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## Young and Older Caregivers at Homeless Animal and Human Shelters: Selfish and Selfless Motives in Helping Others

Joseph R. Ferrari, 1,2 Michelle M. Loftus, 1 and Julia Pesek 1

In the present study, young (n = 34) and older (n = 70) adult volunteers at either animal (n = 48) or human (n = 56) homeless shelters were asked to complete measures of caregiver stress/satisfaction, volunteer motives, and social desirability. Young compared to older volunteers assisting animals, but not humans, reported a significantly higher caseload and spending significantly more time per visit with their clients. In addition, young volunteers reported significantly higher levels of caregiver stress with humans more than animals. Also, volunteers at human (but not animal) homeless shelters claimed the need for meeting social expectations as a motive for community service. Furthermore, younger compared to older volunteers reported gaining relevant career experience, obtaining a knowledge of the plight of others, relieving aversive emotions, and meeting normative expectations as significant motives for volunteering. These results may have important implications for recruitment and training of community volunteers at homeless shelters.

**KEY WORDS:** community volunteerism; caregivers; human and animal shelters; young vs. older volunteers.

#### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, national attention has focused on the recruitment and development of *community service volunteers* programs which involve the commitment of one's time and talents at providing assistance to others

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within the local community. Surveys suggest that about one-quarter of American schools offer courses that require community service (Independent Sector, 1990; Newmann & Rutter, 1983), and these campus-based service programs involve nearly 100,000 volunteers each year (Youth Service American, 1988). Researchers consider community volunteerism as a way to promote civic responsibility and moral growth in participants. Community service programs can be thought of as a primary prevention tool to social distress and a means of developing life-long community activism (Moore & Allen, 1996). For example, Newmann and Rutter (1983) proposed that community service may aid in the development of competent, independent persons with strong reasoning skills, problem-solving abilities, and abstract and hypothetical thought processes. Weinstein (1995) found that among adults community volunteerism provides a purpose in life and reduces boredom proneness. In addition, volunteering may increase one's self-esteem, self-worth, mastery over life, dependability, leadership capabilities, personal sense of social responsibility, and getting along with others (Harrison, 1987; Kirby, 1989). In short, community service may increase a volunteer's personal perceptions of self-efficacy and empowerment (Ferrari & Geller, 1994; Ferrari & Jason, 1997a).

In reviewing the literature on volunteers to persons with AIDS, Omoto and Snyder (1990) described a set of altruistic motives that they claimed were applicable to volunteers in general. They suggested that motives for volunteering were personal ("selfish") and/or other ("selfless") oriented, with individuals most likely driven by both orientations. These motives included: values, a personal feeling of obligation to help others; understanding, a desire to gain a better knowledge of a group of people or social phenomenon; social, a sense of civic concern or commitment to aid others: career, a way of gaining hands-on experiences that enhance one's occupational skills; esteem, a way of enhancing one's self-worth by aiding others; and, protective, a desire to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation by getting involved in the service of others. Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, 1993; Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992) claim that most volunteer caregivers report values and understanding as their highest motives for assisting others. Okun and Eisenberg (1992) found that continuance as a volunteer caregiver was significantly predicted by high levels of understanding and social motives.

The present study examined the motives of volunteer caregivers to humans or animals residing in homeless shelters. Assisting homeless men and women has been of interest to social service and public health workers for a number of years (see Smith & Ferrari, 1997), but little psychological research attention has focused on caregivers to animals in homeless shelters (e.g., Manning & Serpell, 1994; Ray, 1982). Granger and Carter (1991)

stated that pet owners who shared their animal with elderly, nursing home residents as part of a "pet therapy" program were less anxious about volunteering their time and more satisfied from being a community volunteer than caregivers who did not share any pet. Savishinsky (1992) reported that community members and college students who brought their pet dog or cat to various nursing homes for the elderly reported greater satisfaction in caring for the animals that serviced others. Unfortunately, in these studies the caregivers to the animals were also the owner of that pet, thereby confounding caregiver satisfaction with effort justification by owning the animal Hart and Mader (1995) found that contributions to employee burnout among humane society staff and administrators included anger and disgust from working with the public. However, these stressors were associated with professionals who worked with people who were relinquishing their pets in order for them to be put to death. It is possible that making a difference when helping others decreases a caregiver's "burnout" from stressors (Maslanka, 1996), but employees in humane societies who are faced with the ultimate death of an animal may not be able to be relieved of negative stressors.

In the present exploratory study, young and older adult men and women were volunteers to homeless animals or homeless people, both residing in private shelters. We focused on young and older caregivers in order to ascertain whether there were significant differences in their motives. While both selfish and selfless motives may be relevant for community volunteerism (Snyder, 1993), it is not known how men and women who differed in age, but working at the same shelter, might differ in their volunteer motives for community service. It was expected, though, that young volunteers would report more personal, selfish motives (e.g., the need to acquire relevant career experiences from community service) than older adult volunteers. Research by Zweigenhaft, Armstrong, Quintis, and Riddick (1996) found that young volunteers donated their time because the personal rewards, while older volunteers provided service because they were drawn by social interaction rewards.

We chose to compare volunteers at human and humane (animal) shelters. Of course, we do not propose that homeless men and women are similar to homeless cats and dogs. It is not the residents that are the focus of this study, but the characteristics (e.g., volunteer motives) of person who assist at these sites that are the participants. By comparing these homeless sites we were able to explore whether a caregiver's motives for volunteering were purely altruistic (reflecting a desire to help living creatures that need assistance), or whether social interaction motives (such as a need to prevent isolation and loneliness) that may contribute to a person's choice of assisting people over animals. Because of the few studies on human vs animal

caregivers, no *a priori* expectations were made about which motives would emerge in this exploratory study.

Besides volunteer motives, participants completed reliable and valid self-report measures that assessed stress and satisfaction from being a nonprofessional care provider, and social desirability to assess response biases. The measure of caregiving experiences has been used with professional and nonprofessional health care providers, and among long-term vs. beginning caregivers (Ferrari & Jason, 1997a; Ferrari, Jason, & Salina, 1995; Ferrari, McCown, & Pantano, 1993). Caregivers reported greater satisfaction than stress from their experience, independent of self-reported levels of life satisfaction and social desirability. In the present study, it was expected that greater satisfaction than stress levels also would be reported by the caregivers, but no a priori hypothesis was made in terms significant stress or satisfaction differences between young vs. older caregiver at animals vs. human volunteers. To determine if there was an influence of social desirability in response sets, correlates between social desirability scores, volunteer motives, and caregiver stress/satisfaction also were examined. Consistent with other studies on volunteer motives and caregiver experiences (e.g., Ferrari, Dobis, Sierwaski, Boyer, Kiernias, Mechna, & Wegner, 1999), it was expected that social desirability scores would not be significantly related to self-reported selfish or selfless motives or caregiver satisfaction or stress.

#### **METHODS**

#### Participants and Setting

A total of 104 community service volunteers (83 women, 21 men) participated in the current study. The distribution for age among these participants was such that there was a significant number of young (M = 18.5 years, SD = 4.3: 29 women, 5 men) and older (M = 54.9, SD = 10.3: 54 women, 16 men) service volunteers (overall M = 36.5 years; range = 17-70). Most participants were Caucasian (71.2%), had at least some college education (77.9%), of Christian faith (55.8%: 37% Roman Catholic; 29% non-Catholic), and employed either full or part time (67.5%: 13.5% full-time students) with an average annual income of \$27,400. Also, participants reported that they were a community volunteer at only their present service site (64.5%) and were not an officer in that service organization (81.9%). When at their community service site, participants noticed an average of 5.9 (SD = 4.0) other volunteers also present assisting clients.

Participants were recruited for this study from either two homeless animal shelters or two homeless shelters for humans. One animal and one human shelter each were located within the city of Chicago, and the other two shelters were located in suburban cities west of Chicago. No participant was involved at more than one of these four shelters, and pilot testing indicated that participants were not significantly different in terms of demographic profile or scores on psychometric self-reports. Therefore, no further comparisons based on site location were performed or included in any primary analyses.

The animal shelters contained household cats and dogs that were found wandering without owners or that were relinguished by their owners for a variety of reasons. These homeless pets typically required medical attention, and the volunteers provided "social" care in the form of grooming, feeding, nurturing, and showing the animals to potential adopters. Persons from the human shelters were homeless, with a wide variety of medical and financial difficulties. Many of the homeless men and women reported being single and actively seeking both a place to live permanently as well as steady, full-time employment. Volunteers at the human homeless shelters provided social and emotional support, and interpersonal contact with the homeless persons. Volunteers did not provide medical or psychological services to the homeless persons. It should be noted that little other information for this study were collected about the homeless men and women in order to maintain their privacy and confidentiality, and because an assessment of homeless clients was not the focus of this study. The animal and human shelters were private organizations which relied on the assistance of community volunteers for many of the daily operations at the site.

#### **Psychometric Measures**

Participants completed several standard reliable and valid psychometric measures. One of these scales was Clary et al.'s (1992) *Volunteer Functions Inventory* (VFI), a 30-item, 7-point rating scale where respondents report how important or accurate each possible reason for volunteering is for them. For each participant, six subscale scores (each with five items) were calculated corresponding to the different motives for volunteering proposed by Snyder and his colleagues (Clary *et al.*, 1992, Omoto & Snyder, 1990). High scores reflected the importance of that motive to the respondent. The scale has good internal consistency and temporal stability, as well as construct and predictive validities (see Clary *et al.*, 1992; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Ferrari *et al.*, 1999). With the present sample, the mean score and coefficient alpha for each subscale were (career, *M* score = 10.7,

alpha r=0.91; esteem, M score = 17.2, alpha r=0.84; protective, M score = 13.1, alpha r=0.81; social, M score = 13.7, alpha r=0.83; understanding, M score = 21.6, alpha r=0.83; value, M score = 28.9, alpha r=0.87).

Participants also completed Ferrari et al.'s (1993) 14-item Caregiver Scale. This 7-point (1 = low; 7 = high) self-report inventory assessed the emotional experiences from working as a care provider to others. Two subscales (each with seven items) comprise the inventory, including personal satisfaction (M score = 36.8, alpha r = 0.87) and emotional stress (M score = 15.1, alpha r = 0.82) subscales. Ferrari et al. (1993) reported the satisfaction and stress scales were negatively related (r = -0.50), internally consistent, temporally stable, and unrelated to social desirability. The inventory has been validated with target samples of health care, volunteer, and pastoral caregivers to persons with AIDS, as well as caregivers to physically disabled, elderly persons and homeless persons (Ferrari et al., 1993, 1995, in press; Ferrari, Billow, Jason, & Grill, 1997; Ferrari & Jason, 1997). After 6 months of caring for persons with AIDS, caregivers' stress scores were found to be related to depression (Ferrari et al., 1993). Stress scores also were related to lower levels of knowledge about an illness, and satisfaction scores were related to perceived vulnerability to a physical illness (Ferrari et al., 1997).

Finally, each participant completed Crowne and Marlowe's (1960) Social Desirability Scale, a 33-item, unidimensional, true/false measure. Participants completed this scale, embedded among other scales, in order to determine whether there were response biases toward socially appropriate responses to their survey. With the present sample, the mean score was 15.9, and coefficient alpha was 0.77. It was expected that VFI scores would not be significantly related to SD scores, consistent with other studies (see Clary et al., 1992: Ferrari et al., in press). Nevertheless, we felt it important to include the SD scale with this study as a "control" over potential response set toward socially desirable answers.

#### **Procedure**

Community service volunteers from animal and human homeless shelters were recruited for this study by female research associates. During a breaktime, an associate approached a volunteer and explained the general purpose of this study as a survey of volunteers at community sites. If a volunteer agreed to participate, a consent form was signed and dated and then separated from the subsequent self-report measures. The associate then asked the volunteer to complete demographic items (age, gender, edu-

cation status, race, religion, employment status, and annual income) and a brief set of questions on service experiences, including: length of time (months) they have been affiliated with the present site, number of visits to this site they make per month, length of time (minutes) they spend assisting clients at each visit, number of clients they assist per visit, number of other volunteers present per visit, whether they hold office in that volunteer organization, and whether they are affiliated with any other volunteer organization.

Associates also asked volunteers to complete each of the psychometric inventories cited above, namely the caregiver stress/satisfaction scale, the volunteer functioning inventory, and the social desirability measure (administered in random order across participants). It took participants approximately 25–30 minutes to complete all items. Compliance by volunteers for completing the study's items was quite high (over 95% of persons asked at each site).

#### **RESULTS**

A 2 (age: young vs. older)  $\times$  2 (homeless shelter: animal vs. human)  $\times$  2 (sex: men vs. women) MANOVA was performed on the demographic items and the scale scores used in this study. These calculations assessed whether there were age and homeless shelter differences between men and women who served as community volunteers. There was no significant three-way interaction; and, there was no significant two-way interactions or main effect involving sex. It appears that men and women volunteers did not differ significantly in their motives or caregiving experiences. No further gender comparisons, therefore, were computed with the present set of participants.

There was a significant two-way interaction, however, between age and homeless shelter on the length of time (minutes) volunteers spent with homeless residents per visit [F(1, 102) = 4.65, p < .05]. Post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) indicated that young volunteers assisting at animal shelters reported spending significantly more time with homeless residents than volunteers in the other three groups. Also, there was a significant two-way interaction between age and homeless shelter on the number of residents assisted per visit [F(1, 102) = 5.86, p < .02]. Post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) indicated that young volunteers at the animal shelters and older volunteers at the human shelters reported working with the most homeless residents, compared to volunteers in the other two group. Also, on the length of time volunteers had been associated with their present site there was a significant main effect for age [F(1, 102) = 6.12, p < .02].

Older volunteers had been involved at their site longer (M number of months = 37.8, SD = 15.2) than younger volunteers (M = 10.9, SD = 10.2). On the number of monthly volunteer visits made by participants, there was a significant main effect for homeless shelter [F(1, 102) = 4.55, p < .04]. Volunteers at the animal shelters made more monthly visits (M = 4.3, SD = 2.3) than those volunteers at the human shelter (M = 1.9, SD = 1.2).

In addition, on reported caregiver stress there was a significant two-way interactions between age and shelter [F(1, 102) = 6.99, p < .01]. Post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) indicated that young volunteers at human shelters reported the highest level of caregiver stress, followed by older volunteers at animal shelters, and both these groups claimed more stress than the other two groups of volunteers. Finally, on gaining career experience as a motive for volunteering there was a significant two-way interactions between age and site [F(1, 102) = 4.82, p < .04]. Post hoc comparisons (Newman-Keuls) indicated that young volunteers at animal and human shelters performed community service as a way to obtain relevant career experience more strongly than older volunteers at animal and human shelters. Table I presents the mean duration/frequency and scale scores for these particular variables.

In addition, there was a significant main effect for homeless shelter on social motive for volunteering [F(1, 102) = 5.04, p < .05]. Volunteers at the human shelter (M = 16.2, SD = 6.3) more than volunteers at animal shelters (M = 10.7, SD = 4.8) were involved in community service in order to live up to perceived social norms held by others. There also was a significant main effect for age on volunteer motives as career [F(1, 102) = 37.73, p < .001], protective [F(1, 102) = 7.43, p < .01], social [F(1, 102) = 11.13, p < .001], and understanding [F(1, 102) = 10.72, p < .002].

Table I. Mean Score on Demographic and Psychometric Items for Yo	oung and Older
Volunteers at Animal or Human Shelters	_

	Length of time (min) working with clients	Number of clients per visit	Caregiver stress subscale	Career motive subscale
Young volunteers Animals $(n = 15)$	331.5 (68.3)	57.7 (5.1)	12.2 (10.1)	18.2 (8.9)
Humans $(n = 19)$ Older volunteers	166.5 (43.9)	7.4 (3.7)	20.8 (11.3)	16.2 (8.4)
Animals $(n = 33)$ Humans $(n = 37)$	188.5 (47.0) 198.4 (41.1)	15.6 (9.1) 37.8 (5.9)	17.8 (16.5) 10.8 (11.3)	7.5 (4.1) 7.2 (3.7)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup>Values in parentheses are standard deviation.

Younger volunteers stated that they were more motivated by career experience (M = 17.5, SD = 8.5), protection against aversive feelings (M = 17.2, SD = 7.5), social expectations (M = 16.6, SD = 7.8), and an understanding of others (M = 26.4, SD = 5.6) than older volunteers (career M = 7.4, SD = 3.9; protective M = 11.6, SD = 5.4; social M = 12.3, SD = 5.7; understanding M = 19.2, SD = 6.6).

Partial correlates controlling for the frequency of volunteer visits per month to the shelter, and controlling for a person's length of time associated as a volunteer with the shelter organization are shown in Table II. These two variables were partialed out of the regressions because there were significant differences between young and older volunteers in terms of site involvement and between animal and human volunteers in visitation frequency. The size (magnitude) of the partial coefficients between same pairs of scale scores showed very similar patterns. Caregiver satisfaction was significantly related to the volunteer motives of esteem, protection, understanding, and values in both sets of partial coefficients. Caregiver stress was not significantly related to any volunteer motives. Social desirability was not significantly related to either caregiving stress or satisfaction, or to the set of volunteer motives, even when controlling for one's length of time as a volunteer at the site or the number of times per month visiting the site. In short, it seems that participants in this study were not respond-

Table II. Partial Correlates Between Self-Reported Psychometric Inventories Across All Participants<sup>a</sup>

			Partic	ipants <sup>a</sup>					
Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Caregiver experience									
1. Satisfaction		.13	.16	.39**	.35**	05	.41**	.64**	.05
2. Stress	.15	_	09	.07	.09	06	.06	01	.04
Volunteer functioning	g motives								
3. Career	.12	08		.48**	.57**	.32**	.56**	.19	19
4. Esteem	.38**	.16	.49**	_	.77**	.33**	.49**	.24*	.02
5. Protective	.34**	.11	.59**	.77**	_	.33**	.49**	.25*	09
6. Social	06	06	.33**	.33**	.33**		.49**	.12	11
7. Understanding	.36**	.11	.59**	.51**	.51**	.49**		.36**	12
8. Value	.63**	01	.19	.23*	.24*	.11	.36**	_	.06
Social desirability									
·	.04	.03	18	02	09	13	15	.06	-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup>Coefficients below the diagonal = controlling for number of times per month as a volunteer; Coefficients above the diagonal = controlling for length of time in months as a volunteer (n = 104).

<sup>\*</sup>p < .01.

<sup>\*\*</sup>p < .001.

ing to the scales in socially desirable ways that would have reflected response biases in their answers.

#### **DISCUSSION**

It is important to recognize from the present study that differences emerged between young and older volunteers, regardless of their gender. For instance, both young and older volunteers at the human homeless shelters claimed social motives as more important than volunteers at the animal homeless shelters for community service. Despite the fact that social motives (normative expectations to assist others) were not significantly related to the SD scale (which measured a tendency toward social approval, particularly when responding to surveys), male and female volunteers admitted that they were helping people, but not animals, in shelters because of a need to act on a civic responsibility.

In addition, young volunteers at animal homeless shelters reported spending the most amount of time as a caregiver and having the greatest number of "clients," yet these caregivers did not report the highest level of stress from caregiving. These results support Ray's (1982) claim that love of animals demonstrates a person's positive, general expression of compassion. Further, young volunteers working with homeless men and women indicated greater levels of caregiver stress than older volunteers who also assisted humans. Young and older volunteers, however, did not differ significantly in the amount of time they spent as a caregiver, and older volunteers had a greater number of human clients needing their assistance than younger volunteers. Perhaps, older volunteers had obtained an ability to cope with the stresses needed as a caregiver. Older volunteers reported being a volunteer longer than young volunteers, and it is possible that during their experiences these men and women caregivers learned important skills to deal with varied client problems and interaction issues. Of course, further research is needed with community volunteers to ascertain a better understanding of effective coping strategies in paraprofessional caregiving (Ferrari & Jason, 1997b).

Young and older volunteers also reported significant differences in their motives for active involvement in community service. Clary et al. (1992) theorized that for many beginning (e.g., young) volunteers, selfish motives (such as personal career skill enhancement or attempts to relieve emotional "guilt" for social problems) were often important reasons for involvement in community service activities. However, these researchers stated that volunteers often cite more selfless motives (such as a need to act on social norms promoting civic responsibility to help others, or at-

tempting to understand the plight of the disadvantaged) as reasons for being a community caregiver. In the present study, independent of social desirability young volunteers (who also reported that they had less experience as a community service volunteers) cited career and protective motives as more important than older volunteers for their reasons for involvement as a community caregiver. Also, young compared to older volunteers claimed social and understanding as other motives that were more important factors for their community involvement (and these claims were independent of social desirability). Thus, it seems that the theoretical statements of Clary et al. (1992) and others (Snyder, 1990; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, in press), were supported and expanded: both selfish and selfless motives promote volunteer service, at least among young (less experienced) community caregivers.

The pattern of intercorrelates among volunteer motives were consistent with studies involving different volunteer agencies and participants (e.g., Ferrari et al., in press; Omoto & Snyder, 1990). In fact, the present results were consistent with previous studies using young adults (Ferrari et al., in press) and older adults (Omoto & Snyder, 1990). Values and understanding were significantly related, and these motives have been classified as "selfless" motives (Snyder, 1993) reflecting involvement in helping others to fulfill civic or social responsibilities. Furthermore, the motives of protective and esteem were significantly related, identified as "selfish" motives (Snyder, 1993) where community service originates from a personal need to help others. Given that the former two motives reflect "selflessness" and the later two motives suggest "selfishness" (cf. Clary et al., 1992), it appears that emotional satisfaction experienced from providing assistance to other living creatures may include both internal and external orientations for volunteerism. These results indicate that both personal and other-oriented motives influence volunteerism. Furthermore, volunteers claimed a sense of satisfaction as a care provided was positively related to value and understanding, as well as esteem and protection, motives for service. It seems that care for others reflects a person's prosocial values, a sense of understanding of those receiving the care, a positive "good feeling" from providing care, and relieving any negative feelings from volunteering. These relations seem to be independent of social desirability.

Future studies are needed in the area of community volunteerism. The small number of male participants in this present study may limit the generalizability of these results. Only a few self-report measures were used, and no record of actual volunteer behaviors were taken of participants at any of the homeless shelters. Still, age-related differences in motives and caregiver experiences seems apparent, and efficient ways to recruit participants and effective ways to instruct coping strategies seems warranted. Fi-

nally, we believe that the present study does provide some additional knowledge about volunteerism in America. The need for involvement in social ills is apparent, especially as our society enters a new century with limited resources but expanding civic problems. Community service may be one way citizens can offer a real make-a-difference in the lives of others.

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