

support services immediately come to mind as appropriate responses to a heat emergency. Thus, our understanding of, and response to the seasonal vulnerability of older people needs to be considerably expanded.

To be "old and cold" is to face days and nights of misery, it is to be ill-protected against the risk of injuries, illness, and even death; it is to be doomed to days of home-bound isolation from kith and kin. It is the fate of countless older people in the cities, suburbs, and small towns of our nation and it is a fate from which all should be spared.

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## FROM THE WORLD OF PRACTICE

### The Willingness of Persons 60 or Over to Volunteer: Implications for the Social Services

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**ABSTRACT.** This investigation examined persons 60 or over concerning their willingness to engage in volunteer activity. Volunteering was defined as contributing one's time without pay to non-profit organizations in the community.

Of the 56 non-volunteers interviewed, a startling 59 percent expressed a willingness to volunteer and a main reason given for not volunteering was simply that no one has asked them.

Older persons have historically underutilized and/or have been underserved by the social service network in the community. Results of this and other investigations indicate that there is a significant group of older volunteers and potential volunteers waiting to be asked who can be used to bridge this service gap.

#### INTRODUCTION

This article reports on research which examined a group of persons 60 or over concerning their volunteering or lack of volunteering activity. Volunteering was defined as "any unpaid work per-

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"formed for or through an organization" (Smith & Freedman, 1972: 115).

Older persons have traditionally been thought of as recipients of social services instead of volunteers or providers of services. However, volunteering is an expanding role for older Americans as is indicated by the fact that approximately 14.5 percent of the elderly were volunteers in 1974 compared with 10.5 percent of the older population in 1965 (Americans Volunteer, 1975). With the trend toward earlier retirement continuing in spite of a federal law prohibiting forced retirement before 70 (*U.S. News and World Report*, 1981) and the resultant increase in leisure time, one would hypothesize that the percentage of elderly volunteers may now be significantly above the 14 percent recorded in 1974 at the last nationwide survey specifically dealing with volunteering.

Older persons who are retired are faced with a large amount of leisure time and few societal norms for this newly acquired leisure role. Miller (1965), Sainer and Zander (1971) cite the devastating effects of retirement on individuals in terms of decreased self-worth when they can no longer be identified in terms of their occupation. It appears that without the label of mechanic, lawyer, secretary or whatever, individuals struggle with their identity and in turn are seen as less important by their fellow citizens.

Studies have shown that persons working are happier and better adjusted than those who are not working (Rosenblatt, 1966; Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1965). Among those persons who do not work, those who have higher levels of social participation have been found to be better adjusted than are those with lower levels of participation (Rosenblatt, 1966).

This implies that adjustment of the elderly would be improved if there were more alternatives to work such as opportunities for social participation. Carp (1968) likewise notes that "substitutes or alternatives for work will become increasingly important to the well-being of older adults as more of them move into retirement" (p. 497).

In this study, volunteering is viewed as an emerging social role for the elderly and as one such alternative to the work role. Havighurst (Friedman & Havighurst, 1954) suggested incorporating the following functions of work into leisure to make it meaningful: social participation, routinization of life activity, creative self-expression, interesting experiences and source of self-respect. The

volunteer role has the potential of meeting many if not all of the above functions.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a dearth of research on volunteering in general and on older persons' interest in volunteering in particular (Payne, 1977). Recent researchers (i.e., Babchuck et al., 1979; Cutler, 1976) have shown an interest in voluntary association participation of older Americans, but it is apparent that voluntary association membership does not directly correlate with volunteering in that one can be a passive member of a club and not engage in any volunteer activity.

Let us now examine the less than plentiful research that has focused specifically on the older American volunteer. Lambert, Guberman, and Morris (1964) tested two assumptions: (1) that there is a need for the ability of older volunteers in the performance of community service activities, and (2) that the elderly are willing and interested in serving as community volunteers. The authors used 17 retired male volunteers as interviewers. The sample consisted of 297 older persons and represented a random sample of all non-institutionalized residents 65 or over in a Boston suburb. The respondents who were interested in volunteering wanted meaningful assignments which involved interpersonal communications instead of mechanical or physical tasks. Age and sex were not found to predict volunteer potential significantly but "previous experience as a volunteer, educational level attained, and self-perception of health were all factors which differentiated persons willing to participate in community service from persons not willing to become involved" (p. 48).

The authors did not find a significant number of elderly willing to volunteer their services to agencies on a regular basis. The study also found that agencies were not willing to utilize to their full potential those elderly who did volunteer. The authors concluded with the following pessimistic comment:

In summary, it appeared that current job openings could absorb very few additional older persons, that most jobs are routine and unattractive to the potential recruit, and that there is

little desire to create new and challenging job opportunities. This lack of interest is possibly related both to the availability of younger persons as volunteers and to the stereotyped view of the older person who would fill the new job opening. The older volunteer is viewed as an intrusion into the well organized functioning of an agency. He has three strikes against him: he is a lay person, he is old, and he is a volunteer. (p. 50)

Dye et al. (1973) compared the older adult volunteer with the non-volunteer. Sex and past patterns of participation in organizations turned out to be the only distinguishing characteristics between volunteers and non-volunteers. There were more females in volunteer roles than males and those individuals with high levels of organization participation in the past were also more likely to be volunteers. The volunteers had less free time than the non-volunteers and fewer difficulties in filling up free time. The variables of age, income, social class and life satisfaction did not significantly differentiate between volunteers and non-volunteers.

Rosenblatt (1966) interviewed 250 persons between the ages of 60 and 74. He viewed volunteer activities as "a particular type of social participation closely resembling employment. Like the worker, the volunteer also gains social approval and esteem from others for his participation in a desirable activity" (pp. 87-88). Nineteen percent of the population answered affirmatively when asked: "Are you interested in working a few hours a week for a hospital or a charity?" (p. 89). But he notes that for most of the potential volunteers, "it may be more accurate to speak of latent interest that probably will not lead to action unless some kind of campaign is introduced to motivate them to become volunteers" (p. 91).

Rosenblatt (1966) concluded that, generally, the potential volunteers were somewhat younger, healthier, and more neighborly than persons who said they were not interested in volunteer activities. They were found also to enjoy life more and make more plans for the future. In addition, the study revealed that potential older volunteers lacked sufficient education and experience to perform in many volunteer positions without training by the agency.

Carp (1968) compared older workers, volunteers, and aged persons who are in neither group. She found a significant difference between the work group as compared to the other two groups. The older workers tended to be happier and to have better relationships with others. There were no differences found between the volunteer

and non-volunteer, non-work group. Carp added that these results may change as leisure time increases and volunteer activities become more acceptable. She stated that one of the reasons why the workers scored better on all of the scales was because of the payment for work.

Monk and Cryns (1974) interviewed 180 subjects, 60 or older in Buffalo, New York to determine the predictors of voluntaristic intent. Thirty percent of the sample expressed a current willingness to do volunteer work. Characteristics which best predicted willingness to volunteer were as follows: younger age, more education, home ownership, better health, more knowledge of community service facilities, higher income, expressed interest in relating to other aged persons, belief that one has something to offer others, and broader social interests. Their subjects selected youth and senior citizens (not the middle-aged) as preferred groups with which to work.

Faulkner (1975) studied black elderly at a neighborhood center who were recruited to be volunteers. Informal volunteering tasks were assigned the subjects. It was hypothesized that "doing for others rather than receiving services would enhance the self-image of the black aged" (p. 555). Those who became active in the program tended to be those subjects who previously had volunteered. The subjects liked volunteering as a group because they were more visible and received greater recognition. The hypothesized results about an increase in self-image were inconclusive but Faulkner called for future research to test the hypothesis that self-image can be enhanced through volunteering.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The global objective of the research herein reported was to learn more about older persons' attitudes toward volunteering. The following research questions were explored:

1. From a sample of older persons not presently volunteering, what proportion would be willing to volunteer if a volunteer position were found for them?
2. What are the reasons given by the non-volunteers for not participating in any volunteer activity?
3. What type of volunteering would be preferred by those persons willing to volunteer?

4. What demographic characteristics separate non-volunteers from volunteers?

### METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this investigation was a cross-sectional survey. The subjects were obtained by sampling from a combination of lists of persons 60 or over in Leon County, Florida. Three different lists were used to increase representativeness and avoid bias as much as possible in the selection of the subjects.

The following rosters of aged citizens in Leon County comprised the sampling frame:

1. Members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)—225 persons.
2. Participants at the congregate nutrition site at the Senior Center—127 persons.
3. Residents of Miccosukee Hills (an older adult condominium complex)—109 persons.

Of the 461 senior citizens on these combined lists, 75 were randomly selected to be directly interviewed.

### FINDINGS

Of the 75 subjects interviewed, 56 were non-volunteers (75%) and 19 (25%) were volunteers. Persons were considered volunteers if they had contributed their time and efforts without pay to non-profit organizations in the community within the past year.

The non-volunteers and volunteers were differentiated from each other by the following characteristics:

1. Age—The non-volunteers' mean age of 75.5 was higher than the mean age of the volunteers (70).
2. Income—The volunteers ( $\bar{x}$  = \$14,000) had a higher mean income than the non-volunteers ( $\bar{x}$  = \$8,500).
3. Race—There were a higher percentage of blacks (21 percent) among the non-volunteers than among the volunteers (8 percent).

4. Education—The volunteers had completed more years of formal education than the non-volunteers. The majority of volunteers were college graduates whereas most of the non-volunteers had completed between 10 and 12 years of formal schooling.
5. Prior volunteering—Twenty-six of the non-volunteers (46%) had never volunteered whereas only 5 (20%) of the current volunteers had never volunteered prior to age 60.

To evaluate the willingness of older Americans who are not presently volunteering to participate in volunteer activities, the 56 non-volunteers were questioned about their attitudes toward volunteering. The findings reveal that a startling 59 percent (33) of the non-volunteers would be willing to volunteer if a volunteer position were found for them in a setting of their choosing and at a time that would be convenient.

Table 1 portrays the type of volunteering in which these 33 non-volunteers would prefer to engage. The most frequently chosen category was the Senior Center.

In addition, the non-volunteers were asked why they were not volunteering at the present time. Their responses are noted in Table 2. The most frequent reason given for not volunteering was illness or poor health followed by "no one asked me."

Table 1

Non-Volunteers Preference for Type of Volunteer Setting

Type	Frequency (n = 33)	
	No.	Percent
School	5	15
Hospital	8	24
Senior Center	15	45
Youth, Recreation	0	0
Nursing Home	2	6
Other	3	9

Table 2

## Non-Volunteers Reasons for Not Volunteering

Reason	Frequency <sup>a</sup>	
	No.	Percent
Want a paying job	2	4
Too busy with other activities	9	16
Transportation is a problem	10	18
No one has asked me	12	21
Illness, poor health	25	44
Other <sup>b</sup>	9	16

<sup>a</sup>Subjects could check more than one category so percentages will not add up to 100.

<sup>b</sup>Four persons who chose this category indicated that they spent practically all of their time caring for a sick person.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research was undertaken to learn more about the willingness of older persons to participate in volunteer activities. Older American Volunteer Programs (OAVP) such as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program and Foster Grandparent Program assume that a significant percentage of older persons are willing and have the time to volunteer. This basic assumption was explored in this investigation. A purposive sample was used whereby subjects were randomly selected from a combination of lists of senior citizens in Leon County, Florida. However, it should be noted that the findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the sampling frame from which the subjects were drawn. The subjects cannot be viewed as being representative of older persons in Leon County or in Florida, much less in the United States.

Of the 56 non-volunteers in this study 33 (59%) expressed a willingness to volunteer if a position were found for them in a setting of their choosing and at a time that would be convenient. This highly significant finding contradicts the findings of Lambert et al. (1964) who did not uncover a sufficient number of elderly willing to volunteer. There have been 18 years since that research, however, and

the willingness of 59 percent of the older persons interviewed to volunteer seems to reflect the increased acceptance of the volunteer role among the elderly.

A large pool of older volunteers appears to now be available to assist community agencies whose resources have been cut by the recent austere federal budget. The problem lies in finding agencies receptive to the contributions of older persons and then locating volunteer positions for them. Campaigns to involve senior citizens in volunteer roles in their communities would not be lacking potential recruits. Twenty-one percent of the non-volunteers indicated that they were not volunteering quite simply because no one had asked them.

The subjects most frequently chose the Senior Center as the place that they would want to volunteer. This is indicative of their desire to work with their peers.

The 19 volunteers (25%) interviewed are illustrative of the fact that there is already a core group of senior citizen volunteers in Leon County and probably in many other communities across the nation who are contributing their services to human service organizations that frequently serve their contemporaries.

### IMPLICATIONS

It was impressive to hear many of the subjects who were volunteers talk about the importance of volunteering in their lives and also to learn that the majority of non-volunteers were interested in a volunteer role. The role of volunteer appeared to have more impact on those who did not have many other social outlets. These individuals were likely candidates somewhere down the line for being recipients of social services if their life situation had not changed. One subject in her late seventies talked about how valued her volunteer role has become since her husband died. Another subject recently moved to Leon County and was lonely. She started volunteering as a way to meet people.

Volunteers at a local senior citizen center originally went there to receive services whether it was a free meal or an exercise class. They were gradually placed in the role of helpers or volunteers. For example, a senior center volunteer in his eighties, who initially came only for the free meals, now sets tables everyday for lunch and escorts persons needing assistance to their places. A woman who

was bored came to the center on the recommendation of her daughter. She was recruited as the receptionist and now has little idle time.

Riessman (1965) calls the above process, of persons who are originally in a recipient of services role being placed in a helper/volunteer role, the "helper-therapy principle." Persons are placed in a volunteer role in order that they themselves might be helped and one of the main correlates of a volunteering role is increased self-esteem (Perry, 1982). This increased self-worth comes at a most crucial time when many elderly have lost lifetime roles, are doubting their usefulness, and have lost avenues of regular social interaction.

Because of the benefits of a volunteer role, not only to the persons receiving the service but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the volunteers themselves, policy makers and program planners should focus on creating more helper/volunteer roles for those persons who are not traditionally attracted to volunteer positions. These non-traditional volunteers, who have a lower socioeconomic status and less resources within the community, are more likely to need and benefit from such a volunteer role. Volunteering should not be the prerogative of the well-to-do and healthy only. Naylor (1978) notes the following:

The challenge for the future is to devise ways to enable more of the population to enjoy the benefits of having a volunteer and of being one, especially the elderly, the physically or mentally handicapped, children and families.

The results of this investigation indicate that the challenge does not lie in finding older persons willing to volunteer (59% of the non-volunteers expressed their willingness to volunteer), but rather in creating volunteer roles into which these older persons can be channeled. The community as a whole, and more specifically the non-profit organizations in the community, need to recognize the potential of the older volunteer and begin to take advantage of this underutilized resource. Getze (1981) describes it this way:

In the 1980s there is, more than ever, a tremendous need for volunteers in social services. . . faced with declining resources and increased need. The volunteer work force of older Americans is best equipped to meet these needs. They have ex-

perience in overcoming hardships and have lived through times of economic scarcity. They are needed now more than ever. (p. 51)

This study has additional implications for the social service field in that an emerging role for human service workers could be that of volunteer coordinator. There are no longer abundant resources for social workers to use in helping their clients meet their needs. Alternative helping strategies such as the use of volunteers need to be employed. Social service workers could reach more people by working through volunteers who would deal directly with the clients. Clients may respond more positively to a peer, i.e., older persons helping older person in need, than to a helping professional.

Educational institutions that prepare social service workers should instruct students on how to effectively organize and train volunteers in the human services. As seen in this study, senior citizen volunteers are a large resource that has been mainly neglected in the social service field.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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**GAY AND GRAY: THE OLDER HOMOSEXUAL MAN.** Raymond M. Berger. *Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.*

As recently as a decade ago, gerontologists had almost no information on the characteristics of older homosexual men and women. This overlooked group comprises, perhaps, ten percent of the elderly population. However, the stigma of an unpopular sexual orientation combined with stereotypes about aging sexuality to make this group more than invisible. It was hidden in the gay community, in the aging community, in training programs, and in the literature. Like the fairies of folklore, gay people apparently did not age; they vanished in the mist before sunset! When Jim Kelly first presented his dissertation research on older gay men at the Gerontological Society meetings in 1972, it was introduced as an "unmentionable topic." Today, nearly every major journal in gerontology has published an article on homosexuality and aging; in some cases, only one. However, a bibliography prepared by the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Gerontologists currently lists eight pages of relevant citations. (It is available from them at 1290 Sutter St., Suite 8, San Francisco, CA 94109.)

Raymond Berger's book is a very welcome addition to this rapidly growing literature. While his focus is only on men, similar books are available (and in press) on older lesbians.

*Gay and Gray* includes two separate studies. One is a questionnaire study of 112 homosexual men between the ages of 41 and 77. The second is a set of interviews with 10 of these men, chosen to reflect the diversity of the larger sample. It begins with six chapters devoted to some of these excellent interviews (apparently not all respondents gave permission for their interview to be published).