Social capital: Sense of Community and Social Participation among Youth

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Research Paper

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to survey the level of social capital among Malaysian youth. This study has two main constructs, namely the sense of community and the construct of youth involvement in social activities. This study uses a survey research design that involves data collection using a set of questionnaires. The number of respondents who were randomly selected in this study was 264. The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The findings show that the level of social capital among youth is at a moderate level. The findings also show that the sense of community among youth and their involvement in social activities are still at a moderate level. This suggests that the majority of respondents do not utilize the importance social capital for their well-being. Therefore, the existing practices related to fostering a sense of togetherness need to be reviewed so that the sense of togetherness in a country can be strengthened. Many initiatives should also be undertaken to encourage participation in social activities among youths across the country.

KEYWORDS: Social capital, sense of community, social participation, youth

I. INTRODUCTION

Youth is a pillar of the nation where the quality of youth today will determine the future pattern of the nation. In order to ensure that the country's youth are of high quality, various efforts have been made. Among the efforts made by all governments of the world is to ensure that the youths get a good education. In this way, the youths can identify their talents and potential to be developed positively and optimally. This means that youth is the human capital of a country where the social network between youths whether inward or outward is the capital that needs to be utilized well. Social capital is only built through social networks that involve the process of interaction with various parties. If social capital is built without planning, then the social network that is the capital for the youth will also be built erratically. in today's global world, social capital can be built in a variety of ways including through involvement in virtual social activities that can sometimes lead to conflict. hence, wisdom in managing social capital requires a better strategy. therefore, this study examines this issue by presenting some empirical data related to the social capital of youths in Malaysia. These data are very important to be examined as a basis for understanding the quality of the country's youth that can be used as a basis for further action by various parties.

II.   SOCIAL CAPITAL

There are various terms that have been interpreted by scholars on social capital. Some scholars highlighted the nature of social capital by looking at a person's roles in community. Oher scholars are tended to make a link between an individual networking and nature of socio-environment. Irrespective of various dimensions of interpreting social capital, there is a common thing when talking about social capital is regarding the values of social networking. This means that social capital deals with two main things that are "networking" and "values". [1] Social capital has a value of mutual-trust (trust) between members of society. Social capital is also defined as a social phenomenon that involves networks, norms, and social trust that encourages a social collaboration (coordination and cooperation) for the common good. Social capital has a close link with network of interaction that involves the elements of trust within/between community members to achieve common aspirations. Social capital is the stock of active relationships between communities. Each pattern of relationships that occur is bound by trust, mutual understanding, and shared values, which binding group members to make it possible for joint action to be carried out efficiently and effectively [2] & [3]. Trust is a key condition to the formation of strong social capital in society [4]. Trust can be defined as a sense of mutual trust between individuals and between communities.

Investigation of social capital requires a study of an individual involvement, participation and engagement in community acclivities. An individual participation in community activities might be occurred in a voluntary basis (volunteer) or mutual-understanding between/within community members. The commitment of community members to attend community gatherings, for instance is a benchmark for the values of social capital in the community. Sociologists believe that social capital involves interactions that often benefit both parties over a long and continuous period of time. To form a strong social capital, community members must have the similar norms and social values that may become regulations to be followed by community members. It becomes social guideline to prevent individuals from doing something that is contrary to the norms and vales of the local community. The past study highlights the roles of modern communication i.e. radio and television may contribute towards various happiness, norms and values in the modern society [5]. Overall, social capital is an important resource generated through interaction and networking within/between societies and institutions that provide a sense of trust, reciprocity, social networks, norms and values. These elements would shape the structure of society to achieve the societal aspirations.

III.   METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a survey research design using a set questionnaire containing 21 items. These items are grouped into two categories that are students' involvement community activities and university clubs. Respondents were asked to indicate their involvement in those activities either rarely, sometimes, and often. All the items developed were adapted and modified from several past studies of social capital. This study involves 264 university students in Malaysia that has been selected randomly. Data collected was analysed descriptively.

IV.   FINDINGS

In general, the findings of the study found that the level of sense of community among youth is at a moderate level.

Table 1. Social capital

Social Capital	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levels
Sense of Community	2.1340	.71923	Moderate
Involvement in Social Activities	2.0283	.75522	Moderate
Average	2.0913	.70528	Moderate

Table 2 below displays the findings of the study for each item for the construct of sense of community. In general, there are variations for each sense as follows:

Table 2. Sense of Community

Sense of Community	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Involvement in many community activities	2.10	.898	Moderate
visiting neighbours/relative	1.94	.921	Low
spending time with friends	2.01	.975	Moderate
Together in solving personal problems	2.21	.882	Moderate
Spending time during leisure	2.32	.917	Moderate
Having support from friends	2.08	.927	Moderate

Comfortable with friends	2.07	1.026	Moderate
Improving neighborhood safety	2.20	1.039	Moderate
Trusting community members	2.43	.988	Moderate
Getting support from family	2.14	1.069	Moderate
Respecting each other	2.05	.873	Moderate
Taking care of local environment	2.02	.764	Moderate
Average	2.1340	.71923	Moderate

Having a sense of community is very important in life because it describes the well-being of the individual. The findings of this study indicate that the majority of youths have a moderate sense of community (see Table 2). The majority of them have still unstable feelings about their existence in society. Result shows that there the majority of youths do not visit neighbors. This illustrates that life in this modern-day neighborhood has big issues. It requires a comprehensive strategy by the authorities. At the same time, youths need to change their way of life in the community to further enhance local social networks, while further increasing social capital [6].

Table 2. Youth Involvement in Social Activities

Social Activities	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Involvement in NGO activities	2.17	1.007	Moderate
Voluntarily work	2.08	.884	Moderate
Charity activities	1.96	.837	Low
Club activities	2.02	.834	Moderate
Association activities	2.01	.902	Moderate
Sharing information of various social events	1.98	.958	Low
Cooperation to carry out activities	1.99	.856	Low
Good relationship with society members	2.03	.878	Moderate
Carrying out various social duties	2.03	.928	Moderate
Average	2.0283	.75522	Moderate

Table 2 shows that although in general the level of youth involvement is at a moderate level, there are three items are still at a very low level. The majority of the youth in this study stated that they were significantly less involved in charitable activities. It should be noted that charity activities are very important social activities because they are activities that can cultivate the value of helping in the community. Such social responsibilities need to be increased so that the youths can appreciate the values of humanity. The findings of this study also show that the majority of youths do not share information related to various social activities. In fact, they are also very less active in organizing social activities in the local community. This shows that many youths are still less interested in taking on social responsibilities in their daily lives. It is a matter of concern because weaknesses in social capital can weaken the bonds of sense of belonging and togetherness in society [7].

V.   CONCLUSION

Overall, this study found that the sense of community among youths is at an unsatisfactory level. There are four elements in this study that are in the very weak category, namely activities related to neighborhood ties, involvement in charitable activities, information sharing of social activities and also working together in doing social activities. It indicates that the development of youths requires a comprehensive strategy and is based on current empirical evidence. There are still many improvements that are needed to enable the social network structure of the youths to be strengthened towards making optimal use of their social capital. Among them is to focus on the creation of an intact social network which can create a high value of togetherness, thus enabling the youth to do many activities. Social capital needs to be directed in a positive direction. This is because strong social bonds between youths do not necessarily have a positive impact if youths use social capital by participating in negative activities. Thus, nurturing youth to engage in positive activities is one of the best platforms to form a positive social network. Through such activities, the potential and talent of each youth can be identified and developed. For example, the establishment of clubs and associations that bring together youths in a group whose members have similar interests and talents will enable social capital to be harnessed. A more comprehensive framework is needed in an effort to identify the potential and inclinations of youths in various social activities to enable the social capital of the country's youth to be fully utilized.

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