VALUES AND VOLUNTEERS: AXIOLOGY OF ALTRUISM IN A CRISIS CENTER[1]

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Summary.—The present study examined the values of volunteers for a crisis center "hotline" telephone service. The volunteers (19 males, 23 females) were compared to an aggregately sex-matched control group of 42 evening college students at a major urban regional university. Both groups completed a Rokeach Value Survey. A total of 12 values discriminated between the volunteer and control groups. Results suggest that, in contrast to control subjects, volunteers for crisis-intervention centers are demonstrably more altruistic, with more highly developed interests in social activity and an increased need for inner-direction. A subsequent value comparison of the 23 volunteers who remained for at least 2 mo. beyond the training period with 19 who dropped out disclosed only 2 minor differences. Value differences appear to be critical in volunteer selection but are generally unrelated to retention.

The use of nonprofessional volunteers in the delivery of community mental health services has spread rapidly in the last decade. Research has tended to disclose a reliable picture of differences between the volunteer and non-volunteer populations. Engs and Kirk (1974) found that volunteers for community agencies tended to be upper-middle-class whites with more socially oriented interests. Other studies have disclosed traits of introversion and nurturance (Knapp & Holtzberg, 1964), altruism and conscientiousness (Howarth, 1976), increased self-control (Hersch, Kulik, & Scheibe, 1969), and tolerance and dedication to self-improvement (Turner, 1973) among volunteers. A global evaluation of increased self-actualization has been used to describe individuals who volunteer (Tapp & Spanier, 1973).

It is clear that differences in personality between volunteers and non-volunteers exist, but there is ambiguity regarding the axiological substratum or value systems of volunteers. Rokeach (1968) has elaborated a model relating values to behavior in a very fundamental sense. According to Rokeach (1973), "a *value* is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A *value system* is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (p. 5). The importance of values is precisely in the central position in the cognitive sphere; values predispose behavior and are reflected in both attitudes and personality.

The issue of the values of the volunteer is notable for several reasons. First, effective recruitment of volunteers appears to require some understanding of the values of potential volunteers. For example, Rokeach (1971) identified a powerful relationship between value structure and willingness of college students to contribute to a civil rights organization. Ultimately, a single value, "equality," determined a large proportion of the variance of contributors' behaviors. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the most efficacious use of recruitment effort may be directed by comprehension of those values diacritically associated with volunteering behavior.

Second, the issue of differences in values between the aggregate of potential volunteers who successfully complete a training program and those who drop out is critical. Much staff time spent in training and preparation is wasted when recruits do not complete the sequence or do not stay in the program long enough to offer substantial volunteer activity. Differences in personality and demographic variables between volunteers who persist through a training period and those who drop out have been shown to exist. Schoenfeld, Preston, and Adams (1976) found substantial discrepancies between successful and unsuccessful volunteers in marital stability, education, alcohol consumption, depression, and suicidal ideation. In general, persisting volunteers were more stable over-all. The relationship of values to emotional stability has been demonstrated (Mahoney, 1977; Shotland, 1968), and it is reasonable to expect differences in values between successful and unsuccessful trainees.

Finally, the values of volunteers reasonably can be expected to affect the nature of the counsel in the advisor-client relationship. Best and Kirkpatrick (1977) found that successful rape-crisis counselor-volunteers demonstrated significantly more profeminist attitudes than pediatric nurses, and the relationship between traditional and profeminist attitudes and values has been established (Mahoney, 1975).

It is clear that differences in demographic variables and personality influence the crisis volunteer. However, to date the underlying values of volunteers have not been examined. The assumed relationships between values and volunteer behavior can be summarized in two hypotheses: (1) Volunteers for crisis-center activity would differ in values from nonvolunteers. (2) Volunteers who successfully complete training for crisis-intervention will have values different from those volunteers who did not complete training.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 84 individuals, 38 males and 46 females, participated in the study. Half of the males ($n = 19$) and females ($n = 23$) were volunteers for a crisis-center program who had been recruited from the community through television, radio, and newspaper announcements and from evening college programs at a large (19,000-student) urban regional university. The remaining gender- and age-matched controls were students enrolled in the same evening college classes who had declined to volunteer for crisis-center participation. The mean age in years of the volunteer group was 27.8 for the males and 30.5 for the females. The corresponding controls were aged 29.4 and 31.5 yr., respectively.

Materials

Value assessment was accomplished with Form E of the Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973), which has two lists of 18 values each. The first list, called Terminal Values, involves desirable end-states of existence, such as "a comfortable life" and "wisdom." The second list, identified as Instrumental Values, reflects mechanisms by which goals are achieved. These mechanisms, such as being "imaginative" or "clean," are conceptualized as tools by which the individual attains the desired terminal values. The respondent ranks each value from 1 (most important) to 18 (least important) in each list. Form E of the Value Survey has a mean test-retest reliability of rankings of .74 for the terminal values and of .68 for the instrumental values (Feather, 1971; Homant, 1969; Rokeach, 1973).

Procedure

Volunteers ($n = 42$) completed the Value Survey at the initial interview meeting of the crisis-center training session. Two separate volunteer groups were run, the first in February ($n = 24$) and the second in August ($n = 14$). Thus, the two groups of volunteers were drawn from different semesters of the academic year, with the specific intent of maximizing the heterogeneity of the volunteer population. The spacing of selection reflected the ongoing needs of the crisis center for volunteers. It should be noted that the center had been in operation for approximately six years, with recurring patterns of solicitation of volunteers on a more-or-less regular basis. Data from control subjects were collected during the course of various evening classes.

Following the recommendations by Feather (1975), data were transformed to yield a normalized distribution for each value. Substantial research has indicated that the extremity of ranking, rather than the absolute rank, is more important as a determinant of behavior. Thus, ranking of "1 (most important)" is considered as potent as a positive influence within the individual's value system, and subsequent behavior as "18 (least important)" is as a negative influence. By contrast, middle-ranked values, for example, those ranked 9 or 10, have been shown to exert little differential effect on behavior. The interested reader is directed to Feather (1975) for an extended discussion of the psychological and mathematical rationale for the transformation. Data were

analyzed by a 2 (volunteer or control status) $\times$ 2 (sex of respondent) analysis of variance on each transformed value.

RESULTS

The test of the first hypothesis of differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers yielded 12 significant differences among the 36 values. For the terminal values, 6 of the 18 appeared to discriminate between the volunteer and control groups. The volunteers placed a relatively higher value on "Inner Harmony" ($F_{1,80} = 10.65, p < .002$), "Equality" ($F_{1,80} = 6.74, p < .01$), and "Self-respect" ($F_{1,80} = 7.15, p < .01$), while nonvolunteers favored "A Comfortable Life" ($F_{1,80} = 13.01, p < .001$), "Salvation" ($F_{1,80} = 5.89, p < .02$), and "An Exciting Life" ($F_{1,80} = 3.86, p < .05$). Among the instrumental values, volunteers evaluated being "Courageous" ($F_{1,80} = 5.34, p < .02$), "Helpful" ($F_{1,80} = 6.20, p < .02$), and "Honest" ($F_{1,80} = 3.86, p < .05$) more positively, while controls cited "Self-controlled" ($F_{1,80} = 8.59, p < .005$), and being "Ambitious" ($F_{1,80} = 8.12, p < .01$), and "Polite" ($F_{1,80} = 4.89, p < .03$) as more important.

The test of the second hypothesis, that of value differences between volunteers who survived the training period and completed at least 8 weeks of the training with those original volunteers who dropped out before 8 weeks of activity, yielded only two significant sex by survival interactions among the 36 values. "Obedient" yielded a significant interaction ($F_{1,38} = 7.58, p < .01$) with male dropouts showing a significantly more positive evaluation of obedience than any other group. A second significant interaction occurred for "clean" ($F_{1,38} = 4.56, p < .04$). In this instance, female volunteers who completed the training and probation period showed a significantly less positive evaluation of "clean" than did any of the other groups. Finally, gender was not related to retention rates ($\chi^2 = 0.98$) for the volunteers.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis of substantial differences in values between volunteers and nonvolunteers was strongly supported by the present study. With regard to these differences, it is useful to consider the pattern of values discriminating the groups in the light of previous research on the underlying structure of human values (Mahoney & Katz, 1976). In general, volunteers showed greater emphasis on what Mahoney and Katz (1976) identified as the "Educational," "Personal Integrity," and "Interpersonal Openness" orientations, in contrast to nonvolunteers who showed more positive evaluation for "Economic," "Religious," "Societal Integrity," and "Interpersonal Constriction" dimensions. These findings are in accord with the general findings of personality differences characteristic of volunteers (Engs & Kirk, 1974; Knapp & Holtzberg, 1964; Hersh, et al., 1969; Turner, 1973; Tapp & Spanier, 1973; Howarth, 1976).

Thus it would appear that there exists substantial continuity from values to behavior among volunteers.

In general, it could be said that crisis center volunteers appear to be altruistic, emotionally sensitive, and stable as a group. The significant interaction of "Obedient" is interesting, since Mahoney and Katz (1976) found that "Obedient" loaded highly on "Interpersonal Constriction," in contrast to the general interpersonal openness of the volunteer group. Not surprisingly, male dropouts placed a higher value on obedience than did any other group, and the general openness of the volunteers may have proven to be stressful, leading to unsuccessful males dropping out.

The finding that female survivors differentially and negatively evaluated "clean" may be due to their concern for a less restricted, nontraditional role. Support for the perspective has surfaced in studies of values and the female role (Mahoney, 1975; Levinson & Huffman, 1955).

The second hypothesis of differential effects of values on retention of volunteers received only weak support. First, only two of the 36 values achieved significance, which is very close to chance expectation, so the possibility of no actual differences in values between successful and unsuccessful volunteers cannot be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, the suspension of the relationship between values and behavior postulated by Rokeach (1968) and supported by analysis of the first hypothesis of the present study would not appear to be warranted. This interpretation of no genuine difference in values between successful and unsuccessful volunteers suggests that factors other than ideological may be operating to select survivors. The conclusions of Schoenfeld, et al. (1976) are particularly germane here, in that they found that successful and unsuccessful volunteers differed in psychological dimensions, with increased indices of social adjustment characterizing the successful volunteers. It may be the case that volunteers in general have a certain cluster of values, but their differential abilities to apply or utilize the value-behavior continuum lead to selection for success along behavioral and interpersonal, rather than ideological, dimensions. Thus, the unsuccessful volunteers may lack the skills necessary to apply their altruism effectively.

The results of the present study suggest that value differences are critical in the volunteer selection but are generally unimportant in retention. Unfortunately, there is little research on patterns of volunteer retention. Further work in this area appears warranted.

The present study also has implications for individuals such as program directors and administrators in the areas of volunteer recruitment and service delivery. It appears that appeals for solicitation of volunteers should focus on the altruistic and experiential aspects of volunteering, since these dimensions appear to be most compatible with values of volunteers. It should be recognized

that there appear to be few diacritical values associated with success, however, so selection of volunteers should countenance indices of psychological and interpersonal adjustment independent of expressed values. Whether adjustment to volunteering assessed via survey or interview or whether only actual on-line experience by itself can winnow the successful volunteers can only be viewed as conjectural.

To the extent that advice and support are directed by the values of volunteers, it seems that there are few differences between the successful and unsuccessful volunteers. Whatever differences exist appear to be the consequence of personality differences or situational demands rather than axiological considerations.

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