



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES ON SOCIAL ACTIVISM
AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITIES**

NISSHANKAGE SHANTHA ABEYSINGHE

IPSS 2009 3

**INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES ON SOCIAL ACTIVISM
AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITIES**

By

NISSHANKAGE SHANTHA ABEYSINGHE

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy**

April 2009



DEDICATION

For the young people who have sacrificed their lives in struggles against policies and practices of power holders thus preventing them from achieving their life aspirations and enjoying life in its fullest and the purest sense

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Influence of the Contextual, Developmental, and Demographic Variables on Social Activism among Undergraduates in Sri Lankan Universities

By

Nisshankage Shantha Abeysinghe

April 2009

Chairman: Professor Haji Azimi Hamzah, PhD

Faculty: Institute for Social Science Studies

Engagement in social activism is one of the means for building identity and citizenship competencies of young people. On campus, one of the vehicles that provide engagement in social activism is the students' union. In Sri Lankan campuses the students' union system has been established by the University Act and it has accorded the Student Unions with a wider scope for the engagement in such activities. Sri Lankan campus youth are encouraged to engage in both internal and external socio economic and welfare issues and to voice for the betterment of both campus youth and the public at large. Therefore a study that aims to measure the important determinants of youth's contribution relating to the engagement in social activism, should essentially take into consideration the related developmental as well as contextual variables.



The specific objectives of the study were to determine the level of social activism of campus youth, the level of social activism across selected contextual variables and demographic variables and the relationships between the level of social activism and the selected contextual variables and developmental variables. Finally, the contribution made by the selected demographic, developmental, and contextual factors on social activism was examined.

Four hundred and forty nine subjects were randomly selected from six campuses and representing three faculties (Science, Arts & Commerce/Management). The findings showed that the developmental variables such as self esteem, aggression and impression on governance were significantly related to the social activism of youth. Similarly, contextual variables namely, school extra curricular activities, campus club engagement and gender as a demographic variable was significantly related to social activism. Even though social activism among campus youth was high, an important feature within this observed phenomenon was the gender segregation. Female voice was not significantly represented in the context of contemporary social activism among campus youth. Subsequently, seniority in terms of age as well as the number of years stayed at the campus enhances the level of engagement in social activism. The level of self esteem, impression on governance, parents' income and female composition at campuses negatively effect the engagement in social activism. The conceptual model developed for this study was able to explain the factors influencing social activism among campus youth. Accordingly, the influence of the contextual factors on the engagement with social activism was greater than the influence of the developmental factors. Hence, external factors (contextual and

demographic) have greater influence on the level of engagement in social activism than internal (Developmental) factors. Policy recommendations for positive youth development are discussed with special attention to minimizing aggressive nature of social activism and building a harmonious democratic culture among youth at the higher educational institutions.

Abstrak Thesis Yang Telah Dipersembahkan Kepada Senat Universiti Putra
Malaysia Dalam Memenuhi Syarat – Syarat Bagi Memperolehi Ijazah Kedoktoran
Falsafah.

**Pengaruh Pembolehubah Kontekstual, Perkembangan Diri dan Demografi
terhadap Aktivisme Sosial di Kalangan Mahasiswa/i di Universiti-Universiti Sri
Lanka**

Oleh

Nisshankage Shantha Abeysinghe

April 2009

Pengerusi: Profesor Haji Azimi Hamzah, PhD

Fakulti: Institut Pengajian Sains Sosial

Penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial adalah satu cara untuk membina identiti dan kompetensi kewarganegaraan di kalangan orang muda. Di kampus, satu daripada saluran yang menyediakan penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial ialah melalui badan gabungan pelajar. Di kampus-kampus Sri Lanka, sistem badan gabungan pelajar telah diwujudkan melalui Akta Universiti dan ia telah memberi badan ini skop yang lebih besar untuk melibatkan diri dalam aktiviti-aktiviti sosial. Belia kampus Sri Lanka digalakkan untuk melibatkan diri dalam kedua-dua isu sosio-ekonomi dan kebajikan dalaman dan luaran dan untuk menyuarakan pendapat untuk kebaikan kedua-dua golongan belia kampus dan masyarakat umum. Justeru, satu kajian yang bertujuan untuk mengukur penentu sumbangan para belia terhadap penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial, seharusnya mengambilkira pertimbangan terhadap pembolehubah perkembangan diri dan kontekstual.

Objektif khusus kajian ini ialah untuk menentukan tahap aktivisme sosial dalam kalangan belia kampus, tahap aktivisme sosial mengikut pembolehubah kontekstual dan demografi yang terpilih dan perkaitan di antara tahap aktivisme sosial dan pembolehubah kontekstual dan perkembangan diri. Akhir sekali, sumbangan yang dibuat oleh faktor demografi terpilih, perkembangan diri dan kontekstual terhadap aktivisme sosial diselidik.

Empat ratus empat puluh sembilan responden dipilih secara rawak dari enam kampus yang diwakili oleh tiga fakulti (Sains, Sastera dan Pengurusan/Perdagangan). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pembolehubah perkembangan diri seperti estim sendiri, agresif diri dan pandangan terhadap govenan mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan terhadap aktivisme sosial di kalangan belia.

Begitu juga, pembolehubah kontekseual yakni, aktiviti kokurikulum sekolah, penglibatan dalam kelab di kampus dan pembolehubah demografi iaitu jantina pelajar didapati mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan terhadap aktivisme sosial. Walaupun aktivisme sosial dalam kalangan belia kampus adalah tinggi, satu dapatan utama dalam kajian ini ialah tentang pengaruh faktor jantina. Suara wanita didapati tidak signifikan dalam konteks aktivisme sosial kontemporari di kalangan belia kampus. Tambahan, kekananan dari segi umur dan bilangan tahun berada di kampus meningkatkan lagi tahap penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial. Tahap estim sendiri, pandangan terhadap pemerintahan, pendapatan ibu bapa dan komposisi wanita di kampus mempunyai kesan negatif terhadap govenan dalam aktivisme sosial. Model konseptual yang dibina daripada kajian ini berupaya untuk menerangkan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi aktivisme sosial di kalangan belia kampus. Seterusnya, pengaruh faktor-faktor kontekstual terhadap penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial

adalah lebih besar daripada pengaruh faktor-faktor perkembangan diri. Maka, faktor-faktor luaran (kontekstual dan demografi) mempunyai pengaruh yang lebih besar terhadap tahap penglibatan dalam aktivisme sosial berbanding faktor dalaman (perkembangan diri). Cadangan polisi untuk perkembangan diri belia yang positif turut dibincangkan dengan perhatian khusus kepada meminimakan tahap tiugkah laku agresif dalam aktivisme sosial dan membina budaya demokratik yang harmoni di kalangan belia di institusi pengajian tinggi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I present my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Dr . Hj Azimi Hamzah, the Chairman of the supervisory committee and two members, Professor. Dr. Datin Sharifah Nor, and Associate Professor Dr. Ezahr Tamam for the extended patronage given to make the postgraduate study a success.

I am also grateful to Professor Dr. Salleh Hj. Hasan, Director, Institute for Social Science Studies as well as Deputy Director, Associate Professor Dr. Bahaman bin Abu Samah, former Director, Professor Dr. Rahim Md. Sail, and the staff members of the Institute for Social Science Studies of the Universiti Putra Malaysia.

I extend also a note of thank to Dr. Ismi, Head of the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Ms Siti Raba'ah, Associate Professor Rusinah Juned , Dr Lateef, the members of the staff, and the staff of the Institute of Extension, Professional Advancement and Entrepreneurship at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. Appreciation is extended to my classmates Mr Thach, Mr Ali Hasan, and Mr Piraha, Ms Wendy, Dr Jefree, Ms Fazila and Mr Riza for their kind cooperation.

I take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Turiman Suandi, the Deputy Dean, and the staff of School of Graduate Studies of Universiti Putra Malaysia for assisting numerous ways. Further, appreciation and gratitude is extended to the Vice chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka, Dr. Ashoka De Silva, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Upali Vidanapathirana, Dr. Mahim Mendis, Dr Amerasena Gamaathige, and all the staff members of the Department of Social Studies of the Open University of Sri Lanka.



My sincere gratitude to Mr Nalaka, Mr Mohandas, Ms Thushari and, Mr Morais for developing the text. Mr Rama and all other Sri Lankan colleagues at UPM has given encouragement under the hands of true friendship. I also extend my sincere thank to all the Vice Chancellors including the academic staff, administrative staff, and all the respondents for the support given.

I extend my gratitude to the staff of the Distance Education Modernization Project and the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka in providing the necessary financial assistance rendering for the completion of post graduate study. Last, but certainly not least, I owe my gratitude and affection to my parents, beloved wife, Pushpa Aththanayaka and family members, for the unconditional support of me, and beloved daughter Hasanthi Lawanya for the encouragement, understanding, support, and patience during study abroad. Thank you.

I certify that an examination committee has met on 28 April 2009 to conduct the final examination of Nisshankage Shantha Abeysinghe on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Influence of the Contextual, Developmental, and Demographic Variables on Social Activism among Undergraduates in Sri Lankan Universities” in accordance with Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Examination Committee were as follows:

Md Salleh Hj. Hasan, PhD

Professor

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Nobaya Ahmad, PhD

Associate Professor

Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner 1)

Jamilah Othman, PhD

Associate Professor

Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner 2)

Abdul Hadi Zakaria, PhD

Professor

Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies
Universiti Dural Iman Malaysia
(External Examiner)

BUJANG KIM HUAT, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:



This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Azimi Hj. Hamzah, Ed. D.

Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Sharifah Nor, PhD

Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Ezhar Tamam, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

HASANAH MOHD. GHAZALI, PhD

Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 17th July 2009



DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

NISSHANKAGE SHANTHA ABEYSINGHE

Date: 28 April 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
DECLARATION	xiii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xiv
LIST OF TABLE	xviii
LIST OF FIGURES	xx
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem and Its Context	1
Social Activism at the Higher Learning Institutions in Sri Lanka	2
Restricted admission procedures into Sri Lankan campuses	7
Higher competition in education	8
Impoverished learning environment	9
Distribution of campuses' outcome	10
Political parties and campus youth	10
The Statement of Problem	11
Research Questions	13
Objectives of the Study	13
Significance of the Study	14
Contribution to practice	14
Contribution to knowledge	15
Policy development and implementation	16
Scope of the Study	16
Limitations of the Study	17
Definition of key Terms	18
CHAPTER 2	20
LITERATURE REVIEW	20
Introduction	20
Concept of Social Activism	21
Education and Social Activism	22
Evolution of the University System in Sri Lanka	24
Social Activism among Campus Youth in Sri Lanka	27
Youth Research Perspectives	31
Macro Socio Economic Policies and Social Activism	37
Theories Related to Social Activism	37
Unfulfilled Expectations of Youth	37
J Curve Theory and Young People	38
Theories of Participation	40



Civic Voluntarism	40
Rational Choice	42
Behavioral Intention Theory	43
Youth Leadership for Development Initiatives	45
Factors Affecting Social Activism	45
Developmental Factors	46
Social Activism and Self Esteem	46
Social activism and self efficacy	47
Aggression and social activism	48
Impression of governance	49
Contextual Factors Influencing Social Activism	50
Theoretical Framework of the Study	54
The Research Framework of the Study	55
Chapter Summary	57
CHAPTER 3	58
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	58
Introduction	58
Research Design	58
Population and Sample	59
Statistical Power Analysis and Determination of Sample	60
Effect size	61
Statistical Significance Level	61
Statistical power	61
Reconciliation of the Sample Size	62
Sampling Procedure	64
Instrumentation and Measurement	69
Social activism	69
Developmental Variables	70
Self efficacy	70
Self-esteem	71
Aggression	71
Impression of governance	72
Demographic Variables	74
Validity of Instruments	74
Language Check	75
Reliability Test	75
Data Collection Procedures	77
Data Analysis Processes	79
Chi- square Test of Independence	79
Pearson Product Movement Correlation	80
Explorative Data Analysis	80
CHAPTER 4	83
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	83
Introduction	83
Preliminary Analysis of Data	84

Profile of the Respondents	85
Distribution of the respondents by gender	85
Distribution of the respondents by age	85
Respondents by place of origin and the field of study	87
Distribution of the respondents by the type of campus	89
Respondents' distribution by academic year, ethnicity, and the distance from home	89
The Level of Social Activism of the Campus Youth	91
Discussion on the level of Social Activism of Youth	93
Level of Social Activism and Demographic Variables	94
Level of social activism by gender	94
Level of social activism by the field of study	95
The level of social activism by the field of study and gender	96
Levels of social activism by age	97
Level of social activism by home location	99
Level of social activism by ethnicity	101
Social activism by the respondents' campus	103
Level of social activism by the year of study	104
Level of social activism by distance from home to campus	106
Relationship between Social Activism and Selected Independent Variables	108
Correlations of Social Activism and Developmental Variables	108
Relationship between self-esteem and social activism	109
Relationship between self efficacy and social activism	109
Relationship between Aggression and social activism	110
Relationship between Contextual Factors and Social Activism	110
School extra curricular activity engagement and social activism	111
Campus club participation and social activism	111
Parents' income and social activism	112
Gender and social activism	112
Discussion on the Relationship between Social Activism and Independent Variables	112
Regression Analysis	113
Multicollinearity	113
Outliers	113
Normality and linearity	114
Case wise diagnostic	114
Cook's distance	114
Regression equation	115
Discussion: Regression Results	121
Summary	124
CHAPTER V	125
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	125
Introduction	125
Summary of the findings	126
Conclusions	129
Implications	131
Practical implications	131

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge	132
Recommendations for Policy Development	134
Recommendations for Future Research	138
Conscientisation Model of Youth Development and Social Activism	140
REFERENCES	141
APPENDICES	150
BIODATA OF THE STUDENT	206
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	207



LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 : News paper clippings related to campus youth activism	4
2: Engagement of social activism at University of Peradeniya in 1988	30
3: Main characteristics of the modern youth research perspectives	34
4: Population distribution by gender and the field of study	60
5: Selected parameters and their values	64
6: Two clusters of campuses by the year of establishment	67
7: Population and sample of the respondents	68
8: Reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) results	76
9: Interpretation of the strength of the correlation (r) values	80
10: Summary table of the data analysis process	82
11: Profiles of the Respondents (n= 449)	86
12: Respondents by the Place of Origin and the Field of Study	88
13: Distribution of respondents' place of origin by the field of study	88
14: Descriptive statistics of the items of Social Activism	91
15: Distribution of the respondents by levels of social activism	93
16: Level of social activism by gender	94
17: Level of social activism by the field of study	95
18: Level of social activism by the field of study and gender	97
19: Level of social activism by the age group	98
20: Level of social activism by age group and gender	98
21: Level of social activism by home location	99
22: Level of social activism by home location and gender	100

23: Levels of social activism by ethnic groups	101
24: Level of social activism by gender and by ethnicity	102
25: Level of social activism by the type of campus	103
26: Level of social activism by gender and type of campus	104
27: Level of social activism by the year of study	105
28: Level of social activism by gender and the year of study	106
29: Distribution of respondents by distance from home to campus	106
30: Level of social activism by distance and gender	107
31: Correlation between Social Activism and developmental variables	109
32: Correlation between SA and contextual and demographic variables	111
33: Multiple regression model for social activism	117
34: Model summary of regression analysis	118
35: The results of analysis of variance	119
36: Multiple regression results of the models A and B	120
37 : Population of universities in Sri Lanka	150
38 : The number enrolled, the number graduated and annual intake	151
39 : University admissions and allocation of expenditure	152
40 : Graduate output by major academic streams	152
41 : Liberalism, comunitarianism, and welfare society models	157
42 : Summary of Exploratory Data Analysis	192



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1: Snakes and Ladders of campus students' revolt	36
2: Davies' J Curve	39
3: Social activism model based on Theory of Planned Behaviour	44
4 : Theoretical Framework of the study	54
5: Research framework of the study	56
6: Percentage distribution of young people who were qualified	151
7: Frequency distribution of social activism	192
8: Normal Q-Q plot of social activism	193
9 : Box plot of social activism	193
10 : Frequency distribution of self esteem	194
11: Normal Q-Q plot of self -esteem.	194
12 : Box plot of self-esteem	195
13 : Frequency distribution of self efficacy	195
14 : Normal Q-Q plot of self-efficacy	196
15 : Box plot for self -efficacy	196
16 : Normal Q-Q plot of aggression	197
17 : Box plot of aggression	197
18 : Frequency distribution for patriotism	198
19 : Normal Q-Q plot for patriotism	198
20 : Box plot for patriotism	199
21: Frequency distribution of Engagement in activities at school	199
22 : Normal Q-Q plot of Engagement in activities at school	200

23 : Box plot of Engagement in activities at school	200
24 : Frequency distribution of Engagement in campus' club activism	201
25 : Normal Q-Q plot of Engagement in campus' club activism	201
26 : Box plot for engagement in campus' club activism	202
27: Frequency distribution for parents' income	202
28 : Box plot for parents' income	203
29 : Normal Q-Q plot of parents' income	203
30 : Frequency distribution of regression standardized residuals	204
31 : Normal Q-Q plots of regression standardized residuals	204
32 : Detrended Normal plot for residuals	205
33 : Scatter plot diagram for forecasted regression values	205

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIWA	Asian Immigrant Women Advocates
CAPAY	Coalition for Asian Pacific American Youth
DV	Dependent Variable
ECR	Embuldeniya Committee Report
EDA	Explorative Data Analysis
EE	Electronic Economy
IV	Independent Variable
KE	Knowledge Economy
PYD	Positive Youth Development
SJP	Sri Jayewardenepura University
UGC	University Grants Commission
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
TRA	Theory Reasoned Action
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
SA	Social Activism

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Context

Pioneers of the higher education sector in Sri Lanka have given adequate attention to the non academic sector and specially the development of civic and social engagements of young people at the campus level. Accordingly, the students' union system has been introduced and students' voice and opinions have been taken into consideration with regard to internal matters as well as external public issues. This policy has set out both positive as well as negative outcomes.

Empowerment of youth and their engagement in social activism can be considered as a part of positive youth development. Such engagement would elevate national development goals, since educated youth will be the future key actors in policy planning, development and leadership.

However, close examination of the contemporary student activism indicates that academic functions have been overridden by the social activism among campus youth. During the year 2007 itself one campus (Rajararta Campus) could not conduct classes for 195 days and another campus (Sabaragamuwa) also failed to conduct 165 days of work out of the total 210 days allocated for the year's academic activity schedule (Dissanayaka 2008). Furthermore, internal group conflicts have arisen. The learning environment has become more uncertain, fearful, and hostile. Campus

administration is in a powerless condition in the present scenario of social activism. Parents of campus youth are also uncertain about the time taken to complete their children's education and more serious and concerned about their engagement in social activism and its negative outcomes such as hospitalization due to injuries resulted from conflicts at the campus level and the suspension of studies by the university authorities. Few of them have already sacrificed their lives due to extreme engagement in social activism political party affiliations. The university learning environment has more hostile and volatile conditions and even leads to the intervention of police. Local universities are becoming less appealing higher educational institutions except in some fields such as medical, law and engineering fields. Therefore, universities have become even dysfunctional and have fallen short of optimizing their outcomes. In this context, unveiling the factors that have contributed for such social activism is of prime importance today. Therefore, there is a due need to conduct a study to seek as to what factors have contributed towards social activism among campus youth in Sri Lanka.

Social Activism at the Higher Learning Institutions in Sri Lanka

Since independence in 1948, political pluralism was encouraged in Sri Lanka by the successive governments. The new constitution (1948) made provision for minority ethnic participation and wider participation of citizens in the process of decision making. Subsequently, a democratic system of government was established with adequate room for such participation and representation. Policy makers of the secondary and higher education sectors have also laid the foundation for the orientation of civic and social engagement of young people. One example is the advancement of students' associations / unions and their activities in the context of