

UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEERS' MOTIVATIONS

Katerina Papadakis
State University of New York, College at Brockport
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
350 New Campus Drive
Brockport, NY 14420

Tonya Griffin
State University of New York, College at Brockport,
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

Joel Frater
Associate Professor
State University of New York, College at Brockport
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

Abstract

Volunteers are an important human resource for many organizations. Reasons to volunteers are attributed to factors such as the increasing number of nonprofit organizations, decreasing pool of volunteers, competition for volunteer recruitment among organizations, and problems in volunteers' retention to an organization. Groups of college students from six departments were stratified according to service oriented and non-service oriented majors. For this study, a two-part questionnaire, including the six scale of the Volunteer Inventory Functions (VFI) was administered to college students. The results showed differences between volunteers and non-volunteers, males and females, and service-oriented and non-service oriented majors in their motivations to volunteer.

1.0 Introduction

Volunteering is an activity that is undertaken by an individual for no financial reward and benefits someone other than the person who volunteers. Every year, millions of people devote important amounts of time and energy to volunteer in different organizations. According to findings from a national survey (Independent Sector 2001), 44% of adults in the U.S. over the age of 21 volunteered in a formal organization in 2000. Volunteer activities take many forms; involvement in voluntary associations, activism focusing on social change or donations of money, supplies or blood donations (Wilson 2000). Other expressions of volunteering are mutual help in the health and social welfare field, philanthropy to others within voluntary or community organizations. Volunteers in hospitals, schools, religious organizations, sport clubs and other community organizations all

contribute to the breadth and effectiveness of services (Hiatt & Jones 1998). Thus, volunteers, apart from their contribution to the social welfare, may be considered an essential human resource for many organizations. Consequently, the total dollar value of volunteer time was \$11.30 per hour for 1998 and increased to \$15.40 per hour in 2000 (Independent Sector 2001).

However, although the dollar value of volunteer hours increased over the past 10 years in the U.S., the percentage of volunteers decreased over the 1998-2000 period from 55.5% to 44%. Specifically, young people and men are two groups most often under represented (Bussel & Forbes 2002). Due to the signs that there is a decreasing pool of volunteers (Independent Sector, 2001), the competition for volunteer recruitment by the public sector and voluntary organizations is stronger. Volunteer managers have become increasingly concerned with the recruitment and retention of volunteers (Bussel & Forbes 2002). An important marketing technique for the recruitment and retention of volunteers that has been the focus of many studies is understanding what motivates individuals to volunteer their time and effort to different organizations (Benson et al. 1980; Clary & Orenstein 1991; Penner & Finkelstein 1998; Farmer & Fedor 2001; Bussel & Forbes 2002).

The majority of the studies conducted in this area agree that volunteers can compose homogenous subgroups depending on the different reasons or motives for joining a volunteer organization (Clary & Orenstein 1991; Penner & Finkelstein 1998). Moreover, these groups may predict the amount of help (deciding whether to help and how much) they will contribute to an organization (Clary & Miller 1986; Rosenhan 1970). Motivation issues may affect the retention of the volunteers' services due to prior studies (Clary & Miller 1986; Clary & Orenstein 1991; Penner & Finkelstein 1998). Most of them found that altruistic motives are related positively to the length of service (Rosenhan 1970; Clary & Miller 1986; Clary & Orenstein 1991). However, volunteers who receive benefits relevant to their primary motivations are most likely to be satisfied with their service and to continue to volunteer (Clary et al. 1998). These findings indicate that some volunteer motivations may predict serious intention of involvement in a volunteer activity

and maybe these motivations are the ones to be pursued by the organizations in order to recruit their volunteers. Thus, from an applied perspective, it is important to learn about the factors that lead people to volunteer in different organizations, to understand these factors and use them successfully in the planning, recruiting, and managing process.

Findings from several studies report that volunteering is gender specific, with more women than men volunteering (Bussell & Forbes 2002; Independent Sector 1998). Clary and his colleagues (1998) analyzed the survey data on volunteerism in the U.S and explored the role of motivations in relation to gender differences and found that females assigned more importance to all six motivations of the VFI (values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement) than did males. However, they found that men and women assigned the same importance on the six functions, with the highest rated motives being Values, Enhancement, and Social, and the lowest rated motives being Understanding, Protective, and Career (Clary et al. 1998).

Volunteering in different organizations is a type of students' extracurricular activities. A review of 20 studies of the personality characteristics of community volunteers for students' volunteer motivations concluded that volunteers had higher moral standards, had higher self-esteem, were more empathic, and were more emotionally stable than non-volunteer students (Allen & Rushton 1983). Fitch (1987) reported that students volunteered for both egoistic and altruistic reasons. Fitch (1991) did a study to determine if there are characteristics that distinguish student volunteers from other students who are involved in extracurricular activities not of a service nature and from those who are not involved at all. Students involved in service were significantly different from both of the other groups on all three scales, scoring higher on Conformity (doing what is actually correct and conform to regulations) and Benevolence (helping the unfortunate and doing things for others) and lower on Independence (being able to do things in one's way and being free to make one's own decisions).

There are different approaches to measure volunteers' motivations, but the classic issue in the literature concerns whether the helper's motives are altruistic as opposed to egoistic. The one-factor model is the unidimensional model that suggests that volunteers act

from a combination of motives described as a meaningful whole and not from a single motive or a category of motives (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen 1991; Luciani 1993). Conversely, other researchers argue that people have more than one reason for volunteering (Unger 1991; Omoto & Snyder 1995; Penner & Finkelstein 1998). The two-factor model suggests that individuals volunteer for two reasons: 1) for concerns to others (altruistic motives); and 2) for themselves (egoistic motives). One of the most promising strategies for uncovering the motivational forces underlying an activity like volunteering comes from functional theories or beliefs and behaviors. This approach points that similar beliefs or similar behaviors may well serve different psychological functions for different people. Hence, in volunteering, people engage in volunteer work in order to achieve important psychological goals, and that different individuals will be seeking to satisfy different motivations through volunteer activity (Clary et al. 1998). Recently, Clary, Snyder, and their colleagues have been applying the functional approach to the motivations underlying involvement in volunteer work (Clary & Snyder 1991; Clary et al. 1992; Clary et al. 1994; Clary et al., 1995). This work has resulted in the identification of six categories of motivations or psychological functions that may be served by volunteering.

The functional approach to volunteerism (Clary et al. 1998) suggests that people may be attempting to satisfy a Values function, whereby they participate in volunteer work to express and act on values important to the self (e.g. humanitarian values or altruistic concerns). In the case of the Career function, some people engage in volunteer work to gain experiences that will benefit their careers. For others, volunteering helps them to increase their knowledge of the world and to develop and practice skills that might otherwise go unpracticed, thus satisfying an Understanding function. Other people view volunteer work as an opportunity to help them fit in and get along with social groups that are important to them, thus serving a Social function. However, for some individuals volunteer work serves the purpose of allowing the individual to engage in psychological development and enhance their esteem, thereby satisfying an Enhancement function. Finally, some people attempt to satisfy a Protective function and engage in volunteer work to cope with inner anxieties and conflicts, thus affording some protection for the ego (e.g. to reduce feelings of guilt, to combat feelings of inferiority) (Clary et al. 1998).

In this study motivational differences between important subgroups were investigated. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to examine the motivational differences for volunteering between: 1) volunteer and non-volunteer college students; 2) male and female college students; and 3) college students pursuing a service-oriented major versus college students pursuing a non-service oriented major.

2.0 Research Participants

The sample consisted of 437 undergraduate students enrolled in classes at six departments of SUNY College at Brockport: Psychology, Recreation and Leisure Studies, Nursing, Business and Administration, Communications, and Biology. The research sample was divided into six groups. Students who had volunteered at least once in their life (Group A, nA=373), students who had never volunteered in their life (Group B, nB=64), female students (Group C nC=278), male students (Group D, nD=159), students pursuing a service-oriented college major (Psychology, Recreation and Leisure Studies, and Nursing) (Group E, nE=169) and students pursuing a non-service oriented college major (Business and Administration, Communications, and Biology) (Group F, nF=177). Service-oriented majors were those majors that would most likely lead to professions where people will have to work in social and customer service settings towards the welfare of different population groups (children, seniors, etc.). Non-service oriented majors were those majors who would most likely lead to highly ordered professions, both verbal and numerical and probably in an office setting.

3.0 Procedure and Measures

A two-part, self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 17 academic sessions within the six departments. For most of the sessions, students completed the survey at the beginning of the class, whereas for the rest of the sessions, the students completed the survey during their spare time and returned it the next session. The first page of the survey was an informed consent document, indicating that the survey is voluntary and anonymous. The first part of the questionnaire was the six scale (Values, Career, Understanding, Social, Enhancement, and Protective) of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary et al. 1998). The VFI asked students 30 reasons for volunteering-volunteers were asked to indicate the importance of each reason for volunteering. Particularly,

respondents were asked to rate each reason from 1 to 4, respectively, as not at all important, not too important, somewhat important, and very important. The second part of the questionnaire included sociodemographic questions (gender, major, academic year) and questions about the student's previous volunteer experience (if they had any volunteering activity in their life, how many hours they volunteered every week, areas of volunteering etc.)

4.0 Data Analysis

In order to examine the motivational differences between volunteers and non-volunteers (Group A vs. Group B), male students and female students (Group C vs. Group D), and students pursuing a service-oriented major and students pursuing a non-service oriented major (Group E vs. Group F) a series of t-tests were performed. For the first t-test the grouping variable was Experience (Group A vs. Group B), then Gender (Group C vs. Group D), and finally Major (Group E vs. Group F), and the test variables for all the t-tests were the six functions of the VFI (Values, Career, Understanding, Social, Enhancement, and Protective). Moreover, a calculation of the mean scores for each function for all the groups was performed to find out which function was the most important within each group.

5.0 Results

The results from the series of t-tests that compared the six motivational functions of the respondents who reported some volunteering in the past with those who reported no volunteering at all (Group A vs. Group B) demonstrated interesting findings (Table 1). Group A and Group B differed on three of the six motivations, with students in Group A reporting greater levels (* when $\alpha=.05$ and ** when $\alpha=.001$) of Values ($p=.006^*$), Understanding ($p=.000^{**}$), and Enhancement ($p=.013^*$). Thus, the Values, Enhancement and Understanding functions of the VFI distinguished those who had served as volunteers at least once in their life from those who had not participated in any voluntary activity in their lifetime. In addition, according to the mean scores for each function, the importance of the six motivations was not the same for Group A and Group B, with the highest rated function for Group A being Values and for Group B Career.

The t -test results that compared the motivational difference between female and male students (Group

Table 1.—Mean Values and T-Test Results of Volunteers VS Non-Volunteers on Their Motivations to Volunteer

| VFI Scale | Volunteers | Nonvolunteers | T-STAT | P-Value |
|---------------|------------|---------------|--------|---------|
| Protective | 10.23 | 9.98 | -.560 | .117 |
| Values | 15.91 | 14.11 | -4.005 | .006** |
| Career | 14.87 | 15.19 | .682 | .301 |
| Social | 10.42 | 9.77 | -1.515 | .171 |
| Understanding | 15.17 | 14.06 | -2.486 | .000** |
| Enhancement | 13.22 | 12.34 | -1.900 | .013* |

*, ** denote significance at the 5% and 1% levels respectively

Table 2.—Mean Values and T-Test Results of Males VS Females on Their Motivations to Volunteer

| VFI Scale | Male | Female | T-STAT | P-Value |
|---------------|-------|--------|--------|---------|
| Protective | 9.54 | 10.57 | -3.192 | .085 |
| Values | 13.92 | 16.64 | -8.763 | .000** |
| Career | 14.36 | 15.23 | -2.563 | .054 |
| Social | 9.92 | 10.55 | -1.983 | .462 |
| Understanding | 13.61 | 15.81 | -7.039 | .007** |
| Enhancement | 11.77 | 13.85 | -6.361 | .031* |

*, ** denote significance at the 5% and 1% levels respectively

Table 3.—Mean Values and T-Test Results of Service VS Non-Service Oriented Majors on Their Motivations to Volunteer

| VFI Scale | Service | Non-service | T-STAT | P-Value |
|---------------|---------|-------------|--------|---------|
| Protective | 10.31 | 9.87 | -1.263 | .091 |
| Values | 16.43 | 14.78 | -4.726 | .002* |
| Career | 14.83 | 14.85 | .051 | .953 |
| Social | 10.31 | 10.22 | -.272 | .441 |
| Understanding | 15.59 | 14.29 | -3.779 | .010* |
| Enhancement | 13.54 | 12.49 | -2.922 | .077 |

* denote significance at the 1% level

C vs. Group D) and showed that students in Group C assigned more importance to the Values ($p = .000^{**}$), Understanding ($p = .007^{*}$), and Enhancement ($p = .031^{*}$) functions of the VFI (Table 2). Thus, the Values, Enhancement and Understanding functions of the VFI distinguished female students from male students. Additionally, according to the mean scores for each function, the importance of the six motivations was not the same for Group C and Group D, with the highest rated function for Group C being Values and for Group D Career.

Finally, the results from the t-tests that compared the six motivational functions of the respondents who were pursuing a service-oriented college major with those who were pursuing a non-service-oriented major (Group E vs. Group F) showed that students in Group E assigned more importance to the Values ($p = .002^{*}$) function of the VFI (Table 3). Moreover, according to the mean scores for each function, the importance of the six motivations was not the same for Group E and Group F with the highest rated function for Group E being Values and for Group F Career.

6.0 Discussion

According to this study's findings, motivational differences for volunteering do exist between volunteer and non-volunteer students, female and male students, and students pursuing a service-oriented major and students pursuing a non-service-oriented major. Students who had volunteered at some point in their life assigned significantly more importance to the Values, Understanding and Enhancement function than students who had never volunteered in their life. These findings are partially consistent with other studies' findings that reported both altruistic and egoistic reasons for volunteering among volunteers (Clary et al. 1992; Penner & Finkelstein 1998). However, these research findings are inconsistent with other researches' reports that found that the Social function was also very important for volunteering for volunteers (Fitch 1991; Clary et al. 1998).

The Values, Understanding, and Enhancement function were assigned significantly more important for the female students in comparison to the male students. These findings on the Values function fit the traditional feminine stereotype that women are more caring, emotional and service-oriented than men. These study's findings are partially consistent with the findings from a National survey (Clary et al. 1998). Clary et al. (1998) found that women assigned more importance to five of the six motivational functions of the VFI, adding the Social and the Protective function. Fitch (1987) found no significant gender differences in motivations for volunteering among college students. Penner and Finkelstein (1998) reported that female volunteers scored lower than males both on the measures of altruistic motives and egoistic motives.

Service-oriented major students assigned more importance to the Values function. An interpretation of this finding might be that the Values function is "stronger" among the service-oriented majors due to the nature of their coursework and career orientation. Service-oriented majors are preparing mostly for careers in the helping professions. The fact that there were no significant differences between the two groups of college majors and the other VFI functions could suggest that a combination of functions lead those individuals to volunteer and that the type of college major (service vs. non-service oriented) cannot distinguish those motivations. Because other studies that have compared

motivations for volunteering among different college majors classified the academic majors differently, no reasonable comparisons could be made to these findings.

7.0 Implications for Practice

Clary et al. (1998) suggest that people can be recruited into volunteerism by appealing to their own psychological functions. College students are more likely to express an intent to volunteer when they are exposed to persuasive messages that are tailored to the most salient motive for volunteering (Clary et al. 1998). According to the findings of this study, Values play the biggest role in motivating an individual to volunteer, especially when these individuals are women and service-oriented major students. Volunteer recruitment messages for everyone should include Values statements and benefits. Moreover, practitioners might want to develop messages identifying direct benefits to personal development and positive feelings (Understanding and Enhancement functions), due to the fact that these functions were more important to volunteer than the non-volunteer students. Volunteer coordinators who are seeking to recruit college students, after they target their potential volunteers among college students, they can use, accordingly, the findings on the VFI to develop appeals that emphasize these functions and recruit the volunteers. For example, if an organization is looking to recruit women students, they should develop persuasive messages that emphasize Values, Enhancement, and Understanding functions.

Finally, these findings might enable colleges and universities to better market volunteer opportunities to students without the use of a formal requirement incentive such as academic credit that might lower volunteering intentions (Stukas et al. 1999). After all, aside from volunteerism's contribution to the social welfare, students who participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to be satisfied with their college experiences than are non-participants (Astin 1977, 1984a, 1984b).

8.0 Citations

- Allen, N., & Rushton, J. P. (1983). Personality characteristics of community mental health volunteers. *Journal of Voluntary Action Research*, 12, 36-49.
- Benson, P., Doherty, J., Garman, L., Hanson, E., Hochschwender, M., Lebold, C., Rohr, R., & Sullivan, J. (1980). Intrapersonal correlates of spontaneous

- helping behavior. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 110, 8-95.
- Bussel, H., & Forbes, F. (2002). Understanding the volunteer market: The what, where, who and why of volunteering. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 7(3), 244-257.
- Chaan, R. A., & Goldberg-Glen, R. S. (1991). Measuring motivation to volunteer in human services. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 27, 269-284.
- Clary, E. G., & Miller, J. (1986). Socialization and situational influences on sustained altruism. *Child Development*, 57, 1358-1369.
- Clary, E. G., & Orenstein, L. (1991). The amount and effectiveness of Help: The relationship of motives and abilities to helping behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(1), 58-64.
- Clary, E. G., & Snyder, M. (1991). A functional analysis of altruism and prosocial behavior: The case of volunteerism. In M. Clark (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 12, pp. 119-148). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R., Miene, P., & Haugen, J. (1994). Matching messages to motives in persuasion: A functional approach to promoting volunteerism. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 1129-1149.
- Clary, E., Snyder, M., & Stukas, A. A. (1998). Volunteer motivations: Findings from a national survey. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 25(4), 485-505.
- Farmer, S. M., & Fedor, D. B. (2001). Changing the focus on volunteering: an investigation of volunteers' multiple contributions to a charitable organization. *Journal of Management*, 27, 191-211.
- Independent Sector (1994). *Giving and volunteering in the United States: Findings from a national survey, 1994*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Omoto, A., & Snyder, M. (1995). Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIS volunteers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 671-687.
- Penner, L. A., & Finkelstein, M. A. (1998). Dispositional and structural determinants of volunteerism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(2), 525-537.
- Rosenhan, D. L. (1970). The natural socialization of altruistic autonomy. In J. Macauley & L. Berkowitz (Eds.), *Altruism and helping behavior* (pp.251-268). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Unger, L. S. (1991). Altruism as a motivation to volunteer. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 12, 71-100.