

# **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 that focuses on Saudi women volunteers as a social capital, it is compiled to offer highlights of the results of a PhD. dissertation. Despite the unavailability of literature on volunteering, social capital or statistical data depending of nation wide surveys on volunteering in Saudi Arabia, The researcher adopted a theoretical framework of social capital as defined by Coleman and Putnam and focusing on volunteering and women volunteers. 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 the Saudi community in Jeddah through 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 i.e. tolerance, diversity and value of life. Different issues will be covered such as: demographic profile, 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 for improvement of voluntary work.

**Key words:** Social Capital; Civil Society; Volunteering; Voluntary Work; Saudi Women.

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## **Introduction**

This paper describes voluntary work in Saudi civil Society that focuses on Saudi women volunteers as a social capital, it is compiled to offer highlights of the results of a PhD. dissertation (Afif, 2009) The objectives of the study are to explore:

- 1- The way Saudi women volunteers create social capital.
- 2- The view of women volunteers to voluntary work and its impact on the status of Saudi women volunteers
- 3- Problems facing women volunteers.
- 4- Suggestions to improvement of voluntary work.

## **Civil Society and Voluntary Work in Saudi Arabia**

Civic engagement, formal volunteering and civil society organizations are relatively new concepts in Saudi Arabia compared to the West. Saudi Arabia is a Moslem traditional transient society; oil resources discovered during 1936 changed a traditional society into modernity. Civil society organizations were known 15 centuries ago in Arabia examples are "Souk Okaz" and "Dar Al Nadwa" established before Islam and waqf (endowments) after the rise of Islam. During the era of King Abdulaziz guilds (or sheikhdom) for different professions were found (Al-Salloum, 2006).

Civil society Organizations in the sense of the Western world organizations were only established in 1962, the period that coincides the foundation of Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1999). Saudi Arabia has embraced dramatic changes during the last decade that includes social, political, and economic reforms, the creation of the Shura Council or the Consultative Council, municipal elections (2004), an independent organization for Human Rights, and founding of King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue, all these are positive indicators of reform and modernization for society (Al-Kurdi, 2004). These indicators are also seen as promoting top down political liberalization while at the same time institutionalizing monarchical power in Saudi Arabia (Dioun, 2005). Also the post-Gulf War period commenced a period of rapid growth for Civil Society in the Arab world, CSOs doubled in Saudi Arabia by 2002, and the UNDP views them as the richest source of civic vitality in the Arab world, guiding citizens with an "invisible social hand" (Yom, 2005).

**Table 1: Civil Society Organization in Saudi Arabia**

Civil Society Organization	N	Registration
Men's Philanthropic Societies	366	Ministry of Social Affairs
Women philanthropic societies	30	Ministry of Social Affairs
Foundations	36	Ministry of Social Affairs
Cooperative Societies	161	Ministry of Social Affairs
Sports Clubs (males)		General Presidency of Youth Welfare
Scientific Societies		Saudi Universities
Cultural Clubs	16	Ministry of Culture
Saloons		none
Chamber of Commerce and Industry		Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Professional	4	
International Organizations	3	
Total	872	

Table (1) shows type, number and place for registration of civil society organizations in Saudi Arabia a total of (872) organizations, civil society organizations include men and women philanthropic societies, foundations, cooperative societies, sports clubs (males), scientific societies, cultural clubs, saloons and chambers of commerce and industry, professional, and International Organizations, but no political parties. Registered civil society organizations get financial assistance from the government. And there is a number of unregistered groups who avoid bureaucratic procedure and complications.

Volunteering and volunteerism are being encouraged in schools and universities, through T.V programmes, Internet websites for volunteering and research centres. A "Volunteering Culture" is emerging and the concept of volunteerism is spreading. Awareness of volunteering across the country is evident through new T.V programming, conferences and workshops. The Saudi government is responsive and working to formulate different rules and regulations to organize Civil Society Organizations and voluntary work.

### **Saudi Women: Civil Society and Volunteering:**

Saudi woman was enabled to be educated, join the labor force, and participate in developing society (Almunaggeed, 2006, 18). Saudi women pioneered the establishment of the first three civil society organizations (philanthropic societies) in the whole country in 1962. Factors that motivated pioneering Saudi women to participate in volunteering: they were enthusiastic women with a sense of national feeling and responsibility aiming to improve conditions of Saudi women. The founding of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The openness of Saudi society

to modern changes in other societies and the arrival of expatriates women from Arab or Western countries to Saudi Arabia either for work or for accompanying their husbands (Al- Shubaiki, 1992).

The main feature of women Civil Society Organizations is that they provide a selection of a multi - purpose services in accordance with the needs of society. Services were targeted mainly for poor families and for helping Saudi women and their families in areas like child care, old age, people with special needs, adult education, training and rehabilitation, health care, cultural, religious, poor housing, and recreation (Ali Rida, 2003). The number of women welfare societies during the last half century reached only (30) organizations in the entire country while men civil society organizations flourished attaching women sections for female services or volunteering.

In the last decade a new trend of Civil Society Organizations of one purpose service emerged singularly focused on specific issues such as: health societies focusing on one kind of disease (e.g. Cancer, Alzheimer, Aids etc), advocacy (Human Rights, Domestic Violence), environment and others. These organizations are both of philanthropic or scientific types, some of them are either inclusive for females or males others are gender integrated.

Women Civil Society Organizations in Saudi Arabia encountered different problems during the last half century: 1- multi – services due to multi – goals consumed efforts and resources. 2- Supervision and censorship of the Ministry of Social Affairs stopped cultural activities, and new unregistered groups of women emerged enjoying more freedom in their activities. 3- Civil Society Organizations depend on employees rather than the inexperienced volunteers. 4- Services are duplicated and there is a lack of cooperation and coordination between societies located in the same cities. 5- Other problems in planning projects, administration, inability to cope with large numbers of people applying for assistance, in training, lack of services in rural areas, volunteers retainement, and services are not targeted to developing people (Al-Angary, 2004, 44-45).

## **Theoretical background**

### **Social Capital and Volunteering**

The researcher adopted a theoretical framework of social capital as a school of civil society as being a part of society i.e. the neo – Tocquevillian school that focuses on associational life (Edwards , 2007,10 ) and volunteering.

Social capital is 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).

There are different approaches for measuring social capital Putnam has developed 13 different measures of social capital across all the American states, his main indicators of social capital are formal membership, participation in many different forms of informal networks, social trust and altruism ( doing good for other people) (Putnam 2001). Other indicators for measuring social capital are to conduct a census of groups and group memberships in a given society, and to use survey data on levels of trust and civic engagement (Fukuyama, 2001). And membership in local associations and networks, indicators of trust and adherence to norms and an indicator of collective action (Grootaert and Basteelaer, 2002,). Dimensions of social capital were defined by Narayan and Cassidy as group characteristics (such as number of memberships contribution of money etc.), generalized norms (like helpfulness of people, trustworthiness of people), togetherness (how well people get along) every day sociability, neighborhood connections, volunteerism and trust (Narayan and Cassidy, 2001). Social capital is viewed as an additional resource to that of physical and human capital (Healy 2003, 26-28).

Volunteering is defined as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization" (Wilson, 2000).

Researchers have linked between civil society, social capital and volunteering. Volunteering has been counted as an indicator of social capital as being predicted by civic engagement (Putnam, 2000), it also has a contribution to the development of social capital (Smith, 2000) and may be seen as "an expression of reciprocity or potentially as a direct outcome of social capital" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, 18-19). In addition, where there is "an abundant stock of social capital is presumably what produces a dense civil society" (Fukuyama, 2001).

The World Bank studies make specific links between the role of social capital and development (Krishna and Shrader) and the UNDP describes the importance of collective action by people and civil society groups as an emerging consensus in shaping the course of human development (The United Nations Development Programme, 2002, 54). Volunteering is seen as a substantial activity in most developed countries and is growing in importance in many developing countries (Kakoli and Ziemek, 2001)

Volunteers have played a very important role in providing a range of valuable services to the Community (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, 18-19), in the development of non-profit organizations, and in the work they do to help society. (The Forbes Funds, 2002, 4).

Studies on women and volunteering in Saudi Arabia have focused on role of women organizations in developing society (Al-Sasi, 1981), the role of women voluntary organizations in social welfare (origins- motives- achievements) (Al-Shubaiki, 1992), and the role of majoring in Islamic studies in religious volunteering for Saudi University girls students (Al-Musa, 2003). A related study where the sample unit were board members of a woman welfare organization that focused on women's social networks and urban life in Jeddah (Rajab, 1981).

## **Methodology**

The study combined between exploratory and descriptive studies, and used social survey, historical and anthropological methods. The sample was purposive and snowball, the total number of the sample of civil society organizations in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia n=98 organizations including 6 unregistered groups, total number of volunteers n=377, but since half of the sample participated in more than one organization the total number of volunteers would be equivalent to 724. The interviews (n =29) were held with some leaders in volunteering and people working in voluntary organizations.

The instruments used were a structured questionnaire with some opened questions and opened interviews. The questionnaire was designed in accordance to literature on social capital (Australian bureau of Statistics 2002; Bullen and Onyx 1998; Healy 2003; Krishna and Shrader 1999) and volunteering (Dingle et.al. 2001; Al- Shubaiki, 1992; Shteivi, et.al., 2000). The main two conditions for answering the

questionnaire were to be 1) an active volunteer and 2) answer only one questionnaire if the unit of the sample was participating in more than one organization.

A five point Likert scale was used for measuring: strongly agree=5 agree=4, neither agree nor disagree=3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree=1. The data was computed by SPSS in percentages and mean scores. Data was collected during the period between March to December 2007.

The difficulties faced in collecting data were finding active volunteers, because lists of names of members of civil society organizations who pay their annual membership fees not necessarily involved active volunteers. In addition, for some cases volunteers belonged to the organization but practiced voluntary work outside the organization, so the researcher had to go and find volunteers in hospitals, universities (students) and coffee shops where meetings were held for unregistered groups.

## **Findings**

### **Demographic Profile of Volunteer's Sample**

The demographic profile consists of age, marital status, education, profession, sector of work, monthly income and growing up place.

**Age:** The ages of the sample less than 20 years is 16.7%, 20-29 years 29.2%, 30-39 years 16.2%, 40-49 years 20.7%, 50-59 years 12.7% and more than 59 years 4.5%. The highest age group in the sample is (20-29), comparing this result of age groups of volunteers in the literature of volunteering, the age groups of volunteers in different countries like Egypt and Palestine is the highest at middle age (Shteiwi, et.al., 2000), in the USA (35-55) (Wilson and Musick,1998), in Canada (35-54) (Lasby, 2004) and in Australia (45-54) (Wilson , et.al., 2005).

**Marital Status:** The marital status 48.3% married, 44% single, 5% divorced and 2,7% are widowed, it is noticed that there is a narrow percentage difference between married and unmarried women volunteers.

**Number of children:** A group representing 50.4 % of the married sample units have children. The number of children's distribution is as follows: 1-2 children 23.1% , 3-4 children 45%, 5-6 children 31.6%.

**Education:** The majority of the sample units are highly educated and findings are as follows: graduated from the university 43.1%, postgraduate level 14.1%, university level students 20.2% and high school and below 22.5% most of the units of this last group are still students. This result agrees with literature on volunteering and education where volunteers are highly educated and their major skills have effective role in their volunteering and to the organizations in USA (Wilson and Musick,1998), Canada (Lasby, 2004) and Saudi Arabia (Al- Shubaiki, 1992). Education is also seen as a human capital complementary to social capital (Schuler, 2002).

**Profession and Sector of Work:** The professional status 49.1% working, 30.8% students and 20.2% are not working. This result indicates that Saudi women volunteers are enthusiastic for work and education. The sectors of work 53.5% working for the public sector, 35.5% for the private sector and 11% are self-employed. It is noticed that the preference of work for Saudi women is at the public sector where they find better salaries and security than the private sector.

**Monthly income:** The income of the volunteers distribution in Saudi Riyal (equivalent to US 3.75 dollars) is as follows: less than 1000 Riyals 24.1% (this includes students who get pocket money from parents or university students. All university students in Saudi Arabia get a monthly financial assistance around (1000 SR). Salaries from 1000 to less than 5000 Riyals 39.5% , from 5000 to less than 10.000 Riyals 8.5%, from 10.000 to less than 15.000 Riyals 11.4%, from 15.000 to less than 20.000 Riyals 10.95%, and more than 20.000 Riyals 5.6%. This result indicates that incomes vary and sample of volunteers are not necessarily very rich people as compared to high incomes of volunteers who are board cabinet members in Saudi Arabi (Al- Shubaiki, 1992) and volunteers in Canada (Lasby, 2004). This result agrees with the cases in the Arab world in Jordan, Palestine and Egypt, where majority of volunteers belong to the middle class (Shteivi, et.al., 2000).

**Growing up place:** The units of the sample "growing up places" are as follows: 72.9% in Jeddah, 18% in other cities in Saudi Arabia, 7.4% in cities outside Saudi Arabia and 1.6% in villages in Saudi Arabia, These results reflect that volunteering is related to cities and urban life.

## The Way Saudi Women Volunteers Create Social Capital

Social capital was measured by two social networks, the first is formal through participation of women in different types of civil society organizations and the second is an informal social network that contained family, friends and neighborhood relations during the last six months. Trust, feeling of happiness when meeting other women with different style of life (diversity), and the feeling of self-satisfaction and meaning of life are also measured.

### A- The Formal Net Work: Participation of Women in Civil Society Organizations

**Table 2: Membership in Civil Society Organizations**

Membership in Civil Society Organizations	N	%
1	189	50.1
2-3	126	33.4
More than 3	62	16.4
Total	377	377

Membership among civil society organizations distribution (Table 2) 50.1% are members in one organization, 33.4% in 2-3 organizations, 16.4% in more than 3 organizations. Membership in different organizations is one of the methods for measuring volunteerism; a study indicates that elites are associated with an average of two or three community service organizations (Bradely, 2002, 12).

**Table 3: Number of Years for Volunteering**

Number of Years for Volunteering	N	%
Less than one year	120	31.8
1-5	144	38.2
More than 6	113	30.0
Total	377	100

Number of years for volunteering, Less than one year 31.8%, from 1-5 years 38.2%, and for more than 6 years 30% as shown in (Table 3).

**Table 4: Hours of Volunteering per month**

Hours of volunteering per month	N	%
Less than 10	161	42.7
10-15	46	12.2
16-20	36	9.5
21-25	12	3.2
More than 25	45	12.0
On seasonal basis	77	20.4
Total	377	100

Hours of volunteering per month: less than 10 hours 42.7%, 11 to 15 hours 12.2%, 16 to 20 hours 9.5%, 21 to 25 hours 3.2% , on seasonal basis 20.4% and for more than 25 hours 12% (Table 4). An interview reflects that some units of the sample volunteer on seasonal basis e.g. the medical students volunteer with health organizations on daily basis for 12 hours during the month of Ramadan (fasting month) in Mecca (75 Km. from Jeddah) giving first aid services for the worshipers in the Holy Mosque.

**Table 5: Distribution of Volunteers among Fields of Civil Society Organizations**

Fields	Areas	N= Volunteers	%	
Philanthropic	Social Services	185	39	
	Youth	144	38	
	Religious	134	35	
	Health/Medical	91	34	
	Childhood: Orphans, cancer patients and special needs)	66	18	
	Social Awareness	38	10	
	Training and Development	33	8.8	
	Youth : Special Needs (hearing disabilities- females)	24	6.4	
	Cultural	Cultural	12	3.2
	Scientific	Scientific	9	2.3
Advocacy	Human Rights and Domestic Violence	6	1.5	
Professional	Professional	3	0.8	
Cooperative	Cooperative	1	0.3	

There are six fields of civil society organizations as shown in (Table 5) philanthropic, cultural, scientific, advocacy, professional and cooperative. Many of the organizations are registered as philanthropic societies, the distribution of volunteers among this field of civil society organizations is as follows: 39% social services, 38% youth organizations, 35% religious organizations, 34% health and medical organizations, 18% children (special needs and cancer), 10% social awareness, 8.8% training and development, 6.4 % special need for females. The other four fields are cultural , scientific %, Advocacy (Human Rights and Domestic Violence), 1.5%, Professional and Cooperative %.

**Activities:** The activities volunteers do: bazaars 56%, planning for activities 41.1%, collecting donations 37.3%, fund raising events 30.8%, social awareness 33.4%, assisting in distributing donations (foodstuff) 29.2%, helping and supporting patients and their families 26.5%, secretarial work 21.5%, teaching 21%, studies and research 7.2%.

## B - The Informal Net Work

**Table 6: Tolerance, Diversity, Value of Life and Trust**

<b>Diversity, meaning of life</b>	%
Feeling of self-satisfaction and meaning of life	89.9
Feeling of happiness when meeting other women with different style of life	67.4
<b>General trust in others</b>	
General trust in others	57

The results for feeling of self-satisfaction and meaning of life 89.9%, feeling of happiness when meeting other women with different style of life 67.4%. and general trust in others 57% (Table 6).

General social trust had never been measured in Saudi society, comparing this result to other countries 57% is medium if compared to the highest degree of social trust is in China % and the lowest in Kenya % and the Arab neighboring country to Saudi Arabia Kuwait % (Wike and Holzwardt, 2008). In OECD countries, Norway has the highest general trust 65.3% and the lowest Brazil 2.8% (Aldridge, et.al' 2002), taking into consideration that this figure represents the opinion of a sample of Saudi women volunteers not including the non-volunteers.

**Table 7: Social Capital Measurement for Informal Net Work During last 6 months**

<b>Family and Friends Network During last 6 months</b>	%
Frequent visiting to family	86.5
Helping relatives	83
Helping friends in need	82.5
Receiving help from others when in need	60.2
Helping neighbors	38

Social capital measurement for the informal net work during last 6 months as seen in table (7) family and friends network during last 6 months: Frequent visiting to family 86.5%, helping relatives 83%, helping friends in need 82.5% receiving help from others when in need 60.2% and helping neighbors 38%. These results agree with the rate of visits between family members is higher than other groups due to urbanization and urban life has weakened neighborhood relations in Jeddah Rajab, 1981, 455-456).

## **View of Women Volunteers to Volunteering and Effect of Voluntary Work on Saudi woman**

**Table 8: View of women volunteers to Volunteering**

<b>View of Volunteers to Voluntary work</b>	<b>%</b>
Voluntary work is participating in community development in Saudi society	92.6
Voluntary work is joining a philanthropic organization	73.4

Table (8) shows how women volunteers view that voluntary work is participating in community development in Saudi society 92.6%, voluntary work is joining a philanthropic organization 73.4%.

**Table 9: Effect of Voluntary Work on Saudi woman**

<b>Effect of Voluntary Work on Saudi woman</b>	<b>%</b>
Voluntary work acquired women volunteers new skills	94.1
Voluntary work raised social status of Saudi woman volunteers	87.5

The effect of voluntary work on Saudi women volunteers is that it enabled volunteers to learn new skills and experiences 94.1%, and affected positively the status of Saudi women 87.5% as seen in table (9).

### **Problems Facing Women Volunteers**

The first personal problems towards voluntary work are transportation 78%, which comes first (Saudi women are not allowed to drive cars and public transportation are not available for women), followed by child rearing 62.6%, and family discouragement of volunteering 59.2%. Organizational problems include lack of creativity in programs 68.7%, lack of work organization 64.2% and unclear job roles of volunteers 63.9%. Relational problems between members by not accepting each others 58%. Societal Problems resulting from that voluntary work is not a parental focus during childhood 89.7%, awareness of citizens on voluntary work is weak 84.1% and the mass media does not give enough focus on voluntary work 81.9%.

### **Suggestions of for Improvement of Voluntary Work**

Women volunteers suggest the necessity for training volunteers before volunteering 92.3%, to establish a data base for voluntary work 89.1%, to establish volunteer management and centres for volunteers 88.9% and to include voluntary work as part of curriculum at schools and universities 84.3%.

## Conclusion

The paper reviewed the results of the research on how Saudi women volunteers create social capital through measuring different levels of social capital. Volunteering as being a formal social network implies to civic engagement and participating in organizations that lead to formation of social capital. The informal social network contained family, friends and neighborhood relations during the last six months. 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 i.e. tolerance, diversity and value of life.

For over fifty years Saudi women have been able to participate positively in social development inspite of confronting governmental supervision and censorship, personal obligations and responsibilities and organizational challenges. Conducting more research on volunteering and social capital for volunteers and non - volunteers on a nation wide basis in Saudi society is a necessity and recommended by the researcher.

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Appendix I  
Arabic References

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