

A Study on the Strengths and Weaknesses of Red Crescent Youth Organization: Solutions and Suggestions for Quality Improvement

Ensieh Loghmani^{1,*}, Mohammad Jafariyan², Seyyed Mohammadhossein Javadi³

¹M.A. in Women Studies, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

²PhD Student in Social Aid Working, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

³PhD in Social Aid Working, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

Abstract Red Crescent Youth Organization is focused on holding camps. Almost all aid working and humanitarian activities are provided in formed training of the members. Undoubtedly, camps are so important to this organization that performance evaluation of the camps, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, asking for opinions of members and supervisors about quality of the camps and listening to their constructive criticisms and suggestions for the purpose of improvement of the camps' quality is part of the heavy duty of the organization. This research tries to answer to the important questions raised. This research was conducted by a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In quantitative section, survey method was used, in which two different questionnaires were prepared for members and supervisors. In qualitative section, over 20 in-depth personal interviews were made with old members of the organization, and over 10 in-depth personal interviews with experienced supervisors of the camps, and 5 focus groups were formed in presence of the members of different clubs in different cities. Findings is made a comparison between the camps of the Red Crescent Organization and those being held by other organizations and institutes, Members and supervisors of different camps provide their opinion about strengths and weaknesses of the different camps held by the organization, and about different elements and parts of the camps. The results show the young members of Red Crescent Youth Organization have high interest and willingness to participate in youth camps.

Keywords Camps of Iranian Red Crescent Youth Organization, Strengths, Weaknesses, Different Elements of Camps, Solutions

1. Introduction

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a non-making profit organization that operates in 186 countries. This organization kicks back its root in 1919, and its major goal is to provide aid to the victims of technological and natural disasters, and health emergencies as well as the refugees. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement act as the main representative for its members in the international arena. In addition, it enhances the cooperation among the national societies, and assists in promoting their ability to perform disaster, health, social programmes and preparedness effectively. The Iranian Red Crescent was established in 1922 and changed its former name, the Persian Red Lion and Sun Society, to the present one in 1980. It has 30 governorate headquarters and 330

branches throughout the country. With about 7,000 paid staff members and more than two million volunteers, as well as the mainly high school and university student members of its youth organization, it is one of the world's largest National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies. Beside its core activity of relief and disaster preparedness, the Iranian Red Crescent engages in wide-ranging humanitarian services in health and rehabilitation, training and research. The Society is held in high esteem by the Iranian general public (Norbala, A, 2005). Iranian Red Crescent Organization has been always the pioneer of humanitarian activities, raising the white flag of humanity, epitomizing sacrifice. It is not easy task to gather a series of attempts, achievements and services provided by Iranian Red Crescent Society to damaged and miserable people, describe the magnificent moment of philanthropy and sacrifice, and depict the smily and cheerful face of aid workers who give help and hope to needy people (Mubashar Ria Sheikh and M. Mahmood Afzal, 2003). The seven principles of Red Cross and Red Crescent are as follows:

1. Philanthropy: reliance on humanity, and keeping and

* Corresponding author:

sara.loghmani@gmail.com (Ensieh Loghmani)

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respecting human esteem and dignity.

2. Lack of private motive: provision of humanitarian services without any racial, gender, religious, political and class discrimination.

3. Neutrality: avoidance of advocating of the parties involved in the conflict to facilitate access to victims.

4. Independence: independence in provision of humanitarian services and independence from the governments and other such authorities which may challenge independence of provided services.

5. Voluntary services: humanitarian services provided by Red Crescent and Red Cross societies have a non-profit and voluntary nature (WHO Gender Mainstreaming for Health Managers, 2006).

6. Oneness and Union: in every autonomous country, only one Red Crescent or Red Cross may be established. Such society must officially be introduced to the international official authorities by the government of the respective country.

7. Universality: Red Crescent and Red Cross societies are not limited by geographical borders and regions, and their objectives and activities cover the whole world (Avijgan M, Karamalian M, Ashouroun V, Changiz T (2009)).

Iranian Red Crescent' activities are focused on the camps that are held by this organization. Training of almost all aid working and humanitarian activities is provided to members in form of camping (Junxiu Wu, 2007). Such camping is held on different levels including branch, province, country, and sometime, international level, with each of which following a different objective, and therefore, holding different programs depending on the type of camping (Asadi, 1991: 4).

Young members who are members of different clubs including free, student's, seminary student, and rural clubs, participate in these camps, and are going to learn in these camps whatever they must learn from Red Crescent (Azizi, 2006: 11). The fact that the camps are categorized in thematic terms indicates diversity of activities and trainings provided to the members and also provide an opportunity for identification and realization of the talents and potentials of the members (Tajik, 2010: 3).

Undoubtedly, camps are so important to this organization that performance evaluation of the camps, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, asking for opinions of members and supervisors about quality of the camps and listening to their constructive criticisms and suggestions for the purpose of improvement of the camps' quality is part of the heavy duty of the organization (Ostovar Izadkhah, 2010: 16).

The present research was conducted for the same purpose. This research tries to answer questions like these:

- How was quality of the camps held by the Red Crescent Youth Organization?
- What were strengths and weaknesses of individual camps held in opinion of members and supervisors?
- How pleasant were individual elements of camps to

members?

- What methods and solutions do the members and supervisors provide for raising quality of camps?

Method: This research was conducted using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The procedures in which each method was applied are as follows.

2. Quantitative Method

In this section, survey method was applied. First, several heuristic interviews were made mostly with older and more experienced members; and several camps of the organization were attended, including Bandar Anzali Vividness and Dynamism Camp (summer, 2013), Kerman Desert Expedition (spring, 2013), Mashhad Scout Trainers (spring, 2013), and the manner in which programs were conducted in different camps, members dealt with different situations in camps were observed, and based on the observations, two questionnaires were developed; one specific to members and the other to supervisors.

3. Qualitative Method

The interview is usually called a targeted dialogue. In this study, interviews were used to collect data. In order to collect data, over 20 in-depth personal interviews were made with old and experienced members of the organization from different cities including Karaj, Esfahan, Kerman, Ilam, Qom, Ardebil, Bushehr, Semnan, etc.; and over 10 in-depth personal interviews were made with experienced supervisors of the camps. Besides, 5 focus groups were formed in presence of members of different clubs. The results from analysis of the said data not only highly contributed to design of quantitative section, but also, determined main chapters and subjects of two camp instruction books aimed at members and supervisors.

4. Sampling Method

There were different methods available to administer questionnaires to members and supervisors, for example, emphasis on the province of residence, the club to which a participant was a member, duration of membership, or conventional methods in which questionnaires are randomly distributed among all members. After considering weaknesses and strengths of all methods, one method was selected. Since questions included in the questionnaire were specifically related to the type of camps and elements of camps held by the organization, and there were relatively large number of open questions included in the questionnaire, which should be answered only by those members who had experience of participation in different camps held by the organization, then, it was decided to administer the questionnaire to those members who had at least spent 4 weeks in camp. In addition to this condition, it was made

sure that all provinces be represented in the sample, so that opinions of experienced members from all provinces are included in the sample. Having considered the above said points, 320 questionnaires were collected, and after filtering of incorrectly completed questionnaires, 296 questionnaires constituted the sample. For supervisors, different methods were considered as well. Supervisors' questionnaire was in fact a semi-open interview, because most questions were open ones, which required remark and experiences to be made and described by supervisors. Therefore, this questionnaire was designed for use in survey to be conducted by normal method, so that the data collected from questionnaire could be generalized to the whole statistical population, which here included all supervisors working across the country. We intended to be acquainted with experiences and opinions of supervisors, and it was decided that the administration of the questionnaire be continued until no new information was added. In other words, as long as new opinions and suggestions are being made, questionnaires are administered to the supervisors, and when the researcher feels that data saturation has occurred, and no new data emerges, the administration and completion of questionnaires stops. Accordingly, 40 questionnaires were completed by the supervisors who were working in the camp, the results of which will be analyzed in chapter three.

5. Findings

Over 50% of the members who were included in this survey aged 20-24. About 66% were university students or graduates. Over 60% of them were members of student's clubs. Over 70% of them had history 4-8 times participation in different camps. Respondents were from all providences of Iran. First, members of camps held by different organizations were compared, and the highest score was won by camps held by Red Crescent Society. On the other side, the lowest scores related to camps held by Basij and local mosques. Camps held by universities and sports clubs were placed in 2nd and 3rd placed, followed by camps held by schools. 72-94% of members considered effectiveness and efficiency of camps held by Red Crescent Youth Organization to be high. Then, positive and negative features of individual camps were studied separately, and strengths and weaknesses of each were identified considering the type and nature of each. However, for the strengths, the common points between all camps included empowerment of members, creation of sense of empathy between the team members, acquaintance with customs of other cities, creation of happy morale among members, and creation of interest in participation in activities of Red Crescent Society. On the other side, the negative points shared by all camps included shortage of facilities and budget, short camping period, low quality of food, and improper health condition, low number of camps, and lack of proper planning. For the role of supervisors, 80% of members believed that supervisors play a large or very large role in raising of the camps' quality. Accordingly, it is necessary to make careful planning to

improve knowledge and skills of supervisors. Also, care must be taken in choice of camps' supervisors, and it must be considered that just because an elder is accompanying a team, it doesn't mean that the team doesn't need a trained supervisor. In this regard, the supervisors themselves said that supervisors must be chosen from among personnel of the organization, and use of people from other departments must strictly be avoided. They believed that communication skill is one of the most important features of a good supervisor, and suggested that two supervisors be used in each camp. Also, over 87% of supervisors believed there was a high or very high need for holding training courses for supervisors. They mostly proposed the following subject-matters for the training courses: how to treat adolescents and youths, management of camping, ethics of camping, objectives of camping, threats in camping, opportunities in camping, teamwork in camp, laws of camp, duration of camping, results of camping, change of attitudes through camping, effectiveness of camping, and location of camp. As for willingness of members and supervisors to hold camping under hard conditions, only 16% of members and 22% of supervisors selected either high or very high choices. As for the question whether they wished dried food to be provided to the members or they wished to prepare food by themselves, only 20% of members and 27% of supervisors were much or very much agree. As for payment of a share, even if small, of the camp's expenses, 11% of members and 10% of supervisors selected much agreed or very much agreed.

Thus, the vast majority of members and supervisors who participated in the survey did not agree with the above said items. When members were asked about what courses wished to take, most of them suggested courses on aid working, prevention of social pathologies, practical training courses, courses on ethics, life skills and use of outdoor camping environment for training. In addition, about 60 percent of members said training they had received in Red Crescent Youth Organizations was highly or very highly efficient and effective. Following, 26 items of camps were provided to participants, and they were asked to score them on a scale of 0-10 based on their satisfaction with and interest in each item.

Data showed that public speeches, group discussions, and classroom training were least popular, while outing and entertainment, strengthened friendship between members from same providence, the security provided on the way to the camp, and in the camp, presents that may be received in the camp, acquaintance with other cultures and ethnicities, behavior and conduct of supervisors, and drivers on the way to the camp were among the items that were considered as being over 80% satisfactory by the respondents.

Food and reception quality, presence of clergy in camp and opening ceremony were comparatively considered to be moderately satisfactory. For the manner in which people were chosen to participate in the camping, both members and supervisors believed that the choice must be made based on level of activity of people, and suggested that a data bank be established to hold data about member's activities, and

people with higher score be let in the camp.

Also, supervisors provided two other suggestions: choice of members to be undertaken by the young officials of each branch, and head of branch not to intervene in selection process, and also, personnel's families to be invited to participate in camps. For presents, the members said that presents in kind make them always remember memories of the camp, and believed that low quality of presents damaged reputation of Red Crescent Society. They suggested that either aid working equipments carrying the organization's sign or souvenirs of the cities in which the camp was held be given as present. For the manner in which camp are held, members and supervisors believed that involvement of members must be increased and the capabilities of members must be employed in performance of programs. In this regard, almost 64% of members, and 66% of supervisors believed that camp's programs must be performed by members and youths. Supervisors said that if they were the managers and planners of the camps, they would increase involvement of member, and hold group programs, so that members from different provinces would become more acquainted with each other. They also said they would recognize the talents of members, and assign each program to a different province. Members said that if they were manager and planner of the camp, they would allocated some space to each province, so that they would use it to exhibit their arts and souvenirs to members from other provinces. For instance, they could prepare their traditional pastries and foods, or assign preparation of each meal to a different province, and hold cooking competition between the provinces. Also, the supervisors said that if they were manager and planner of camps, they would not only increase involvement of members, but also, give program of the camp to the provinces before camp was held, so that they could prepare themselves for the camp. They also said they would hold camps in right place and time. For example, they said they wouldn't hold camps during exams time, better equip sleeping rooms, for instance, by using carpet in the rooms, so that members could sit together instead of lying on their bed on free times, or they would not lengthen the training sessions longer than one hour, and would certainly provide sports equipment to the members.

For orientation programs, only 33% of members and 29% of supervisors stated that orientation program had been held for them before camping. Vast majority of them, that is, 86% of members and 83% of supervisors, were highly satisfied with camps. For negative and positive features of the camps being held by the branch, supervisors said that closer proximity and strengthened friendly relation between members, lower population, and better reception, better selection of those who will be let in the camp, and higher participation of members in programs of the camp were among positive points, and low number of camps of branch, and short budget were among the negative points of the camps held by the branch.

As for faults of the organization in notification of

directives and instructions of the camp, it must be said that notification was delayed, and interference between camps and exams or other bad timings occurred, and sometimes, organization failed to understand the special conditions of individual branches and provinces, and issued the same instruction for all provinces. Overall, over 68% of supervisors stated that they were highly or very highly willing to participate in camps as supervisor again, and over 94% of members stated that they were highly or very highly willing to participate in the camps.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

Research findings in two qualitative and quantitative areas confirm opinion and remarks of members and supervisors, and confirmed that members of Red Crescent Youth Organization are highly willing to participate in the camping of the organization. They considered the effects of participation in the camping on their individual and social as being useful, and believed that the camping of this organization was more effective than similar camping held by other institutions such as schools, universities, etc. Increased self-confidence, empowering, practice of teamwork, acquaintance with different cultures and ethnicities, acquiring of different skills and learning in line with objectives of the organization are part of the benefits the young people received from camping of this organization. At the same time, individual camping have their unique and different achievements depending on the nature and objectives. Satisfaction of the sense of philanthropy in camping called Jihad Camp, desire for competition and increasing aid working skills in camping called Kindness Competition Camp, acquaintance and friendship with nature, and acquiring skill of aid working in different situations such as mountain, desert, jungle, flood, creation of the sense of solidarity and friendship in camping called Branch Camps, practice of living in hard conditions, keeping of order and training of the seven principles of Red Crescent in camping called Scout Camp, etc. are among other achievements of the members of Red Crescent Youth Organization. However, progress, and raising of qualitative and quantitative level of the camps, is possible without criticism and providing practical and constructive suggestions, which is undoubtedly required for advancement and raising of the qualitative level of the camps. Therefore, it is necessary to use effective and compassionate opinions, experiences, and ideas of the members and supervisors to pave the way toward realization of the humanitarian objectives of the organization. Undoubtedly, time and expenses consumed during this research, which was conducted with full support from Red Crescent Youth Organization, will become fruitful if the invaluable and practical suggestions of dear members and supervisions, as discussed in detailed in the section on research findings, and briefly mentioned in this paper, will be used for elimination of defects and shortcomings.

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