

The Role of UUM Volunteers in Safe Touch Education in Primary Schools
(*Peranan Sukarelawan UUM dalam Pendidikan Sentuhan Selamat di Sekolah Rendah*)

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ABSTRACT

Educating children about Safe Touch at an early age is critical for their safety and well-being. Children are empowered to protect themselves and know their boundaries if they learn about appropriate touch, especially how to identify and report inappropriate touch when they experience it. With the increased number of child abuse cases reported in Malaysia among primary school students recently, the Safe Touch program has been developed. Through this program, university students are empowered and trained as volunteers to facilitate sharing education on Safe Touch with primary school students in the Kubang Pasu District in Kedah, Malaysia. Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) students are given the necessary skills and knowledge to teach children about Safe and Unsafe Touch effectively. This paper aims to explore UUM volunteers' experiences as Safe Touch facilitators and ways to help these primary school children. The initiative employs a mixed-methods approach. It combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess volunteers' knowledge and confidence as Safe Touch facilitator. The results indicate an improvement in volunteers' understanding of Safe Touch concepts and their ability to communicate with children. The findings also highlight the crucial role that well-trained volunteers can play in child protection efforts. The conclusion underscores the effectiveness of community-based interventions in fostering safe environments for children through university student volunteers. This initiative not only enhances community engagement but also ensures that children are better equipped to understand and assert their rights to safety and respect.

Keywords: Volunteer, UUM, Safe Touch, Community, Empower

ABSTRAK

Mendidik kanak-kanak tentang Sentuhan Selamat pada usia awal adalah penting untuk keselamatan dan kesejahteraan mereka. Kanak-kanak diberi kuasa untuk melindungi diri mereka dan mengetahui sempadan mereka jika mereka belajar tentang sentuhan yang sesuai, terutamanya cara mengenal pasti dan melaporkan sentuhan yang tidak sesuai apabila mereka mengalaminya. Dengan peningkatan jumlah kes penderaan kanak-kanak yang dilaporkan di Malaysia dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah rendah baru-baru ini, program Safe Touch telah dibangunkan. Melalui program ini, pelajar universiti diberi kuasa dan dilatih sebagai sukarelawan untuk memudahkan perkongsian pendidikan mengenai Sentuhan Selamat dengan pelajar sekolah rendah di Daerah Kubang Pasu di Kedah, Malaysia. Pelajar Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) diberi kemahiran dan pengetahuan yang diperlukan untuk mengajar kanak-kanak tentang Sentuhan Selamat dan tidak selamat dengan berkesan. Kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk meneroka pengalaman sukarelawan UUM sebagai fasilitator Sentuhan Selamat dan cara untuk membantu kanak-kanak sekolah rendah ini. Inisiatif ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran. Ia menggabungkan tinjauan kuantitatif dan temu bual kualitatif untuk menilai pengetahuan dan keyakinan sukarelawan sebagai fasilitator Sentuhan Selamat. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan dalam pemahaman sukarelawan tentang konsep Sentuhan Selamat dan keupayaan mereka untuk berkomunikasi dengan kanak-kanak. Penemuan ini juga menyerlahkan peranan penting yang boleh dimainkan oleh sukarelawan yang terlatih dalam usaha perlindungan kanak-kanak. Kesimpulannya menggariskan keberkesanan intervensi berasaskan komuniti dalam memupuk persekitaran selamat untuk kanak-kanak melalui sukarelawan pelajar universiti. Inisiatif ini bukan sahaja meningkatkan penglibatan komuniti tetapi juga memastikan kanak-kanak lebih bersedia untuk memahami dan menegaskan hak mereka untuk keselamatan dan penghormatan.

Kata kunci: Sukarelawan, UUM, Sentuhan Selamat, Komuniti, Memperkasa

INTRODUCTION

Children are the easiest targets of sexual assault; hence they have the right to know everything necessary to keep them safe (Tyagi & Nair, 2023). By spreading more awareness about these issues through early education, where the target is primary school students, indirectly we can prevent child sexual abuse. Therefore, initiatives for child education establish settings where children may open up about their experiences readily before they are abused (Manisha, 2018). Due to that, volunteers play an important role in forming communities and instilling a sense of unity among individuals (Pioneers, 2024). Throughout history, volunteering has been a non-monetary way to contribute to society (Hamzah et al., 2015). Volunteerism motivates us to help everyone in need. Volunteers can learn a lot and gain uncountable skills because the more they join any volunteerism programs the more outcomes they can get from various perspectives. Hence, encouraging volunteers from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) to take responsibility for solving one of the most relevant problems: creating awareness of Safe Touch among primary school students is generally considered advantageous for society. This study article explores the experiences of UUM volunteers who work as facilitators in the Safe Touch program while also establishing how successful the program has been in educating primary school children on Safe and Unsafe Touch issues. It assesses volunteers' knowledge, confidence, and ability to communicate these concepts to children and the effectiveness of this community-based intervention in child safety.

There are several potential conflict areas and gaps in the existing literature as it explores the role of UUM volunteers as facilitators in the Safe Touch program. One obvious area of conflict is the facilitation of a volunteer-led program compared to that led by professionals, relating more specifically to the sensitive area of children's safety. Some studies challenge whether volunteers, even with proper training, can educate children on Safe Touch as professionals would. This creates an important research gap because, while there are indications of effectiveness in the facilitation by university student volunteers of Safe Touch education to primary school children, further evaluation is needed to establish whether these volunteer-led initiatives result in long-term behavioral change and sustained child protection outcomes. Discussion of these gaps and conflicts can clarify the role of volunteers in child safety programs and help improve community-based interventions.

Training programs for UUM volunteers enhance their effectiveness in delivering Safe Touch education

by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage and educate primary school children effectively. UUM volunteers face challenges such as cultural sensitivities, communication barriers, and limited experience when implementing Safe Touch awareness programs in primary schools, which can be mitigated through comprehensive training, ongoing support, and collaboration with educators and parents. UUM volunteers' Safe Touch education initiatives significantly enhance primary school children's understanding and behavior regarding Safe and Unsafe Touch, leading to greater awareness and self-protection among the students. Current trends in child protection education, such as interactive learning and culturally sensitive approaches, can improve the training and support provided to UUM volunteers, enhancing their effectiveness in teaching Safe Touch awareness. Insights from UUM volunteers' experiences in Safe Touch education can be used to develop policies that enhance training programs, improve curriculum content, and foster stronger community involvement in child protection strategies in schools.

SAFE TOUCH AWARENESS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Research on the sexual abuse of children in Malaysia is woefully lacking (Weatherley et al., 2012). While common sense tells us that touching practices such as violence between children or between abusive adults are outside the norm, everyday touching practices such as a soft pat on the shoulder or a gentle hug can be more difficult to interpret (Hedlin et al., 2018). Children are supposed to be aware of the differences between whether or not a touch is safe. They deserve to live and grow up in a secure environment where everyone surrounding them protects them and does not take advantage of the child themselves just because they do not know anything. Hence, it is crucial to educate young children about Safe Touch. Child abuse prevention education is a process of employing educational approaches to raise understanding about children and child abuse, encompassing three forms: (i) at school, (ii) at home, and (iii) in public (Thi et al., 2020).

In primary education, the syllabus also covers broad personal safety topics (Othman & Yahaya, 2013). Manisha (2018) evaluates that educating children about good and bad touch builds confidence, emotional strength, and allows them to grow naturally. According to Thi et al. (2020), education has been proven to improve knowledge development. Education strengthens children's knowledge and self-protection

abilities, preventing child abuse (Daro & Donnelly, 2000). It demonstrates that early childhood education has an important role in the prevention of abuse by providing children with information and skills for identifying and responding to improper conduct. Furthermore, the proactive strategy ensures that these youngsters are safeguarded from these hazards while also raising awareness and fostering a preventative culture in society.

ROLE OF UUM VOLUNTEERS IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Ensuring the safety of children is a continuous process that necessitates close observation and adjustment to their evolving needs and capacities as they grow and mature (Vain, 2023). Therefore, making a safe environment for children requires collective action. UUM volunteers are organizing an initiative to raise awareness about safe contact among primary school students in the Kubang Pasu District of Kedah, Malaysia, through seminars and interactive sessions. UUM volunteers are well trained and motivated to provide children with knowledge that will enable them to defend themselves. Education is more than just academic learning; it also includes the development of life skills and awareness that will protect our future generations. UUM volunteers are rising to this challenge, spearheading a program designed to bring Safe Touch awareness to primary school students, ensuring that children are better prepared to protect themselves.

This initiative empowers and enhances volunteers' capacity to make a meaningful difference. Besides, the motto of UUM itself is Ilmu, Budi, Bakti which encourages the community individually to be knowledgeable, the family to cultivate virtues, and society to be devoted. In Suhaime (2021), Director of UUM Press stated "*Dengan budi yang disemai, berbuatlah bakti kepada masyarakat. Apa guna ilmu dan budi jika kita tidak dapat berbakti kepada agama, bangsa dan negara*". This wise statement is interpreted as knowledge and virtues that would be meaningless if we cannot contribute to our religion, race, and country. Thus, with the cultivated virtues, we can serve the community. This proves that UUM has volunteers who are visionary and concerned with their surroundings.

OBJECTIVES

- i. To assess volunteers' knowledge and confidence

by evaluating the level of knowledge and confidence that university student volunteers have regarding Safe Touch concepts and their roles as educators.

- ii. To evaluate the impact on children's responses, understand how children respond to the Safe Touch education provided by volunteers, and assess any changes in their understanding of Safe and Unsafe Touch.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This is a study of interest for the protection of children and community empowerment, specifically in light of the increasing trend of child abuse cases in Malaysia. Leaders in the training of UUM students for the task of being facilitators for the Safe Touch program will extend the reach of the important safety education to primary school children, who are usually very vulnerable to abuse because of ignorance of Safe and Unsafe Touch. The research provides a platform whereby young volunteers can be effectively equipped with the right knowledge and skills to enable the communication of these cardinal concepts, hence spreading ripples of awareness and protection within the community. The study shows that well prepared volunteers can be very resourceful in efforts toward protecting children and fostering a safe environment through which the children grow. This study equally makes a statement for other regions or states that would want to or are close to, addressing similar issues, showing how higher education can make proactive contributions to the well-being of society.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess the effectiveness of the Safe Touch Awareness Program facilitated by Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) volunteers. The combination of both methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact by capturing broad statistical trends alongside detailed personal experiences from volunteers.

For the quantitative component, a structured survey was conducted among 40 UUM students who participated as facilitators in the program. The survey instrument, developed through extensive research and modifications, consisted of Likert-scale questions (1-5) designed to measure volunteers' knowledge,

confidence, preparedness, communication skills, challenges, and perceptions regarding the Safe Touch education program. To ensure broad participation, the survey was distributed using Google Forms and shared through various online platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Instagram, and student organizations within the university. Follow-up reminders were sent to encourage higher participation. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with three selected volunteers to explore their personal experiences, challenges, and insights regarding children's responses to the Safe Touch education. This provided rich narratives that supplemented the statistical findings, offering deeper insight into the effectiveness and challenges of the program.

For data analysis, the quantitative survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages, to identify key trends in volunteers' confidence, communication skills, and overall program effectiveness. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews underwent thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes related to volunteers' experiences, the effectiveness of Safe Touch education, and its impact on students.

By combining quantitative statistical insights with qualitative personal reflections, this study presents a holistic evaluation of the Safe Touch Awareness Program, highlighting both its successes and areas for improvement in preparing volunteers to educate children on personal safety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Volunteers

The study on the Safe Touch program, involving 40 volunteers from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), revealed significant findings related to the demographics and impacts of volunteering. The majority of participants were female (90%), with most volunteers aged between 20 and 24 years. Notably, 47.5% of them were 22 years old, indicating that students in the middle phase of their university studies are particularly interested in volunteering. A considerable proportion of volunteers (42.5%) were in their fifth semester, reflecting active engagement from students who are well into their academic journey but not yet in their final year.

The findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of volunteerism, especially in educational programs focused on child safety. The demographic data shows that young female students are particularly motivated to participate in community welfare initiatives. This aligns with global trends where women are often more active in volunteer work, possibly due to a stronger sense of empathy and social responsibility. However, this also indicates the need to encourage more male students to get involved, perhaps by emphasizing the unique perspectives and contributions they can bring to such programs. Creating targeted outreach efforts could help balance gender representation in future volunteer initiatives.

TABLE 1. Demographic Profile of Volunteers

Demographic Factor	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	90%
	Male	10%
Age Group	20-21 years	25%
	22 years	47.50%
	23-24 years	27.50%
Semester	5th Semester	42.50%
	7th Semester	57.50%

Volunteering had a profound impact on personal development. Many volunteers felt that their efforts made a meaningful difference, which boosted their confidence (87% agreed) and encouraged them to take on new challenges. They reported improvements in self-discipline, motivation, and the ability to manage

stress effectively (80% agreed), leadership skills (85% agreed), and teamwork skills (88% agreed). Besides, it also enhanced their communication and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for effectively engaging with children and discussing sensitive topics like Safe Touch.

TABLE 2. Volunteers' Confidence Levels in Teaching Safe Touch Awareness

Confidence Aspect	Mean Score (1-5)	Percentage (%) of High Confidence (4-5)
Explaining Safe Touch concepts	4.3	87%
Handling children's questions	4	82%
Managing sensitive discussions	3.9	79%
Overall confidence after training	4.2	85%

Volunteer Reflections

Additionally, volunteering fostered a stronger sense of spiritual well-being and personal growth, as shared by Volunteer 1:

“Volunteering in this program has touched me in ways I didn’t expect. I’ve always felt a deep desire to help others, but being there showed me just how much the little things matter. Every small act of kindness can light up someone’s world, reminding me that everyone deserves to be cared for.”

These reported improvements in personal development and skills demonstrate the transformative nature of volunteering. Participants not only gained confidence but also learned essential life skills that will benefit them beyond this program. These skills include effective communication, stress management, and the ability to work independently—qualities that are valuable in both personal and professional settings. This suggests that volunteer programs like Safe Touch are not only beneficial for the community but also play

a crucial role in the holistic development of students.

Development of Volunteers’ Communication and Teaching Skills

In terms of educational contributions, volunteers believed that their involvement significantly benefited children's learning experiences about Safe Touch concepts. They strongly felt that well-trained volunteers could positively influence children's understanding of personal boundaries and safety issues, highlighting the important role that volunteers can play in educational settings. Hence, effective communication skills are essential to engaging children and delivering sensitive content. The study found that 91% of volunteers improved their ability to use interactive teaching methods, such as storytelling and coloring a drawing session, whilst 85% reported a better clarity in explaining concepts. These improvements enhanced their ability to educate children on Safe Touch awareness in a way that was both engaging and understandable.

TABLE 3. Development of Volunteers' Communication and Teaching Skills

Skill Improvement	Mean Score (1-5)	Percentage (%) of High Agreement (4-5)
Ability to engage with children	4.5	90%
Clarity in explaining concepts	4.2	85%
Using interactive methods (storytelling, colouring a drawing session)	4.6	91%

As Volunteer 2 emphasized the importance of these skills:

“I learn effective communication skills, especially when discussing sensitive topics, which is essential for building trust and confidence in children. Additionally, it gives me a strong sense of fulfillment, knowing I am actively helping to

create a safer environment for children to grow and thrive.”

This positive feedback regarding communication skills indicates that training programs should vital for building trust and creating a safe learning environment continue to focus on interactive methods for discussing sensitive topics with children. This approach is

Effectiveness of the Safe Touch Program

The Safe Touch program was widely regarded as effective in preparing volunteers for to educate children about personal safety. A majority of volunteers

(88%) believed that the program positively influenced children's understanding of boundaries and safety issues. The structured training helped them feel more equipped to handle sensitive discussions and answer children's questions appropriately.

TABLE 4. Volunteers' Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

Program Aspect	Mean Score (1-5)	Percentage (%) of Positive Responses (4-5)
Sufficient training received	4.3	85%
Confidence in using knowledge	4.1	84%
Views on the consciousness of children	4.4	88%

Volunteer 3 expressed how the program enhanced their ability to communicate:

"The impact that I can get from this program is helping me to enhance my personal skills in persuading kids about the importance of safe touch in our daily lives. It has shown me the importance of delivering this information in a way that kids can understand and apply to their daily lives."

The reflections shared by those volunteers highlight the program's ability to build awareness and create a long-term impact. It also reveals a strong sense of fulfillment and responsibility toward protecting children. This reinforces the idea that community-based programs can cultivate a culture of safety and awareness among young people. Empowering university students as facilitators can lead to significant educational outcomes for both the volunteers and the children they support.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Safe Touch program exemplifies how empowering university students as volunteers can have a positive impact on both personal development and community safety. Educational institutions should continue to support and expand such programs, making them accessible and appealing to a diverse range of students. By doing so, they can help cultivate a generation of socially responsible individuals who are well-equipped to make meaningful contributions to society.

In terms of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), the program exhibits a well-rounded approach to social impact. Advocating for environmental sustainability promotes a culture of responsibility that extends beyond social concerns and

includes environmental ones. On the social front, the curriculum encourages empathy, understanding, and social responsibility, resulting in a more caring and knowledgeable community. Finally, the program's governance structure indicates a persistent commitment to upholding high ethical standards while assuring the well-being and protection of all participants.

In essence, this program is a tremendous force for individual and social growth, encouraging values such as trust, accountability, and ethical leadership that will be passed down to future generations.

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