

## Psychological benefits of Voluntary work

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### Abstract:

Participating in volunteer activities is widely acknowledged as a manifestation of humanitarianism, encapsulating numerous social and ethical advantages. The impact of such initiatives goes beyond simply assisting others and improving their situations; volunteers themselves also stand to benefit greatly. Volunteering can play a pivotal role in enhancing individuals' psychological and emotional wellness, thereby adding depth to their lives and outlook. As a result, this article will focus on three key elements through which volunteer work can yield positive impacts: social skills, behavioural deviations, and quality of life.

**Keywords:** Mental health, volunteer work, social skill, behavioural deviation, quality of life.

### 1. Introduction:

People face a variety of challenges and problems throughout their lives which may damage their mental health. Some of them are able to overcome those challenges; whereas, others' mental health may get affected negatively due to their inability to adapt to the situation or to the lack of effective support and therapy. Therefore, and because of the importance of mental health, researchers have been trying to come up with important preventive and therapeutic alternatives to maintain individual's mental and psychological health. This can be achieved through engaging into specific activities that help fill the void and focus on alternative behavioural strategies so that individuals can overcome hardships they may encounter.

One of the primary emphases of some treatment programs is to enhance individual's self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence. To reach that, people should depict their values to others in society through their deeds. Engaging in voluntary work is perhaps one of the best methods to achieve this goal. According to the United Nations Program (2014), It is a non-profit work that is not provided for a known remuneration, and it is non-functional or professional work, carried out by individuals in order to help and develop the standard of living of others from their neighbours or human communities in absolute terms (Al-Farra, 2018). Thus, individuals volunteer to help others and improve the surrounding environment willingly, without anticipating any material rewards.

Consequently, this research paper seeks to establish a relation between voluntary work and the psychological and mental well-being of individuals by exploring the following inquiries:

- How does volunteering contribute to maintaining and enhancing individuals' mental health?
- What impact does volunteering have on social skills, behaviour, and overall quality of life?

### 2. The Concept of Volunteerism:

Volunteering is not a newly emerged concept. Instead, it has historically been propagated by various religions, related to the concepts of humanity, altruism, positive social values, principles, and aiding others. Al-Marwani (2002) defines voluntary social work as the act of "contributing time and effort to carry out activities for the betterment of the community in a non-obligatory manner, motivated by non-material incentives, without the expectation of financial remuneration. Even if there are some material benefits, they do not equate to the time and effort invested in volunteer work. A volunteer is the individual who embodies these actions" (Al-Farra, 2018).

Volunteering is a selfless act which includes giving one's time, skills, and resources to help others without expecting anything back. It is a noble endeavour that has the power to bring positive change in both the lives of those being helped and the volunteers themselves. From a psychological perspective, volunteering has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental health and well-being.

### **3. The Psychological Aspects of Volunteering**

#### **3.1. Volunteering and Mental Health:**

One of the main psychological benefits of volunteering is the sense of having a goal to work for and fulfilment. Engaging in meaningful activities that contribute to the welfare of others can foster a sense of purpose and satisfaction is essential for overall psychological well-being. Studies has shown that individuals who volunteer report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction comparing to those who do not do.

Volunteering also offers opportunities for obtaining healthier relationships. By working with like-minded individuals who share the same values and goals as you, volunteers can make strong social bonds and create a sense of community. These social connections can provide emotional support, reduce the feeling of loneliness, and enhance overall psychological resilience.

Furthermore, volunteering can have a positive impact on mental health by reducing stress and anxiety. Engaging in voluntary activities can serve as a form of distraction from personal worries and concerns, allowing individuals to focus on the needs of others. This shift in focus can lead to decrease stress levels and improve mental well-being.

In addition to the psychological benefits that this process provides, those who get supported by volunteers can also receive positive psychological outcomes. For example, individuals who are the recipients of volunteer services may feel some kind of gratitude, appreciation, and increased self-worth. Knowing that others are willing to offer their time and assistance can have a profound impact on their sense of belonging and connectedness within their community.

From a developmental perspective, volunteering has been linked to the cultivation of important psychological traits such as empathy, compassion, and altruism. Volunteering enables people to discover others' needs and life experiences in general, which can lead to increased empathy and compassion towards those who are less fortunate. These traits are not only beneficial for the individuals being helped but also contribute to the overall well-being of society as a whole.

It is important to note that while volunteering can have numerous psychological benefits, it is essential for individuals to engage in voluntary activities that interest them and go along with their values. Obligatory volunteering may not result in the same positive outcomes as voluntary and meaningful engagement.

#### **3.2. Volunteering and Social Skills:**

Participation in voluntary work plays a significant role in developing and strengthening social skills by fostering positive social interactions. Social skills are defined as "the ability to achieve personal objectives through social relationships, while also cultivating positive and enduring connections with others in various circumstances" (Rubin & Burgess, 2002). Due to the positive values on which voluntary work is based, the relationships formed through it are associated with altruism, helping others, and a love for charitable work. Consequently, these connections predominantly contribute to the enhancement of social skills related to establishing and sustaining friendships, as well as cooperating for the benefit of others.

"The acquisition of social skills has a considerable impact in numerous aspects of life, including personal hygiene, health management, financial organization, educational pursuits, career management, time management, family life, domestic relationships, lifestyles, and recreational activities" (Dutrénit, 1977). Social skills help individuals to manage life demands and to adapt with others. Engaging in voluntary work and interacting with others can enable people who are experiencing relational challenges to develop their social skills by building relationships and interacting with others.

The skill is "the ability to generate adaptable and coordinated responses to demands, as well as to recognize and make use of opportunities" (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Therefore, skill enables individuals to adaptively respond to environmental requires and take advantage of available opportunities by choosing the most suitable response from a range of choices. Consequently, voluntary work helps individuals develop the skill to respond to the requirements of their environment, especially since its aim is to assist others.

In essence, voluntary work involves engaging in activities aimed at helping others, leading to relationships based on human values. Through voluntary work, individuals repeatedly encounter situations that support and enhance their social skills, as well as develop important values such as citizenship, environmental preservation, helping the less fortunate, collaboration, and more.

According to McClellan & Katz (2001), recent studies have shown that children's long-term social, emotional, academic, and cognitive developments, as well as their citizenship behaviour, are positively affected by frequent opportunities to enhance social skills during childhood.

Volunteering provides a way to form new social connections and friendships based on shared interests among volunteers. It can also help individuals who struggle with making new friendships. Engaging in voluntary work involves regular communication with others, which can improve communication and language skills and provide significant psychological and mental benefits, particularly for those dealing with relationship issues, lack of self-confidence, or low self-esteem.

Participating in voluntary work related to one's interests allows individuals to meet people with similar passions, leading to knowledge exchange and personal growth. This can increase individual interactions and enhance social skills, ultimately contributing to improved mental health and improving social relationships beyond the framework of volunteering. Volunteering also promotes increased self-confidence, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to confront challenges directly (Abdel Fattah, 2017).

Furthermore, engaging into volunteering helps alleviate social isolation, encourages social interaction, and facilitates making new friendships which protects individuals from the perils of isolation, loneliness, and the fear of interacting with others. It also helps boost confidence in social and communication capabilities. "Volunteering is a form of social activity or participation, and social integration (social solidarity) is linked to an individual's level of social connections (social bonds) that shield them from isolation or its negative effects" (Rashidiya, 2016).

Furthermore, focusing on volunteering reduces the amount of time spent on the internet, building virtual relationships on social media, and instead fosters genuine relationships and empathy. Engaging in voluntary work encourages individuals to participate in social activities based on human values, thereby reducing the risks of isolation, depression, and internet addiction. It also helps individuals develop social skills, gain diverse experiences, and strengthen real-life connections with others, including family and friends. These factors contribute to improving mental health, preventing mental disorders, and overcoming personal challenges.

### **3.3. Voluntary Work and Behavioural Deviations:**

Voluntary work also plays a crucial role in addressing behavioural issues prevalent in our societies such as violence, theft, addiction, and delinquency, particularly among young people. By engaging in volunteering, individuals get benefit of their free time with meaningful and morally valuable work, reducing the opportunity for engaging in deviant behaviours. Therefore, engaging in voluntary work is an important preventing factor from behavioural risks.

Besides, volunteering teaches people the importance of commitment and team work. Interacting with others during voluntary work enhances social relationships and improves communication skills, providing individuals with a support system to overcome their personal challenges and enhance their psychological well-being, especially since the goal of voluntary work is to help the other and support the needy, fostering a sense of community and empathy.

Voluntary work is generally seen as a positive influence on the psychological, health, and behavioural well-being of individuals (Al-Farra, 2018). Engaging in volunteer activities can provide a distraction from personal problems and challenges, or even help to alleviate them, whether at home, school, or work. It serves as an outlet for stress and anxiety, allowing individuals to focus on supporting others while also receiving support themselves. This dynamic mirrors the principles of group therapy, fostering a sense of belonging and participation among young people (Abdel Fattah, 2017). Many volunteer opportunities are socially and environmentally oriented, promoting a sense of citizenship and community spirit to achieve common goals.

Volunteer work helps individuals to prioritize their activities and future goals, potentially reducing the risks of addiction and substance abuse. It provides valuable knowledge and experiences that can shape their professional aspirations. Engaging in social relationships of a human and social

nature has a positive impact on an individual's intellectual development and moral values. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals learn by observing and imitating others, choosing their behavioural models. This socio-cognitive perspective emphasizes the role of individual thought in the learning process (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2010).

According to psycho-analytic theory, moral behaviour is learned through the process of "reincarnation," where the child emulates the parental model of the same sex. This latter goes hand in hand with the idea of "imitation" or "modelling" in social learning theory. Socio-cognitive theory emphasizes the role of imitation in shaping attitudes, norms, values, and ethical behaviours (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002).

Engaging in voluntary work and interacting with individuals who uphold human values and principles associated with good morals and helping others can influence an individual to improve his behaviours and avoid any kind of deviations, especially since imitation and learning by observation continue to adulthood through values input and through the process of socialization. By participating in volunteering, people increase their awareness and strive to align themselves with the general environment and at the same time working to improve it. This process contributes to the development of internal control, awareness, and moral growth.

Volunteering also fosters a sense of responsibility and self-worth, leading to the feeling of satisfaction and gaining the respect and appreciation of others (Abdel Fattah, 2017). Providing assistance and support for social, environmental, and economic causes reinforces the people's sense of purpose and existence, boosting self-esteem and confidence. It shifts the focus away from self-centeredness towards the needs of others.

#### **3.4. Volunteering, Quality of life and psychological well-being:**

Quality of life, as defined by the World Health Organization, is an individual's perception of his place in existence, in the cultural context and value system of the society in which he lives and in which he is in relation to his goals, expectations, norms and tensions" (Vray & Bouvenot, 2006). Considering this concept, volunteering represents an essential tool to achieve quality of life, because through it the individual enhances his social and existential state, by allowing individuals to contribute to society, promote moral values, and build positive relationships. It fosters a sense of belonging, encourages helping, and aids individuals set future goals, leading to improve quality of life both socially and psychologically, and self-well-being (or psychological happiness).

Additionally, volunteering helps people develop the sense of self-efficacy, which in return fosters their confidence and ability to tackle tasks and control their environment. Studies have shown that optimistic attitudes towards one's capabilities lead to increased efforts and endurance, ultimately leading to greater achievement and resilience in the face of challenges. Also, high self-efficacy leads to increased confidence and perseverance, impacting behaviour in various areas such as academic achievement, career advancement, emotional well-being, and physical health.

Volunteering boosts an individual's confidence in his abilities and personal effectiveness, as confirmed by "Wilson & Musick" (1999). One reason people volunteer for personal happiness is to strengthen their belief that volunteering can make a difference, thereby enhancing personal effectiveness. Volunteering also provides a sense of control over our lives and our environment, which can alleviate depression. Researchers suggest that volunteering reduces the risk of death by increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem, acting as a form of anti-stress (Rashidiya, 2016).

The human values underlying volunteering bring happiness to individuals by distancing them from stressors, helping others, setting goals, and strengthening social ties. Through volunteering, individuals enhance their social identity and foster a sense of cohesion, solidarity, support, and responsibility. Happiness has become essential for achieving psychological well-being and a good quality of life. Helping others allows individuals to break free from routine and boredom, while also developing cognitive abilities and potentially opening up new scientific and professional opportunities.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

The positive influence of volunteering on people is wide and cannot be fully captured in few paragraphs. It can serve as a form of behavioural or group therapy for a variety of mental disorders and diseases. Some of the benefits of volunteer work on psychological well-being include making new friends, strengthening social relations, enhancing communication and social skills, promoting common

interests, and providing an opportunity for personal growth and development. Additionally, volunteering can help individuals find meaning in their lives, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve their overall quality of life. It can also serve as a therapeutic approach for patients with mental problems, allowing them to focus on responsibilities, find purpose, and improve their social status.

The relationship between volunteering and psychology is one that is deeply intertwined. Volunteering offers a wide range of psychological benefits for both the volunteers and those who receive their support. From fostering a sense of purpose and fulfilment to promoting social connection and empathy, the psychological impact of volunteering is undeniable. So, promoting and supporting volunteerism can be a valuable strategy for enhancing mental health and well-being in individuals and communities alike.

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