

Active Ageing and Older Adults' Volunteerism in Asia: A Systematic Review

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Review Paper

Active Ageing and Older Adults' Volunteerism in Asia: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: Volunteerism among older adults has been actively encouraged and adopted as a policy measure among developed countries in view of its benefits and impact on the wellbeing of the elderly. However, there is a paucity of research related to the same effort in Asia even though this region is projected to have the fastest-growing ageing population by the year 2050. Utilising the eight determinants of active ageing as posited by WHO Active Ageing Policy Framework, this paper aimed to identify emerging themes in the existing literature grounded upon older adults' recent volunteering policies and practices in Asia. A systematic review was performed to explore the literature on older adults' volunteerism in peer-reviewed journals published in the past decade in two main databases (Scopus and Web of Science). The findings identified from the 19 articles were analysed according to the following themes: (1) culture, (2) gender, (3) behavioural determinants, (4) personal determinants, (5) physical environment, (6) social determinants, (7) economic factors, and (8) health and social services. From the review, behavioural, personal and social environment determinants appeared to be the focal point of active ageing research agenda. A robust and strategic collaboration between policymakers and volunteering stakeholders is key to amplify older adults' volunteerism efforts in line with successful active ageing in Asia.

Keywords: volunteerism; older adults; active ageing; Asia; systematic review

Introduction

Globally, many countries are fast approaching an ageing population due to the three prime forces: declining fertility, increasing longevity, and the progression of large-sized cohorts to older ages (Bloom, 2020). Based on a recent report, an estimated 728 million people worldwide are 65 years or older currently and this figure is projected to increase to more than double by 2050 (United Nations, 2020). When compared to other developed industrialised countries that have attained the ageing population status far earlier, today's developing countries are ageing faster and they must swiftly respond to ageing populations. However, these countries are facing various challenges in terms of lower levels of national income, health status, social welfare facilities, and overall capacities (United Nations, 2015). In ageing society, there is a considerable proportion of healthy older people with skills, resources, and time available who can still contribute to society. Thus, it is imperative for governments around the world to construct robust policy measures, good governance, and adequate financing mechanisms to safeguard the wellbeing of the ageing population.

By 2050, Asia is expected to account for the largest proportion of the elderly population in the world, with one-third of the global population aged 65 and above residing in Japan, Korea, and Singapore (OECD, 2023). In particular, the Eastern and South-Eastern Asia regions are expected to experience the greatest rise in aged people (+300 million people) from 272 million in 2020 to 572 million in 2050 (United Nations, 2020). This demographic shift poses a serious threat to many economies because a good social support system is

closely linked with socioeconomic wellbeing among the people. Declining productivity in an ageing population may compromise the sustainability of income and health. An ageing population will bring both personal and social issues for senior citizens. To prevent the worst-case scenario, the policymakers in Asian countries need to implement the necessary services and facilities to meet the various needs and challenges of the elderly (Alavi et al., 2022).

The current elderly population hails from the era of baby boomers and they enjoy a longer life span with better resources and experiences in their lives. Therefore, with the immense potential they possess, they should not be viewed as a burden to society. In this modern era, older people are vulnerable and often subjected to environmental and physical challenges (Sazali et al., 2022). While it is vital to provide programs and services catered for the younger generation, the government should also evolve and focus on the provision of necessary assistance and age-friendly options for the elderly. By tapping the elderly's resources and maximizing their human capital, countries facing an ageing population will not be hampered by overconsumption and limited resources in the long run. Many have called for robust discourse and decision-making by policymakers at all levels to increase older adults' participation in society. Thus, volunteering is often embedded as one of many strategies to engage senior citizens in active participation in the community (Someya & Hayashida, 2022; Grinshteyn & Sugar, 2021; Saz-Gil et al., 2019). The benefits of volunteering for the older adults is well documented, and recent studies have consistently shown that involvement of the elderly in society via volunteering contributed towards an improved physical and mental health as well as overall wellbeing (Song et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2021; Jongenelis et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023).

Literature Review

1. Active ageing

The concept of active ageing was first coined in the 1990s in response to worldwide population ageing. Although there is no commonly accepted definition, the term "active ageing" is often used interchangeably with other comparable concepts such as "healthy ageing", "successful ageing", "productive ageing", "positive ageing", and "ageing well". To support the notion, the World Health Organisation proposed an Active Ageing Policy Framework in 2002 that emphasises health, participation, and security components to achieve the common global goal of ageing well. Subsequently, the "Age-Friendly Cities and Communities" initiative that targets engagement in local communities was launched in 2007 (WHO, 2002). The framework incorporates eight determinants of active ageing that can be used to predict how well certain populations will age (Figure 1).

2. Older adults' volunteerism

Volunteering in later life refers to unpaid services or labour conducted voluntarily by an individual after retirement in a form of beneficial social roles or activities (Huang, 2019; Dury et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2012). While it is a voluntary act, volunteering is frequently driven by a sense of personal, cultural, religious, political or other obligations (Ahmad et al., 2023; Berger, 2006). Older adults' volunteerism, also known as 'grey', 'silver', or 'senior' volunteerism, recognises the elderly's roles in formal (structured and organised) or informal (spontaneous, individual) active participation in society (Lu et al., 2018; Papa et al., 2019). Such volunteerism has long been advocated in many developed countries, particularly America, the United Kingdom, and other European countries as one of the strategies to encourage active ageing.

Previous studies have established that active volunteering by older adults conveys positive outcomes and benefits across multiple health and psychological domains, including improved welfare, social connectedness, and promotion of longevity (Kim, 2020; Gil-Lacruz et al., 2020; Shea, 2016; Taghian et al., 2019). Volunteering among older adults is also positively associated with a better quality of life and psychological wellbeing (Huang, 2019; Jongenelis et al., 2019). By participating in volunteer work, older adults preserve their intellectual and cognitive capacities, thus easing their feelings of loneliness and

depression as well as preserving their mental wellbeing (Jiang et al., 2020; Crittenden, 2018). Gender-wise, women across all age groups, educational levels, and other major demographic characteristics are more likely to engage and spend more time volunteering than men (Crittenden, 2018; Chen, 2015). The positive outcomes of volunteering applied not only to older volunteers, but also brings beneficial impact towards the volunteering agency (Ling et al., 2023) and caregivers (Jennifer et al., 2022).

Volunteering rates rise in tandem with social awareness and economic development. Hence, the act of volunteerism is more common in wealthier nations and liberal democracies that invest more in social capital, as well as in countries with a higher level of religiosity (Morawski et al., 2020). In recent years, volunteering is gaining popularity in Asia, with the volunteering rate in Japan increasing to 10% between 2006 to 2011 and doubling in Hong Kong from 2006 to 2016 (Huang, 2019). However, despite the growing interest in volunteering, Asia still recorded one of the lowest rates of volunteerism compared to the rest of the world. Overall, only an average of 20 percent of the whole Asia population is involved in volunteerism (Tan et al., 2020). Additionally, whilst there is rich literature on older adults' volunteerism in developed countries, research on similar initiatives across Asia remains scarce (Li et al., 2013).

This review is imperative as it aimed to provide an overview of the available literature related to older adults' volunteerism as a strategy to encourage active ageing in Asia. Secondly, recognising the growing awareness of active ageing, we aimed to conduct a systematic analysis to better understand the policy and strategic measures promoted by the various governmental and non-governmental agencies in a large geographical continent like Asia. By utilising WHO's active ageing framework, thematic analysis was done to fulfil the second objective of analysing the emerging determinants related to older adults' volunteerism in Asia. Based on these findings, future research recommendations are proposed to add to the available body of evidence on volunteerism by older adults in Asia. To achieve this, we aimed to answer the following research questions;

- (i) What is the publication output on older adults' volunteerism in Asia in the past decade (2013-2024)?
- (ii) Basing upon the WHO Active Aging Framework determinants, what are the emerging themes that contributed towards volunteerism among older adults in Asia?

Methodology

The following section outlines the method used to answer the study objective. It is followed by the study background and the emerging themes derived from the selected papers. The last section provides recommendations on potential future research.

1. Identification

To answer the research question, a systematic review is utilised to collate and synthesise the present literature. In this systematic review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach is selected as a guideline of choice to fulfil the publication standard and review rigour. The review process consists of three main phases. The first phase is to identify keywords and to search for similar equivalents and analogous concepts from previous studies, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and thesaurus. Following an exhaustive search for keywords, the final search strings were created and applied in two widely used research repositories i.e. Scopus and Web of Science (Table 1). Following this first step, 2000 papers were successfully identified and retrieved from both databases.

2. Screening

From the available data, a thorough screening was done to identify the most suitable articles to be included for review. A total of 1,550 records were removed to avoid duplication and only 450 remained to be screened

at the next level. The following steps in the PRISMA guideline were applied and the result is presented in Figure 2.

3. Eligibility Criteria

In the third phase, the eligibility criteria including articles' titles, abstracts, and key content were thoroughly reviewed to ensure that the studies fulfilled the research aim of the current study (Table 2). The inclusion criteria for selection were academic journal articles written in the English language from the last decade (2013-2024). To ensure uniformity of source, all systematic reviews, reviews, meta-analyses, meta-synthesis, book series, books, chapters, and conference proceedings are excluded. Finally, only research articles whose study respondents were based in Asia were selected.

After this step, a total of 58 articles remained. However, 39 articles were omitted as they were irrelevant to the topic of interest. Upon final screening, a total of 19 studies were chosen for the final review. The key characteristics of the included studies are presented in Table 3.

4. Data extraction and analysis

Microsoft Excel database was used to extract and classify the important data derived from the included articles. As this paper aimed to identify recent senior volunteerism initiatives in Asia, the data collected included authors, journal's name, methods and instruments used in the research, study population and sample, as well as results and findings. Common themes among the articles were also identified. Additional data deemed crucial in the 14 included papers such as ideas, opinions, or analyses relevant to the issue were also analysed to enhance data interpretation.

The Findings

Older adults' volunteerism initiatives in Asia, while many, are still scarcely reported in the literature. Based on initial screening, the majority of volunteerism-related research was based on studies located in Western or developed countries. Our review identified 19 articles on volunteerism among the elderly in the past decade (2013 – 2024). Based on the review objective, the discussion is classified into two components, namely (1) the publication output of selected studies and (2) emerging themes of older adults' volunteerism in Asia according to the WHO Active Aging framework.

1. The publication output of selected studies

To answer the first research question, the discussion on older adult volunteerism policies and strategies across Asia will be outlined based on the following characteristics: geographical, research frequency by year, field, and type of journal in which the articles are published.

Geographical area

Despite the vast number of countries on the continent of Asia, studies obtained from the two databases were carried out mainly in East Asian countries, i.e. China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) with 11 articles (57.9%), followed by Japan with five articles (26.3%), Korea with two (10.5%) and one from Singapore (5.3%). All authors were affiliated with their universities in their respective countries and none of the authors published more than one journal article on the same theme. It is obvious that publications from other Asian countries were either underrepresented or absent altogether in these two databases. Figure 3 below represents the percentage of publications according to country.

Research frequency by year

The research frequency of the topic was analysed according to the year of publication by utilising a frequency distribution chart (Figure 4). Based on the chart, only 26.3% (n=5) were conducted in 2013, followed by 21.1% (n=4) in 2016. The mean number of papers published per year was 1.58. To better delineate the trend of the publication, we divided the years into two equal periods of six years each, from 2013 – 2018 and 2019 – 2024. The first six-year period (2013 – 2018) only witnessed nine publications (47.3%) compared to 10 publications (52.6%) in the second period. There is a clear paucity of publications on this topic from Asian perspective in 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2022.

Field and journal

The topic of senior volunteerism in Asia has been published in several peer-reviewed journals, even though the field of the journals varied. Table 4 illustrates an overview of the papers published according to the field and type of journals. The majority of papers were published in the field of gerontology (31.6%), followed by ageing (26.3%) and other fields including psychology, tourism, education, volunteer and health (42.1%). In short, one peer-reviewed journal (Ageing International) appeared with the greatest number of publications on senior volunteerism in Asia with three articles (15.8%).

2. Emerging themes of older adults' volunteerism in Asia

The following section presents the ageing strategies formulated by policymakers in Asia that are geared towards encouraging older adults to have greater participation in society by volunteering. Next, the emerging themes were also outlined based on the eight determinants of the WHO Active Ageing Policy Framework, namely (1) culture, (2) gender, (3) behavioural determinants, (4) personal determinants, (5) physical environment, (6) social determinants, (7) economic factors, and (8) health and social services. Table 5 presents the summarised findings driven by the research papers.

Older adults' volunteerism strategies in Asia

Based on previous literature, older adult volunteerism efforts among Asia countries are known to vary depending on the cultural, community, and religious backgrounds in different societies. In view of the possible challenges arising from resource constraints due to the ageing population in the near future, policymakers and governments have taken numerous measures to mitigate the negative impact of ageing. In an effort to introduce and engage more elderly volunteers in civic participation, China has introduced several measures, including the 1996 and 2013 Elderly Protection Law, White Paper on the Development of China's Undertakings for the Aged, as well as the Decisions on Strengthening Work on Ageing and Plans for Development of China's Undertakings for the Aged (Shea, 2016). These programmes are designed to meet the needs of the elderly without compromising the requirement of the beneficiaries of the voluntary work. In another study, older Japanese adult volunteers' involvement in volunteerism was narrated from the perspective of the national policy framework that encompasses the four aspects of institutional capacity, i.e. access, information, incentives, and facilitation (Chen, 2013). Furthermore, one study (Gau, 2013) focused on Toy Clinic Shop, a program introduced by the China Ministry of Education which involves senior citizens' participation in school activities to repair toys in an effort to facilitate school and community development. Another study from China described the elderly volunteering experience in the tourism sector during the National Day holiday (Dashper

et al., 2021). However, the remaining studies presented a more diverse range of volunteering activities that were not affiliated with any specific programmes by public or private entities.

Culture

According to the WHO Active Ageing Model, culture is a cross-cutting determinant that affects all domains of ageing. The societal perception towards the ageing process and older people is heavily influenced by the cultural values and traditions that are practised within the same community. Asian countries are the best examples of how culture determines the intention to volunteer among citizens. To begin with, the culture of living together in a multi-generational household and the concept of 'filial piety' are both deeply rooted in Eastern or more specifically, Chinese societies, thus stimulating a lot of opportunities for informal volunteering and caregiving. In addition, older adults volunteering behaviours are also increasingly influenced by societal concerns (Chong et al., 2013). For instance, in China, older adult volunteers often view volunteering as an act of service and responsibility, as well as a matter of national pride and dedication to the country (Dashper et al., 2021). Historically, volunteering and other forms of community involvement in Japan have always been carried out within the confines of a stable network of either local connections or blood ties. However, in view of the ample benefits of senior adult volunteering, many Japanese volunteer organisations (for example Osaka Volunteer Association) are now moving away from locally-recruited volunteers and expanding the volunteer membership to all citizens (Chen, 2013). Another option to amplify the cultural values in the volunteering experience is by establishing small-scale associations to encourage citizens to start contributing to society on a local basis, a concept known as "moral citizenship".

Gender

In the evaluation of the suitability and impact of diverse policy options gender was often used as a "lens" to compare these aspects between men and women. Traditionally, women have always played the main role in "informal" volunteering tasks such as taking care of the household and providing care for the elderly while men take on the role of the family breadwinners. Similarly, women are also more involved in informal and formal volunteering compared to men, which are evident in the selected studies (Ang and Malhotra, 2024; Takahashi et al, 2024; Leung, 2016). Out of the 19 papers in this review, only one study by Chen (2015) focused on gender; what and how older men learned when they volunteered. The paper also highlighted the difference in learning in a different set of environments, i.e. learning via volunteering as compared to classroom learning. By volunteering in later life, older men perceived volunteerism as an altruistic purpose. They also view volunteering as a resource for obtaining knowledge, skills, and wisdom via continuous lifelong learning.

Behavioural determinants

The WHO Active Ageing Policy Framework posits that behaviours or actions such as exercise and physical activity as well as drinking and smoking habits are some of the important predictors of active ageing. Furthermore, the model also recommends for active ageing measures be supported by facilities and activities that can stimulate physical activity championed by older people themselves. It is possible to achieve active ageing via active participation in volunteer work, whether formal or informal. Recent research reported that volunteering is a good platform for older adults to remain physically and mentally active (Dashper et al., 2021). Maintaining social contacts, developing social exchange, conducting diverse interactions, and establishing support and network via older adults who willingly engage in volunteering activities in the community are vital components towards healthy ageing. Nonaka et al. (2019) explored the interactive effects between the willingness to volunteer⁴⁶ and actual volunteer engagement on the maintenance of functional⁴⁴ health among older Japanese adults. The study findings revealed that many participants carried out actual engagement to obtain health benefits from volunteering activities. However, the study also highlighted it was only effective when volunteers willingly engage in societal activities. All selected studies promote behavioural as an important determinant towards achieving active ageing.

Personal determinants

Next, the personal determinants in the active ageing framework can be categorised into (1) biology and genetics and (2) psychological factors, both of which can significantly impact ageing. Participation in volunteering work can be influenced by psychological factors. Intelligence, cognitive capacity, and self-efficacy are some of the psychological factors that can influence the decision of older adults to volunteer. According to the literature, the decision of older adults to volunteer usually starts at a certain point in their lives. Previous research suggests that volunteering is connected with improved health outcomes for Chinese older persons, including a lower level of depression, greater wellbeing, and life satisfaction, as well as improved self-reported health status (Chen et al., 2020). Li et al. (2013) who studied the physical and psychological health among older adults in Taiwan found that older adults with previous participation in volunteering work reported better health status. They also experienced a higher level of life satisfaction compared to their peers who have never been involved in such work. However, it is important to highlight that only continuous volunteering activity and a transition from inactivity to activity were associated with positive changes in functional impairment and depression. Takahashi et al. (2024) also found that volunteer orientation plays an important part on the willingness of older adults to continue volunteering activities. On the other hand, to encourage senior citizens to prepare and adapt to life as volunteers, Kim (2020) recommended the establishment of a holistic volunteer programme that fulfils the objectives of the organisation as well as provides the necessary financial, and personal support to the volunteers. Additionally, other psychology factors such as self-efficacy and coping styles also influenced how people age. This is evident in the study by Lee et al (2023) which highlighted the benefits of volunteering on resilience and ability to cope with ageing.

Physical environment

Older people require an age-friendly place and community for healthy ageing (Che Had et al., 2023; Salleh et al., 2022). The policy framework in Japan emphasises the aspect of 'facilitation', i.e., increasing institutional capacity for older adult volunteers (Chen, 2013). Facilitation refers to the administrative capacity and ability of a volunteer organisation to provide appropriate support that enables older volunteers to fully engage in volunteer activities over time. To begin with, they require more flexible volunteering schedules so that they can continue to create and maintain social ties. This is vital to ensure that older adults can continue their engagement in volunteerism to achieve sustainable participation in volunteering activities. In an effort to promote older adult volunteerism in Hong Kong, Chan & Liang (2013) studied the local active ageing policy framework and applications, particularly The Neighbourhood Active Aging Project. This project promoted integrated community involvement from the ground level in the community by establishing close networking via NGOs, schools, religious establishments, and resident associations. Such initiatives would inspire local community organisations and volunteers (including seniors) to uphold the concepts of practising neighbourhood-based mutual help in caring for and respecting older individuals in order to achieve intergenerational harmony. Research by Ho et al (2023) on older Taiwanese volunteers who served as Standardized Patients (SP) also informed that the pleasant atmosphere at SP Centres motivated them to continue volunteering, which further strengthened evidence of physical environment as a determinant towards the promotion of active ageing.

Social determinants

Next, social support, education, and lifelong learning opportunities, as well as protection from violence and abuse are three of the crucial elements that promote the health, engagement, and security of the elderly in the social environment. To begin with, social support as well as education and literacy are two main components associated with the willingness of older adults to volunteer. Social support refers to the interaction and activity between individuals in the community that enables them to coexist both structurally (social connectedness with others) and functionally (exchange of different types of social support) in the same environment. Interpersonal connection and interaction, love and understanding, caring and concern, affection and companionship, financial aid, as well as respect and acceptance are all examples of social support that play a major role in the wellbeing of older people (Rausa, 2008). The importance of social support to ensure a positive

volunteering experience is widely acknowledged by researchers. Chen et al. (2020) studied the perceived community volunteering experiences in Shanghai and found that the expansion of social networks resulted in a strengthened volunteer identity. Similarly, the Neighbourhood Active Aging Project in Hong Kong promoted support networks to enhance the capacity of volunteers to care for and visit their neighbours in the same community (Chan and Liang, 2013). Such opportunities also enabled the volunteers to grow ²¹ their social skills (Shea, 2016). Therefore, facilitation is highly encouraged to ensure appropriate support for **older volunteers to fully engage in volunteering activities over time.**

Moreover, another significant benefit for older volunteers is access to lifelong learning and education opportunities. All the studies in this review identified volunteering as a learning opportunity that further encourages participation in volunteering work. In a recent study by Chen (2015), older men volunteers reported volunteering as a learning process of not only knowledge and skills but also wisdom. They also utilised past experience to learn about volunteerism. Elsewhere, in Taiwan, the establishment of Toy Clinic Shop as a Community of Practice is a good platform to provide learning interaction for senior citizens (Gau, 2013). Furthermore, volunteers also gain new knowledge and skills that can enhance personal and family development (Shea, 2016).

Economic determinants

Income, work, and social protection are three domains under the economic environment that dictate the success of active ageing. As older people retire from formal work, they still have valuable skills, knowledge, and experience that they can contribute via volunteering. This can also help them to remain productive in old age. Kim (2020) evaluated the ways to encourage the participation of Koreans in volunteering work. The findings emphasised the importance of developing human capacity surrounding volunteers, volunteer managers, volunteer groups, and volunteer organisations. Also, Chen, Ye and Wu (2020) highlighted that volunteers are shaped by their identity in different stages of life. For example, volunteering can help older people to maintain their professional identity (identity continuum) besides grooming them to hold a new role under the new career identity as a volunteer (identity development). For some, volunteering also offers older people a socially-valued role in the community after their retirement from a paid career (Shea, 2016). Although volunteerism is often regarded as unpaid labour, some countries have already proposed financial incentives for volunteers to encourage retired people to stay active. Paid volunteerism may be particularly appealing to low-income older persons because it represents an alternative source of revenue that is more flexible and practical than full employment (Chen, 2015). In other words, it is a win-win situation as low-income older adults can take part in paid volunteer opportunities and sustain their livelihood.

Health and social services

To design successful active ageing measures, policymakers should incorporate promotion and disease prevention, long-term care, curative services, and mental health services for the elderly population. Volunteering plays an important position under this continuum, as adult volunteers can either be providing services to the aged or becoming the recipient of the provision under certain situations. Therefore, governments, medical practitioners, representatives of the pharmaceutical business, and traditional medical practitioners should all partner up in this endeavour to assist organisations that safeguard the wellbeing of older people. More importantly, the right mindset of volunteers is pertinent to ensure the success of the programme in the long run. For example, volunteers who value their work as a service to their nation and people by providing kindness, love, and care should be recruited and retained (Dashper et al., 2021). The participation of older people in the Toy Clinic initiative in Taiwan showed that volunteers and recipients of the service both receive ample opportunity in widening their network and sense of belonging in the community, eventually improving their ²⁴ physical and mental wellbeing (Gau, 2013). On a similar note, Kim (2020) concluded that the creation of **a private-led ²⁴ organisation dedicated to elderly volunteering, the development of comprehensive programmes that can meet the needs and demands of elderly volunteers,** as well as provision of robust financial support for elderly volunteers are some of the innovative strategies to achieve successful implementation of such service in the long run.

From the results, three (3) main determinants were identified to be the most studied; behavioural, personal and social environment. However, studies touching on the themes of gender, culture and physical environment are still in its infancy. The fast pace and ever-changing demographics of older adults in Asia require crucial attention from policymakers, stakeholders and researchers in an effort to create an age-friendly environment and community.

Discussion

From this review, the ageing population in Asia is growing at different speeds and magnitudes across the region. Considering the diverse socioeconomic and cultural characteristics in Asia, the policies revolving around the elderly also vary between countries. Based on the literature review of senior volunteerism in Asia, countries from the East Asia region were more active in the research and publication of relevant and related topics. This is not surprising as Japan currently records the world's highest rate of population ageing while China is also witnessing a rapid rate of population ageing with the world's largest senior population (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, both countries recognise the urgent need to formulate measures that are geared towards 'active ageing' rather than 'protected ageing' for senior citizens. In view of the lacking focus on gender and culture, future studies are recommended to gather more robust evidence on active ageing preparedness across demographics, continent and culture.

However, apart from these East Asia countries, research on senior volunteerism in other developing and underdeveloped Asian countries is scarce. The rapid growth of ageing population, especially in South Asia is predicted to lead to unprecedented challenges in terms of rising costs in pension and healthcare, high dependency ratios, and changes in family dynamics (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, this review presents the need for more research in this area to address the gaps in the ageing policies and strategies formulated by public and private entities, especially in the aforementioned countries/regions with limited literature. Additionally, future research must also consider the effectiveness and impact of volunteering programmes in countries with a high rate of population ageing.

Last but not least, population ageing in Asia serves as an imperative discussion topic among gerontologists worldwide in view of the largest proportion of older people in this continent (Chen et al., 2019). Despite increasing interest in elderly-related subjects, the research on senior volunteerism in Asia is still in its infancy. In this review, only two studies (Chen, 2015; Fukuzawa et al., 2019) explored the demographic variables of senior volunteers while only one reported (Fukuzawa et al., 2019) on the socioeconomic status and social networks of volunteers. The association between individual characteristics and the patterns of productive activity engagement among older adults was only assessed in one study (Liu & Lou, 2016). Additionally, Li et al. (2013) reported that positive benefits experienced by elderly volunteers are often subjected to volunteering characteristics, frequency, type, organisation, and continuity.

Further research should focus on gaining a better understanding of the demographics and characteristics of older adults who volunteer. The identification of the motivating factors of volunteerism in terms of age, education level, and financial capacity is important to sustain senior volunteerism. In addition, the topic can also be explored via the lens of the participants and practitioners in both public and private institutions. The findings from these research projects will serve as vital learning and teaching guides for practitioners to supervise and train new volunteers in the field.

Conclusion

From this review, volunteering is shown to be associated with various benefits and positive impacts on the elderly. As a way to promote active ageing, the elderly population can contribute an active role as volunteers in their community. Additionally, in view of the scarcity of research on older adults' volunteerism in Asia, there is a growing opportunity for gerontologists worldwide to further study this phenomenon especially among developing and underdeveloped countries. Elderly participation in volunteerism can be further

improved if the government and private foundations can commit to the agenda by providing more opportunities for civic engagement, including offering incentives and increasing funding for the development of volunteering programmes.

However, volunteerism is not without its setbacks. Identifying the barriers and challenges faced by the elderly before, during, and after volunteering is equally important to encourage and retain volunteers. Therefore, improving public recognition via frequent campaigns, as well as conferring recognition awards and letters of appreciation for long-term volunteering service are vital steps to attract and promote enthusiasm among volunteers. Last but not least, a lifelong education programme is also a good option for skill transfer to elderly volunteers.

This review is not without limitations. For reliability measures, we included only peer-reviewed articles from two established databases, i.e. Scopus and Web of Science. Hence, it is possible that studies published in other databases were not included in the study. Secondly, in view of the multidisciplinary nature of the topic, thus it might be discussed across all fields or subjects that were interrelated. Nevertheless, due to the subject inclusion we applied in the search process, some of the relevant studies on elderly volunteerism might have been omitted from this review. Finally, other sources of literature apart from journal articles may be plenty and should be explored in future research to obtain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

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