteers among their respondents. Besides, Azizan (2011) has argued that volunteerism in Malaysia has yet to prove to be a basic and important aspect in the development of the country and this should be addressed systematically and consistently. Additionally, Siti Raba'ah

et al. (2011) and Turiman et al. (2009) stated that profile studies on Malaysian youth participation in volunteer activities are scarce and the subject warrants further research. Despite all the efforts carried out to cultivate a spirit of volunteerism in society, studies on youth motivation to participate in voluntary activities are less studied. Youth involvement in voluntary work is also seen to be inconsistent. The initiatives in place to attract young people to participate in volunteer work are sometimes seen as not appropriate in the context of voluntary work and did not fit the wants and needs of youth.

Thus, this study will answer such questions as: What is the level of participation of youth in volunteer activities?; and What hinders and motivates them to participate in volunteer work? This research identified volunteer profiles through their participation in volunteer activities. Specifically, it was aimed at profiling: 1) factors that motivate youth to participate in volunteer work; 2) the level of motivation towards participation in volunteer work among Malaysian youth; and 3) the most dominant motivation factor influencing youth participation in volunteer work.

Literature Review

Volunteerism is a crucial aspect of life because it has an element of sincerity in the aid provided. Studies defined volunteerism as an organised, ongoing and pro-social behaviour specifically to cater benefits and welfare to community through any particular organisation (Omoto & Syder, 1995; Penner, 2002; Snyder & Omoto,

2000). Turiman (1991) defined volunteerism as an individual's behaviour of assisting that is seen as valuable to him and it is neither intended to obtain material compensation nor forced by any party. According to Akintola (2011), volunteering is a deed of serving the community by providing time and energy without expecting money or any material gains in return. A volunteer is also defined as someone who always looks for opportunities to help others (Clary et al., 1998) and who provides aid willingly in any circumstances (Lavelle, 2010). Meanwhile, Azizan (2011) stipulated that volunteerism ought to encompass eight features, which are organisation and social mobility, volunteer development, various voluntary activities, knowledge regarding various aspects of volunteerism, the skills that are needed to volunteer, volunteer management, the management of voluntary organisations and volunteer leadership.

Volunteer participation or volunteerism can contribute significantly to the development of the country. Therefore, many social scientists have been interested in studying volunteerism, especially the reasons or motivation for engaging in this social behaviour (Wilson, 2012). Past research showed that the type of voluntary organisation, the family, teachers and time are motivational factors for youth to participate in volunteer activities (Gage III & Thapa, 2012). Bang and Ross (2009) categorised seven volunteer motivations: 1) expression of values; 2) community involvement; 3) interpersonal contacts; 4) career orientation; 5) personal development;

6) external rewards; and 7) interest to sport. Yeung (2004) on his part stated that besides altruism, social contract and personal desires, emotional needs can also influence an individual's motivation to volunteer. However, a study found that the link between emotion and volunteer participation is weak (MacGillivray & Lynd-Stevenson, 2013).

Many research studies focussed on three aspects of youth motivation to volunteer, which are altruistic, material and social motivation (Esmond & Dunlop, 2004; Hussin & Arshad, 2012; Morrow-Howell & Mui, 1989; Tapp & Spanier, 1973; Widjaja, 2010), while various other studies considered other aspects of motivation related to demographic profile (Clerkin, Paynter, & Taylor, 2009; Eley, 2001; Pauline & Pauline, 2009; Turiman et al., 2011). Ellis (2004) specified five volunteer motivation categories, which are personal feelings, personal needs, altruism, experience and personal inducements. Other than altruism, volunteers are also motivated by learning and development, a sense of belonging and recognition of their career (Ferreira, Proença, & Proença, 2012). Hyde and Knowles (2013) identified other factors that motivate youth to engage in volunteer activities as being the desire to help people who are suffering, make people happy in a given period of time, provide support to the local community, follow in the footsteps of family members similarly involved in volunteer work, give back to society, love people in need, contribute groceries, occupy free time and be responsible to voluntary

organisations. In addition, Turiman et al. (2011) found that religion, community development, reward, support, career development, trends and knowledge also have a significant relationship on motivation towards youth participation in volunteerism.

From the psychological perspective, the most widely proposed theory is the theory of functional approach (Clary et al., 1998; 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Snyder, 1993). The theory has validated its usefulness and practicality in explaining motivation towards volunteerism (Wilson, 2012). According to Clary et al. (1998), this theory states six types of motivation arising from the following:

- 1) Values: This function allows individuals to express their values such as altruism and humanitarian concerns.
- 2) Understanding: This function drives volunteers to learn, improve and exercise skills to ensure none is left untapped.
- 3) Career: This function drives volunteers to increase and to improve career-related experiences, to look for job opportunities and to increase their job prospects.
- 4) Social needs: This function allows individuals to satisfy their need to strengthen and increase social relationships and interaction.
- 5) Enhancement: This function motivates volunteers to increase in personal growth and self-development.
- 6) Sense of security: This function addresses volunteers' desire to overcome

negative feelings within the individual, to surmount personal problems and to decrease guilt for being more fortunate than others.

There are four assumptions of the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI), which are: 1) People are purposeful, plan-driven and goal-directed i.e. volunteers engage in volunteer work in order to satisfy important personal goals; 2) Different people may do similar things for different reasons i.e. volunteers performing the same volunteer activity for the same organisation may have different reasons for volunteering; 3) Any one individual may be motivated by more than one need or goal i.e. an individual volunteer may be attempting to satisfy two or more motives through one activity; and 4) Outcomes depend on the matching of needs and goals to the opportunities afforded by the environment i.e. successful volunteer recruitment, satisfaction and retention are tied to the ability of the volunteer experience to fulfil important motives that drive the volunteer.

The functional motivation theory was derived from theories concerning attitude and persuasion at the centre of which were two considerations, namely: 1) individuals participate in purpose-driven activities to fulfil a certain goal; and 2) individuals can perform the same activities to serve different psychological functions (Clary et al., 1998; Widjaja, 2010). In other words, different volunteers engage in volunteer service to fulfil distinct psychological functions unique

to the individual or a particular time of the individual's life. However, all volunteers are attracted to volunteerism because it fulfils certain psychological functions (Widjaja, 2010).

METHODS

Data for the study were collected from young Malaysian volunteers between the ages of 15 and 40 years old. The sample for this study included 342 active volunteers within nationally-recognised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia. A Youth Motivation on Participation in Volunteering Activities Questionnaire adapted from the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) by Clary et al. (1998) was administered to Malaysian youths. This study used a simple random sampling method for data collection, allowing all youths who engage in voluntary work to have the same opportunity to function as respondents of the study. The large study population was divided into five zones. Zone A represented the northern states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak, while Zone B represented the central and southern states of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor as well as the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, Zone C represented the eastern states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan, Zone D represented the state of Sabah and the Federal Territory of Labuan and Zone E represented the state of Sarawak. The simple random sampling method was used to obtain respondents for every zone. This study also used the quantitative

research design as it made use of numerical and numbering data. Thus, to measure and to fulfil the objectives of the study, this research used the correlation research design. This research design measures the relationship between two or more variables in the same group. Hence, it was suitable for the context, as the study attempted to reveal the relationship between each factor studied in this study and participation in volunteer work. Data were analysed using SPSS in order to answer the research objectives by way of descriptive and inferential methods. The descriptive analysis reported the mean, median, mode, frequency, minimum and maximum, percentage, average and standard deviation used to measure and describe the respondents' demographics and the level of each variable. This study used inferential statistical techniques to analyse the entire dataset in order to answer the problem statement and objectives of the study. The inferential statistical techniques used were the Pearson correlation analysis and Simple Linear Regression. The Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between motivation of youth to engage in volunteer work and their participation in volunteer work. Meanwhile, the Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to determine the most dominant factor influencing youth participation in volunteerism within the framework. The following section presents the results from the analysis of the data collected from this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis was conducted to obtain volunteer profiles based on gender, race, age group and residence. Table 1 shows that the sample was considered balanced in terms of gender, with males making up 58.2% and females, 41.8% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were Malay, numbering 81.3%, while 10.5% were Chinese, 2.9% were Indian and 5.3% were of other ethnic groups. Among the 342 respondents, 84.2% were Muslims, 5.3%, Christians, 7.3%, Buddhists and 3.2%, Hindus. Table 1 also shows that 35.2% of the respondents were between 15 and 20 years old, 37.7%, between 21 and 25 years, 13.6%, between 26 and 30 years, 5.9%, between 31 and 35 years and 2.7%, between 36 and 40 years. A percentage of 44.7% of the respondents lived in urban areas, 50.9%, in sub-urban areas and only 4.4% lived in rural areas.

Table 1
Respondents' demographic profile (n=342)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (n=342)		
Male	199	58.2
Female	143	41.8
Race (n=342)		
Malay	278	81.3
Chinese	36	10.5
Indian	10	2.9
Others	18	5.3
Religion (n=342)		
Muslim	288	84.2
Christian	18	5.3
Buddhist	25	7.3
Hindu	11	3.2

Table 1 (continue)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (n=342)		
15-20	122	35.7
21-25	129	37.7
26-30	47	13.6
31-35	20	5.9
36-40	12	2.7
Residence		
Urban	153	44.7
Sub-urban	174	50.9
Rural	15	4.4

To determine the level of the research variables, the researchers examined the means and standard deviation for the five motivational factors i.e. values, understanding, career, social needs, enhancement and sense of security using the mean scores (1.00 to 3.33 is considered low, 3.34 to 6.66, moderate and 6.67 to 10.00, high) shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Interpretation of mean scores into 3 levels (1-10)

Mean score	Interpretation
(1.00-3.33)	Low
(3.34-6.66)	Moderate
(6.67-10.00)	High

The motivational factors for participation in volunteer work discussed and measured in this study were based on the Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI), which comprises the six elements i.e. values (concern for others people and the expression of humanitarian values through voluntary

activities); understanding (desire to acquire knowledge, to practise unused skills and to utilise capabilities); career (career-related desires such as the desire to gain experience and explore career opportunities and job prospects); social needs (the need for interaction with others and for strengthening of social relationships); enhancement (the desire to increase in personal growth and positive self-development), and sense of security (need to remove negative and guilt feelings towards the less fortunate and to escape from personal problems).

As presented in Table 3, the respondents indicated that motivation to learn, explore their strengths, exercise their skills and expand their understanding of how to give aid was the strongest factor in driving them to participate in voluntary activities. This factor received a mean score of 7.50. The other factors, in order of influence from strong to weak, were enhancement ($M=7.41$), values ($M=7.39$), career ($M=7.31$), social needs ($M=7.29$) and sense of security ($M=7.27$). This finding implied that the overall level of motivation of the youth respondents to participate in voluntary activities spurred on by these six elements of motivation was high. Using VFI, this study found that there is a need to increase youth motivation by increasing their confidence and understanding of volunteerism. By assessing the influence of various factors such as family, educational institutions, relatives and peers, the present study can be of use to volunteer organisations as its findings can be translated into specific action designed to increase the rate of youth

participation in volunteer activities. This study also supported the findings of previous research such as Turiman et al. (2011), Hyde and Knowles (2013), Widjaja (2010), and Hussin and Mohd Arshad (2012). Thus, it was shown that several issues need to be addressed in encouraging youths to be motivated and to be willing to participate in voluntary work.

Table 3
Mean and standard deviation of six motivational functions

Variables	Mean	SD
Values	7.39	1.43
Understanding	7.50	1.53
Career	7.31	1.56
Social needs	7.29	1.48
Enhancement	7.41	1.55
Sense of security	7.27	1.69

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between each of the six motivational factors (values, understanding, career, social needs, enhancement and sense of security) and participation in volunteerism ($M=7.37$, $SD=1.47$) as shown in Table 4. Yielding an alpha level of 0.05, the results of the correlation showed that there was a significantly strong positive relationship between the values function and the participation function, with a score of $r(342)=0.852$, $p=0.01$. The results also indicated that the relationship between participation and the other functions was significantly, positively and strongly correlated with understanding, with a

score of $r(342)=0.884$, $p=0.01$, career, $r(342)=0.853$, $p=0.01$, social needs, $r(342)=0.844$, $p=0.01$ and enhancement, $r(342)=0.855$, $p=0.01$. Meanwhile, the correlation between the sense of security function and participation was found to have a moderately positive relationship, with $r(342)=0.678$, $p=0.01$. This indicated that youth motivation among the respondents towards participation in volunteer work was strongly related to values, understanding, career, social needs and enhancement, but only moderately related to sense of security.

The study also showed that the relationship between motivation and participation in volunteer work was positively significant. This showed that almost all the respondents were influenced by a number of motivating factors. The findings showed that these youth respondents were more likely to participate in voluntary activities when the activities could offer: positive values such as the opportunity to display altruism and humanism; provide understanding i.e. the opportunity to learn acquire knowledge, make improvements to existing skill and knowledge and to exercise existing skills; career-related benefits i.e. the opportunity to enhance experience for career development and readiness to find better jobs for the future); social needs i.e. the opportunity to improve communication skills and strengthen existing relationships and expand networking; enhancement i.e. the opportunity to enhance efforts towards self-development, personal growth and self-esteem; and sense of security i.e. the

opportunity to reduce a sense of guilt at being better off than others and to overcome negative feelings towards others.

The findings of the analysis of correlation between motivation and participation in volunteer work supported the principles underlined in the Functional Approach (Clary et al., 1998), with a focus on motivation as a driving force for participation in voluntary activities. The findings also supported those reported in previous studies such as Turiman et al. (2011), which showed that motivation as a factor was a huge influence on youth involvement in voluntary work.

Table 4
Intercorrelation between six motivational functions (values, understanding, career, social, enhancement and protective) and participation in voluntary work

	Participation in Voluntary Work
Values	0.852
Understanding	0.884
Career	0.853
Social needs	0.844
Enhancement	0.855
Sense of security	0.678

CONCLUSION

Profiling youth engagement and participation in voluntary activities in Malaysia is important. For a number of reasons, voluntary activities have increased in recent years, much of it driven by public and private sector. In this study, six factors were explored, which are values, understanding, career, social needs, enhancement and sense of security that act as predictors of

the motivational function to encourage participation in voluntary works. This study also showed a high level of participation among youth in voluntary activities.

This study identified volunteer profiles through volunteer participation in voluntary activities. Specifically, it was aimed at profiling the factors that motivate youth to become involved in volunteerism. Youth motivation to participate in voluntary activities is strongly related to values, understanding, career, social and enhancement function. Having values encourages people to volunteer even if few seem willing to do their part. Having values also helps explain why some volunteers are more committed to their work than others. Most of the volunteers in the sample explained that they volunteered because they realised there was a “need” for their involvement and they felt a sense of “responsibility” towards others. This led them to “dedicate themselves” to service because they were “concerned” about others and cared about “what happen[ed] to people in the community.” They were also guided by “a warm and sincere desire to right human wrongs” and to give “their time and effort” as well as skills to helping their communities.

In this study, the findings showed that voluntary activities supported volunteers in using their knowledge for the community’s benefit and to develop and practise skills that might have otherwise remained dormant. In terms of career, the findings revealed that improvement to the volunteers’ skills was necessary to make them more employable.

Being involved in voluntary activities will pave the way of social interaction that could develop into friendship and career networking and employment opportunities. As for the factor of enhancement as an element of motivation, the study showed that the respondents experienced enhanced self-esteem as a result of participating in voluntary activities such as blood donations, helping the community and environment and becoming involved in health campaigns and sport activities.

These findings suggest that the six factors, which are values, understanding, career, social needs, enhancement and sense of security, are predictors of the motivational function that encourages participation in voluntary activities. This information would be beneficial to volunteer organisations as the data would enable them to tailor their promotions to meet the needs of youth volunteers, and in this way, ensure the success of their voluntary activities.

Recommendations

Future studies on this subject could include in-depth interviews to collect more data on what might motivate youths to participate in voluntary activities. The present study is cross-sectional and it is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies on volunteers in Malaysia. These results have clear practical implications. Being aware of motivational agenda can be useful when designing recruitment that is tailored to the profile of the volunteers. It will allow voluntary bodies to know which group of youths to

attract and how to match their message to the motivation level of the youths for best impact on their community.

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