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**CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTEERS
IN A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL SETTING:
A QUALITATIVE CASE ANALYSIS**

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of the present research was to describe the characteristics and experiences of all of the volunteers in a psychiatric hospital setting. A second aim was to relate the findings to current theories and evidence on volunteers. A third aim was to explore practical implications of the findings from an organisational perspective.

A qualitative case approach was adopted which used an interview schedule formulated for the present research to address general issues of motivation, expectation, satisfaction, and involvement. Specific questions concerned volunteers' initial expectations, reasons for volunteering, what the volunteers actually do, good and bad experiences, changes in perceptions of volunteering, difficulties and how coped with, perceived need for help, support, and training, extent of involvement, and, reasons and intent to continue. In addition, the 'Perceived Rewards from Volunteering Scale' (Gidron, 1983) was used to provide a quantitative measure of job satisfaction. Information about respondents' gender, age, ethnic background, marital status and dependent children, socioeconomic status, religion, residence, regular commitments, other volunteer work, and time spent as a volunteer was also recorded.

The group consisted of 34 middle to late middle aged women, who were church based, and resident in a small rural community. Analysis of the results were made for the group as a whole but predominantly at the case level, using techniques of pattern matching and explanation building as described by Yin (1984).

The case approach makes difficult a satisfactory summary of the main findings, however, notable results included a sociodemographic profile of the present volunteers not atypical of the general population, that volunteers rated that they were satisfied with their work, similar good and bad experiences by all volunteers, different perceived roles of their work by individual volunteers, and evidence of volunteer participation as a changing phenomenon.

The utility of the present approach supports both the integrative model of Smith & Reddy (1972) and the need for further development of theories within an integrative framework. A number of practical implications were drawn, particularly concerning the need for training and information, monitoring the progress of volunteers, and for general hospital policy in the recruitment and utilisation of volunteers. Suggestions for future research were also made.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The services offered by volunteers have always been a vital human resource. Despite this however, the literature concerning most aspects of volunteer participation has a short history. Recently, more attention has been paid to this literature because of an increased recognition and reliance on volunteers, without whom many social services would be greatly reduced or become unavailable altogether. The importance of this area has prompted an interest in information and policy formulation as evidenced by a growing number of publications, including several commissioned inquiries (eg. Social Advisory Council, 1987). The current literature available however, is characterised by a number of deficiencies: insufficient information particularly with regard to aspects of the volunteer experience; lack of integrated theory and 'rich' data; and, little applied research.

The aim of the present study is to describe the personal characteristics (sociodemographic factors, time spent as a volunteer, other commitments, and relevant experience) and experiences (eg. expectations, reasons for volunteering, what the volunteers actually do, good and bad experiences, changes in their perceptions of volunteering, perceived rewards and overall satisfaction, difficulties faced and how they are coped with, perceived need for help, support, and training, extent of involvement, reasons and intent to continue) of a specific volunteer group within a psychiatric hospital setting. There are two secondary aims. First, to examine the findings of the present research in view of how they fit with the current literature and the theoretical implications this may have. Second, to make explicit any practical considerations, mainly for the present situation of the volunteer group and their future management.

The current state of the literature is that there is generally insufficient information, and this is particularly with regard to the actual experiences of volunteers. Limited reference is made however, to a number of pertinent factors (motivation, expectation, satisfaction) which influence volunteer

participation. A smaller body of literature brings attention to these factors in relation to the volunteer work one does (eg. Dailey, 1986).

Although personal characteristics (especially sociodemographic factors) of volunteers are the most frequently documented area of the research this has focused on the problem of predicting volunteer participation (Smith & Reddy, 1972). Little is known however about the effects of these individual characteristics on the actual experiences of volunteers which would seem to be just as pertinent in terms of recruitment, selection, and identifying needs of volunteer groups.

Thus while research on volunteers has examined the effects of isolated factors or sets of factors on volunteer participation there is insufficient empirical evidence which considers an integrative approach. Smith & Reddy (1972) appear to be the only authors to emphasise an integrative model which considers the combined effects of: (1) personal factors; (2) contextual factors; and (3) the immediate volunteer situation. The present research is therefore noteworthy in that it does take an integrative view, considering interrelationships between volunteers' personal characteristics, their attitudes, feelings, and experiences, and the context of the situation (ie. the psychiatric hospital setting) in which they volunteer.

The lack of integration of all aspects of volunteering is also reflected by the research designs that have been used. Data collection has been focused solely at the group or nomothetic level, with few, if any, studies attempting to examine volunteering using naturalistic research designs and case studies. A strength of the present study is therefore its use of an individual case study approach which enables both common patterns and themes across cases, as well as exceptional examples, to be identified in the present volunteer group (Yin, 1985).

In conjunction with the traditional research approach taken in the literature, studies have concentrated on collecting quantitative data, even though there are difficulties with standardising the definition and measurement of aspects of volunteer participation. There is consequently a lack of rich descriptive data typical of qualitative research. With an emphasis on qualitative information the present descriptive approach captures the richness and

complexity of the subjective data which is the very essence of the overall volunteer experience (Miles & Huberman, 1985). Similar valuable insight would not be possible if the data were essentially quantitative.

A further deficiency in the existing literature is the lack of applied research. A number of recent authors (eg. Social Advisory Council, 1987; Vilkinas, 1986) point out the current necessity to conduct research for practical reasons. Since the majority of available studies neglect to examine the whole range of factors on the overall volunteer experience and to incorporate the organisational context in which they occur, there are consequently limitations on what practical implications can be drawn. For example, there are no complete case studies of particular types of volunteer groups or organisations (eg. hospital volunteers) that could enable specific practical recommendations regarding issues such as recruitment, job scope, training requirements, and general hospital policy. A further advantage of the present research therefore is the ability to make practical recommendations which can be directly and specifically applied to the situation of the volunteers at the present psychiatric hospital.

The introduction for the present thesis comprises this and the proceeding three chapters. Chapter 2 presents a definitional and contextual framework for the concept of volunteer. Chapters 3 and 4 review the two areas of research for which an integrative approach is taken in the present study. Thus Chapter 3 reviews the literature concerning personal characteristics of volunteers and Chapter 4 examines the literature on aspects of the volunteer experience including the volunteer-organisation relationship. Chapter 5 sets the present study in the context of current research in the volunteer area and outlines the specific aims of the present study. The method, including a background description of the present volunteer group sample, the research design, and analytical procedure are presented in Chapter 6. Chapters 7 and 8 present the results and discussion of group data and case data respectively. A concluding summary of the findings and discussion of the implications of the present research, including suggestions for future studies, is given in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 2

THE VOLUNTEER CONCEPT

The aim of this chapter is to present a conceptual framework for the present study. This will be done by reviewing the literature in defining the central concept of volunteer and the broader notion of voluntary action, and with regard to a changing social and historical context.

Defining what is a volunteer.

A number of definitions of 'volunteer' have been proposed in the literature, all of which are characterised by one essential component: non remuneration. The most concise and widely accepted definition is found in the comprehensive review of Smith, Reddy & Baldwin (1972). On designating an individual as a volunteer, he or she is defined "broadly as a person engaging in voluntary action with little or no direct economic benefit being received as a result of this activity" (p.172).

Apart from the recognition of non-remuneration other definitions in the literature vary in terms of specificity. Some, such as Ellis & Noyes (1978), include components not universally accepted as essential to the concept of volunteer (eg. social responsibility, altruism), while others differentiate subcategories of volunteers (eg. Skeet & Crout (1977) classify 'visitors', 'prepared volunteers', and, 'trained volunteers'). The latter type of definition seems particularly relevant to undertaking research. Obviously with the diversity of roles or tasks a volunteer may engage in it is necessary to make at least some divisions which will enable systematic study, and more direct application of research findings.

Expanding on the definition of Smith et al. (1972), the Working Party on the discussion paper Working with Volunteers in Government Departments (Social Advisory Council, 1987) in New Zealand, offer a definition which is of immediate concern to the present study. This definition states that a volunteer is "a person who by choice provides a community or social service. Volunteers may receive expenses directly related to the service they provide

but do not receive remuneration. The volunteer usually provides his or her services through an identifiable scheme rather than through family or neighbourly arrangements" (p.2).

It is noteworthy that the Social Advisory Council (1987) divide their definition into two forms of volunteering - those providing a 'community service' (activities which are of value to the wider community and which are outside the personal support area) and those providing a 'social service' (which refers to personal caring areas of work that have a direct impact on the individual or family unit). The provision of a 'community service' is usually "based on the concept of mutuality in which the volunteer and the department provide a service of mutual value" (p.5). Here the volunteer is the recipient or a member of the recipient group as well as the provider of the service (eg. Search and Rescue). In contrast, the provision of a 'social service' is usually "based on the concept of altruism in which the volunteer is used by a department to provide a service to others" (p.5). In this case the individual may be part of a client group but this is not the key to involvement, rather the essential aspect is that of benefitting others (eg. hospital visiting). On this criterion the volunteers in the present research can therefore be differentiated as those providing a social service in that they befriend long term mentally ill patients who have no other family or social support networks. The nature of their task inevitably has different implications for involvement than those providing a community service.

The Social Advisory Council (1987) also identify four sub-categories of volunteers relevant to working within government departments. These are 'direct' volunteers who carry out department-defined and controlled tasks; 'indirect' volunteers who work within a voluntary agency assisting a government department to carry out its responsibilities; 'statutory' volunteers who carry out administrative tasks for government departments, and; 'independent' volunteers who carry out community-defined tasks for a voluntary agency which may relate to a departmental service such as health, welfare, or education. Accordingly, the services provided by the individuals in the present research places them in the category of 'independent' volunteers.

Aside from more detailed formal definitions used to discriminate the wide range of volunteer personnel it is surprising to find that very little attention has been paid to operational definitions in the literature. Few authors actually report specifically the tasks that the volunteers actually do, in their studies, whether the sample is drawn from a single organisation, or perhaps more importantly, when comparing samples from different organisations. It is noteworthy however, that even before the bulk of research on volunteering, the Aves Committee (Aves, 1969) stressed the importance for the participants in their study to produce specific definitions of their volunteer task. In support of this it would be thought that the value of the volunteers' own description of their work needs to be recognised in relation to their overall experience. For example, how much congruence is there between individual volunteers' and 'employing' organisations definitions, and how does this affect perceptions of what is required of the volunteers? On this basis, specific accounts of the actual tasks fulfilled by volunteers will be obtained by the present research.

The Concept of Voluntary Action.

The definition of 'volunteer' given by Smith et al. (1972) views the individual engaging in 'voluntary action' for which no remuneration is received. Voluntary action then, is the general concept which subsumes all research on volunteers and from which theoretical perspectives are emergent. A lack of consensus in defining the boundaries of 'voluntary action' coupled with the use of multifarious terminology contributed by more than one discipline however, reflects the state of the current literature in the area. At present no unified theory (or theories) exist which explain the processes, functioning, and impacts of the various forms of voluntary action.

The generally uncritical acceptance of a number of definitions in the literature (Bode, 1972), and thereby a diversity of groups or organisations meeting these definitions (Warner, 1972) has resulted in numerous studies being cited which illustrate the poorly standardised nature of voluntary action research (Amis & Stern, 1974). Inevitably, for the sake of future research it does seem necessary that a conventional definition, or set of definitions, will have to be accepted, particularly in order to standardise measurement techniques in the area.

For the purposes of the present study, the definition of voluntary action given by Smith et al. (1972) was adopted for two reasons: it is certainly the most comprehensive, and it is frequently used in more recent publications (eg. Brenton, 1985; Mellor, 1985; Smith, 1986; Vilkinas, 1986). The definition has a motivational basis and in summary states that voluntary action is defined as including "all behaviour (whether individual or collective) that is primarily a product of commitment to values other than sheer, direct economic benefit, self-preservation, physical force, physiological need, and psychic or social compulsion. Voluntary action may involve helping others, helping oneself, or both. In any event voluntary action tends to include all of those activities which most serve to give meaning and satisfaction to life from the standpoint of the individual" (Smith et al., 1972, pp.171-172).

Pertinent to this broad definition are three considerations. Firstly, that Smith et al. (1972) identify four major heuristic categories of motivational behaviour in man: bio-social; socio-political; economic; and that which is "essentially motivated by the desire for other kinds of psychic benefits of one kind or another" (Smith et al., 1972). Of these four, only the last refers to man as a 'voluntary being'. Smith et al. (1972) identify the relationship between this view and Maslow's (1954) classification of motivation in terms of the hierarchy of needs, arguing that the more basic needs in the hierarchy have to be satisfied before the individual is motivated by higher level needs. Voluntary action is seen as relating to the higher level needs - cognitions and self-actualisation.

A second consideration regarding Smith et al.'s (1972) definition is that voluntary action exists as a matter of degree. The authors contend that although actual behaviour of real individuals has a complex motivational pattern which varies greatly over time and across situational contexts this does not diminish the necessity for having a reasonably clear and operationalisable definition of voluntary action as an ideal type. Essentially though, voluntary action is viewed on a continuum. In this sense the volunteer, in terms of being non-remunerated, is conceptualised as a polar-ideal or as engaging in the 'purest' form of voluntary action.

Thirdly, Smith et al. (1972) acknowledge both individual and group components in their definition which is no doubt a reflection of a contribution from both psychological and sociological spheres. Unlike many other definitions in the literature the emphasis on the individual is foremost for Smith et al. (1972) who impress that "the nature of the term 'voluntary' makes sense directly and concretely only when referring to the behaviour of individuals" (p.173). In conjunction with this however, Smith et al. (1972) see the most important forms of voluntary action as collective. Further, these authors identify and define various levels of voluntary action (voluntary acts, voluntary roles, voluntary groups, voluntary organisations (formal and informal), voluntary community, voluntary sector, and voluntary society) primarily in terms of "the relative amount of activity engaged in by their members" (Smith et al., 1972; p.173).

All three of these considerations endorse the preference of the Smith et al. (1972) definition for the present study: (1) that motivation to volunteer can stem from a number of higher level needs, (2) that volunteering is differentiated from voluntary action (which is clearly not the case in other definitions) and, (3) that individual level analysis is necessary toward understanding whole group processes. When compared and contrasted with other definitions the issue is generally one of emphasis. For example, other authors define voluntary action only at a social systems level (Landsberger, 1972) and including an organised system for change (Theodore, 1972), or emphasise altruistic (Baker & Northman, 1981; Warriner, 1972) and leisure components (Bosserman & Gagan, 1972; Henderson, 1984).

For Smith et al. (1972) a social systems approach is not feasible without first examining motivations and benefits for the individual. In line with the bulk of current literature Smith et al. (1972) tend to see altruistic behaviour not as a crucial defining element but a variable of considerable interest once voluntary action has been defined. As for the emphasis on leisure, Smith et al. (1972) accept that voluntary action overlaps with a concept of leisure but cannot accept that there is a direct correspondence to all forms of voluntary action. Nevertheless, because Smith et al. (1972) do acknowledge the contribution of all of these variables then this causes their definition probably the most universally accepted.

From a critical viewpoint the major strengths of the Smith et al. (1972) definition can also be perceived as its major weaknesses. Through the ability to accommodate, to differing degrees, almost all of the components thought possible as pertaining to voluntary action by other definitions, it is inevitable that Smith et al.'s (1972) definition would be the most universally accepted. One could argue then, that Smith et al. (1972) do nothing but conglomerate existing definitional literature, which in a sense is true. However, it is also to be regarded as an important step toward developing any cohesive theory. Moreover, the generality of Smith et al.'s (1972) definition is also complemented by their specificity in differentiating different levels (eg. individual, group, organisation) and forms (ie. 'volunteer' as the purest form) of voluntary action.

A different definitional approach to voluntary action is found in a number of typologies including those reviewed by Bode (1972), Brenton (1985), Johnson (1981), Mellor (1985), Smith (1972a), and Warner (1972). Suggested characteristics or dimensions include, for example: sociability; productivity; formality; relationship of the association to individual interests; nature of the link to community or societal structure; closeness of the association to an institution; inducement to participate; coercive power; time span and activity commitment; social change; and, goals and aims (Amis & Stern, 1974; Bode, 1972; Smith et al., 1972; Warner, 1972). It is important however, to note that the majority of these typologies more specifically refer to voluntary action at an organisational level. Many of the dimensions are continua in terms of which voluntary organisations vary and therefore differentiates them into sub-types, while others qualify as defining characteristics, which differentiate voluntary organisations from other kinds of organisations.

The relative strength of the Smith et al. (1972) typology however, which is in line with these authors' earlier definition, is that it ventures to identify a limited number of dimensions from which voluntary action can be described or analysed at any, or across all, levels. Subsequently, six dimensions are identified ((1) control-separateness, (2) motivation-compliance, (3) social structuring, (4) time and activity dimensions, (5) goals and aims, and (6) economic inputs and outputs) which are further broken down into twenty one sub-dimensions. The importance of these dimensions is that they indicate a

number of important similarities and differences that stand out most among types of volunteer activity at the various levels of voluntary action. The present research is concerned with these dimensions on individual and social group volunteer levels. At this level the six dimensions translate loosely into:

- (1) aspects of the volunteer setting (eg. nature of the task, effects of the social and physical environment);
- (2) nature of motivation and impact on volunteer involvement;
- (3) social structuring, ie. degree of normative structure, (informal, formal, organised) and degree of sociability, (physical presence of other individuals);
- (4) time and activity dimensions (length of commitment, frequency of the volunteer activity, and intensity (demands of the volunteer situation));
- (5) goals and aims of the volunteer activity (eg. individual, group and institutional goals, and the degree to which goals focus on objective task accomplishment versus satisfaction, enjoyment, self expression, and interpersonal relations); and,
- (6) economic inputs and outputs (ie. in terms of individual volunteers), all of which provide a useful background frame-work for the present research questions.

The Volunteer within a Changing Social and Historical Context.

Apart from defining 'volunteer' and understanding the general framework of 'voluntary action' research, it is important to realise that the whole conceptual area is not a static one. Indeed, this is emphasised by the bulk of the literature in this area which suggests that the profile of the volunteer in society has certainly changed and is currently changing (Baker & Northman, 1981; Bode, 1972; Brenton, 1985; Jenner, 1982; Langton, 1981; Manser & Higgins-Cass, 1976; Mellor, 1985; Schindler-Rainman, 1982). Moreover, the fact that volunteering is in an interesting transitional state at this point in time brings about the need to be aware of the contributing contextual factors and the possible implications for current research.

Firstly, some authors (eg. Baker & Northman, 1981) emphasise changes in population and demographic characteristics which have implications both in

terms of the people who are available to volunteer and the types of problems they may be attempting to ameliorate in the future. The Report of the Wolfenden Committee (Wolfenden, 1978) makes reference to the rising proportion of the population in the older age bracket and the changing pattern of relationships between family, friends and neighbours, and the impending implications these have for the voluntary social services. Several authors give the example that the contemporary emphasis on self, coupled with the variety of social forces encouraging women to seek employment has generated the concern that upper middle-class women, who have long been a mainstay of the volunteer workforce will be increasingly less available (Edwards, Edwards & Watts, 1984; Jenner, 1982; Rubin, 1982). The Wolfenden Committee (Wolfenden, 1978) suggest that the availability of more young unemployed people for volunteer work is also an important consideration. They also make the point that although the growing number of organisations is strong evidence of increasing voluntary activity, it is less clear whether the actual number of people involved has been rising. In addition to the obvious changes in the demographic area, Baker & Northman (1981) list economic changes, technological innovations, and educational changes as major components responsible for new directions in the voluntary sector. These however, are beyond the scope of the present review.

The other fundamental area of change has been the specific developments made within the voluntary sector, including its role and its general relationship to other social sectors in meeting the demands of society. While some of the more traditional ideas, such as a means of fostering pluralism, providing vehicles for altruism, maintaining order and stability, encouraging opportunities for individual fulfillment and serving social and fellowship needs, are retained by the so-called 'new voluntarism' while others, such as a philanthropic ideal, the nature of giving and helping, and the domination by professionals of voluntary organisations as managers and professional helpers, are being questioned (Langton, 1981).

Subsequently as a result of 'new voluntarism' a number of changes have been identified. The most obvious of these seems to be increased autonomy, with volunteers' taking increased responsibility in decision-making processes and in the setting and implementing their own goals and policies (Baker &

Northman, 1981; Langton, 1981; Mellor, 1985; Parkum, 1984; Wolfenden, 1978). Such changes are essentially a response to the increased reliance (economic or otherwise) on volunteers to provide much needed social services in a situation where governmental agencies are taking on a more supportive role. Baker & Northman (1981) summarise these changing values simply in terms of increased social emphasis on deinstitutionalisation, citizen participation, and the blurring of professional roles, while Mellor (1985) considers the volunteers' contribution more in terms of extending the scope of existing provision, improving standards of statutory provision, and offering services where nothing is available through the state. Whatever the case, it is important to see that the scope of the voluntary sector is widening.

Contingent on the volatile state of this whole voluntary action area then, arise practical implications which need to be considered by research. Schindler-Rainman (1982) identifies two fundamental areas: recruitment of volunteers, and how and where certain volunteers may serve within a group or organisation (assuming the wider range of roles for volunteers including direct help, decision making, community liaison and monitoring).

As a consequence of changing population and demographic trends there is a need to continually monitor sociodemographic factors in relation to volunteering. In particular, one needs to be concerned with what types of people volunteer and the role sociodemographic factors play in the volunteer experience. In response to this need the distribution of sociodemographic factors within the present volunteer group is a central focus of this study.

Further as a result of social change affecting the voluntary sector it is necessary to be aware of possible consequences for existing groups. For instance, in the present research there may be implications for the most effective ways of utilising volunteer effort when considering the current emphasis on deinstitutionalisation and the transfer of patients out into the community. A clear indication of the role of the present volunteers (eg. including their expectations and extent of involvement) as sought by the present research questions, therefore, is a necessary step in considering these issues.

Furthermore, in terms of the present research, the volunteers, in befriending a patient within the constraints of a psychiatric hospital setting have been fulfilling a traditional volunteer role which is very much defined by the institution they visit. With the current emphasis on deinstitutionalisation and the transfer of patients out into the community however, there are implications for change, particularly towards the most effective ways of utilizing volunteer effort.

Summary.

Voluntary action is a theoretical term which embraces a range of roles and activities and is currently represented by a number of typologies. As a sub-category, the activities of volunteers are considered to be the polar ideal or the purest form of voluntary action in that they receive no remuneration for their work. The present research examines a group of volunteers who by definition, offer their services in the capacity of friendship to chronically mentally ill patients at a psychiatric hospital.