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Normah A. N., Lukman Z. M. & Muhamad Fazil A.

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Implications of Constraints towards Students' Involvement in Volunteer Activities

Normah A. N., Lukman Z. M. & Muhamad Fazil A.

Fakulti Pengajian Sains Sosial Gunaan (FSSG), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA),
Kampus Gong Badak, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu.

Corresponding Author Email: normahawang@unisza.edu.my

Abstract

Volunteerism is a global issue that is increasingly gaining attention due to its importance to individuals, society and country. Even though the volunteerism sector contributes largely to individuals, society and country, the decline in volunteerism and lack of participation in the activities is becoming a worrying issue for many parties, especially those involving university students. The declining participation of university students in volunteer activities can be associated with the existence of constraints, caused either by individuals or their surroundings. These constraints mean that there is something that hinders or limits university students from being involved in volunteer activities. This study will look at three aspects, namely intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints and structural constraints. The aim of this study is to identify the types of constraints faced by university students and the effects of these constraints towards the participation of university students in volunteer activities. This study uses the survey method and the quantitative approach. Around 400 students from three public universities, namely Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) that are involved in volunteer activities were selected as respondents. The study results show that the main constraints hindering respondents from being active in volunteer activities is structural constraints that recorded the highest mean value of 4.98 and standard deviation of 1.1, followed by interpersonal constraints with a mean value of 4.05 and standard deviation of 1.5, and finally intrapersonal constraints with a mean value of 3.23 and standard deviation of 1.5. In terms of the effects of these constraints on the involvement of university students in volunteer activities, it is shown that these have a significant influence ($\beta=0.14$, $p<0.05$). This proves that the presence of constraints greatly affects the involvement of university students in volunteer activities.

Keywords: Constraints, Involvement, University Students, Volunteerism

Introduction

Volunteerism is not a new phenomena in society, as it has been around since the beginning of civilisation and the formation of society (Shier et al., 2020). Volunteerism appeared in societies in different forms depending on history, ideology, politics, socio-economy and culture of a country (Rehberg, 2005; UNV, 2011). Human tragedies such as war, political conflict, economic downturns and natural disasters has pushed individuals to react and become involved in

volunteerism. Thus, involvement in volunteerism is not localised, but is characteristically global, transcending national, cultural, religious and societal borders (Rochester, 2006).

Volunteerism is a global issue that is increasingly gaining attention due to its significance to individuals, society and country (Ockenden, 2007; Simha et al., 2011, Fenyas et al., 2021). The effects of volunteerism on individuals can be seen through the aspects of self-growth, career development and social development (Konidari, 2010; Salamon et al., 2011; Llenares and Deocarís, 2015). For societies, involvement in volunteerism can strengthen and empower communities, increase social integration, build strong trust and social bonds, increase societal health and well-being, produce active and positive members of society, form a quality social capital, decrease social problems and crimes, and encourage social inclusion programmes for marginalised groups (Ockenden, 2007). Volunteerism also contributes towards national development aspects by forming a nation that is strong and progressive as well as creating a democratic society (UNV, 2011).

Constraints in The Involvement of University Students in Volunteerism

The involvement of student volunteers in volunteer activities first gained attention around the 1960s and 1970s (Gage III and Thapa, 2012). At that time, universities offered a variety of community service activities that aimed to encourage student participation in volunteer activities through student associations, student affairs and campus-based religious organisations (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Lee and Won, 2011; Gage III and Thapa, 2012). Campus activities encompass activities both sponsored and non-sponsored activities and are organised by universities to inculcate and encourage the development of positive values within the students.

However, the decline in involvement of university students in volunteer activities is worrying many parties (Hall et al., 2006; Samnegard, 2011). The involvement of university students in volunteer activities is still low and is only at a satisfactory level, causing the volunteer sector to be dominated by the elderly and pensioners (Gombe et al., 2015; Gage III and Thapa, 2012). A report from the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (or *Institut Penyelidikan Pembangunan Belia Malaysia* (IPPBM)) (2012/2016) showed that there was a decline in the involvement of youths in volunteer activities, recorded at 67.4% in 2008 then declining to 65.4% (2011) and 60.6% (2015). Even though IPPBM's report showed declining statistics for youths, university students are also represented in that group. This is because the age of youths is deemed as 15 to 40 years.

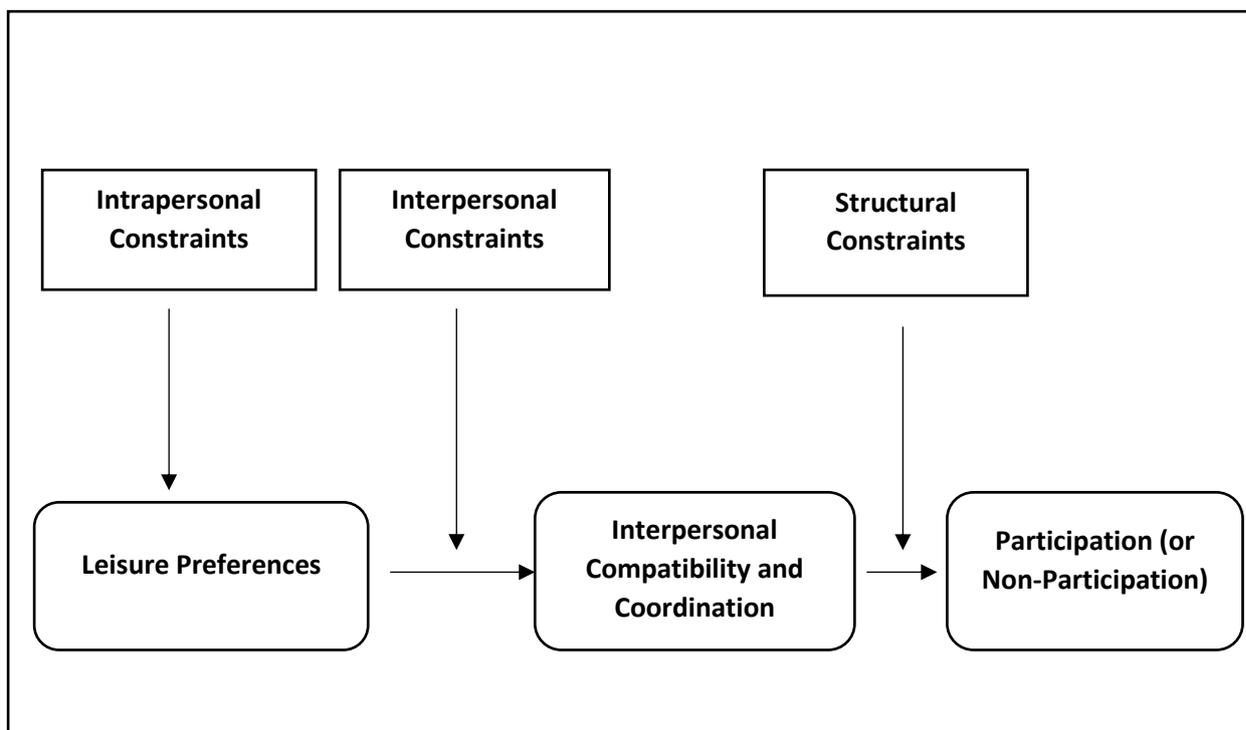
The issue of declining involvement of university students in volunteer activities is a global phenomena that not only occurs in Malaysia but also happens in developed as well as developing countries (Cheng & Djita, 2021). This should not happen as universities have introduced various approaches to encourage the involvement of university students in volunteer activities. Furthermore, the university surroundings expose the students to many social activities, including volunteer activities (Mardhiyyah et al., 2013). The number of student volunteers involved in volunteer activities is still low compared to their involvement in other social activities (Levine and Hirshi, 1991; Bringle and Hatcher, 1996). According to Simha et al (2011), the majority of university students do not respond positively to volunteer programmes being organised.

The decline or non-participation of university students in volunteer activities is attributed to the constraints from individuals or their surroundings (Hall et al., 2006; Samnegard, 2011). Constraints refer to something that hinders or limits students from being involved in volunteer activities (Raymore et al., 1993; Gage III, 2009). Based on the Leisure

Constraints Model, there are three forms of obstacles, namely intrapersonal obstacles, interpersonal constraints and structural constraints (Crawford et al., 1991; Raymore et al., 1993; Gage III and Thapa, 2012).

- i. **Intrapersonal Constraints**– Refers to constraints related to psychology and characteristics in an individual’s self, such as health issues, depression, pressure, and lack of skills, among others. Intrapersonal constraints are seen to be the most influential and powerful in limiting an individual’s involvement in volunteerism. This is because every decision of whether or not to become involved in volunteer activities fully depends on the individual themselves without involving any external pressure.
- ii. **Interpersonal Constraints**– Interpersonal constraints occur due to problems in interacting with those around an individual. Students would become involved in volunteer activities if they are in a positive environment and vice versa. Lack of encouragement from family members and friends would influence the involvement of student in volunteer activities.
- iii. **Structural Constraints**– Refers to external constraints that cannot be avoided by volunteers as these constraints do not come from within themselves. Financial issues, distance, transportation, time, opportunity and accessibility are examples of structural constraints.

Figure 1: Leisure Constraints Model



Source: Crawford et al (1991)

Generally, the main constraints to a person becoming involved in volunteer activities relates to time, money and energy (Lee et al., 2007; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Sundeen et al., 2007; Gombe et al., 2015). A report from the Bureau of Labour and Statistics (2005) shows that constraints faced by students include not having enough time (64.5%), having

transportation issues (5.8%), not interested with the volunteer activities being organised (4.5%), not getting any encouragement (3.1%), feeling that their help is not needed or not suited to the situation (2.2%), not being a member of any organisation (2.1%), feels pressured and deems the activities as not fun (7%) and other issues (12.4%).

Smith et al (2010) through his study found that most students (64.4%) are not active in volunteer activities due to certain constraints. For students, the main constraints for them include not having enough time, lack of interest in volunteer activities, having a negative perception towards volunteerism, lack of awareness about the importance and benefits that they would receive, thinking that volunteerism involves a lot of costs, and assuming that volunteerism would take up a lot of time.

Studies on students that are not involved in volunteer activities in London found that the main constraints they faced included being too busy with their academic assignments (49%), time not suited to their schedule (29%), not finding an icon that can guarantee career opportunities (29%), not relevant to their studies (18%), taking up too much time (17%), locations not suitable (16%), activities that are uninteresting (15%), busy with work (15%), not able to become involved (11%), busy with social activities (10%), busy with other social activities and clubs (9%), language barriers (8%), busy with family commitments (8%), absence of support from their faculty (8%), having had a negative past experience (5%), unsuccessful in the interview to become a volunteer (2%) and having health issues (1%).

Methodology

In the world of research, the method used has to be based on the research objective (Chua, 2006). In addition to this, the use of a suitable method is important so that all study objectives can be achieved. The objective of this study is to:

- Identify the constraints faced by students in volunteerism
- Study the implications of these constraints towards the involvement of university students in volunteer activities.

To achieve the study objective, a quantitative approach was used. According to Neuman (2011), the quantitative approach is based on the positive enquiry research method where research is carried out through experimentation or survey and data that is collected is analysed using statistical research. In this study, the survey method involving structured questionnaires was used. The survey used a structured questionnaire that was distributed among student volunteers who are members of the *Sekretariat Kesukarelawanan Universiti Malaya* or SEKSUM association and Kelab Penyayang at three public universities, namely UM, UKM and UPM.

The population for this study involves student volunteers who are part of selected student associations at public universities around Malaysia. Sekaran and Bougie (2009) suggested that the suitable sample size for most research ranges from 30 to 500 people. However, this study does not involve students from all of the many associations formed based on volunteerism. Instead, in this study, the researcher has chosen only one student association from the three universities selected, namely SEKSUM (UM), Kelab Penyayang (UKM) and Kelab Penyayang (UPM). The justification for the selection of these associations is based on three aspects, i.e. function, objective, and activeness of the association. The selection of respondents is based on their membership in any of these associations and is chosen randomly. Simple random sampling is used to ensure that each subject in the population has an equal chance of being chosen as a study respondent. The simple random sampling process begins with acquiring the name lists for these associations. From these lists,

random draw of votes was carried out to select the respondents. 134 university students were selected from SEKRUM (UM), 133 from Kelab Penyayang (UKM) and 133 from Kelab Penyayang (UPM). This resulted in the total 400 respondents for this study from the three selected associations.

Data acquired from the survey were analysed using SPSS software. Two analysis methods were used, namely descriptive analysis using the mean value to determine the constraints faced by student in volunteerism and the inferential analysis that uses hierarchical multiple regression analysis with the stepwise method to study the implications of the constraints in the involvement of students in volunteer activities.

Results and Discussion

This objective of this study is viewed from two aspects, i.e. determining the constraints faced by university students in getting involved in volunteer activities as well the implications of those constraints on the involvement of students in volunteer activities.

Constraints to Involvement in Volunteerism

Constraints refer to limitations that can prevent students from being involved in volunteer activities. Based on Table 2, the results of the study show that there are three main constraints at a high level for the structural constraints component. The three constraints are financial issues that recorded a mean value of 5.27 with a standard deviation of 1.3, followed by location of volunteer activities being quite far, recording a mean value of 5.17 with a standard deviation of 1.3. Next was the factor of being busy with other commitments, recording a mean value of 5.14 and standard deviation of 1.3.

For the interpersonal constraints component, all items are at a moderate level, scoring between 3.01 and 5.00. Most respondents agreed that their main constraints were having family that were not actively involved in volunteer activities, with a mean value of 4.23 with a standard deviation of 1.7, and having no job prospects, recording the lowest mean value of 3.82 with a standard deviation of 1.8.

For the intrapersonal constraints component, most respondents agreed that they didn't have the necessary skills needed for volunteer activities, recording the highest mean value of 3.53 with a standard deviation of 1.7, followed by the factor of having health issues that recorded a mean value of 3.43 with a standard deviation of 1.8. On the other hand, not many respondents felt that volunteer activities are a waste of time, showing the lowest mean value of 2.85 with a standard deviation of 1.8 (refer Table 1).

Table 1

Constraints to the Involvement of University Students in Volunteer Activities

Obstacle component	Component item			Overall component		
	Mean value	SD	Level	Mean value	SD	Level
<i>Structural Constraints</i>						
Time not suited to schedule	4.92	1.3	Moderate	4.98	1.1	Moderate
No transportation	4.96	1.4	Moderate			
Financial issues/ lack of funds	5.27	1.3	High			
Location that is far away	5.17	1.3	High			
Busy with other commitments	5.14	1.3	High			
Activities are uninteresting	4.45	1.6	Moderate			
<i>Interpersonal Constraints</i>						
Family members are not volunteers	4.23	1.7	Moderate	4.05	1.5	Moderate
Close friends are not volunteers	4.16	1.7	Moderate			
No guarantee for job prospects	3.82	1.8	Moderate			
No encouragement to be a volunteer	4.00	1.7	Moderate			
<i>Intrapersonal Constraints</i>						
Had a negative past experience	3.27	1.6	Moderate	3.23	1.5	Moderate
Disrupts academic studies	3.31	1.6	Moderate			
Having health issues	3.43	1.8	Moderate			
Lack of skills	3.53	1.7	Moderate			
Waste of time	2.85	1.8	Low			
Negative perception	3.04	1.9	Moderate			

Regarding the main constraints that limit the involvement of respondents in volunteer activities, the research results show that all components, namely structural constraints, interpersonal constraints and intrapersonal constraints are at a moderate level. However, based on the results, structural constraints showed the highest mean value at 4.98 with a standard deviation of 1.1, followed by interpersonal constraints with a mean value of 4.05 and

standard deviation of 1.5, and lastly intrapersonal constraints that recorded a mean value of 3.23 and standard deviation of 1.5 (Table 1).

This is consistent with other researchers such as Siti Hawa (2002); Lee et al (2007), Sundeen et al (2007); Haski-Leventhal (2009); Gage III and Thapa (2012); Gombe et al (2015), all of whom opine those structural constraints are the most dominant and are the main limitation to the involvement of students in volunteer activities, compared to intrapersonal constraints and interpersonal constraints. Among the main issues preventing university students from being involved in volunteer activities include being busy with other commitments (Brewis et al., 2010), not having the time to spare (Shaw et al., 1991; Smith et al., 2010), financial issues (Lee et al., 2007; Sundeen et al., 2007; Haski-Leventhal, 2009), not having the right facilities, particularly transportation (Shaw et al., 1991), and worry that their academic studies will be affected if a lot of time and effort is put into the volunteer activities (Astin and Sax, 1998).

The Implication of Constraints Towards the Involvement of Students in Volunteer Activities

The results of the study as shown in Table 2 show a significant constraints regression coefficient value ($\beta=0.14$, $p<0.05$), which reflects those constraints have a significant influence on the involvement of students in volunteer activities. This proves that the presence of constraints impacts the involvement of students in volunteer activities.

Table 2

Constraints Implication Coefficient Towards the Involvement of University Students in Volunteer Activities

Model	<i>Unstandardised coefficients</i>		<i>Standardised</i>	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constraints	.074	.021	.141	3.491	.001

a. Dependent variable: Involvement

The decline in participation of university students in volunteer activities can be related to the presence of a variety of constraints, making it hard for these students to become actively involved. It cannot be denied that there are students who do participate in volunteer activities, but their participation is inconsistent and does not last for a long duration due to the constraints discussed. The results of this study support Leisure Constraints Model where the presence of these constraints limit the involvement of students in volunteer activities.

Even though these constraints are seen to be able to impact the involvement of students in volunteer activities, Crawford et al (1991); Jackson et al (1993) opine that these constraints can be overcome, depending on the student's abilities. If their motivation greatly outweighs the constraints, then the students will choose to become involved in volunteer activities. However, if it is the other way round, then the student would choose to not become involved. This means that involvement in volunteer activities depends on the ability of the students in balancing between the constraints and their motivation (Jackson et al., 1993).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The objective of this study is to identify the constraints faced by university students as well the influence of these constraints on their involvement in volunteer activities. Results of the study show that the main constraints faced by students that limit their active participation

include financial issues or lack of funds, the location of the programme that is far away and being busy with other commitments. The results also show that there are significant implications from these constraints towards students' participation. This shows that the decline in participation of students in volunteer activities can be attributed to the presence of constraints. However, these constraints can be overcome if the students have high motivation to be involved in the volunteer programmes.

Results from this study will contribute by strengthening past research and existing theories. Many previous studies have shown that structural constraints are the main constraints preventing the participation of individuals in volunteer activities. Results from this study also show the same finding, thus building upon existing data. In addition, the outcome of this study also showed that constraints are related to and have significant influence on the level of participation of youths in volunteer activities. In general, the more constraints are present, the less youths will participate in volunteer activities. The results from this study support the Leisure Constraints Model that was introduced by (Crawford et al., 1991). Based on this model, youths are less active in volunteer activities due to there being certain constraints, whether intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural.

The results also provide meaningful input for related parties such as student associations and university management on how to come up with the right and effective strategy to overcome the constraints faced by students to become involved in volunteer activities. A clear understanding on the problems and constraints faced is important for future planning of volunteer programmes. A collective effort from all parties is crucial to encourage university students to be actively involved in volunteerism, which ultimately will benefit them in a holistic way.

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