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# **UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE ROLES OF ALTRUISM AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS ON VOLUNTEERING COMMITMENT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The growing awareness of volunteerism has made volunteerism as an issue on the global scale. In relation to this, the essential role of volunteerism in the modern society has been the subject of increased attention by many leaders. It was well captured in the first 1988 presidential debate when President Bush of the United States of America stressed on the prevalence of the voluntary sector in helping the government to solve many of its domestic problems such as poverty, school dropouts, crime and substance abuse (Turiman Suandi, 1991).

Based on the report by Independent Sector (2001) as cited in Mardhiyyah Shari et al. (2013), the volunteering activities carried out through non-profit organisations in the US have been estimated to be equivalent to 9 million full time jobs. It is perceived that volunteering activities are crucial within America. Moreover, volunteerism has been evident to be an integral part of the social and economic landscape of Australia. It is reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], (2007) that approximately 713 million hours were spent on volunteering annually. Mardhiyyah Shari et al. (2013) also found that a survey in the UK suggested that volunteering was worth up to 40 billion pounds per annum, making it the third largest contributor to the nation's Gross Domestic Product.

All those reported cases of volunteering work all over the world are overviewed and discussed to provide a better prospect and a deeper understanding on how those developed countries view and perceive volunteerism.

## **PURPOSE/AIM & BACKGROUND**

The present study aims to explore the socio-demographic background of university students who participate in volunteering activities, to examine the effect of altruism on the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism and lastly to examine the differences in terms of students' commitment towards volunteerism across their gender, education level & ethnicity.

While the ongoing Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016- 2020) is designed to anchor growth on people in 2020 and the final leg before we enter the arena of developed nations, thus the volunteering activities and associations are identified as one of the key agenda incorporated in the plans. It is highlighted under the first and third thrusts on inclusivity and human capital respectively which give special emphases on youth volunteerism by implementing National Youth Policy (Official Website of Economic Planning Unit (EPU), 2017).

In that respect, the Malaysian government is committed in its plans to nurture the young generations as the targeted group of population that could spearhead this volunteering work and play their parts effectively. Despite all the government effort as outlined above, the younger generations are still not aware of this spirit. This is supported by Mercy Malaysia president Datuk Dr Ahmad Faizal Perdaus said the low level of volunteerism among Malaysians could be due to the lack of focus on

community service among the young in schools (*The Star Online*, October 15, 2017). The university students are not an exception. For example, Aisyah et al, (2013) claimed that lack of interest in volunteerism among youth, such as making the Voluntary Youth Anti-Drug Programme to be a success has always been a problem. The programme should arouse students at various levels ranging from secondary schools to the tertiary level in Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), somehow it is not. It is interesting to find that, based on a study by Kauthar Mohamad Kamaludin et al., (2013), gender, marital status and education are among the demographic variables that have been identified as indicators of an inclination towards volunteerism.

This study further supports the studies done by Zweigenhattm et al., (1996) and Lindenmeir (2008), which found that women are more likely to engage in voluntary work and are more dependable compared to their male counterparts. Previous studies have also reported that volunteering generally increases with educational attainment whereby those with higher levels of formal education are more likely to volunteer than others and may contribute more hours in volunteering (Hall et al., 2009; Claxton-Oldfield et al., 2011; Wilson & Newman, 2011).

On the other hand, one's level of education has been found to be among the most consistent predictors for voluntary engagement (McPherson and Rotolo 1996). On the other hand, with regard to ethnic groups, the influence of ethnic groups on volunteering and the pattern of association vary from study to study. A review of the literature reveals a number of studies of whom volunteers, but they present inconsistently, even contradictory findings. One most possibly explanation on this matter is that the nature of the sample and the measure of volunteerism (Wilson, 2012).

Findings in the United States (data from the U.S. Current Population Survey) have shown that there are strong differences in volunteering work by ethnicity (Bey, 2008). This is confirmed by findings from his study that Whites are much more likely than African America who was inclined to volunteer, whereas Asians and Hispanics consistently appear to have low rates of volunteering work. They also appear to be much less actively engaged in their communities as compared to either Whites or Blacks.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative approach with a cross sectional study was employed among students in University of Malaya. The analysis of data was based on 375 collected and usable questionnaires. The sampling methods applied was purposive and convenience sampling whereby the sample was based on current students of the University of Malaya and the researcher's convenience as well as the availability of the sample (Creswell, 2014).

Data were obtained by conducting a survey using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted with some modifications from questionnaire used by Turiman Suandi (1991) in the Malaysian context and Clary et al. (1996).

## **FINDINGS/RESULTS**

The findings obtained in this study demonstrated the wide-ranging characteristics of the majority of the volunteers in the University of Malaya. The present results revealed that the influence of altruism was found to be significant on the level of students' volunteerism. The results also indicated that

only gender of respondents was found to be significantly different in terms of their volunteering commitment. However, it was also discovered that no differences in terms of ethnicity and education level of the students level of commitment towards volunteerism.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

To pave the way for a successful implementation of volunteering work, the university itself must set up efforts to integrate their students into the communities that surround them. One example is the growth in community service and service-learning programs. It is envisaged that, the government must see that student volunteering is a core part of developing an engaged and civil society. Thus, it is safe to say that volunteering plays a vital role for the development and wellbeing of a community. Students should perceive volunteering work as a value added things such as skill development or a way to “test new careers in their future undertakings.

**Keywords:** Commitment towards Volunteerism, Altruisms, University Students, Demographic

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