

ABSTRACT

Older women are increasing in number and are the gender who most often volunteer. Thus, an increasing pool of older women volunteers may be forthcoming. Keeping these women satisfied can serve them and the people they serve. The 119 women in this study range in age from 60 to 93, are racially diverse, and are most often low-to-middle income. For these women, volunteer satisfaction and retention relate to interaction on the job, recognition for their work, and meeting their own expectations. Methods for meeting these needs are suggested.

Older Women Who Volunteer: Tapping a Valuable Woman Resource

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The 21st century will witness rising numbers of elder adults, and the majority will be women (Atchley, 1991; Hooymann and Kiyak, 1993). Of the elders who provide volunteer service through formal organizations, the majority are women (Garner and Mercer, 1989). Thus, demographic projections and volunteer trends suggest increasing numbers of older women in volunteer roles. By addressing the issues of satisfaction and retention, more older women may find continued usefulness through volunteer work which utilizes their skills and serves the needs of society.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This article presents characteristics associated with volunteer satisfaction and retention for 119 volunteers who are older women. The work is based on a prior study of 151 volunteers who were both men and women (Stevens, 1989-90). Volunteer administrators and supervisors can utilize these findings to tap the proliferating human resource of older women who choose to volunteer.

THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The volunteers of study were working under the auspices of one senior volunteer organization in the northeastern U.S. They provided information about themselves and their volunteer roles through a 46-item survey which was developed and pretested by this author.

The survey questionnaire was pretested with a representative sample of older volunteers, the majority of whom were women. Reliability for the five items measuring volunteer satisfaction was documented by an inter-item coefficient of .95. Face validity was determined by a three-person panel of gerontological experts consisting of one mental health practitioner, one sociologist, and one nurse administrator. Content validity was established for items measuring "satisfaction," "retention," "socioeconomic status," and "role strain" through comparison with definitions of these concepts in the literature. Criterion validity was upheld for "retention," "age," "marital status," and "gender" by comparing volunteers' responses with other sources of this information.

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Role theory was the basis for the development of study variables. Questionnaire items inquired into qualities of the volunteer role such as "role sanctions," including provisions of transportation, money, and recognition; "role-set interaction;" "role induction;" and "role continuity" in regard to type of work, respect, and enjoyment. Questionnaire items which measure these and other role-related characteristics are identified in Appendix I.

Questions about the women themselves inquire about sociodemographic characteristics such as age, marital status, racial and ethnic identity, and socioeconomic status, including education, occupation, and income. Information about their levels of satisfaction and retention was also collected.

Data were analyzed through frequency distributions of sociodemographic and role characteristics and correlational statistics to determine which characteristics were associated with volunteer retention and satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was then used to identify the most salient variables.

THE WOMEN OF STUDY

The women of study range in age from 60 to 93 years, with the vast majority being in their sixties and seventies (89%). Most are widows (53%). There is a sizable representation of racial and ethnic minorities, including nearly one-fourth who are African-American. The majority are of low to middle socioeconomic status, with over one-fourth reporting less than \$5,000 annual income. Most were formerly, but are not currently, employed (86%). The majority are long-time community residents who have provided service for at least five years (59%) and live within one mile of their volunteer site (55%).

Volunteer satisfaction ranges from relatively low to high, with the largest proportion being "moderately satisfied" (43%). Over 70% of these women have been volunteering for more than one and one-half years; nearly 30% discontinued

service during this time. These characteristics are further detailed in Figure 1.

Characteristics which Contribute to Retention and Satisfaction

Six qualities of the volunteer and the volunteer role contributed to retention and satisfaction. Role-set interaction, role congruence, role recognition, assistance with transportation, continuity of respect, and pattern of service were each statistically significant. These characteristics are explained below:

Role-set interaction refers to the number of agency workers with whom the volunteer had contact. Responses could range from "nobody" to "ten people or more." The women who reported contact with more people reported higher levels of retention and satisfaction.

Role congruence refers to similarity between one's expectations and actual experiences on the volunteer job. Response choices ranged from "just like I expected" to "not as I expected." Those who perceived higher degrees of congruence between expectations and experiences tended to perceive higher levels of retention and satisfaction.

Role recognition refers to recognition for one's work. This included recognition from the staff of both the volunteer organization and placement agency. Responses ranged from "a lot of recognition" to "no recognition." Receiving a lot of recognition was associated with higher levels of retention and satisfaction.

Assistance with transportation was indicated by whether transportation assistance or reimbursement was provided. Responses could be either "yes" or "no." Receiving this assistance was related to satisfaction.

Continuity of respect was measured by the perceived similarity in level of respect between past and current work roles. The degree of similarity could range from "a lot alike" to "very different." More similarity in respect was related to more satisfaction.

Age	60 - 69	45.3%	Occupational Identity	Homemaker	27.4%
	70 - 79	44.4%		Skilled Work	20.5%
	80 - 89	9.4%		Clerical Work	17.1%
	90 - 99	.9%		Business	8.5%
	Total	100.0%		Managerial	6.8%
Marital Status	Married	27.4%		Professional	9.4%
	Widowed	53.0%		Other	10.2%
	Divorced	5.1%		Total	100.0%
	Separated	2.6%	Community Residence	Less than ten years	12.1%
	Never Married	12.0%		10 - 20 years	12.9%
	Total	100.0%		20 - 30 years	19.8%
Racial/Ethnic Minority	Black/African	24.6%		More than 30 years	55.2%
	Italian	19.3%		Total	100.0%
	Jewish	17.5%	Pattern of Service	Less than one year	8.7%
	White/Caucasian	16.7%		One to five years	32.2%
	Hispanic	9.6%		Five to ten years	17.4%
	Other	5.3%		More than ten years	41.7%
	Total	100.0%		Total	100.0%
Annual Income	Less than \$5,000	25.2%	Proximity to Site	Less than one mile	54.8%
	\$5,000 - \$9,999	41.7%		One to two miles	20.9%
	\$10,000 - \$14,999	18.4%		Three to five miles	16.5%
	\$15,000 - \$19,999	16.8%		More than five miles	7.8%
	More than \$20,000	7.8%		Total	100.0%
	Total	100.0%	Volunteer Satisfaction	Low Satisfaction	22.0%
Education	Grade school or less	37.4%		Moderate Satisfaction	43.0%
	High school graduate	45.2%		High Satisfaction	35.0%
	College graduate	17.4%		Total	100.0%
	Total	100.0%	Volunteer Retention	Less than 1 1/2 Years	71.0%
Employment Status	Not employed	86.3%		More than 1 1/2 Years	29.0%
	Working part time	9.4%		Total	100.0%
	Working full time	4.3%			
	Total	100.0%			

Figure 1
Characteristics of the women of study

Pattern of service was measured by the number of years the volunteer had been involved in service to her community. Responses ranged from "less than one year" to "more than ten years." There was a positive relationship between number of years and level of satisfaction. The statistical significance of these findings is reported in Figure 2.

Since several characteristics were significant, multiple regression analysis was employed to identify the most salient characteristics when all were considered. "Role-set interaction" and "role congruence" continued to impact volunteer retention. "Role recognition" and "role congruence" continued to impact volunteer satisfaction. The multiple regression statistics which document these findings are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Thus, "role-set interaction," "role recognition," and "role congruence" are salient for tapping this older women resource. Ways to promote opportunities to interact with others on the job, receive recognition for one's work, and meet one's own expectations are suggested in the implications which follow.

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<i>Retention</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Retention</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>
Role-set Interaction	r= .35**	Role-set Interaction	r= .24*
Role Congruence	r=-.28**	Role Congruence	r=-.29**
Role Recognition	r= .22*	Role Recognition	r= .45**
		Transportation	r= .23*
		Pattern of service	r= .18*
		Continuity of respect	r= .22*

*p≤ .05. **p≤ .01.

Figure 2
Statistical significance of characteristics which contribute to retention and satisfaction

IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS

Promoting Opportunities for Interaction

Promoting opportunities for interaction among workers and volunteers can pay off in continued service. Volunteer administrators and supervisors can take the lead in educating staff about volunteers' needs for interaction. Abilities of volunteering women can be communicated directly by the women if opportunity for such is provided. Formal programs which showcase volunteers' talents, as well as opportunities for informal dialogue, can bring volunteers' abilities to light. Once their value is recognized, interaction is likely to follow. Additionally, administrators and supervisors who work with these women as collaborators are role modeling the administrator-volunteer interaction which is being advocated.

Promoting Opportunities for Recognition

Receiving recognition from both the volunteer organization and placement agencies is the strongest correlate of satisfaction for the women-of-study.

In addition to formal recognition ceremonies, verbal praise from administrators, along with questions about the volunteers' well-being on the job, are ways to provide recognition. Tangible tokens of appreciation, as well as intangible attention, can be valued forms of remuneration. Soliciting volunteers' input for decision-making, recognizing that older women have had years of valuable experience in family and work roles, can further convey awareness of volunteers' worth.

Promoting Opportunities to Meet Expectations

Enabling older women to meet their expectations may begin with inquiring about the type of work they have done and the type of work they wish to do. While some women may want to apply skills acquired through years of work outside or inside the home, others may want change. Interviews prior to placement can be cost-effective in time and money—since meeting expectations can lead to staying on the job. Older women

Table I
Multiple regression statistics showing impact of "role set interaction" and "role congruence" on volunteer retention

<i>Variable</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>R² Change</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig T</i>
Role-set interaction F(1,72) = 20.9273, p<.001	.2252		.4638	.0000
Role congruence F(2,71) = 16.3743, p<.001	.3157	.0905	-.3009	.0031

Table 2
Multiple regression statistics showing impact of "role-recognition"
and "role congruence" on volunteer satisfaction.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>R² Change</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig T</i>
Role recognition F(1,72) = 22.8350, p<.001	.2408		.4231	.0001
Role congruence F(2,71) = 14.2582, p<.001	.2866	.0458	-.2243	.0363

with interpersonal skills who wish to continue working with people may be candidates for conducting pre-placement interviews with other volunteers.

Follow-up interviews which assess whether expectations are being met could lead to desired changes. Periodic collaborations with volunteers to see if expectations are being met can increase the ongoing "fit" between volunteer and volunteer experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Current and future resources of older women who volunteer can be tapped for the mutual benefit of seniors and society. Volunteer administrators can educate their workforce about the value of this resource and ways to meet their needs. Recognition of volunteers' worth can be conveyed by soliciting input in decision-making processes. The meeting of expectations may begin prior to placement and continue throughout the placement by joining with volunteers to evaluate their well-being on the job. Through opportu-

nities which enable involvement of self, volunteerism may promote satisfying roles for the burgeoning resource of older women and the betterment of society.

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Appendix A
Role Characteristics and Corresponding Questionnaire Items

<u>Role Characteristics</u>	<u>Questionnaire Items</u>
Role Sanctions	Does RSVP give you: transportation assistance or reimbursement; insurance; meals; money? (YES / NO) How much <i>recognition</i> do you receive for your work from people you work with; RSVP? (A LOT / SOME / NOT MUCH / NO RECOGNITION) How much <i>criticism</i> do you receive about your work from people you work with; RSVP? (A LOT / SOME / NOT MUCH / NO CRITICISM)
Role Induction	How helpful was the training in preparing you for your volunteer assignment? (EXTREMELY / VERY / SOMEWHAT / NOT HELPFUL / I DID NOT RECEIVE TRAINING)
Role Continuity	Is your volunteer work like the work you did before (on your job or at home) in regard to: type of work; how hard it is; the respect you get; your own enjoyment? (A LOT ALIKE / SOMEWHAT ALIKE / SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT / VERY DIFFERENT)
Role Mobility	If you wanted to change the amount of responsibility you have, either to have more or to have less, how easy would it be to change it? (VERY EASY / SOMEWHAT EASY / SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT / VERY DIFFICULT / DON'T KNOW)
Role Strain	How difficult is your volunteer job in regard to: getting to and from work; getting along with the people; the type of work; the amount of work; meeting job expenses? (EXTREMELY DIFFICULT / VERY DIFFICULT / SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT / NOT DIFFICULT)
Role-set Interaction	Each time you volunteer, how many <i>different agency workers</i> do you have contact with? Include staff, directors, other volunteers, etc. (NOBODY / ONE TO TWO PEOPLE / THREE TO NINE PEOPLE / TEN PEOPLE OR MORE)
Role Congruence	Is your volunteer work like you expected it to be in terms of the type of work you do? (JUST LIKE I EXPECTED / SOMEWHAT LIKE I EXPECTED / NOT MUCH LIKE I EXPECTED / NOT AS I EXPECTED)