

BAR – ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The contribution of social environment and functions of volunteering on
the motivation among students volunteering in a mental health center**

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Abstract

One of the requests of being accepted to BA studies is to volunteer. There are many frameworks where these students can answer this request, however, it is very difficult to find volunteers and commit them to a whole year. (Papadakis, Griffin & Frater, 2005). The need for this study originated in order to try and understand this phenomenon and reduce it.

The study deals with students' sense of motivation during the year of volunteering. According to self-determination theory (i.e., SDT) motivation in general and the motivation to volunteer for psychology students in particular can range from five different levels in the sequence between external and internal motivation, the same distinction used by many motivational theories in the past (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to Deci & Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 2000) each of the motivations will have a clear outcome that will affect learning, performance, personal experience and well-being.

In order to study the factors which can affect the sense of motivation felt by the volunteers, I chose to study the reasons that led them to volunteer in the first place. Different researchers claim that there are numerous reasons; among which it could be found that they answer various psychological needs (Faletehan, van Burg, Thompson, & Wempe, 2021). According to the functional approach, different acts can psychologically serve different goals to different people, such as answering social needs, advancing personal careers, an opportunity to learn and understand new skills, caring for others, and protection from guilt feelings and improve self-esteem and value (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998).

In addition to the reasons that lead one to volunteer, social influence in the framework of the volunteering is also a factor. The social environment presented in various studies as what may have a great influence in supporting the volunteers' get (Gange, 2003). In this study, the social environment refers to the volunteers' coordinators who have a major role in creating the autonomous and belonging of the volunteers (Deci, Ryan, Gagne, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001).

Until these days, few studies dealing with the relations between self-determination theory, social function of volunteering and the social environment were done. This study intends to look at the connection between the two motivating theories and the long term of the social environment among psychology students.

The participants in this study were B.A students of psychology who study in academic institutions in Israel. It took place in two different time points during the first and one voluntary year. The data was gathered in two consecutive voluntary years. In the first cycle 83 volunteers, ages 19-34 (52.6% female) answered the questioner. In the second cycle, due to natural decrease of participants in the first voluntary year, only 59 participants took part. To check the study's assumptions, the participants answered three questioners: (1) SDT theory questioner, (2) WCQ questioner and (3) VFI questioner.

Analyzing the long term motivation prediction (using multiple regression equations) it was found that those volunteers who arrived with an understanding motive, showed higher inner motivation to volunteer from the beginning and kept it for a longer time. Those volunteers who were career motivated, expressed external motivation from the start kept it for a long time too. While the social environment, the coordinators support predicted decrease in external motivation along the year. It was not found as predicting a clear change in student-volunteers that arrived with internal motivation. It seems understanding and career drive had better influence on those student- volunteers. The students reported the other factors as motives but these were not distinct in predicting long term motivation.

This study has several defaults. It focuses in a certain part in the central part of the country. Studying other areas could very well teach us a lot about voluntary patters of different volunteers and why they choose to do so. In a further study, therefore, it is worth studying other geographical areas both in Israel and abroad, as having psychology students volunteering as part of the learning program exists there too. During the study some students stopped taking part in the program. I would consequently recommend including quality study and having a follow up so as to understand the process and deduct and learn lessons. Another limit of this study is that it was gender homogenous, not many men were represented. Most participants were women and the study results many have been affected by that. To end, the size of the study, the frequency of the voluntary work and prediction studying, were also limitation of this study.

Understanding that student who volunteer in order to learn new things have new understanding and receive new knowledge and skills, advance their future personal career, reserve the inner motivation whereas those who volunteer to advance their future career reserve their external motivation. This is a significant contribution to the existing knowledge in

psychology in general and particularly to the mental health centers. In the future this study will be used to draw conclusions and improve the experience of psychology students' voluntary work.