

Volunteering in the Context of Family Support

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Abstract

Introduction: The present paper is focused on identifying the motives of volunteers working in a family support program. Volunteers' motivation was identified by means of interviews while the objects under observation were volunteers in an unnamed non-profit organization in the Pardubice Region, offering services to families with children.

Objective: The main objective is to identify volunteers' motives for their volunteering work in the family support program.

Methodology: A qualitative research strategy was used for the research. A semi-structured interview method was utilized for data collection.

Results: The research has revealed that volunteers' motives primarily involved gaining experience and obtaining practical skills they could later use in their future careers. The second most important factor turned out to be knowledge-related as the volunteers were motivated by obtaining new information and learning new things. The third position was occupied by the area of life values. The respondents mentioned especially their altruistic and humanistic motives and the related selfless help to others. Apart from the above-stated, the research was also focused on identifying the motives that made the volunteers choose family support as their area of work. According to their responses, a significant motive turned out to be the target group of families with children. Another motive was also the prestige of the corresponding organization and the related positive references obtained by the volunteers from their friends.

Conclusion: Gaining new experience, practical skills related to preparation for a future career and altruism and the related selfless help to others, as well as an open and friendly relationship to the client turned out to be important motives. The research showed that it is an important factor for the respondents what target group they are supposed to work with.

Keywords: family support, motivation, motives, volunteering

Introduction

The subject matter of the present paper is volunteering in regards to family support. The reason for choosing this subject was an effort to bring forward the volunteering phenomenon that is still beyond the interest of the society. With respect to the numerous definitions, we chose a description covering all the substantial characteristics of volunteer work: "A volunteer is a person carrying out a certain activity in good faith, out of inner conviction and without the need to obtain any financial compensation for it" (Slowík, 2011). The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) understands volunteering as follows: "Volunteering is a means of social inclusion and integration. It fosters social coherence, creates bonds of trust and solidarity and thus supports the development of social capital. It is a powerful source of conciliation and reconstruction in segregated societies" (European Volunteer Centre, 2017). The two above-stated definitions are primary for the approach to the topic of volunteering in the present text.

The present paper is focused on volunteering in regards to family support. Family support can be perceived as protection and support of a threatened family, aiming to preserve the family as a whole (Bechyňová & Konvičková, 2008). In practice, family support takes place in the community and is mostly materialized by non-profit organizations within registered social services facilities. Family support is a method of work with the family, taking place in the context of social services. The Social Services Act works with the term “social mobilisation service for families with children”. Social mobilisation services include assistance in the assertion of rights, educative, formative and mobilising activities, mediation of contact with social environment or social and therapeutic activity (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2017). The supportive legislation also includes the Children’s Social and Legal Protection Act. It does not explicitly work with the term “family support” but obligates the personnel of municipalities with extended competence to support families and, in the event that a child is put into an institutional fostering facility, to arrange the family situation so as to enable such child’s return to their family (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2017).

This research is focused on studying the motives of volunteering activity. These motives are the fundamental basis for the volunteers’ decision to invest their time and energy into work for others. Motives can be understood as persisting behavioural factors. They are factors enabling the human to commence certain activity (Homola 1977; Švancara, 1984). The motivation-related reflections raise the question about motivation as a superior concept of motives. Motives are based on motivation and significantly influence the impact of motivation (Švancara, 1984). The various authors differ in their definitions of motivation; in our text we adopt Graumann’s definition: “That thing inside and around us that leads and drives us and makes us behave in a certain way and not in another way” (Graumann in Nakonečný, 1997, p. 102). We have adopted this definition of motivation mainly since it comprises the aspects of internal motives, external motives and behaviours, mentioned for instance by Plháková (2004).

As a fundamental statistical description of the situation, we attach a table (Tab. 1) on the evolution of the number of volunteers in the Czech Republic through non-profit organizations. According to the Study for Governmental Policy Concept, it is impossible to provide a precise number of the persons involved in volunteering in non-profit organizations. Allegedly, the reason is the fact that one person may volunteer in more than one non-profit organization; therefore the data specified in the table are reported as re-calculated (Prouzová, 2015).

Tab. 1 Evolution of the number of volunteers in the Czech Republic in non-profit organizations and the number of their hours worked (Prouzová, 2015)

| Year | Re-calculated number of volunteers in total | Number of hours worked by volunteers in total |
|-------------|--|--|
| 2005 | 36,138 | 62,988,539 |
| 2006 | 28,045 | 48,884,067 |
| 2007 | 47,776 | 83,225,489 |
| 2008 | 27,255 | 47,205,654 |
| 2009 | 27,144 | 47,177,188 |
| 2010 | 25,039 | 44,320,933 |
| 2011 | 25,983 | 45,185,506 |
| 2012 | 25,964 | 44,866,218 |

Objective

The main objective of the present paper is to identify volunteers' motives for their volunteering work in the area of family support. We address mainly those motives that influenced the volunteers' choice to act as volunteer and their reasons to specifically choose the family support program.

Methodology

A qualitative research strategy was used. The objective is to comprehend volunteers' specific motives; therefore a qualitative research strategy appeared to be the most appropriate one. A semi-structured interview technique was selected for the research. All respondents participating in the research are volunteers in the same organization. This non-governmental non-profit organization has been operating since 2003 and for more than 8 years it has offered volunteers the possibility to work in the family support volunteering program. The organization has been selected mainly because it is a typical organization in terms of involving volunteers in the family support program – a volunteer carries out a complementary activity under the supervision of a support worker. To maintain anonymity, the exact name of the organization is not mentioned. Respondents were selected for the survey by purposive sampling. To achieve maximum possible comparability, the following requirement was applied: Respondents have been involved in their volunteering activity on a long-term basis, for at least 1 year. Nine respondents took part in the survey, including both students and working persons and people of retirement age (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 **Characteristics of the respondents**

| Respondent code | Gender | Age | Status | Length of volunteering practice |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|--|
| R1 | female | 23 | student | 3 years |
| R2 | female | 26 | student | 2 years |
| R3 | female | 27 | student | 6 years |
| R4 | female | 42 | working | 2 years |
| R5 | female | 35 | working | 1 year |
| R6 | female | 53 | working | 2 years |
| R7 | female | 68 | retired | 1 year |
| R8 | female | 41 | working | 3 years |
| R9 | male | 25 | student | 1 year |

With respect to the specified main research objective, the respondents were asked: (a) what motives influenced their decision to become volunteers and to carry on their volunteering in the long-term, (b) what motives led them to volunteering work in the area of family support specifically, and (c) what motives for volunteering work they considered unsuitable/undesirable. The obtained data were analysed by applying an open-coding approach. Since the testimonies were numerous, the method of VFI - Volunteer Functions Inventory (Fetzer Institute, 2017) was applied to structure the motives affecting the decision to become a volunteer and to carry on volunteering in the long-term in a more comprehensible manner. The VFI classifies the volunteering functions into various categories. Only the above-mentioned categories will be used in the research as those areas that the volunteers' responses

will be subsequently attributed to. These categories will serve as a structure for a clearer orientation and better structuring of the responses. The VFI includes six areas – protective area, values area, career area, social area, area of knowledge and, finally, personal development area.

Results

The presentation of research results is ordered from the most frequently mentioned to the less frequent motives. All respondents gave multiple motives as the basis for their activity.

According to their testimonies, the career area was the most frequently represented one. This was mostly the case for student volunteers – see, for instance, Respondent R1's statement *"...it was also an expectation of new experience for me, allowing me to gain new practice for my future and allowing me to decide whether I would want to work in this area in the future."* They mentioned motives regarding gaining practical skills and experience they could use later, in their future careers. Respondent R9 reported: *"...I knew that I wanted to work in this field in the future, so it was a chance for me to get closer to my dream job."*

According to the research results, the second most frequently mentioned area was the knowledge area. The research implied that volunteers were motivated by obtaining new knowledge, information, and by learning new things. One of the respondents (R2) stated, for instance, that the practical exercise of volunteering helped her *"better understand the school theory"*.

Another area was the values area; in this context, persons act as volunteers based on their fundamental values and preferences they deliberately wish to follow, such as humanism or altruism. Volunteers mentioned motives related to a vision of an open and friendly relationship with the client, or selfless help. The topic of an open relationship with the client was stressed, for instance, by Respondent R3 who stated that *"relationships in volunteering are always less formal and allow one to get to know the clients from a completely different perspective"*. In terms of its importance, this motivation area ranks third for the respondents. Zášková and Mojžíšová (2011) point out that altruism and empathy are typical for volunteering. In this area, the research also identified motives concerning religious faith and a meaningful way of spending one's free time.

The fourth rank belongs to the area of social relationships. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we can state that the typical indicators for the social area are the need to belong somewhere, the need for recognition by others or the need to succeed. According to Simonov, the term "need" is often linked to the terms "motivation" and "motives" (Simonov in Nakonečný, 1997). According to volunteers' responses, they can be subdivided into internal and external area. The internal area was linked to responses involving the need to belong somewhere and the need for recognition. The external area was linked to responses involving motivation related to influence from one's surroundings, i.e. an impact of friends and acquaintances. According to the VFI, the social area is characterized by strengthening social ties. Motives related to a desire for social integration are illustrated for instance by Respondent R7's statement: *"...I just live on my own now, my children have grown up, I have no husband ... so volunteering means becoming active again and sharing someone's company..."*.

The research also uncovered motives related to personal development. The responses contained motives of positive self-esteem and raising one's own self-respect: *"...I was , to*

a large extent, influenced by the fact that I wanted to help because it gives me satisfaction..." (R2). The respondents placed the area of personal development to the second-to-last position.

The last area that appeared in volunteers' responses was the protective area. One of the respondents mentioned a sense of guilt as the primary motive: *"...we were facing some problems in my family, which affected me, and I wanted to help another family although I wasn't able to help my own very much..."* (R1). In regards to the protective area, the VFI mentions that people use volunteering activity for reducing negative emotions.

The research also focused on identifying motives that made the volunteers choose family support as their area of work. Volunteers' decision-making was affected by the vision of working with a specific target group. Based on the results, the target group of families with children is one of the most attractive ones. Based on the information gained from the respondents, we can further imply that working in the family support program was strongly influenced by the choice of the specific organization. The results show that positive recommendations and references of the organization from friends played a significant role. Respondent R3 stated: *"It was my friend who told me about the organization as she had already worked there for some time."* Volunteers mentioned higher confidence and safety in concerning the information on the organizations they wanted to work for. The respondents appear to value positive feedback from acquaintances, their next of kin or authorities.

Also, volunteers' opinions about inappropriate/undesirable motives for volunteering were surveyed. Respondents defined them mainly as "a desire to self-sacrifice for another person", "excessive curiosity", "a desire to gain power" or "trying to have power over the clients". In the context of inappropriate/undesirable volunteering motives, the respondents also mentioned the problem of insufficient self-identification with the principles of volunteering work.

Discussion

Findings concerning the area of social ties were related to egoistic motivation. Egoistic motivation is a topic studied for instance by Frič and Pospíšilová (2010); according to them, egoistic motives are a natural part of volunteering. These include such motives that serve to satisfy individual needs. Egoistic motives were also present in the personal development area. The research results obviously indicate elements of reflexive approach in volunteering, as well. The reflexive dimension, analysed for instance by Tošner and Sozanská (2006), is characterized especially by the fact that volunteers value the content of their work and who they work with while the egoistic motives of volunteering prevail. Next, volunteers' motivation is the subject matter of a research study by Mlčák and Šamajová (2013) from the Psychology Department of the University of Ostrava. This study addresses, among other topics, the intensity and duration of volunteering activity; the aspect of motivation is also present. Mlčák and Šamajová (2013) use the VFI study for identifying motivation. Mlčák and Šamajová (2013) directly start from the VFI whereas our paper only uses one part of it for a clearer arrangement of the obtained responses. The research was conducted within one organization, as well. If we put their study into the context of our paper, the results will differ for instance in the positions of the various areas. In our survey, career motivation was the strongest represented motivation, contrariwise to Mlčák's and Šamajová's study (2013), where the career area is indicated as the least represented one. The reason for such a difference may depend on the volunteers' age as the average age in the study conducted at the Ostrava University was around 50 years and the respondents were working women. In our paper, the interviewed volunteers were mainly students. The most strongly represented area in

Mlčák's and Šamajová's study was the value area. Motives related to life values rank third in our paper. However, based on the results, concordance was reached for instance in the fact that volunteers value the opinions of their next of kin, either acting as volunteers themselves or sharing positive attitudes to volunteering.

The research sample is small, which complicates its validity. It is therefore necessary to work with the fact that the obtained results correspond to a specific group of respondents.

In the international context, the subject matter of our survey could be viewed from yet another perspective – e.g., through a study conducted by the European Commission that addressed volunteering work in various EU member countries. It mentions “individual choice” and accentuates the topic of individual's “free choice” in the context of motives for volunteering (Frič & Vávra, 2012).

Conclusion

Volunteers' motivation is a key topic in relation to volunteer work. Studying motivation may serve to recruit new persons who are considering engagement in volunteer work and may result in improving the quality of volunteer work as a whole. Most frequently, volunteers tend to have motives related to their career and practical knowledge. Their responses often involved the effect of egoistic motives for volunteer work. In addition, a strong motivation turned out to be the target group and references to a specific organization provided by friends, who had already had volunteering experience.

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

Since one of the authors works as a volunteer, the effect of her own motives could be perceived as a potential risk to the study. This risk can be eliminated and prevented especially by studying expert literature and by respecting the fundamental principles of qualitative research.

Certain issues could have been raised by the actual volunteers and could have been related to their ability to communicate openly. Respondents' open attitude can be supported by creating an atmosphere of maximum security and confidentiality during the interviews. According to Hendl (2016), maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is a substantial prerequisite for qualitative research.

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