

Volunteer Activities and Self-Esteem

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Introduction

Volunteering has become a regular activity in the United States, as well as in different parts of the world. For example, in the United States, 26.8% of the total population engaged in volunteer activities in 2011 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Volunteerism is defined as taking time to help others in the community, such as tutoring at a preschool or helping nurses at a hospital (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Several studies have suggested that there is a relationship between volunteerism and self-esteem (Brown, Hoyer, & Nicholson, 2012; Crocker, 2002; Cemalcilar, 2009). However, there are conflicting findings about whether or not a relationship exists between volunteerism and self-esteem among college students (Lammers, 1982; Sigmon, 1985). In addition, research has paid minimal attention to the types of volunteer activities volunteers engage in and its relationship to a person's self-esteem. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine college students and whether the type of volunteer activity (direct vs. non-direct contact) participants engage in has a relationship with their self-esteem.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that college students who engaged in volunteer activities with direct contact with the people they were serving would report higher levels of self-esteem compared to college students who engaged in activities without direct contact with people they were serving at the volunteer site.

Method

A total of 101 participants participated in the study (23.8% male and 76.2% female). The mean age was 18.56 years old. There were 54.5% Caucasian, 7.9% African American, 17.8% Asian, 14.9% Hispanic, 1.0% Middle Eastern, 1.0% Pacific Islander, and 3.0% Other. All participants attend a small, private, Christian liberal arts college and had engaged, or were currently engaging in volunteer activities. Participants were recruited using the SONA system (an online database) which gave participants research credit for a class as an incentive to participate. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire, the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory and questions about volunteerism.

Results

Results demonstrated no significant relationship between direct contact at a volunteer site and overall global self-esteem. However, a one-way ANOVA, indicated significant differences between gender and how much direct contact the participant had at their volunteer site ($F(1,99)=5.505, p<.05$). Results demonstrated that females ($M=66.94$) have more direct contact compared to males ($M=46.06$). A one-way ANOVA also indicated that females were significantly more likely to report that their volunteer experience was rewarding compared to males ($F(1,99)=9.808, p<.05$). Females reported that their volunteer experience was rewarding 88% of the time, while males reported that their volunteer experience was rewarding 77% of the time.

Conclusions

It was hypothesized that college students who engaged in volunteer activities with direct contact with the people they were serving would report higher levels of self-esteem compared to college students who engaged in activities without direct contact with people they were serving. While the results did not support this hypothesis, significant gender differences did emerge. Results demonstrated that females reported significantly higher levels of direct contact with individuals at their volunteer site and reported that their volunteer experience was more rewarding compared to males. One limitation of the current research is that all participants had participated in volunteer experiences prior to the study. Future research utilizing an experimental design with participants who have no prior volunteer experience might be beneficial. In conclusion, the relationship between the type of volunteer activities a participant engages in and his/her self-esteem needs further research.

Table 1

Correlations Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. How Much Direct Contact			
2. Experience Rewarding	.200*		
3. Volunteering Benefited Others	.352*	.597*	

* $p<.05$

References

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