

RESEARCH NEEDS IN VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

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This country has a long history of volunteer activity. Initially, of course, there was no choice. Banding together for a common cause or volunteering to help others was more of a cooperative necessity than an altruistic gesture. Each volunteer could foresee the possibility, or even probability, that he might require the same services he was providing to others. As the country grew and diversified, this reciprocal and simple relationship ceased to exist. Many of the functions that were handled by volunteers were turned over to employees of local and state governments. The federal government at that time provided little in the way of social services and volunteer activity was generally directed at helping people who were "less fortunate". Volunteer groups were organized and directed by crusaders who became aroused by social conditions or the neglect and mistreatment of specific groups of people. Many of these groups prospered from public support, hired employees, developed as a profession, and lost many of their characteristics as a volunteer organization. At the same time, the federal government began to take an increasing role in the prevention and treatment of social problems - at least in part due to the pressure brought by volunteer organizations. The result today is a proliferation of funds and professional services by both government and private agencies. Unfortunately, it is still not enough. More money is needed, but more important, more people are needed to do the work. There are not enough trained professionals to do the job alone; it may be that there will never be enough. The use of volunteers to fill the gap appears to be an ideal solution. However, we can no longer afford a haphazard and poorly organized approach to volunteer activity. There is an almost complete lack of research in this area. Without an adequate background of research, it is extremely difficult to select and utilize volunteers for the maximum benefit of the client, the professional worker, and the volunteer himself.

The disciplines of psychology, sociology, and social psychology can be most fruitfully applied to research in volunteer activity. Sociology would be concerned with volunteers as a group, their characteristic structure and role in society, and their impact on the organizations with which they interact. Psychological research is more concerned with the individual characteristics and behavior of the members of a group. Social psychology, of course, has some attributes of both psychology and sociology. This paper describes some of the research that has been done and discusses areas where research is needed on volunteers. The approach is primarily psychological and social psychological. The sociological approach would suggest a different set of problems and methods and will not be dealt with in this paper.

The research needs are divided into eight categories, or problem areas. The categories are listed below and will be discussed separately in the following sections of this paper.

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1. Survey of need for volunteers - A survey must be made to estimate the number of volunteers that could be used, the rate at which they could be trained and absorbed, and the types of jobs they could do.
2. Usefulness of volunteers - People now serving as volunteers can be studied to determine how much they contribute to the organization they are serving. Possible detrimental effects of volunteers should also be investigated.
3. Characteristics of volunteers - Descriptive studies on volunteers and comparative studies with non-volunteers should provide data on intelligence, aptitude, and personality of volunteers.
4. Utilization of volunteers - Studies should be made to determine how volunteers are now being used. Experiments could be devised to investigate the optimal use of volunteers and program assessment techniques developed.
5. Motivation of volunteers - An intensive study of why people volunteer and how they became involved in volunteer activity should suggest where to look for volunteers and methods to increase the number of volunteers.
6. Role of the Volunteer - The status of the volunteer in the community and in the organization he serves should be studied together with the factors that influence this relationship.
7. Qualifications of volunteers - An analysis of jobs available as well as those filled by volunteers should be undertaken to determine job levels and qualifications required of volunteers for each level.
8. Prediction - The background data gathered in the seven areas listed above can be combined to make predictions that can be experimentally verified. When this stage is reached, selection and utilization of volunteers can be made on a scientific basis.

Survey of Need for Volunteers

The most basic research step is to determine the nature and extent of the problem. There is no question that a need for services exists; the question is whether this need can be met by volunteers. Volunteer activity can be divided into two distinct types: direct and indirect. Direct volunteer activity is concerned with a service performed for the patient or client and usually requires close interaction between the volunteer, the professional, and the patient. Examples of the direct type of volunteer are Gray Ladies and Candy-stripers. The indirect type of volunteer may never even see the people he is serving. This type of volunteer may be raising money or performing a service such as typing reports at home for a charitable organization. These two types of volunteer activity should be kept separate. The need for volunteers and the characteristics of volunteers required for direct activity differ greatly from those required for indirect activity. This last statement should be verified by comparisons of volunteers now engaged in each type of activity.

The general feeling that an overall need exists must be translated into specific needs for specific groups. A survey could be made of a number of representative organizations and their volunteer needs categorized. This survey could be used as a basis for extrapolating the number and types of volunteers

needed, across the country. A second step would be to determine the amount of training required for the various types of volunteers and the rate at which the organizations could train and absorb these volunteers.

Another aspect of this problem is the number of potential volunteers available in society. Just as no one can say what the total need for volunteers is, no one can predict the nature and number of available volunteers. The comparison of the demand for volunteers with the supply has many practical consequences. If the potential supply is plentiful, standards for volunteers could be high and organizations selective. If the demand exceeded the supply, organizations would tend to compete for volunteers and many volunteer jobs would have to be re-structured to permit the use of volunteers with marginal qualifications. If a survey showed a high demand and a low supply of volunteers at a specific level, research could describe the volunteer that has performed best at that level and indicate where that individual would most likely be found and the type of recruiting program likely to motivate him to volunteer. Three factors would suggest, however, that there is a plentiful supply of potential volunteers. The factors are automation, increased leisure time, and early retirement. Automation has resulted in less job satisfaction and frustrated personal needs for achievement which could be directed towards volunteer work. Increased leisure time and early retirement provide an opportunity to do useful and meaningful work that is therapeutic to the volunteer as well as to the patient. As Stein (1967) states, the volunteers are "overcoming feelings of emptiness and depression experienced in everyday living." This topic will be discussed further under motivation of volunteers.

Usefulness of Volunteers

The usefulness of volunteers, at least in some situations, is still an open question. Often there is some hostility expressed by members of the professional staff (Stein, 1967) towards volunteers. The professional or paid employee may feel that the volunteer is "interfering" in the treatment of the patient. At least part of this hostility may be traced to the ambiguous role of the volunteer in a highly structured setting such as a hospital. The employee knows where he and every other employee stands in the pecking order and he may resent the presence of the volunteer outside this structure. This is more a matter of communication and utilization of volunteers than their actual usefulness but it can influence our evaluation of their usefulness if we rely entirely on assessments of volunteers by staff members. A more direct measure of usefulness would be the accomplishments of similar organizations with and without the aid of volunteers. The same organization could also be evaluated before and after the introduction of volunteers.

Three criteria that may be used to assess usefulness are:

1. Benefit to the patient or client - The patient's progress, recovery, and outlook may be compared with and without the direct aid of volunteers.
2. Benefit to the organization - The value of the volunteer to the organization may be measured in savings of time, money; or an increase in production.
3. Benefit to the volunteer - The physical and mental condition of the volunteer before, during, and after his volunteer service may be compared.

It is also necessary to determine the relative usefulness of volunteers in different types of organizations. The two primary types of volunteer activity were mentioned earlier - direct and indirect. In addition, a distinction should be made between organizations that function independently and are completely made up of volunteers; and organizations that utilize volunteers in certain jobs within a regular structure of employees.

Characteristics of Volunteers

Probably the most straight-forward studies can be done in the area of descriptive and comparative characteristics of volunteers and non-volunteers. There are literally hundreds of standardized psychological tests available that may be used for this purpose. It is surprising that so very few studies have been made in this area. There are several possible reasons for this. It may be that volunteers are considered to be no different than non-volunteers and merely represent a random sample of the population. This, in itself, would be an interesting and valuable finding, if true. However, available research seems to indicate that it is not true. L'Abate, (1967) in a study of volunteer housewives and candy-stripers, found a greater degree of intelligence, emotional stability, and cooperative functioning in these volunteers. MMPI results indicated "a lower degree of submissiveness and a higher degree of activity in volunteers than the controls." Several psychological studies concerned with people who volunteer for experiments seem to substantiate this finding of a difference between volunteers and non-volunteers. Maslow and Sakoda (1952) in a study on volunteer-error in the Kinsey study found that volunteers for a sex study were high in levels of self-esteem. Riggs and Kaess (1955) found that students who volunteered for an experiment as subjects showed more introverted thinking and tended toward a moody cycloid emotionality. On projective tests, the volunteers scored higher on intrapunitive measures and lower on extrapunitive measures. These findings may not be applicable to all types of volunteer activity, but they seem quite consistent with one another. The finding of high ability and self-esteem coupled with low-submissiveness indicate that volunteers may not be used to the full level of their ability and may also be a reason for some of the friction between volunteers and employees. A low extra-punitive score would be an asset for volunteers who deal directly with patients. These findings, however, may not hold up when we start tapping a larger segment of potential volunteers. There is a strong self-selection factor since there is little external pressure to volunteer and most volunteers are thus self-motivated. This will be discussed further in the section on motivation of volunteers. A finding of general superiority is not an unmixed blessing. There are many menial but necessary jobs that could be done better by volunteers with less ability. There are also many volunteer activities where empathy or interest is far more important than ability.

Utilization of Volunteers

Volunteers have been used for everything from guinea pigs to professional workers. At either extreme, the utilization of the volunteer is not a problem. The volunteer for a short-term experiment is simply an anonymous, random, and interchangeable sample and is useable in whatever form he comes. The professionally-trained volunteer is used in his professional capacity. The problem lies in the great majority of volunteers who lie between these two extremes and

come armed with only a willingness to work and a varied history of employment. These volunteers must be utilized effectively so they can make a maximum contribution to the organization and achieve a measure of self-satisfaction that will motivate them to stay on the job.

A study should first be made to determine how volunteers are now being used and to categorize the types of jobs they fill. This can be compared with the survey of the need for volunteers that was mentioned earlier. The characteristics of these volunteers can be compared with the requirements for the job they are filling to determine if they are being fully utilized. Experiments could then be devised to determine the optimal volunteer characteristics for each job type.

The study of volunteer utilization should include program assessment and the evaluation of the volunteer training program. Program assessment is very difficult if the program is not composed entirely of volunteers since it amounts to an evaluation of the entire program and its professional staff. This portion of the study is not concerned with how well the volunteers are performing, but with how well they are being utilized in the overall program. The volunteer training program is probably a critical indicator in the utilization of volunteers. If a volunteer training program exists, then the job of the volunteer must be somewhat defined and some thought given to the skills and orientation required by the volunteer. Beyond this, the program may vary from a half-hour lecture to a condensed professional training course.

Motivation of Volunteers

Volunteers, by definition, are motivated; but they are not all motivated alike. Indeed, motivation is so complex that a single volunteer has many motives - not all of them conscious and recognizable by himself or others. Nevertheless, there may be common motivational factors among volunteers. If these could be identified, the question of why people volunteer would be answered and could be used to influence more people to volunteer. Both depth psychology and surveys should be used to investigate the motives of volunteers. The depth psychology study may be used to identify the unconscious motivation of volunteers while the survey will identify the verbalized motivation of the volunteers. The survey should also note the conditions under which the person volunteered. Only a person with extreme motivation or some need for self-actualization will volunteer on his own initiative. Most volunteers are probably recruited or respond to an appeal for volunteers. If this is true, more people would volunteer if more people were simply asked. While it may be true that the unconscious motives are stronger, they are also more difficult to reach and control. The law of parsimony would suggest that volunteers be reached through their claimed motivations unless that proves inadequate.

Bair and Gallagher (1960), in a study on volunteering for extra-hazardous duty by cadets, found that they could influence the amount of volunteering by manipulating conditions. Subjects were requested to volunteer under both public and private conditions. Blake et al (1956) also requested subjects to volunteer under public or private conditions and found a difference in favor of public conditions where the alternative to volunteering was less attractive than the requested action. Studies by Rosenbaum and Blake (1955) and Rosenbaum (1956) substantiate this effect of background factors which Rosenbaum relates to Helson's theory of adaptation level. In both experiments, more subjects volunteered after

seeing other subjects accept an invitation to volunteer than did the control group. Less subjects volunteered after seeing others refuse an invitation. These studies seem to suggest that either a marginal motivation level can be raised above threshold by external conditions; or that external conditions in itself can provide a force to motivate people to volunteer.

These studies were done under conditions where the subject was asked to volunteer for a short-term experiment. The results have not been confirmed for volunteers that are being asked to provide considerably more of their time and effort. Even if these people could be induced to volunteer, there is still a question of whether their motivation would be strong enough to carry them through a complete volunteer program. It doesn't do much good to just increase the number of drop-outs.

Roles of Volunteers

Volunteers have a unique role, both in society and in the organizations they serve. They may be considered as unselfish and public-spirited by their neighbors and be accorded special status. The patient may see the volunteer as a friend, the nurse may see him as a pest, and the administrator may see him as an unpaid employee. The volunteer is an ambiguous figure - he does not have the means by which we usually assign status: salary, position, or power. He does have an amount of independence that the employee does not have and this increases the difficulty of assigning the volunteer a role by our ordinary standards. It may be this lack of a consistent role that generates some antagonism from other employees and discomfort for the volunteer. This problem is intensified since volunteers are most frequently found in rigid, hierarchical organizations such as a hospital. Research should undertake to determine what role is appropriate for volunteers in different situations and attempt to communicate an understanding of that role to other employees and the volunteer. Stein (1967) found that suggestions for improvements by both hospital personnel and volunteers centered on a clearer understanding of what was expected of volunteers and a clearer role-definition. In addition to improving communication and work-relationships in the organization, a clearer role-definition may motivate more people to volunteer.

Qualifications of Volunteers

Hassol (1967) describes a situation where six hundred applications were received, the volunteers were interviewed and tested, and twelve were selected and trained to take intake case histories. After one year on the job, these volunteers left to become fully trained as professionals. This is a perfect example of the misuse of volunteers. The qualifications of volunteers can be readily determined and screening should be intense only when the demands of the job are great. All jobs should be analyzed and, if necessary, broken down into components that can be handled by the majority of volunteers available. Whenever possible, jobs should be available at several levels of difficulty requiring different abilities and personality traits so the qualifications of available volunteers can be matched to the job requirements.

Prediction of Volunteer Success

The ultimate goal of the seven areas listed and discussed above is to provide a scientific basis for further research and development in the field of volunteer activity. The division of research into the above areas is arbitrary sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory. None of these areas provides an answer in itself, but gathering basic background data in a number of areas is a necessary start to more precise theories and experimentation on volunteer activity. When this stage is reached, accurate predictions can be made on any aspect of volunteer activity that will aid planning and assure steady and orderly growth.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an overview of research needs in volunteer activity with some examples of preliminary studies that are related to this area. Research on volunteers from a psychological frame of reference is practically non-existent. Research needs have been categorized into problem areas that are amenable to solution by standard psychological techniques. Sociological techniques could also be directed to the study of volunteer activity from a different frame of reference. It is suggested that a background of research is essential if volunteer activity is to increase and if volunteers are to be effectively utilized.

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