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Title: Exploring the effectiveness of student-led initiatives in helping underprivileged individuals in Bangladesh: A mixed-method approach to understand the impact and challenges

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Research Aim: This research identifies, understands and examines the effectiveness of the help provided by student-led or student-volunteered initiatives and community work organizations like non-profits and received by underprivileged and needy individuals living in Bangladesh. This study will emphasize on the type of assistance offered by the organizations, their scope and reach, and extent of being beneficial to the receiving party.

Research Questions:

1. How do student-led initiatives help disadvantaged individuals in Bangladesh?
2. How effective is the support for the underprivileged population who receive assistance from these organizations, and what more can be done?

Introduction: Social work organizations and non-profits have become very common in today's world, and many of them are even owned by school going students, and one of the most significant reasons for it being the fact that such activities are preferred by universities. "Colleges often favor students who complete volunteer work as an extracurricular activity

because it demonstrates passion, commitment, and a sense of civic duty” [3]. In a competitive world and an even more selective college admissions board, attaining better and quality education, and intending to be accepted by reputed colleges and universities for higher studies has become a norm. Therefore, founding and volunteering in social work based organizations like non-profits as a way to conduct community service is becoming more frequent. Curriculums like the IB or International Baccalaureate have even made community service as part of CAS (creativity, activity, service) mandatory to be fulfilled in order to receive a Diploma at the end of the 12th grade [1, 2]. Many schools in urban Dhaka have integrated volunteer activities into their curricula. Even regardless of students’ curriculum, volunteering in a non-profit is becoming increasingly preferred and practiced, especially among high school students. In an impoverished developing country like Bangladesh where approximately 19.2% of the population lives below the poverty line, many large organizations have orchestrated and carried out projects, programs and events concerning many sectors in which the needy individuals are deprived; and some of these even involved student volunteers. Namely, BRACE 2018 on medical check ups, screenings and health related concerns, partnership between CREATE and BRAC for introducing digital libraries in a few rural schools, Vulnerable Group Feeding project in partnership of WFP and BRAC, Rising Hope: Flood recovery and resilience project by JAAGO Foundation, and more [7, 8, 9, 11].

Being inspired by many of these actions and the drive to work towards creating a more equal and just society with minimal resource gaps and opportunities bridges, a variety of student led organizations have emerged. Such include ‘Prerona’, a student-led initiative which arranged food drives and donated clothes to flood victims. Another is ‘Prochesta’ which distributed mosquito nets during months of monsoon and dengue outbreak, refreshments in hot summer months, and raw food materials during the month of Ramadan. Then is ‘Esho Pashe Darai Foundation’, another student-led organization which held winter clothing drives and orchestrated a small English Learning Campaign in a Madrasah. Again, there is ‘Kismet’ which held a campaign to donate food during Eid-ul-Adha and also donated food and clothes to flood victims. Moreover, Onnesha arranged food donations in Ramadan and provided help to differently-abled children in the Canadian Organization: Families for Children (FFC).

One common thing is that everyone takes the initiative but very less actually studies or evaluates the actions taken, hence it is difficult to understand which action truly benefits these needy people of Bangladesh. It would also help identify and understand any variance or distinctions in being benefited by certain actions amongst people of different age/gender/location/income group, which would further help modify or personalize the type of assistance that should be provided to a specific group of people / demographic, thus amplifying and maximizing the help provided.

Literature Review: A variety of research and investigations has shown that many student led initiatives were taken to help the underprivileged community. From building digital school libraries equipped with audio visual materials for extremely poor children, to participating in humanitarian missions and providing health screenings and medical assistance for the needy community in Dhaka; a number of assistance were provided to the deprived people in the country by students [6, 7]. What’s common in a lot of programs is that, even if they are

mainly arranged and orchestrated by NGOs and other non-profit organizations, a large number of students participate & volunteer there to help the event run and serve a huge number of needy people. Such an event was the BRACE 2018 programme which was volunteered by students who provided medical check-ups, health talks, much needed medical screenings and distributed basic living items for short-term aid. The long term projects this program featured were providing medical bill coverage for infants coming from deprived families, and building washrooms in nearby Madrasah to improve health and hygiene. Students mainly provided aid to needy individuals and families; particularly those, who were struck by the natural disaster faced by the country at that time [7]. In rural Bangladesh while a wide range of problems can be sighted, one of the most common ones out of these were with lack of education and its awareness. Although according to the constitution the government is to provide primary education in all parts of the country, many students often choose not to attend schools particularly because their circumstances do not allow so, even if such opportunities are free of cost. Again, while some students do attend educational institutes, they find it difficult to actually learn and grasp the information. To reduce both the issues, digital libraries were established in a few sub districts in Bangladesh. These libraries were exceptional and were equipped with unconventional yet attractive apparatuses, like audio visual materials, multimedia projectors and sound systems that made learning interactive and fun. The library was furnished with PCs (Personal desktop computers), projectors, illustrative storybooks and textbooks, history eBooks, documentaries, a variety of other books on cartoons and religions, had music collections and access to the internet connection [6]. More such projects to aid the underprivileged and needy population of Bangladesh have been done, like the project concerning 'Exclusion from Primary Education in Slums of Dhaka' conducted by CREATE and BRAC [8]. Furthermore, especially after Bangladesh's experience of multiple famines and frequent natural calamities, Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programs have been arranged and undertaken [9]. These events are oftentimes volunteered by students and occasionally even influences similar activities and initiatives in the future which are, every so often, wholly student-led.

While so many actions are taken their effectiveness is often not measured, and their impact on the lives of the people who have received the assistance are seldom understood. Since the lack of such information limits understanding as to what truly benefits the deprived people and how that can be achieved, it leaves no space for improvement, because what is to be improved is not studied or explored. This seems to be a recurring pattern and hence is extremely significant to be investigated and researched upon.

Methodology:

A mixed-method approach will be taken combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to acquire the required data, in order to examine and understand the effectiveness of student-led initiatives in helping deprived individuals residing in Bangladesh.

Quantitative Data Collection: A stratified random sampling (N=100) will be done amongst the disadvantaged residents of Dhaka, dividing the population based on categories like- mainly age (18 or less, 19-32, 33-45, 46-59, 60 or above), gender (female, male), location of residence (urban, sub-urban, rural) , and somewhat based on current job / mode of earning a

living. A structured survey containing likert scale (a scale of 1-3) and short answer-question based queries will be prepared and distributed either as a hard copy printed form, or an oral interview will be taken which will be done physically; therefore it will be taken from one person at a time. This will help understand their level of awareness that such activities exist, impact on their life if they have received any form of mentioned help, and what more can be done to support them.

Qualitative Data Collection: A subset of the larger sample will be derived using simple random sampling (n=20) who will be offered to take a semi-structured interview, which will let us understand a broader picture or idea on how any form of assistance impacts their mental and psychological health, and their life overall. This survey will be done physically, particularly by an oral question-and-session. Thorough analysis of the data will be conducted and any repetitive patterns of specific information or recurring data on a particular topic will be taken into close consideration; through which results from the study will be derived. Additionally, since these initiatives are generally administered by different organizations largely consisting of high school students, semi-structured interviews will also be carried out for such organization founders (N=10), which will be done orally however, via digital means.

Data Analysis: Data collected from the surveys and questionnaire forms will be analyzed using softwares like Excel and NVivo. The analysis will also be conducted via methods of descriptive statistics like- Measures of Central Tendency (Mean, Median, Mode, Standard Deviation) and inferential statistics like- Regression Analysis will be used to understand the connection between the variables in the demographics and the impact student-led initiatives have on them. The difference amongst the responses will be closely studied to understand how beneficial the certain activities may be for individuals belonging to demographics of dissimilar variables. This will help evaluate the initiatives that are already taken and can suggest the organizations to take specific initiatives, so whatever initiative is taken in the future, has a great positive impact on the receiving population. Qualitative data will be analyzed using NVivo, and also based on identifying repetitive or recurring information for a particular question to understand the impact of mental and psychological health of the needy individuals after receiving assistance from the student-led initiatives, which would further help understand as to what can be done that truly helps the people.

Project Practicalities: To complete the entirety of the project it would require a total time of 13 weeks/3 months. Over this period, conducting a prior/introductory research on the targeted audience or demographics to be surveyed; and designing the surveys and interview questions appropriately & accordingly will need 3 weeks (Weeks 1-3). The distribution of both tangible and intangible survey forms through physical and digital mediums, collecting the physical survey responses, and receiving the digital responses would require 3 weeks (Weeks 4-6). The processing, analysis and synthesis of the data collected will need 3 weeks (Weeks 7-9). Lastly, the data recording part and writing the final report will take 4 weeks (Weeks 10-13).

Roadblocks and Potential Limitations: All the interviewees might not be honest about the information they will be giving. Some interviewed disadvantaged people may not be honest

about the support they have received, and may try to conceal it to present themselves as extremely needy, even more than they truly are, as they often might expect the interviewers to provide them with any form of external help or monetary support. Then again, some organization owners may provide false information about their activities and its reach, especially if there is no proper account of evidence of their work. Furthermore, some might exaggerate the help they have provided or can increase the quantity of things they have distributed to the needy, which may be different than what they actually did. The above mentioned discrepancies can thus stand as potential challenges and limitations.

Expected Outcome: The results obtained from the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness & efficiency of student-led initiatives distributed to needy & disadvantaged individuals of Dhaka, Bangladesh. It would also help explore & recommend other possible ways through which these underprivileged people can be helped & benefitted.

Conclusion: This research will examine and help understand the effectiveness of student-led initiatives on the disadvantaged and impoverished people of Bangladesh, and how the help provided can be personalized to truly help the people who are receiving the assistance. This study will be helpful in suggesting a number of problems to be taken care of and a myriad of beneficial initiatives that can be orchestrated to overcome the issues faced by deprived people in today's Bangladesh.

Post-Program Plan: As this research comes to an end and after further refinement, the research findings and results will be published as a journal paper via academic publications.

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