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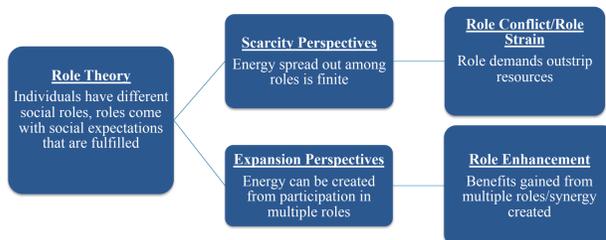
Role Enhancement for Older Volunteers: How Does Formal Volunteering Complement Other Life Roles?

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Overview

Volunteering among older adults has been associated with numerous benefits for older adults and their communities. As the U.S. population continues to age, new and continued opportunities for engagement emerge not just within the civic engagement arena but also within the workplace (paid employment), the family (caregiving), and community (informal volunteering). What is not yet known is to what extent multiple social roles are enhanced or hindered by formal volunteering. Grounded in role theory and utilizing a national sample of current Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers, this study examines the extent to which current volunteers experience role enhancement between their volunteer role and other social roles that they occupy.

Theoretical Framework



Guiding Research Question

What role-related benefits are derived from volunteering that impact the caregiver, worker, and informal volunteer roles?

Methods

- Survey with a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions sent to current RSVP volunteers, 55 and older via 55 RSVP programs in 27 states. A total of 6,796 surveys distributed via mail and e-mail and 1,697 responding (25% response rate)
- Quantitative Items:** demographics, role load and intensity across social roles, health and well-being, role conflict scale, RSVP participation in hours, satisfaction with formal RSVP volunteer role
- Open-response role enhancement questions:**
 - In what ways has your volunteer work through RSVP helped you in your paid work?
 - In what ways has your volunteer work through RSVP helped you in your caregiving?
 - In what ways has your volunteer work through RSVP helped you in other volunteer and helping work (not caregiving)?
- Qualitative responses were loaded into Dedoose and analyzed using basic inductive technique.
- 1,228 individual response excerpts (168 worker role excerpts, 331 caregiver role excerpts, and 729 informal helping excerpts) and a total of 1,553 code applications (202 code applications for worker responses, 427 for caregivers, and 924 for informal volunteers)

Sample

Demographics

- 72.4% was female, 26.6% was male and 0.8% identifying as a gender other than male or female.
- Age range: 55 to 97 years, $M = 72.43$ years ($SD = 7.56$)
- The sample was predominantly white (90.6%), 5.2% was African American and 1.2% reported a multi-race background.

Volunteering

- Volunteer history with RSVP ranged from less than a year to 31 years ($M = 7.03$ years, $SD = 6.18$).

Additional Roles Beyond Formal Volunteering

- Overall, the average number of additional roles held beyond formal volunteering was 1.19 ($SD = 0.80$) roles encompassing an average of 33.8 hours of time and effort each month ($SD = 64.17$).
- Approximately one out of 7 respondents (14%) worked for pay in a given month.
- About a third of volunteers were caregivers (34.9%).
- The majority (78.7%) of respondents participated in informal helping/volunteer.

Results: Indirect Role Benefits

Respondents noted a variety of indirect benefits. Indirect benefits are benefits to volunteers that could be applied to a number of different social roles, rather than having a direct application to any one given role. Examples included:

Socialization: *It [formal volunteering] has widened my circle of friends. #721 (informal volunteer)*

Personal Growth: *[I have] developed more patience and empathy. #8446 (caregiver)*

Greater Perspective: *I am more aware of other's needs and their lack of what I sometimes take for granted. #613 (worker)*

Positive Emotional Benefits: *[Volunteering] made me realize how good this makes me feel. I feel useful and appreciated. #8314 (caregiver)*

Staying Active/Busy: *[Volunteering] represents different ways to stay active now that I am mostly retired. #8957 (worker)*

Physical/Cognitive Benefits: *My physical condition has improved and I have more energy. #9032 (caregiver)*

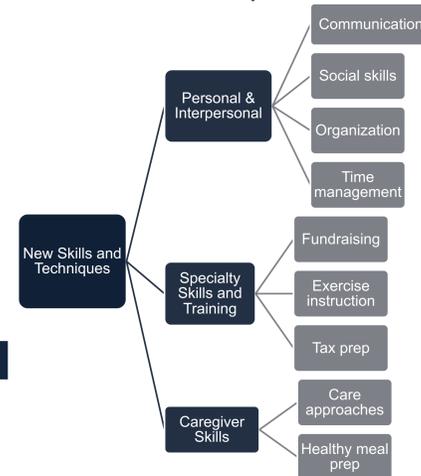
Results: Direct Role Benefits

Direct benefits were defined as benefits that older volunteers derived from their volunteering that they directly applied to their other life roles.

Direct Benefit Code Assigned	Worker Count (n = 40)	Caregiver Count (n = 98)	Informal Volunteer Count (n = 244)
New skills/techniques	13 (32.50%)	24 (24.49%)	87 (35.66%)
New information/resources	10 (25%)	30 (30.61%)	48 (19.67%)
New roles/opportunities	8 (20%)	5 (5.10%)	59 (24.18%)
Networking/connecting	6 (15%)	1 (1.02%)	45 (18.44%)
Respite	3 (7.5%)	38 (38.78%)	5 (2.05%)

Note: n = total direct benefits code applications for given role

New Skills & Techniques



New Information & Resources

Respondents noted that formal volunteering provided them with new information and resources that could be applied to their other roles. Information and resources gathered through formal volunteering were used by the individual themselves or could be retained and shared with others through connecting and networking.

I am aware of community resources to share with others in need. #675 (informal volunteer)

New Roles/Opportunities

Respondents identified new role connections and opportunities arising out of their formal volunteer role. Examples included new opportunities for paid employment and new informal volunteer roles. Responses in this category suggest that, for some older workers, formal volunteering provided a pathway into new employment opportunities.

Volunteering at the county museum led directly to my current job with that museum. #8484 (worker)

Respite

The respite code category, applied most frequently to caregiver responses, underscores the benefit that formal volunteering provides in relieving stress and providing a temporary reprieve from caregiving responsibilities. This relief comes from the distraction provided by volunteer activities, the social aspects of volunteering, and the opportunity for self-care.

For the short time I am volunteering at RSVP, it is like a vacation from my caregiving. I am able to put my worries on hold... #8013 (caregiver)

Networking/Connecting

Responses indicated that formal volunteering offers opportunities for networking and connecting with others, particularly for informal volunteers and paid workers.

Discussion

Research findings support role enhancement among volunteers through direct and indirect benefits that are applied to paid employment, caregiving, and informal volunteer roles. Findings suggest the following:

- Volunteer programs should configure volunteer assignment offerings in a way that will maximize benefits for workers, caregivers, and informal volunteers. This includes offering opportunities to learn new skills, meet new people, and obtain information and resources that can be applied to other roles.
- Caregivers in particular benefit from volunteering when it offers a beneficial break from caregiving duties and the opportunity for socializing with others. These findings suggest that caregivers are a key population of potential volunteers who stand to benefit from volunteer engagement.
- Given these findings, volunteer opportunities and program marketing efforts should emphasize identified benefits for these groups of older adults.