



Age and motives for volunteering: Further evidence.

Dávila, M. and Díaz-Morales, J. (2009). Age and motives for volunteering: Further evidence. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 82-95.

Overview

This article explores the socioemotional theory (Cartensen, 1995) with the purpose of evaluating how people selectively optimize their activities involving social investments as they increase in age, investing more in self-relevant and meaningful goals. Results from the Volunteer Functions Inventory found that as age increases, career, understanding and making friends as motivations decrease, while social and values volunteer motivations' increase.

Previous Studies

Presently, the Functional theory of motivation to volunteer is the most important approach to understanding motivation to volunteer (Clary and Snyder, 1991).

This approach holds that different individuals may participate in the same volunteer work for every age and motives for volunteering: 83 different reasons and volunteering can satisfy different motives for the same individual at different times. Based on this theory, Clary and Snyder identified six primary motives

- **Protective** (to reduce negative feelings)
- **Values** (to express or act on important values)
- **Understanding** (to learn about the World)
- **Social** (to strengthen social relationships)
- **Career** (to gain career-related experience)
- **Enhancement** (to enhance self-esteem).
- **“Making friends”**. Okun and Schultz (2003) included a new motivation not described by Clary and Snyder: Whereas social motive shows the desire to sustain existing friendships as a motive for volunteering, the making friends motive shows the desire to make new friends.

Age differences

The authors cite some studies that find that age has little bearing on volunteers' motives to carry out voluntary activity. However, they acknowledge other studies that find that younger volunteers tend to harbour career and protective motives to volunteer, whereas older people are motivated more by the social aspects of volunteering.

Life stage

Marriage and income were found to be unrelated, but involvement in full time work and a family reduces rather than promotes volunteerism in young adulthood. Past studies have found that chronological age is negatively associated with perceived amount of time left in life, and

the prioritisation of goals is different across life stages have showed that the importance of social goals related to knowledge seeking decreases across adulthood, whereas the importance of social goals related to emotional gratification increases with age. Also, as people age, they have a greater preference for familiar as opposed to new social partners.

Results

The sample of this study included 214 volunteers affiliated with 23 non-governmental organisations.

The most important motivations across all age groups are understanding and values. Up to 35 years old, understanding is the most important motivation for volunteering, but, after this age, the most important motivating factor is expressing or acting on values. All age groups also consider the protective and career motivations as less important in volunteering. From 26 years old onward, the career motivation is the least important. The importance of the remaining motivations changes for each age group. Up to 45 years of age, making new friends is more important than social and enhancement motivations, but, from this age, making friends is the least important of these three motivations. In Figure 1, the variations of motivations by age group are showed.

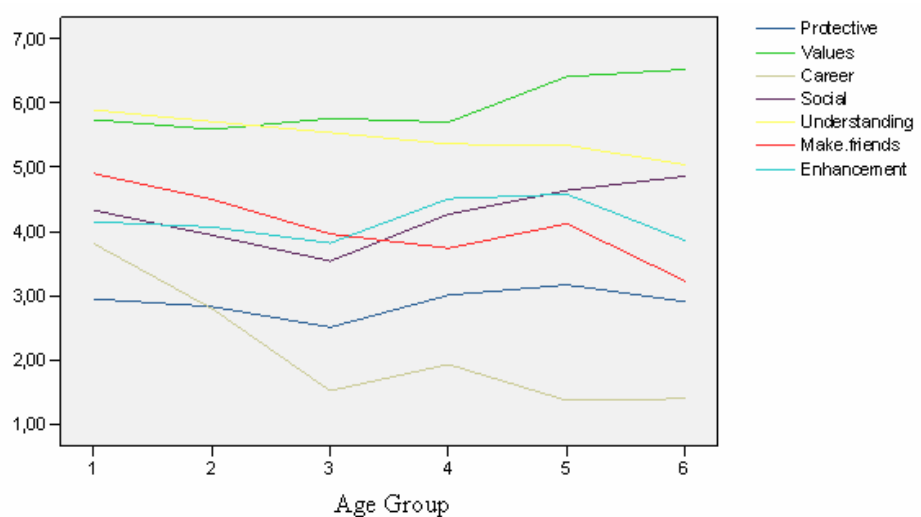


Figure 1. (Dávila and Díaz-Morales, 2009, pp. 87)
Mean of motivations by age group.

However, the career and understanding motive is very important throughout the life course, but it progressively loses importance with age. With regard to the career motivation, all age groups consider it to be the least important motivation, but, starting at 26 years of age, its absolute importance is reduced even more. Volunteers between 16-35 years old give significantly more importance to the career motive than other volunteers, and this age group gives significantly more importance to the understanding motive than older volunteers.

The values motive is one of the most important motivations for volunteering across all age groups, but its importance is greatest from 36 years old onward. Significant differences were found in the importance of this motive between younger volunteers (26-35 years) and the oldest volunteers. There is a positive and significant correlation between age and the values motive that continues even when controlling for other motives for volunteering



Making friends is more important to younger volunteers and age has a significant and inverse relationship with the importance of making friends, but, when we control for the effect of other motives, age is not a significant predictor of the motive to make friends. The social motive is of relatively intermediate importance in all age groups, but its importance increases starting from 46 years of age.

Limitations

This study is only representative of Spain. Furthermore, health was not taken into account and people may not be aware of the underlying motives for why they volunteer.

Conclusion

The most striking finding of the present study is that within all six age groups, the two motives that were rated as most important were value and understanding. Thus, regardless of age, ‘if one were going to develop persuasive messages for volunteering, it seems that the emphasis would be on themes such as “Volunteering is a great way to express your concern for others and to learn about the world around you”’.

References

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