Voluntary Work in civil Society: Saudi women Volunteers as a social Capital

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Abstract:

This paper describes voluntary work in Saudi civil Society focusing on Saudi women volunteers as a social capital.

Despite the unavailability of literature on volunteering, social capital or statistical data depending on nation wide surveys on volunteering in Saudi Arabia. The researcher adopted a theoretical framework of social capital as defined by Coleman as "being the networks and norms that form connections among members of a society "(Coleman, 1988), and Putnam as being "features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995).

Civic engagement, formal volunteering and civil society organizations are relatively new concepts in Saudi Arabia compared to the west. Saudi Arabia is a transient society; oil resources discovered during 1936 changed a traditional society into modernity. Civil society organizations in the sense of the western world organizations were only established during 1962, the period that coincides the foundation of Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Saudi woman was enabled to be educated and join the labour force and participate in society. She was a pioneer in establishing the first three civil society organizations in the whole country during the 60th of the twentieth century.

The study measures social capital on the basis of different levels:

1- A formal social network that included participation in civil society organizations which enabled Saudi women to participate in developing Saudi community in Jeddah through volunteering, it included types of organizations, areas of participation, type of membership, activities, number of years of participation in voluntary work and numbers of hours of volunteering.

2- An informal social network contained family, friends and neighborhood relations during the last six months.

3- Other measurement of social capital were social trust, feeling of happiness when meeting other women with different style of life and the feeling of self-satisfaction and meaning of life.

Different issues will be reported like characteristics of Saudi women volunteers: demographic such as age and others like: marital status, education, income, profession. A brief historical background of voluntary work in Saudi society, impact of voluntary work on the status of Saudi women volunteers and, problems facing women volunteers and their suggestions to improvement of voluntary work will be reviewed.

The study combines between exploratory and descriptive studies, and uses social survey, historical and anthropological methods. The instruments used are a structured questionnaire designed in accordance with literature and theory of social capital and volunteering, and interviews with some women leaders in volunteering.

The sample was purposive n=377 active women volunteers and the civil society organizations n=98, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The paper is a highlight to some of the results of a PhD. dissertation.
References:


Arabic References:

المملكة العربية السعودية، وزارة العمل والشؤون الاجتماعية (١٤١٩ هـ) نشوء وتطور الخدمات الاجتماعية والعملية في المملكة العربية السعودية، المملكة العربية السعودية، وزارة العمل والشؤون الاجتماعية.