

Exploring Participation Opportunities of Young People Living in Urban Areas of Karachi, Pakistan

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Abstract. Researches in the recent era have indicated the significance of facilitating young people to participate in community development and its positive impact on socio-economic development of a country. This investigation aimed at exploring the opportunities of participation of young people at home, school, neighborhood and community in terms of decision making, school planning, town planning, social campaigning and taking responsibilities of social development. Phenomenological design was approached and a total number of 10 young people aged 12 – 14 years from middle class families in Karachi, Pakistan participated in the study and the data collection semi interview guide was prepared using categories of participation with the reference of Child and Adolescents Scale of Participation - CAPS (Bedell, 2011). The data analysis revealed that lack of policy, security, instability in government and parents' support are key barriers of young people participation in the community work. The study is concluded with a set of recommendations for key stakeholders.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Young people in any community are the key stakeholders who are considered to be the makers of the nation. This phenomenon has led many international agencies to make a mandate of youth participating in community development. Charters, policies and plans pertinent to this have been formed and developed and it was explored that there are almost more than 70% of the countries in the world where youth participation is at risk. Talking about community participation and input is something big whereas the smaller opportunities of participation at home were even not found.

The word participation in literal terms means taking part in something or being part of some decision. Several school of thoughts relate participation as being actively involved in making decisions, mechanism of involving everyone in process of deliberation, the act of sharing and putting forward opinions. Participation is important at levels and for all ages and it is well acknowledged globally that joint ventures and participatory planning result in positive outcomes.

Youth participation is significant for the development of any community and on a larger aspect a country. Checkoway (2003) has carried out an evaluation research of youth participation in community and the study findings state that youth participation call an increase in organizational development and community change (1). Bessant (2010) studied contemporary talk and debated about youth participation and explored that enhanced youth participation can lead to solution of many

social problems like crime, drug abuse, sexual harassment and corruption. In addition to this, his article focused on debating how youth participation is a social democratic practice and right of each individual youth in a country (2).

Frank (2006) in the study has recognized youth as a key important stakeholder in process of planning and elaborated on meaningfulness of involving youth in various environmental affairs which according to the author can lead to an economic upliftment of the state (3).

A report by Australian Social Trends (2006) stated how social participation of young people and support from all key stakeholders has enable them to perform in social activities. In their report they have highlighted how crisis situations can be decreased with increased participation and sense of community belonging of the young people (4). As can be seen from the various studies that youth participation has a significant positive impact on social, political, and economic development of a country and hence it is vital and imperative for the key stakeholders to understand its significance in their context at all level including home and school settings. However, participation of youth in various aspects of life in Pakistan is an area not much studied and researched regardless of very limited social evidences of less or no participation of young people at any level.

According to tentative data of Census of Pakistani population, the approximate percentage of young people aged between 12 -14 is 13% (5) and it will increase upto 19% percent in the coming century. Yet, there has been no policy developed to constructively use the potential and skills of these young people into nation development. From home to neighborhood and to community, young people are considered to be dependent and least powerful. From the empirical observations, it is widely seen that not only in rural areas of Pakistan but also in Urban areas of Pakistan young people are not given opportunities to take part in any decision making (6). This starts as early as from their homes (7), where parents consider their young people to be immature and not fully sensible to participate in basic home discussions like household renovation, arranging an event or a party, picking up calls (8) etc and this mentality also gets drags with crucial life decision of young people of choosing their profession and field of interest.

Schools too have very less opportunities for young people to plan their own curricular and co-curricular activities and often they are given penalization for their choice of peers (8). As for the community, there is a lack of policy which could include adults so arguing the participation of young people in these neighborhoods, community and national development gets null and void.

Many agencies are working on preparing for youth empowerment by training young people and government stakeholders to involve youth in decision making. However, there is a lack of capacity building at community and parent education level and agencies seem to have ignored the most important stakeholders that are parents and teachers. With this, there is also a vacuum of published research studies in this regard. Hence, this research study aimed at exploring this phenomenon from the perspective of young people as to how young people perceive opportunities in their context with respect to their participation and the problems faced by them in this regard.

2. Purpose of research study and research questions

The purpose of this research study was to explore the perceptions of youth pertinent to their participation in home, neighbourhood, community and school. The following research questions were draft to investigate this phenomenon.

- a) What are the opportunities of participation that are given to the young people at home, schools, neighborhood and community?
- b) What are the challenges faced by used in making decisions?

3. Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological design was chosen for this research study with Urban areas of Karachi as a research setting for the study. a total number of 10 young people aged 12 – 14 years from middle class families in Karachi, Pakistan participated in the study and the data collection semi

interview guide was prepared using categories of participation with the reference of Child and Adolescents Scale of Participation - CAPS (Bedell, 2011). The categories included home participation, neighbourhood and community participation, school participation and participation in home and community living activities. The sample was selected using purposive sampling where the inclusion criteria consisted mainly of youth studying in schools, living in urban areas and provide consent for participation. The interviews were collected at a community park to ensure that the youth have ample room to express their feelings in private. Each interview was recorded with the prior permission of the participant and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. The data was analyzed using manual pre-determined thematic analysis and majorly focused on open thematic analysis using quotes of the participants.

4. Results and Discussion

The data analysis revealed various perspectives of the young people pertinent to basic opportunities and problems pertinent to participation in various aspects of life. One of the young people mentioned, “my family is very supportive for me participating in different activities but of their choice” this means that parents do allow their young fellows to take part in various activities but the ones they think is good and constructive to a young person. It is seen and observed in the Asian context that parents do make decision in urban areas for their children and decide mostly which activities children should participate and which they should not (10).

Another youth mentioned his participation in school, “in school I am allowed to participate in all the activities but not freely”. Reflecting on this aspect and the word freely used by a youth calls on for many critique of child centered context that is given a huge hype in educational sector (11). Many children even in private schools are not given authority to practice the task that interests them which might influence their participation level in that particular activity.

Majority of the youth stated that the major barrier faced by the youth of today in Pakistan is security issues. This to a greater extent is a fact with the deteriorating security conditioning in Pakistan and increasing terrorism (12), social discriminations, target killings and political instability specifically in Karachi has influenced many social activities of all its residents.

A few youth also mentioned the elder sibling pressure as one of the hindrance in participation. top this one of the youth indicated, “sharing any thoughts and my ideas, many a times my elder brother tease me, disturb me and make my fun and upon complaining my parents always take his side by saying, he is your elder brother, you should listen to him as he is been through what you are going now”. This is a common family trend observed in eastern families where elder siblings are given empowerment to bully their younger siblings (13).

On a positive note, a few participants shared their experience of getting opportunities to plan events in their communities and especially in occasions where there are festivals planned by the community or the neighbourhood. On this one of the participant mentioned, “the best opportunity for me is to plan religious festivals that is the time when we are given importance, we plan, we decorate, we decide who will do what and we arrange carnival. We like it best when we have to arrange any event for our neighbourhood and community”.

Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned any hindrances buy the government and local municipal bodies. Curiously, an additional question was asked for a few participants on their perspective of policy for youth participation and none of the youth were aware of the charter and policies pertinent to youth (14). This phenomenon is widely existed in the developing countries where the policies and charter are not disseminated to the key stakeholders.

5. Recommendations

Youth participation requires serious deliberation, planning and execution at all levels. Government, agencies, organizations and social institutions all must recognize this important right of young

people. There is a need of a clear state policy in this regard at the government and local bodies' level. Key stakeholders like parents, schools administrators and young people can be given capacity building sessions to enhance their understanding of youth participation. Representation of youth in all levels of policy development and community development to announced as quota. Social media can be used to advocate this phenomenon to a larger audience.

6. Limitations of the Study

Every research study has a set of limitations, for this research study; the major limitation was the availability of the relevant contextually published research studies of Pakistani context. Secondly, people in Pakistan are learning research culture and the trend of human development research studies is fairly new and hence this was one of the reasons that very less participations could be interviewed due to the lack of willingness to participate in the study.

7. Future Research Implications

There are avenues for future research in this phenomenon and topics like youth participation survey, country wide youth studies, policy analysis of youth participation and critical appraisal of charter of youth rights could be a few for future investigation. In addition to this, youth participation and its impact on youth life satisfaction and patriotism behaviour could be a topic of study on top.

8. Summary and Conclusion

To conclude, it can be determined that the participation opportunities for the young people living in urban areas of Karachi are at not very well recognized. Young people at very few instances are given opportunities to share their idea of development and to practice their rights of decision.

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