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Who volunteers, why and with what consequences? Life aspirations, motives and outcomes of volunteering and well-being

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Abstract

Volunteering leads to the direct involvement of citizens in local development, and therefore plays an important role in the fostering of civil society and democracy. But, on the other side, volunteering also has positive effects on volunteers themselves.

This study investigated the relationship between life aspirations, motives and outcomes of volunteering and well-being for 136 volunteers aged between 16 and 56 years. Participants completed four instruments: Aspiration Index (measuring intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations), Volunteerism questionnaire (measuring intrinsic and extrinsic motives and their satisfaction), The Satisfaction with Life Scale and The Short Depression-Happiness Scale. Intrinsic motives for volunteering included values, understanding and enhancement while extrinsic motives included career and social function.

Regression analysis showed that intrinsic motives for volunteering were best predicted by intrinsic life aspirations (self-growth and contribution to community) while extrinsic motives for volunteering were best predicted by combination of intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations (contribution to community and social status).

It was also shown that volunteers with intrinsic motives for volunteering were more happy in their life, while fulfilment of intrinsic motives was related to satisfaction with volunteering in general. Extrinsic motives for volunteering were not related neither to satisfaction with volunteering work nor to any indicator of well-being.

It was concluded that although volunteering can attract individuals with both intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations and motives for volunteering it is possible that volunteering for extrinsic reasons would not contribute to volunteers' well-being and that they will not be satisfied with volunteering work.

Keywords: *motives for volunteering, outcomes of volunteering, life aspirations, well-being*

Introduction

'Volunteerism is one of the many and varied ways in which people try to do good for others, their communities, and society at large.'
Snyder and Omoto, 2009, p. 4.

In general, people are purposeful, planful and goal-directed. Kasser and Ryan (1996, 2001) distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations. Intrinsic life aspirations involve emotional intimacy, community service, and personal growth, while extrinsic

ones include financial success, physical attractiveness, and social fame/popularity. The question arises whether one set of goals brings more life satisfaction? Research has shown that these two types of goals do relate in different ways to personal well-being (Kasser and Ryan, 1996, 2001; Ryan et al, 1999). Since intrinsic goals are hypothesized to be naturally consistent with human nature and needs, the investment in, or success at intrinsic goals is associated with enhanced well-being. These goals lead to greater satisfaction because they give everyday activities a long-term perspective and encourage other activities in free-time that are self-determined and enjoyable (Deci and Ryan, 1993; Baumeister, 1991). On the other hand, investment in extrinsic goals, which are less consistent with positive human nature, does not enhance, and often detracts, from well-being. They are primarily concerned with obtaining some (circumstantial) praise and are common means to some other end (e. g. compensation for problems in need satisfaction). In short, people with more materialistic goals are less happy than people who pursue intrinsic life goals (see e.g. Kasser and Ryan, 2001). Applied to pro-social behaviour, one could expect that such a 'hedonistic paradox' occurs because people who are materialistically oriented do not help others and therefore do not benefit from the internal rewards of pro-social behaviour (Konow and Earley, 2002; Phelps, 2001). As a result, it is not individuals who pursue their own happiness who are happy but those who care for others.

People who place their strongest values upon intrinsic goals are highly likely to engage in behaviours which yield well-being (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996). In a longitudinal study Sheldon and Kasser (1998) found that well-being was enhanced by attainment of intrinsic goals, whereas success at extrinsic goals provided little benefit. Even very successful people may experience less than optimal well-being if they pursue and attain goals that do not fulfil basic psychological needs. These goals fail to directly satisfy basic needs and therefore may distract one from investing in more congruent, intrinsically-oriented goals (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001). It seems that extrinsic satisfaction tends to yield more superficial and fleeting positive effects (Richins, 1994; Schwartz, 1994), although some research show that attainment of both intrinsic and extrinsic goals was positively related to life-satisfaction - e.g. in Russian sample (Ryan et al, 1999), in Croatian samples (Brdar et al, 2009; Brdar, 2006; Rijavec et al, 2006), in Hungarian sample (Martos and Kopp, 2012), and in Chinese one (Lekes et al, 2007). But in these studies intrinsic goals were also more important for well-being than extrinsic ones.

It could be hypothesized that people who generally place more importance to intrinsic life goals are more likely to seek specific activities that are intrinsically rewarding. Volunteerism is supposed to be one of these activities. In the United States, more than 50 percent of all adults do volunteer work, and this constitutes an equivalent of 5 million full time jobs. In Europe, on average 32.1 percent of the population do volunteer work and this constitutes an equivalent of 4.5 million full time jobs (Anheier and Salamon, 1999). A lot of charitable organizations crucially depend on the work provided by the large number of volunteers. Many community services only exist because people voluntarily offer their work free of charge.

In addition to its important role in the fostering civil society and democracy and being an evidence of people's kindness and commitment to others, volunteering has positive

effects on volunteers themselves. Research evidence indicates a positive association between volunteering and a wide range of health and wellbeing outcomes (life satisfaction, happiness, health). For example, life satisfaction was shown to increase 24% with the level of altruistic activity in the person's life (Williams et al, 1998). Several studies (e.g: Moen et al, 1989, 1992; Musick et al, 1999; Oman et al, 1999; Van Willigen, 2000) prove that volunteering extends life. High volunteers had 63% lower mortality than non-volunteers (age and sex-adjusted) (Oman et al, 1999). The meta-analysis of thirty-seven independent studies (Wheeler et al, 1998) provided the means of inferring not only that elder volunteers' sense of well-being seemed to be significantly bolstered through volunteering, but also that such relatively healthy older people represent a significant adjunct resource for meeting some of the service needs of more vulnerable elders, as well as those of other similarly vulnerable groups such as disabled children. Averaging across studies, 85 percent of the "clients" who received service from an older volunteer scored better on dependent measures (e.g., diminished depression) than the average person in comparison conditions did (Delle Fave and Massimini, 1992). The results indicated that the higher life satisfaction and positive affect reported by those who volunteer at moderate levels (up to seven hours per week) are related to their higher levels of positive social exchanges and greater availability of social support from friends and family, relative to non-volunteers (Pilkington et al. 2012).

This result, however, does not establish causality. For example, it is very likely that unobserved personality characteristics like extraversion affect volunteering, as well as people's reports on their well-being. Moreover, reversed causality might be involved, i.e. satisfied people are more likely to volunteer.

Meier and Stutzer (2004) presented empirical evidence on the relationship between volunteering and life satisfaction, based on the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) for the period between 1985 and 1999. About 20,000 individuals (from Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, and the UK) were surveyed each year concerning various aspects of their socio-economic status and on their demographic characteristics. In addition to questions about their socio-economic situation, participants were asked about their life satisfaction and the extent of volunteer work they did. The descriptive statistics show a sizable positive relationship between volunteering and life satisfaction. People who never volunteer report, on average, the lowest scores of life satisfaction. For each subsequent category, higher reported life satisfaction is measured. While people who never volunteer report an average life satisfaction of 6.93 points, people who volunteer weekly report an average life satisfaction of 7.35 points, i.e. 0.42 point higher. The difference is sizeable and statistically highly significant.

Different people may do similar things for different reasons and any one individual may be motivated by more than one need or goal. Outcomes depend on the matching of needs and goals to the opportunities afforded by the environment (Clary and Snyder, 1999). It seems that compliance motivation for volunteering with the experience of volunteering has positive consequences. More satisfied with the volunteer work are those who gain more experiences aligned with their motivation (Clary et al., 1998, Study 5). Also, the same authors demonstrated (Clary et al., 1998, Study 6) that these volunteers have a greater intention to continue volunteering, regardless of whether it is volunteering

in the current or any other organization, and regardless of whether it will be immediately after current engagement, or later in the future.

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between life aspirations, motives and outcomes of volunteering and well-being. We assume that individuals with intrinsic life aspirations volunteer more for intrinsic reasons (such as values or understanding) and that individuals with extrinsic life aspirations volunteer more for extrinsic reasons (such as career). It is also expected that volunteering for intrinsic motives will be more positively related to well-being and satisfaction with volunteering work than volunteering for extrinsic motives.

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 134 volunteers (44 males and 90 females) aged from 16 to 56 years old ($M=33.19$, $SD=4.61$). They had volunteering experience from 0 to 8 years ($M=1.68$, $SD=1.88$) and volunteered in various organizations through Volunteers' Centre Zagreb.

Procedure

Data were collected in association with Volunteers' Centre Zagreb (VCZ) through the web survey.

Instruments

Volunteerism questionnaire (VFI, Clary et al, 1998, Clary and Snyder, 2002). The VFI measures reasons for volunteering, volunteering outcomes and satisfaction with volunteering work. The first set, reasons for volunteering, presents 30 reasons why people volunteer and asks participants to indicate how important each reason is for them. The second set, *Volunteering outcomes*, presents 18 outcomes that can result from volunteering and asks participants to indicate whether they have experienced each outcome. The scales, both reasons and outcomes, are divided into six separate functional motives (i.e., factors): *Protective*— a way of protecting the ego from the difficulties of life; *Values* – a way to express ones altruistic and humanitarian values; *Career* –a way to improve career prospects; *Social* –a way to develop and strengthen social ties; *Understanding* –a way to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities; *Enhancement* –a way to help the ego grow and develop. Final set presents five items about satisfaction with volunteering. Respondents answer each item on a seven-point scale ranging from one (not at all important/accurate) to seven (extremely important/accurate).

Aspiration index (Kasser and Ryan, 1996). The Aspiration Index was developed to assess people's aspirations. There are seven categories of aspirations with five specific items within each category. The seven categories include: the extrinsic aspirations of wealth, fame/popularity, and image; the intrinsic aspirations of emotional intimacy, personal growth, and community service; and the aspiration of good health which turned out not

to be clearly either extrinsic or intrinsic. Health subscale was excluded from further analysis because only psychologically oriented variables were of interest in this study. Participants were asked to rate how important each goal was to them on a scale ranging from one (not at all) to seven (extremely). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for subscales ranged from 0.70 to 0.89 (Table 1).

The satisfaction with life scale (SWLS, Diener et al, 1985). The scale measures the cognitive component of subjective well-being. It consists of five statements with a five-point rating scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Principal component analysis of the items resulted in one factor solution, which explains 53,6% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .78.

Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS, Joseph et al, 2004). The SDHS consists of six items, three items measuring happiness and three reverse coded items measure depressive states. Participants rate how frequently they lately felt the way described in the items on a four point scale (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 4 = often).

In our study principal component analysis of the data with Oblimin rotation resulted in two factor solution with eigenvalues of 2.29 and 1.31 (the following being .72, .64, .56 and .48), that accounted for 59.94% of the total variance. So, the two scores, separately for depression ($\alpha=0.61$) and happiness ($\alpha=0.68$), were computed for each subject.

Results

In Table 1 descriptive statistics of the examined variables are presented. Volunteers' total scores on each instrument were formed as mean ratings on the respective scale items. Therefore, the theoretical range of the results is equal to the range of rating scale on the specific instrument.

The mean response ratings for the examined variables indicate a moderately high level of importance for intrinsic reasons for volunteering and satisfaction with volunteering. Among life aspirations, emotional intimacy and personal growth had the highest level of importance and status the lowest.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for motives for volunteering, satisfaction with volunteering, life aspirations and well-being

Measures		Mini	Maxi	M	SD	Cronbach Alpha
Motives for volunteering and satisfaction	Intrinsic motives - importance	2.87	6.93	5.09	0.93	0.871
	Extrinsic motives - importance	1.00	5.40	3.21	1.10	0.813
	Intrinsic motives fulfilment	1.00	7.00	4.59	1.18	0.817
	Extrinsic motives fulfilment	1.00	6.25	3.22	1.40	0.743
	Satisfaction with volunteering	1.00	7.00	5.38	1.10	0.801
Life aspirations	Wealth	1.00	6.40	3.54	1.26	0.840
	Status	1.00	6.60	2.83	1.40	0.890
	Image	1.00	6.60	3.07	1.29	0.834
	Personal growth	3.20	7.00	6.10	0.77	0.792
	Emotional intimacy	2.60	7.00	6.40	0.75	0.846
	Community service	2.60	7.00	5.51	1.05	0.701
Well-being	Happiness	2.00	4.00	3.53	0.50	0.684
	Depression	1.00	3.67	1.99	0.58	0.610
	Life satisfaction	1.20	5.00	3.55	0.75	0.782

Factor analysis was carried out on the subscales using a principal-components analysis with Varimax rotation. The initial analysis of data produced two factors with eigen values greater than one, accounting for 54.7% of variance. Due to factor loadings greater than 0.30 on both factors, subscales importance of *self-protective motives* and *self protection fulfilment* were excluded and the second analysis was preformed. This analysis revealed two factors accounting for 59.6% of variance. As expected all subscales have high loadings on their factors (Table 2). According to the contents of the subscales the first factor was labelled as *Intrinsic motives for volunteering* and the second factor as *Extrinsic motives for volunteering*.

Finkelstien (2009) categorized the six functions into internal and external motives, with the values, understanding, social, enhancement, and protective functions constituting the internal motives and the career function being the only external motive. In our study social motives appeared to be extrinsic, rather than intrinsic. In the situation of economic crisis it is possible that our participants view social motives primarily as means for

attaining some extrinsic rewards (such as getting a job, improving social status or popularity, meeting important people who can help them in career).

Table 2: Factor pattern matrix and loadings of motives for volunteering

Reasons for volunteering and volunteering outcomes	component	
	1 <i>Intrinsic motives</i>	2 <i>Extrinsic motives</i>
Self-enhancement - fulfilment	.805	
Understanding and learning – fulfilment	.801	
Values - importance	.799	
Understanding and learning – importance	.782	
Values - fulfilment	.665	
Self-enhancement - motives	.622	
Career development - fulfilment		.838
Career development - motives		.781
Social interaction - motives		.727
Social interaction - fulfilment		.654

To examine to what extent volunteers' life aspirations predict motives for volunteering, two linear regression analyses were conducted with intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for volunteering as criterion variables and importance of wealth, status, image, emotional intimacy, community service, personal growth as predictors (Table 3).

Table 3: Summary results of regression analyses using volunteers' motives for volunteering as criterion variables and life aspirations as predictors

Life aspiration Variables	Intrinsic motives		Extrinsic motives	
	β	p	β	p
Wealth	-.17	.092	-.10	.365
Status	.07	.512	.32	.006
Image	.17	.129	.18	.181
Personal growth	.27	.009	.12	.300
Emotional intimacy	-.06	.568	.02	.878
Community service	.49	.000	.21	.022
R	0.631		0.479	
R ²	0.399		0.230	
F _(6,114)	12.590		5.619	

The full set of predictors explained 40% of variance in volunteers' intrinsic reasons and 23% of variance in volunteers' extrinsic reasons for volunteering. The inspection of individual variables indicated that the most important predictors of volunteers' intrinsic motives for volunteering were their self-growth and contribution to community as intrinsic life aspirations. The significant predictors of volunteers' extrinsic motives for volunteering were contribution to community as intrinsic life aspirations and status as extrinsic life aspirations.

Next, separate linear regression analyses were performed to establish the relative contribution of motives for volunteering in predicting volunteers' well-being and satisfaction with volunteering. Four linear regression analyses were conducted with intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, intrinsic and extrinsic volunteering outcomes as predictors and life satisfaction, happiness, depression and satisfaction with volunteering as criterion variables (Table 4).

Table 4: Summary results of regression analyses using volunteers' motives for volunteering as predictors and well-being indicators and satisfaction with volunteering as criterion variables

Motives for volunteering	Life Satisfaction		Happiness		Depression		Satisfaction with volunteering	
	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
Intrinsic motives - importance	.03	.867	.30	.033	-.06	.694	-.03	.792
Extrinsic motives - importance	-.13	.417	.11	.442	.16	.265	-.03	.807
Intrinsic motives - fulfilment	-.06	.703	-.16	.247	.14	.318	.62	.000
Extrinsic motives - fulfilment	.17	.289	-.13	.376	-.06	.674	.12	.279
R	.11		.24		.18		.65	
R ²	.01		.06		.03		.42	
F _(4,101)	.289		1.621		.831		18.549	

As shown in Table 4, intrinsic motives for volunteering were significant predictor of happiness. The full set of predictors explained 42% of variance in satisfaction with volunteering, but only fulfilment of intrinsic volunteering motive was significant predictor.

Discussion

This study was based on the idea that general life aspirations are reflected in specific areas of individual's life such as volunteering. That is why volunteering is probably related to individual's life aspirations and people with different life aspirations volunteer

for different motives. Since intrinsic life aspirations are related to greater well-being (e.g. Rijavec et al, 2006, 2011; Sheldon and Kasser, 2001) volunteering for intrinsic reasons should also result in higher level of well-being.

Who volunteers and why? Life aspirations and motives for volunteering

In this study, life aspirations were relevant for participants' motivation to volunteer. Generally, intrinsic motives for volunteering were predicted by intrinsic life aspirations (personal growth and community service) while extrinsic motives for volunteering were predicted by combination of intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations (status and community service). It is evident that volunteers with intrinsic and extrinsic motives for volunteering have one life aspiration in common and that is community service. But this life aspiration is more important for intrinsic than for extrinsic volunteering motivation. Also, for intrinsically motivated volunteers community service is the most significant predictor while for extrinsically motivated volunteers the most significant predictor was status.

These results support findings from previous studies. It has been shown that intrinsically oriented people are more prepared to volunteer. However, also more extrinsically oriented people volunteer. But they may do so for different reasons. These people may volunteer for more extrinsic reasons, i.e. in order to increase the probability of getting a good job or making a political career (Meier and Stutzer, 2008).

Motives for volunteering and well-being

Since intrinsic life aspirations result in higher levels of well-being (as previously stated) it was expected that volunteering for intrinsic motives and fulfilment of these motives would also be related to greater well-being and satisfaction with volunteering work. Results suggest that, in terms of well-being, people who are more extrinsically motivated do not benefit from volunteering. On the other hand, placing more importance on intrinsic motives for volunteering contributes to happiness. Meier and Stutzer (2008, p.20) suggest that 'this may be due to the fact that volunteering is not internally rewarding if people volunteer instrumentally in order to get a (material) reward like a better job. Another possibility is that more extrinsically oriented people are engaged in different volunteer tasks than intrinsically oriented people, whereby the benefits may depend on the task'.

It should be stressed that it is the importance of intrinsic motives and not their fulfilment that contributes to well-being. Evidently, individuals who value intrinsic motives for volunteering are generally happier than those who value extrinsic motives, no matter whether their motives are fulfilled or not. But, when it comes to satisfaction with the volunteering work, the most satisfied are those whose intrinsic motives are fulfilled.

A great number of studies suggest that volunteering is positively related to well-being (Wheeler et al, 1998). One possible explanation is that most individuals volunteer for intrinsic reasons. Although both extrinsic and intrinsic motives play a role in volunteering, intrinsic motives (values, understanding and enhancement) have been found to be the most important ones (Allison et al, 2002; Chapman and Morley, 1999;

Planalp and Trost, 2009). Our study as well as others previously stated demonstrates that these reasons are crucial for greater well-being.

Concluding remarks

It can be concluded that people with more pronounced intrinsic life aspirations volunteer more for intrinsic reasons, while those with extrinsic life aspirations have more extrinsic motives for volunteering. However, although people can volunteer for different motives only intrinsic motives are related to increased well-being and satisfaction with volunteering work. Although volunteering programs can attract individuals with extrinsic life aspirations and motives for volunteering (such as advancing career opportunities and extending social network) it is possible that volunteering would not contribute to their well-being and that they will not be satisfied with volunteering work.

Limitations of the study and future directions

The nature of our study was correlational and cross-sectional which prevents conclusions being drawn regarding causality between variables. It is likely that intrinsic motives for volunteering will lead to greater well-being for the reasons discussed in the introduction. On the other hand, it is possible that happy individuals tend to volunteer more for intrinsic reasons than less happy ones. The results of the study by Meier and Stutzer (2008) support not only that volunteering influences happiness but also presents evidence for the reverse causation: happy people are more likely to volunteer. The two causal directions are not mutually contradictory and can be interpreted as an indicator of a self-enforcing process. Volunteering increases happiness, which in turn increases the likelihood of volunteering. A longitudinal study would permit closer examination of factors involved in motives for volunteering and their relations to well-being.

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