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Organizational and Older Adult Volunteer Perspectives on Role Conflict Management Strategies

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Organizational and Older Adult Volunteer Perspectives on Role Conflict Management Strategies
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### Overview

Older adults are increasingly occupying multiple life roles, including working, caregiving, and volunteering, creating the opportunity for role conflict. Such conflict occurs when stress and strain created by the demands of multiple life roles outruns an individual’s resources to successfully manage such demands.

A two-phase research study was completed with 1,697 RSVP volunteers (ages 55+). Volunteers were recruited through RSVP-program sites across the country (Phase I) with a follow-up survey of RSVP programs conducted with 17 sites (Phase II). Grounded in role theory, the Phase I volunteer survey explored role conflict in addition to self-reported strategies used to mitigate the experience of role conflict. The Phase II program survey gathered responses from volunteer managers and staff about the strategies used by their older adult volunteers to avoid and address role conflict. Results from both surveys were examined for commonalities and differences.

All written and quantitative responses were organized in a Dedoose (v11.7.1) database and were analyzed using a basic inducive content analysis approach with two coders.

### Full-Study Theoretical Framework:

- **Role Theory**
- **Organizational and Older Adult Volunteer Perspectives on Role Conflict**
- **Conflict Management Strategies**

This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What role enhancement strategies have older adult volunteers employed to combat role conflict?
2. What strategies have RSVP programs employed to assist older adult volunteers in managing role conflict?

Key findings from the first phase survey include the following points which served as the basis for the construction of the Phase II program survey and its focus on caregivers and workers:

- Caregivers who also volunteer for RSVP have more role conflict compared to non-caregivers.
- Workers reported more role conflict compared to non-workers.
- Volunteers who completed the survey identified many role enhancement connections with their volunteer work that benefit their other roles including learning new skills and information that can be applied to working and caregiving, along with creating new social connections and friendships.

### Results: Program Profile Data

**Program and Staff**
- 21 completed surveys with an additional five incomplete surveys returned but not included in the final data analysis, representing a 38% response rate.
- Participating programs had been in operation for an average of 35 years (SD = 14) at the time of the survey, with a range of 3-47 years overall.
- Individual respondents had been employed with their RSVP program for an average of 7.6 years (SD = 7) with a range of 1-29 years of experience across the sample.

**Program Host Organization**
- 14 states represented across the sample.
- The programs served an average of 438 volunteers (SD = 197.84) with a range of 85 to 950 volunteers through an average of 73 program sites (SD = 105.82).

### Results: Convergent Themes Across Programs and Volunteers

**Caregivers**
- Volunteers who are also caregivers juggle multiple responsibilities in addition to their volunteer work by making care arrangements for their care recipient and participating in volunteer work alongside their care recipient when possible. These strategies used by caregivers focused on the need for respite for such individuals and the creative ways that respite can be addressed in conjunction with the volunteer experience.

**Respite Examples:**
- “They can do a paid or an unpaid for them: they use that as a way to get out of the house and volunteer.” Program #2
- “Volunteer is generally done while my sister (care recipient) is otherwise busy.” Volunteer respondent #206
- “One program discussed providing respite directly to caregiving volunteers: ‘We can provide a paid or an unpaid for them: they use that as a way to get out of the house and volunteer.’ Program #2
- “I have a volunteer that I was able to get together with to deliver meals for a client. I was able to get him to the library and have him wait while I delivered the meals.” Volunteer respondent #242
- “We also have volunteers who come in for meals for volunteers (on call) as long as they are not working on that day. This leaves the volunteer feeling good about volunteering without jeopardizing either position. There are others in our cadre of volunteers who will volunteer for special occasions when they cannot committed to days during the week because of their work schedule.” Program #7

### Results: Volunteer Demographics

**Respondent Age**
- 76% are 70 or younger.

**Respondent Gender**
- Female 73.0% & Male 26.6%.

**Household Income**
- Less than $20K 12.3%
- $20K to less than $30K 19.5%
- $30K to less than $50K 25.6%
- $50K to $99K 16.3%
- $100K or greater 18.3%

**Respondent Employment**
- Full time 18.0%
- Part time 23.0%
- Retired 59.0%

**Respondent Education**
- High School Diploma 59%
- Bachelor’s Degree 25%
- Master’s Degree 9.5%
- PhD or Professional Degree 6.5%

**Respondent Marital Status**
- Single 15.8%
- Married 59.0%
- Divorced 7.3%
- Separated 1.9%
- Widowed 11.9%

**Similarties across roles**
- “Both my paying jobs and volunteer positions include interaction with the over 60 population giving me insight into their needs, personality, and life experiences. Most are active and so it’s nice to give back to people who are most often feel good when coming home.” #9506 (worker)

**“Something different”**
- “Working with children and establishing a relationship with them is very rewarding. It provides a more balanced view of life from reading with the young, mentoring a junior high student and visiting elderly people.” #9292 (caregiver)

### Discussion

- **Hold multiple roles can create the opportunity for role conflict for older adult volunteers. Study findings suggest that role conflict reduction can be fostered by both older adult volunteers and the programs through which they volunteer. Programs can do this by providing an opportunity for the inclusion of loved ones in the volunteer experience for caregivers and providing flexible volunteer options for working volunteers. Likewise, volunteers scheduling, time management, and respite coverage in order to pursue their volunteer work.

- **Study findings also suggest that creating a solid volunteer match between the experiences volunteers need (i.e., similarly across roles or different experiences across roles) and the volunteer opportunities offered to older adults is important to volunteer recruitment and retention.

- **Future research directions will include a more in-depth exploration of program-based strategies used to support caregiving and working older adults to create program profiles that can be used to replicate and spread successful older volunteer engagement strategies.”

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**Notes:**
- All write and quantitative responses were organized in a Dedoose (v11.7.1) database and were analyzed using an basic inducive content analysis approach with two coders.
- This material is based upon work funded by the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and Senior Corps (Age Corps) programs and volunteers. It does not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, CNCS or Senior Corps.