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Organizational and Older Adult Volunteer Perspectives on Role Conflict Management Strategies

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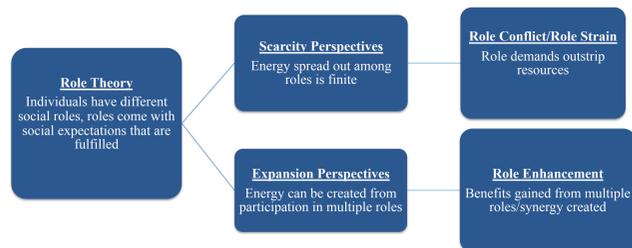
Overview

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 outstrips an individual's resources to successfully manage such demands.

A two-phase research study was completed with 1,697 RSVP volunteers (ages 55+) drawn from 55 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 divergence between older adult perspectives and volunteer manager perspectives.

All write-in qualitative responses were organized in a Dedoose (vol. survey) or Excel database (program survey) and were analyzed using a basic inductive content analysis approach with two coders.

Full-Study Theoretical Framework:



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 volunteers in managing role conflict?

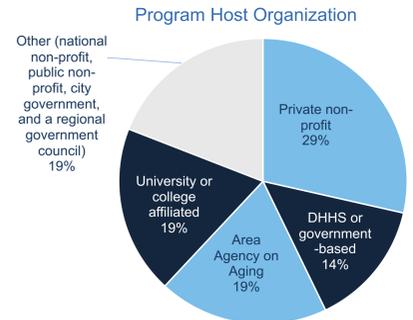
Key findings from the first phase survey include the following points which served as the basis for the construction of the Phase II program survey and its focus on caregivers and workers:

- 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 numerous role enhancements connected 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 friendship.

Results: Program Profile Data

Program and Staff

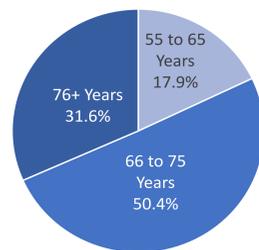
- 21 completed surveys with an additional five incomplete surveys returned but not included in the final data analysis, representing a 38% response rate
- Participating programs had been in operation for an average of 35 years (SD = 14) at the time of the survey, with a range of 3-47 years overall.
- Individual respondents had been employed with their RSVP program for an average of 7.5 years (SD = 7) with a range of 1-29 years of experience across the sample.



- 14 states represented across the sample
- The programs served an average of 438 volunteers (SD = 197.84), with a range of 85 to 900 through an average of 73 program sites (SD =56.82)

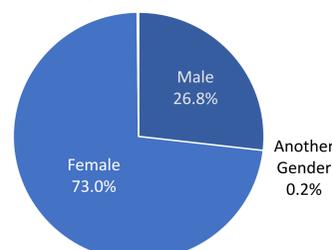
Results: Volunteer Demographics

Respondent Age



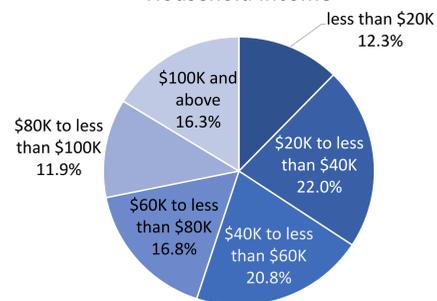
n = 1,675
M= 72.43 years (SD = 7.56)

Respondent Gender



n = 1,683

Household Income



n = 1,469

- Respondents predominantly married (61.8%)
- Respondents predominantly white (92.2%)

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:

"If they can afford a paid sitter, they use that as a way to get out of the house and volunteer." Program #2

"Volunteering is generally done while my sister [care recipient] is otherwise busy." Volunteer respondent #296

- One program discussed providing respite directly to caregiving volunteers:

"... we have volunteers that as part of the Healthy Futures performance measure, serve as respite volunteers so that other volunteers can be supported and provided some relief." Program #9

Care Recipient Inclusion:

- Both program and volunteer respondents reported that caregiver volunteers bring care recipients with them during volunteer assignments when feasible. These assignments included food distribution activities as well as volunteer work that can be done in-home:

"...one of our volunteers takes her husband with her to a food distribution. He sits there in a wheelchair and watches while she works. She says they both enjoy getting out." Program #21

"I'm the caregiver for my husband...He is also losing his eyesight and has poor hearing. He goes with me to deliver meals. He puts the meals into bags, carries the bags to the car, and gets out to deliver the meals to our clients. This keeps him strengthened through exercise and cognitively stimulated. He enjoys meeting, talking to, and helping others. It helps me to keep an eye on him 24/7 and helps him to feel needed." Volunteer respondent #380

"I spend a lot of time with my husband just watching TV. So that is a time I knit [her volunteer work]." Volunteer respondent #8706

Results: Unique Themes Reported by Older Adult Volunteers

- Based on volunteer write-in responses, one condition that facilitated the uptake and transfer of skills and knowledge was a sense of continuity or similarities between volunteer roles and other social roles. In essence, pursuing volunteer opportunities that require similar skills and interest may create the conditions necessary for success in that role and in others. Some volunteers also noted that formal volunteering provided a different experience than their other roles which was generally discussed as a positive attribute. This difference, whether through a different routine or type of activity, can provide a sense of "balance" to one's life.

Similarities across roles

"Both my paid and volunteer positions include interaction with the over 60 population giving me insight into their needs, personalities, and life experiences. Most are so interesting - they are so diversified. Most often I feel good when coming home." #8904 (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." #8062 (caregiver)

Working Volunteers

- Volunteers discussed work-volunteer conflict in terms of time and scheduling constraints. Conflict reduction strategies identified by programs and volunteers focused largely on time management and included volunteering during off-work hours and completing time-limited or intermittent volunteer assignments:

"We have a number of non-profits who need volunteers to deliver their marketing posters around town - that can be done over lunch hours or after work - when people may be off work, but the retail businesses are still open." Program #4

"Other working volunteers will schedule...once a week or once a month, so it is not too much to juggle." Program #25

"We also have volunteers who offer to fill in for other 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 commit to days during the week because of their work schedule." Program #6

Because I work full time (professor at a community college) I can only volunteer at a thrift store during the summer. It is also difficult to keep up with activities at my church. But I love my job and am not ready to retire yet. Volunteer respondent #759

"I work part-time and they [my employer] give me time off for RSVP. Volunteer respondent #9095

"RSVP [volunteering] is mostly in the summer when I'm not working (sub teacher), so it all fits well together and keeps me from boredom in the summer. Volunteer respondent #656

Discussion

- Holding 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 use 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., similarity 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.