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seminar sub-theme: Strategies to deliver quality education

The study of spiritual health of aged volunteers in Taiwan

Purpose: Spirituality plays a vital role in determining the state of well-being of the elderly. The purpose of this study was to explore the spiritual health of aged volunteers in Taiwan. **Methods:** Twelve aged volunteers were interviewed. They are 6 male and 6 female, age range 60 to 85 years. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. **Results:** The results of this study was that from social services, the aged volunteers learned to open their mind and no so attached. Through helping others, they interconnected to foster their spiritual health. From helping others, they felt that they are so lucky, and become more grateful, joyful, peaceful. In their later life, they found their meaning in life. Religion play important role for aged volunteers, through religion belief, they became more aggressive doing social services. **Conclusions:** The aged volunteers did social services by supported family members. From volunteer services, they enhanced spiritual health and live more meaningful and grateful.

Key words: aged volunteer, life style, spiritual health, meaning in life

1. Introduction

The coming of aged society has influenced overall social development and individual quality of life. With medical and technological progress, people's life expectancy increases year by year. According to statistics of the Ministry of the Interior (2009), in 2009, life expectancy at birth in Taiwan is 78.97 years old. Average of males is 75.97 years old and average of females is 82.46 years old. If the elderly retire at 65 years old, they will still have at least 10~15 years to live. Thus, it is important to plan the aged life and enhance overall physical and spiritual health.

1. 1 Study of the elderly spiritual health from Holistic Development

Successful aging is a person's goal in the last stage of life. Besides encountering degeneracy of physical and intellectual functions, internal integration and harmony, spiritual self-transcendence are more important issues for the seniors (Aldwin & Gilmer, 2004; Birkenmaier, Behrman & Weber, 2005; Chiang, 2000; Cheng, 1998; Kang, Chiu (trans.), 2001; Liu, 1996, 1999, 2001; Moberg, 2001; Moremen, 2005; O'Brien, 1999; Piedmont, 1999; Robbins, 1997; Robinson, Kendrick & Brown, 2003; Ross, 1994; Sherron & Lumsden, 1990; Wanpen, 2001; Young, 1993). According to development context of times, in the past, people tended to emphasize physical dimension when defining health. However, with progress of science and medicine, people's average life increases and the vision on health is extended. Regarding health, people no longer passively avoid the diseases; instead, they pursue the happiness of physical, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual health. From holistic perspective, a person is the whole which cannot be separated. The above five dimensions influence each other and result in health of holistic and balanced development (Chandler, Holdern, & Kolander, 1992; Eliopoulos, 2004; Huang, 2007; Hsiao, 2002; McGee, 1998; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Phyllis, 1998; Purdy & Dupey, 2005; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

Spiritual health is the important academic issue in recent years. By reviewing literatures on religion and spirituality in 1988-2001 from PsychInfo, Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) found nearly 2000 reports and the application included clinical, consulting, healthy, psychological, physical and interpersonal fields. It demonstrates that spiritual issues are gradually valued. There are three reasons regarding importance of spiritual health: first, from holistic perspective, a person's "health" is developed upon multiple dimensions, including physical, psychological, social and spiritual balance. Second, spiritual health is treated as the main force to integrate other dimensions and it can connect other healthy dimensions or become the essential resource. It will result in behaviors and motivations to allow a person to acquire meaningful life (Banks, 1980; Fehring, Miller & Shaw, 1997; Golberg, 1998; Seaward, 2001; Walsch, 1999; Young, 1993). Third, spiritual health not only concerns about an individual's internal resources, meaning and integration, but also places an individual in a higher level of existential world. It emphasizes the harmony and combination among "heaven, human, object and self". Spiritual health can be the core of life to coordinate a person's physical, psychological and social health (Chang, Wang, Chen, 2005; Chao, 2007; Chen, 2004; Fu, 2003; Li, 2005, 2006; Lin, 2004; Wu, Huang, 2001).

Based on the above, spirituality integrates critical factors of individuals' other dimensions, such as physical, psychological, emotional and social aspects. In addition, the scholars (Erikson, 1963; Moberg, 2001; Moody, 1976; Neugarten, 1968; Wanpen, 2001) emphasize that when people get older, they will have less social activities and declining physical functions. Thus, they would explore inner self and spend more time probing into life meaning, existence and death. More and more literatures on psychogerontology start valuing existential factors. For instance, they explore influences of religion, spiritual and life meaning on a person's happiness and health (Emmons, 1999; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Fry, 2000; Liu, 1999; Moberg, 2001; Robbins, 1997; Yalom, 1980).

As mentioned above, spiritual and health are closely related. Spirituality is the main force of individual inner meaning, external connection and upward transcendence. Studies of spirituality become more important. Besides the term "spiritual health", some scholars also use "spiritual well-being". Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stollenwerk (1996) conducted spiritual well-being study on the seniors aged from 65 to 85 and defined spiritual well-being below: it is the harmony among self, others and ultimate subjects beyond time and space. It is the dynamic process of growth which allowed a person to realize ultimate goals and meaningful life. Spiritual well-being was a kind of ability to search for meaning and purposes in past and future life events.

According to research of Banks (1980), and Banks, Poehler and Russell (1984) on spiritual health, Howden (1992) conducted questionnaire survey on 189 participants aged from 40 to 60, and found a significant and positive correlation between spiritual health and participants' crisis experienced in the past year. Spiritual health developed by Howden included four dimensions, (1) purpose and meaning of life; (2) internal adaption ability; (3) unification of all things on earth; (4) transcendence. Fisher et al. (2000) divided spiritual health into four dimensions of well-being: (1) individuals and self; (2) individuals and communities; (3) individuals and environment; (4) individuals and transcendence. Based on definitions of Hungelmann et al. (1996), and Fisher, Francis, and Johnson (2000), this study defines spiritual health below: it is the harmony among self, others and transcendental ultimate subjects. People will realize ultimate goals and meaningful life. Internal dimensions include self-exploration and integration of life meaning. External dimensions include interpersonal interaction, connection with environment and connection with transcendental power.

Based on the above, dimensions of spiritual health can be divided into four aspects: individuals and self, individuals and communities, individuals and environment, individuals and transcendence (Hung, 2009), as shown below:

1. Individuals and self: It includes understanding, accepting and appreciating self and exploring life meaning and value of self-existence.
2. Individuals and communities: it means to value construction of interpersonal relationship and exchange with different communities.
3. Individuals and environment: it means to value the concept to live with the environment harmoniously.
4. Individuals and transcendence: it values transcendental power, religion and transcendental

growth.

1. 2 The purpose of this study

With physical and psychological change, role shift, retirement from workplace, return to family and community, aged people's life style will also change. Many studies have demonstrated that most of aged people focus on their families (Chung, Huang, 1986; Chung, 1987; Hsu, 2003; Kuo, 2004). After retirement, more and more aged people participate in volunteer service, and they affirm their life value and meaning by helping others. Some studies on pro-social behavior (Chen, 2006; Liu, 2006) and aged people's volunteer service (Huang, 2009; Huang, 2003; Hung, 2009; Lai, 2008; Tsai, 2002; Tsai, 2006; Liao, 2003; Yang, 2007) demonstrate that serving others will enhance personal life meaning, spiritual health and well-being.

As mentioned above, because of retreating from workplace, aged people return to self and families. They spend more time with family members and explore internal life world. Some aged people start joining in volunteer service. In the process, they enhance themselves, learn to grow, expand life and life level and enhance internal spirituality and values. Therefore, this study aims to probe into aged volunteers' spiritual health and indicates related suggestions.

2. Research Method

This study was based on qualitative method, and interviewed 12 aged people above 60 years old (average age of 72 years old). The factors of heterogeneity included the subjects' age, religion and working field. The subjects were recruited by snowball sampling from 7 recommendation units, including three elderly learning groups, two religious groups, and two community universities. The interview was conducted upon the consents of the subjects.

2.1 Research subjects

Educational levels of the subjects are shown below: 3 have elementary school education, 2 have junior high school education, 2 have senior high school education, 2 have college education, 2 have graduate school education, and 1 is home-schooled. Regarding the religion, most of them (7) are Buddhists, 2 have no religion (folklore religion), 1 is Christian, 1 is Catholic, and 1 is Tenrikyo. As to ethnicity distribution, 9 are Fukien, 2 are Han, and 1 is Hakka. Regarding occupation before the retirement, 4 subjects are school teachers, 2 subjects are in mass media industry, 2 are businesspersons, 1 is in finance industry, 1 is soldier, 1 is housewife, and 1 is painter, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Research subjects

Codes	Gender	Occupation before retirement	Age	Educational level	Religion	Major voluntary attributes	Ethnicity
A	F	Housewife	60	Elementary school	Buddhism	Orphanage and school	Fukien

B	F	Independent shop	63	Elementary school	Buddhism	Cooking team and donation	Fukien
C	F	Junior high school teacher	65	University	Buddhism	Da-Ai mother	Fukien
D	F	Mass media industry	66	Senior high school	Buddhism	Da-Ai mother	Fukien
E	M	Senior high school teacher	66	Master	None	Calligraphy association	Hakka
F	M	Finance industry	69	Vocational school	Buddhism	Organic agriculture	Fukien
G	M	Mass media industry	70	Master	Buddhism	Buddhism industry	Han
H	M	Business	76	University	Christian	church , school	Fukien
J	M	Soldier	81	Old-style private school in China	Buddhism	Buddhism industry	Fukien
K	M	Elementary school teacher	82	Junior high school	None	Volunteer lecturer	Fukien
L	F	Painter	84	Elementary school	Tenrikyo	church	Fukien
M	F	Elementary school teacher	85	Junior high school	Catholic	Volunteer lecturer	Fukien

Content of the interview included aged people’s background of growth and physical & spiritual development. It is based on semi-structural design which allows the subjects to narrate their life stories from specific events to abstract psychological depiction. Each interview was recorded, and then transcribed for repetitive reading and recording. Text analysis was based on spiral cycle with cross thoughts and journals, and was connected with research purposes and theories.

2.2 Data analysis

Manuscript reading and analysis included different stages. In the first round, the researcher carefully read all texts of the interview and wrote down the learning and questions. In the second round, key words and sentences were selected and key concepts (e.g., “life meaning”, “volunteer service”, “interpersonal interaction”, “cherishing the well-being after encountering the pain”, “religion” and “life style”) were recorded in the margin on the right column. In the third round, 12 manuscripts were read repetitively and crossly in order to recognize the similarity and difference. In the fourth round, the researcher constructed common context of 12 texts to result in common imagery and concept in order to enhance interpretation of key sentences and meet research purposes and theoretical views. According to interview topics, the researcher reorganized, classified, organized and recognized the connection and primary classification framework (e.g., four fields of spiritual health: “individuals”, “community”, “environment” and “transcendence”). Subsequently, subjects’ common points were developed, and the researcher repetitively reviewed, reorganized and classified data until the extracted concepts could precisely answer the research questions.

3. Research Results and Analysis

In this study, most aged volunteers are enthusiastic about lifelong learning and volunteer service, and they obtain physical and spiritual peacefulness from religion. The subjects' development of spiritual health are shown below.

3.1 Aged volunteers' spiritual health

Regarding spiritual health, the researcher reorganizes four dimensions in literatures: (1) individuals and self, (2) individuals and communities, (3) individuals and environment, (4) individuals and transcendence as keys of analysis.

(1) Analysis of aged volunteers' spiritual health: individuals and self

1. Physical and spiritual harmony; more actions and works, much healthier

J believes in Buddhism. At 69 years old, he followed Master Sheng Yen and had been sweeping the floor on Dharma Drum Mountain for more than a decade. His mind became clearer. It demonstrated "sweeping the floor, sweeping the mind". J serves as a volunteer at Tzu Chi Foundation and Dharma Drum Mountain every morning. He became healthier in old age. He often donates to charity groups. He said that he only spends one hundred a day and donate the rest of the money. He is not greedy for money. J is healthy and he has even travelled around Taiwan by motorcycle for 13 days. He has been chanting scriptures for over a decade and he thought that chanting scriptures and za-zen significantly enhanced physical and spiritual states. He does not suffer from many diseases and he has good teeth. Without Alzheimer's disease, he has regular life and no worries.

I swept on Dharma Drum Mountain. They were surprised that an old man like me swept the floor every day. At the foundation of Dharma Drum Mountain in Taichung, Master Guo Hua had five floors. I swept, cleaned the floor and washed the toilet of these five floors. The guard told me Master was there. I came to see him and Master asked me to come frequently. I said, yes. Then I sweep the floor and window every day and I also sweep my mind. (J-48-839)

2. Return to nothing and enhance personal spiritual level

After retirement at 50 years old, G burned all his certificates of degrees. Money, fame and certificates of degrees are something he cannot possess forever. He expects to return to nothing and be a spiritual volunteer. He is the volunteer in Buddhist group, Council of labor affairs and schools. Sometimes he is the advisor for students' theses. He treats the students to meals and drink. Being a volunteer is a simple thing and he only intends to share happiness with everyone. As he said, "success means moving forward and happiness means moving backward". It is the most joyful to release oneself.

On the day of my retirement, I burned all my certificates of degrees. I told myself that I had to return to nothing and be the student again. I should be a spiritual volunteer. I work voluntarily in Council of Labor Affairs. We can have our own happiness. Success means

moving forward and happiness means moving backward. We should move forward to be successful and move backward to be happy. I feel anxious to look at it closer and I can see more when being backward. It is good to be retreated and relaxed! (G-33-480)

3. Recognize well-being after encountering the pain; be more contented

Under the parents' influence since childhood, H enjoys helping others. He has the honorary and unpaid positions in many non-profit institutions. He founded university for the seniors over ten years ago and focused on aged people's needs. He expected the seniors to be health and happy. It was difficult to run the school. Besides the students' tuitions, he should raise the funds from external world. However, H still enjoys it and is supported by many friends. He says that one should not promote his good deeds. He is satisfied as long as aged people are healthy.

The aged people are healthy. We have contributed a lot. We spent money and efforts quietly. We arranged many affairs. Direct Chen was the leader. Were the aged people safe, happy and healthy? Did they receive proper care? Thus, I have deficits and find solutions every year. However, since I have made many friends, I was supported by external world spiritually or financially. I have been contributing a lot in this school. (H-7-86)

By serving others, I recognize others' difficulties and my own well-being. C said that when she served in hospitals, she could realize the patients' pain. She learned people's difficulties when visiting gratitude (low-income) families. We contribute ourselves without asking for the return. Volunteers should pay our own transportation and accommodation fees. However, we help ourselves by helping others. We purify our body and soul and cherish our own happiness.

The master said that we called the low-income families gratitude ones since we should have gratitude for them. We thus the opportunity to help them and realize their difficulties and know our situations.... (C-22-183)

Helping others actually means to help ourselves. When working as volunteers in hospitals, I wondered "why did Master ask us to be volunteers in hospitals?" We are neither doctors nor nurses. We cannot do anything. Master said, "You should realize well-being by seeing the difficulties." We should have gratitude for others when seeing their pain. Why? They warn us by their difficulties and thus we should be grateful. (C-22-179)

(2) Analysis of aged volunteers' spiritual health: individuals and communities

1. Admire others; being good to others

C promotes instructional activities of Still Thought in educational association of one Buddhist group. Her descriptions demonstrate spirit of Tzu Chi in her life. She says Still Reflection and honor words of Dharma Master Cheng Yen and practices them. It shows her concept of "saying what I do and doing what I say". C reduces past learning activities and is devoted to Tzu Chi. Besides giving up her favorite recreational activities, she significantly changes her states. For instance, she gets along with her husband, she no longer has luxurious life and she says good words and does good

things to others. She often encourages herself by honor words of Dharma Master Cheng Yen and practices the words in daily lives, such as “anger is the temporary craziness”, “anger means to punish ourselves by others’ mistakes”, “admiring others means to glorify ourselves”. She then becomes happier spiritually in life.

We admire others and they will be happy. People love to hear good words. It means to say good words and do good to them. (C-11-70) Now my anger will not last more than two days. Sometimes I have fight with others in the morning and I will be calm in the afternoon instead of being persistent as before (C-11-68) The state is changed and I will not do the same thing. (C-11-68)

2. Being flexible and thinking for others

Before the retirement, F worked in the bank. It was stressful and the colleagues concerned about promotion and merits. He said that interaction was competitive in the bank. However, in volunteer service, people’s interaction becomes simple. “Thinking for others” is the most important learning. It is the best training place to learn to avoid persistence. Broad devotion to others will be enhanced.

Interaction in the bank was competitive. We all thought about merits, performance and promotion. It is not the case here (volunteer service). We learn to interact with others and “think for others” as well as considering others’ feelings. Will others accept my action? I hardly thought about this in the past. (F-12-224)...I was persistent with what I considered correct and I would not care about others’ feelings.. after being a volunteer, I learn to interact with others, not be persistent and cooperate with others. (F-12-226)

3. Being welcomed and respectable everywhere

H suggests that because of religion and family, he has the habit to help others. He is more just in doing things. He and his wife are welcomed in church activities. Once H’s wife went abroad and H ate for free next door. H couldn’t help but accept it. Since he makes many good friends, he can run the school every year by fund raising. He said that he could recognize the returns by helping others. If we want to have others’ good deeds, we should be good to others.

Since I made many friends, I was supported by external world spiritually or financially. (H-7-86)...people in church are grateful for us. Besides, our neighbors are good to use. When my wife went to U.S., I sometimes ate next door when I was hungry. They treated me for free. (H-33-594)

H says that he is welcomed everywhere. Since he does good things to others, is thoughtful and devotes himself without asking for returns. Thus, we can have real happiness after devotion. Running the school was difficult and H’s wife also considered fund-raising embarrassing. However, H thought that it was the opportunity to allow others to have good deeds. Thus, he would raise funds from friends since it was worthy to contribute to society instead of daily enjoyment.

I am popular everywhere and why? Everyone is good to me. Why?...I am experienced,...and I always help and praise others. (H-29-517) I am thoughtful and devoted. Devotion is gain. We do not devote ourselves for returns. I gain others' job and appreciation after helping them. We then also feel happy. Thus, devotion should become a kind of habit. (H-10-124)

4. Not good at complicated interpersonal network; simply enjoy happiness to be volunteer

In volunteer service, although aged volunteers expand their interpersonal network, some of them do not enjoy complicated interpersonal interaction. Thus, they retreat from volunteer groups or only join in some activities. A and B try to avoid complicated interpersonal relationship and they prefer simple network. They do not like gossiping or pursuit of fame and fortune in society. They simply do social services, such as distributing materials and cooking. They thus become more grateful and contented.

At the year-end party, I went cooking and I was really happy! I do not enjoy doing things of favor. (B-17-229)...interpersonal relationship should be simple! (B-18-247)

I return home after doing what I should do. I am not talkative. (A-22-607)

The conclusions above are similar to researcher of Lai (2008). Aged people participate in volunteer service in order to “serve others and enhance themselves”. They satisfy their internal needs by altruistic service and recognize that “volunteers are happier”. By joining in volunteer service, aged volunteers expand their life horizons and interpersonal network. Because of devotion, they learn to cherish fortune and become grateful and content.

(3) Analysis of aged volunteers' spiritual health: individuals and environment

1. Involve in nature; feel spiritual beauty

The subjects do not mention a lot regarding individuals and environment. The reason can be in that most of them do not join in environmental volunteer activities. As to environmental harmony, subjects mostly share their learning in outdoor and recreational activities, such as how to get along with nature and learn to accept nature. E says that we cannot compete with nature and we should involve in nature to recognize natural love and spiritual beauty.

We are born in the world to be in concordance with nature. (E-35-111064)...we cannot compete with nature. We cannot conquer nature and should be involved in nature. (E-35-1068)

2. Walking, traveling and learning from nature

Some subjects associate nature with their childhood in agricultural villages. They transplanted rice seedlings in the field with bare feet and feel the close contact with the land. After they grow up, they still approach nature to relax themselves, such as walking in the park. Sometimes they travel to expand their horizons and experience exotic cultures. They can learn from advanced countries and feel sympathy to undeveloped nations.

We worked in the field in childhood. I knew how seeding, transplanted rice seedlings and cutting the rice. (E-14-380) It took time to till land and we should be careful about water and bugs. We did not harvest after transplanting rice seedlings. It was not that simple. (E-35-1092)

There was a gutter in the neighborhood. Xizhi is beautiful with mountains and rivers. I enjoy living here. I lived in Taipei City before. I enjoy living in countryside and approaching nature. I have been like this since childhood. Nature is my teacher and good friend. I even talk to grass. (L-3-37)

It is more shocking. They are mostly poor and we will realize how lucky we are. It is happy to live in Taiwan and I will show my children that there is a difficult country in the world. (B-24-315)

(4) Analysis on aged volunteers' spiritual health: individuals and transcendence

1. Religion guides the thoughts in life purpose

Among 12 subjects, 10 of them have specific religion. Buddhists are the majority. Their life is inspired by religion, such as Karma, cherishing fortune and developing fortune and wisdom. J has been in jail for seven months. Jail is hell and he thought that it was his Karma. After following Buddhism, he accumulated fortune by chanting scriptures, sitting in meditation and being a volunteer. He is clear about many things. H, a Christian and M, a Catholic, think that it is peaceful to worship in churches. They totally devote themselves to God. Reading Bible and confession are the most important channels to exchange with God. By following God's decree, they will overcome all frustration and difficulties in life.

It was the past and Karma. The jail was hell. (J-41-769)...Where is hell? Where is heaven? It is hell! We could not even wear shoes in jail and we only wore slippers. It was hell! Imagine what hell look like. (J-41-771)...I made the mistake and was put to jail. My guilt was cleaned and my past was gone. (J-41-773) According to Buddhism, when we mend our fault, we will no longer be guilty. (J-41-775)

I will not think about this, sometimes it's a brand new day when I wake up 時...(M-14-328)...I join Mass on Sunday and thanks for another peaceful week. (M-14-330)

It is natural and don't be afraid. I saw a lot in hospitals every day. There are many patients of cancers....we should treat it with religious power. God gives us life and I cannot ask for it and give it up randomly. Thus, we will not be anxious. People's diseases and aging come from worry and depression. (H-23-389)

2. Religion is spiritual dependency and we should not be superstitious

Many subjects mention not to be superstitious about religion. For instance, when A joined in religious activities at the beginning, she worried that her husband would not support her. Thus, she would concern about family members' feelings and agreement. She could not affect family members because of religion. Thus, the family would support her belief and volunteer service.

Because of problems related to children, A's husband was painful during certain period of time. Afterwards, he overcame the difficulty by religion. They went to Buddhist ceremony together, were volunteers and copied scripture. L believes that religion is to make people to do good deeds and we should not be superstitious and especially not greedy about fame and fortune when worshiping gods.

We cannot be superstitious and it is simply the spiritual dependency. We should take care of the family. My husband was worried when I was first the volunteer. (A-22-669)...after this time, he felt something and gradually believed in the religion...it was the cause (A-26-753)...he kept saying it was efficacious. We would go worshiping gods together. (A-26-757)

I worship gods frequently; however, I am not superstitious. We cannot be greedy for fame and fortune when worshiping gods. We should save people with good words. When someone intends to commit suicide, we should say something to stop him. We should save good people and punish the bad one. It is religion and we should be happy.. (L-10-111)

3. Help others and pray for everyone

G suggests that life is full of many helpless things, such as going to Taiwan out of expectation, having operation due to brain tumor. Pains in life are more than happiness. However, after following Buddhism, it seems that we can be clear about everything. Death resembles sleep. We live one more day when we wake up in the morning. It is like we have birthday every day. G further mentions that all kinds of religion pray for and bless people in the world. Without money or efforts, we can help others simply with our thoughts.

Talking about life, it seems that we have birthday every day. I sleep today means I die today. Death is similar to sleep! Except for dreams, right? I wake up in the morning.....and live for another day. I have my birthday every day. (G-24-349)

In all kinds of religion, we should pray for people in the world! We can worship Most Exalted Lord Lao or Heavenly Goddess...and pray for and bless all living. We cannot help others without money and efforts. At least, we can pray for them! (G-24-353)

4. Help others without asking for returns; physical and spiritual peacefulness

Christianity significantly influences H. He said that he learned a lot from Bible. Peaceful mind was upon pious religion. He accepted the frustration or difficulties. In Bible, he learned about use of money. Rich people should learn to give up money. Poor ones believe in peace from God and have sufficient money.

Important sentences in Bible are encouragement for us. (H-20-313)...better to be a poor person who respects God...we thus have our inner peace. Thus, sometimes religious people and those who go to church will accept the difficulties. People who do not believe in Christianity will think that it makes sense! (H-20-321) We cannot simply make money...sigh...if we have the world and lose our life, everything will be in vain! (H-20-327)

C and J believe in Buddhism and they think that volunteers do not ask for returns. Because of religion, people can totally devote themselves without returns. It is the mission and value of life. C suggests that volunteers should not ask for return; however, it is to exchange with gods instead of doing good deeds. H is a Christian and his parents taught him the belief of helping others since childhood. He learns a lot by assisting others. From perspective of Karma, as what J said, helping others enhance his happiness in older life. He is physically and spiritually healthier and it demonstrates good end for good people.

They are willing to join in Tzu Chi. Everyone devotes himself without returns. Thus, we will have better character. I do not ask for returns by what I do. Master also says, “if you often think about what you have devoted..., you ask for gods’ blessing by a string of bananas, two apples and two oranges for your promotion, fortunate and having a new-born son. Things are not as easy!” Master asks us to do good deeds, have good thoughts and do everything from goodness...(C-17-116)

We live for serving others. Helping others means to help ourselves. (J-48-833) People will suffer from their bad things. My good deeds benefit me now(I become healthier). (J-45-803) I feel that...when we do good to others, others will do good to us. There is a saying, before expecting others’ good deeds, you should do good to others. Bible also says, you should first be good to others before expecting others’ good deeds. It really makes sense. (H-26-446)

Empirical studies on aged people’s life meaning in Taiwan (Lin, 2002; Lin, 2002; Chao, 2002) demonstrated that people with positive interpersonal relationship, self-concept, finance, health and social support and religion would have more positive life meaning. Thus, they would have better overall life. Life meaning was not influenced only by one factor. It was related to a person’s overall living environment. Tang (2004) also suggested that aged people’s participation in religious activities would enhance life meaning. Aged people positively affirmed participation in church activities. Regarding spirituality, Tongprateep (2000) interviewed 12 Thai women above 60 years old without physical and psychological diseases by Hermeneutics. Since most of subjects were Buddhists and those who believed in folklore religion, their spiritual concept constructed was related to religion. Karma and impermanence of Buddhism significantly influenced life of aged people. After experiencing crisis, aged people would go through their old time by Karma in Buddhism. They would accept their diseases and difficulties. It was easier for religious aged volunteers to recognize happiness of broad devotion in volunteer service and they would have significant recognition and practice on transcendence of spiritual health.

4. Conclusions

Most of subjects expand personal life horizons by volunteer service. Through sweeping the floor, being in cooking team and volunteer teachers, they learn to cooperate and interact with others. By serving others, they demonstrate their broad devotion and recognize others’ difficulties. From

donation, they neglect the importance of money and materials. They learn to admire others and be good to others. They will be happy when seeing others happy.

Aged volunteers' major life style is family and volunteer service. They have positive supportive systems regarding interpersonal interaction and family life. Thus, in old age, they can follow their inclinations. After participating in volunteer service, many subjects still focus on their family and family members' feelings. They try to spend time with family members and take care of both family life and voluntary activities. Thus, harmonious family life is the base of aged people's spiritual health. If children have their own families and career, the parents will be volunteers in groups without any worries or fears. It is delightful for aged people to join in volunteer service. When they discard past identities and positions, they will have conflict of interests. They recognize their happiness by caring others, sweeping floor and cooking. They have gratitude and are contented. Religion significantly influences aged volunteers and we encourage the subjects to demonstrate broad devotion out of families and accumulate good fortune by selflessly helping others.

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