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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH VOLUNTEERS: A REVIEW

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Community volunteers provide assistance to a wide variety of client popula-
tions. Indeed, without the efforts of these individuals, many services,
particularly those in the mental health field, would be greatly reduced or
become unavailable altogether (Carter, 1975). An examination of the deter-
minants of this altruistic behavior, therefore, is of practical significance,
as well as theoretical import.

Why do community mental health volunteers devote the time they do to helping
others? No doubt there are numerous factors, both situational and dis-
positional. A number of investigators have tried to determine whether the
personalities of volunteers were in any way different from those of non-
volunteers. The research strategy has been a direct one. A group of volun-
teers is given a variety of paper-and-pencil personality tests and their
scores are compared with those of a group of nonvolunteers. Many investigators
have hypothesized, either directly or indirectly, that community volunteers
are more empathic, self-efficacious, emotionally stable, have higher internalized
standards of morality and more positive attitudes towards self and others.

These hypotheses are similar to those proposed in the increasingly voluminous
experimental literature on human altruism, defined as social behavior carried
out to achieve positive outcomes for another. Altruism has grown to be a major
field of enquiry in the behavioral sciences and there are now numerous sub-
stantive reviews of this literature (e.g., Rushton, 1980; Rushton and
Sorrentino, 1981; Staub, 1979; Wispé, 1978). Most investigations of human
altruism have been carried out in experimental-laboratory situations. One of
the findings is that some individuals are consistently more helpful, kinder,
more considerate and compassionate than are others (Rushton, 1980, 1981).
In short, there is an "altruistic personality."

What are the characteristics of the altruist? Rushton (1980) proposed that

much of the research literature on altruism could be usefully ordered in terms of (a) empathy and (b) high internalized personal standards (for example, of social responsibility). Individual differences in these motives, assessed using paper-and-pencil questionnaires, significantly predicted a wide variety of prosocial helping in laboratory situations. Other personality characteristics associated with altruistic behavior include: positive attitudes toward self and others, a sense of self-efficacy, and emotional stability. It appears that the large body of data from experimental-laboratory investigations provides a description of the altruistic personality that parallels the expectations of a number of investigators studying community mental health volunteers.

The current literature review was undertaken to determine whether the "altruistic personality," so readily seen in the laboratory situation, could be generalized to potentially real-life "altruists," that is, community mental health volunteers. We must stress at the outset that this is not to deny that other (self-oriented) motivations are present among community mental health volunteers, nor that volunteers derive internal satisfaction from their work. Neither would we deny the effects of a variety of social constraints and situational factors on helping. We intend, simply, to examine the empirical evidence which relates to the question: "Do community mental health volunteers appear to possess characteristics associated with the altruistic personality?"

METHOD

In order to select research for inclusion in this review, all those studies of personality characteristics abstracted under the terms altruist, altruistic, helping, prosocial, and volunteering in the Psychological Abstracts and the Social Science Citation Index (for the years 1965 to 1980) and Current Contents (for 1980) were examined. As the focus of the review was the characteristics associated with community volunteers, we excluded from this initial sample all experimental-laboratory studies and all those concerned with blood and organ/tissue donors. Also excluded were those studies appearing in non-English language journals and, because methodological detail is not readily available, those unpublished studies conducted as part of Masters and Doctoral degree requirements. Following this, there remained nineteen studies.

RESULTS

In each of these, paper-and-pencil personality measures of volunteers, carrying out a diverse range of prosocial "duties," are compared to those of non-volunteers. Table 1 provides a summary of each study and indicates its main relevant finding. In order to examine more closely our hypothesis that community mental health volunteers share the characteristics of the "altruistic personality" mentioned earlier, we will consider the studies as they relate to: empathy, internal moral standards, positive moods and attitudes, self-efficacy, and emotional stability.

Methodological issues associated with these studies will be considered in the Discussion section.

Empathy

As can be seen in Table 1, a number of investigators have attempted to determine whether volunteers are more empathic than non-volunteers. For

TABLE 1

Summary of Studies on the Personality Characteristics of Community Volunteers

Reference	Volunteers	Non-Volunteers	Nature of the Volunteering	Measures	Results
Adler & Graubert (1975)	72 university students	Control Grp. 1: 74 psychology students. Control Grp. 2: 33 science or business students	Companion program involving individuals confined to a mental health facility	A projected social distance task in which Ss placed "self" in relation to "retardates," "mental patients" and "mental hospitals"	V/Grp. 1 (p<.05), V/Grp. 2 (p<.01) for retardate; mental patient (p<.01)(p<.01); mental hospital (p<.01)(p<.01)
Beckman (1972)	30 adults (7M, 23F)	34 students (15M, 19F)	Program at a large mental hospital involving direct contact with adolescent or adult patients	Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). Opinions about Mental Illness Attitude Scale (Cohen & Struening, 1962).	V's more internal than N-V's (p<.05). Social Restrictiveness Factor V<NV (p<.05) (indicating that V's view patients and ex-patients as "less dangerous to society."
Benson, Dehority, Garman, Hanson, Hochschwender, Lebold, Rohr & Sullivan (1980)	113 college students (44M, 69F)		Number of hours subjects self-reported engaging in unrenumerated "non-spontaneous" helping in 14 categories including crisis intervention work, counselling, and "doing volunteer work for organizations which help people."	Social responsibility scale (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968). Intrinsic religious values (Hoge, 1972). Internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Life-satisfaction scale. Self-esteem. Social desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964).	.34 (p<.01) .30 (p<.01) .29 (p<.01) .26 (p<.01) .19 (p<.05) n.s.

Table 1 continued

Reference	Volunteers	Non-Volunteers	Nature of the Volunteering	Measures	Results
Cowen, Zax & Laird (1966)	17 college students majoring in either psychology (N=9) or education (N=8)	17 college students majoring in either psychology (N=9) or education (N=8)	An after-school daycare program with primary grade school children with emotional problems; one-to-one relationship; twice weekly for 70 minutes.	Evaluative ratings of 9 concepts related to schools, mental health and self.	Of the 153 possible V/NV comparisons (9 concepts x 17 semantic scales), 32 yielded significant differences (p < .05 or better) differences, indicating that V's viewed these concepts more positively than NV's.
Crandall & Harris (1976)/ Crandall (1980)	College students TOTAL N = 24	College students	Agreeing to register with a local volunteer bureau after telephone solicitation	Social Interest Scale (Crandall, 1975)	Volunteers > Non-volunteers on "social interest" (p < .05)
Fretz (1979)	(1) 87 college students in a children's program for at least one semester.	(1) 45 college students who discontinued work with children's program before semester end.	(1) Companionship program (one-to-one) with children.	Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1966)	Inner-directedness V>NV (p < .05) Capacity for Intimacy V>NV (p < .05)
Hersch, Kulik & Scheibe (1969)	151 college students (41M, 110F)	142 college students (76M, 66F)	Intensive interaction with chronically ill mental patients; 40 hours per week for 8-10 weeks in the summer.	California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1957)	Self-control V>NV (males p<.05) (females p<.01) Good impression V>NV (p<.05) Achievement via Independence V>NV (males p<.05) (females p<.01) Flexibility V>NV (p<.05)

Table 1 (continued)

Reference	Volunteers	Non-Volunteers	Nature of the Volunteering	Measures	Results
Hersch, Kulik & Scheibe (1969) (con't)				Adjective Checklist (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965) Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966): Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964)	Males: Abasement V>NV Females: Achievement V>NV Self-control V>NV Heterosexuality V<NV Succorance V<NV no differences no differences
Hobfoll (1980)	23 under-graduate tutors for inner-city preschool children	38 undergraduate (19 tutors receiving course credit for tutorial participation; 19 non-tutors)	Tutorial program for inner-city preschool children.	"personality scales designed to measure empathy, self-acceptance, tolerance, dogmatism and social responsibility"	Social responsibility V>NV (p<.05) Remaining scales: no V/NV differences
Holzberg, Gewirtz & Ebner (1964)	32 male college students	24 male college students	One-to-one companion program with hospitalized mental patient; one hr/week for at least one academic year.	Moral judgment questionnaire (36 items from Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, Edwards, 1954) Self-acceptance questionnaire (Lesser, unpub.)	V>NV (p>.05) no V/NV differences
Howarth (1976)	374 females "from a wide variety of or-ganizations"	(1) "Normative sample": 1267 adults (M & F) (2) "Student sample": 331 females	Volunteers were drawn from "a wide variety of organi-zations in the Province of Alberta"; no further information given.	Personality Question-naire scales (Howarth, 1972)	Anxiety: V<NV (student sample) Superego: V>N-V (both N-V conscientiousness samples) Persistence: V>N-V (student sample) Trust V>N-V (both samples) (significance levels not specified)

Table 1 (continued)

Reference	Volunteers	Non-Volunteers	Nature of the Volunteering	Measures	Results
Jamison & Johnson (1975)	20 (10M, 10F) crisis telephone	20 (10M, 10F) of each of 3 groups: (1) paid crisis telephone personnel; (2) professional therapists; (3) undergraduate college students	Telephone crisis center counselling	Hogan Empathy Scale (Hogan, 1969)	Male V's > male students and male therapists
King, McGowen, Doonan & Schweibert (1980)	36 crisis telephone counsellors with at least one year of experience (13M, 23F)	36 university students matched for age and sex	Telephone crisis center counselling	California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1957)	Psychological Mindedness V>NV (p<.01) Flexibility V>NV (p<.01) Tolerance V>NV (p<.05) Achievement via Independence V>NV (p<.05)
Knapp & Holzberg (1964)	85 male college students from 5 classes (1961-65)	85 male college students randomly chosen from the same classes	Companion program with hospitalized	Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Edwards, 1954) Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Scale of Values	Need V>N-V (p<.01) Intraception Need V>N-V (p<.01) Nurturance Social V>N-V (p<.01) Religious V>N-V (p<.05) Economic V<N-V (p<.01)
Sakowitz & Hirschman (1975)	10 college students (4M, 6F); 10 non-student volunteers (5M, 5F)	10 college students (5M, 5F)	Church-sponsored telephone referral and counselling service	50-item Q sort (includes self and ideal Q sort measures)	No V/NV differences prior to counseling training; self-ideal Q sort correlations for all groups were consistent with norms for a 'non-neurotic' group
Schneider (1977)	Female students who volunteered to read to the blind	Female students who did not volunteer to read to the blind	Students were asked to read to a blind student under a variety of experimental	Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (Guilford, 1959)	Ascendance V>NV Thoughtfulness V>NV Objectivity V<NV

TOTAL N = 217

Table 1 (continued)

Reference	Volunteers	Non-Volunteers	Nature of the Volunteering	Measures	Results
Smith & Nelson (1975)	571 males (members of either a rescue squad or the Big Brothers organization)	566 males chosen "randomly"	Rescue squad; Big Brothers organization (no further information provided)	Cattell's 16PF	Outgoing V>NV (p<.001) Happy-go-lucky V>NV (p<.001) Superego Strength V>NV (p<.01) Venturesome V>NV (p<.001) Shrewd V<NV (p<.01) Liberal V<NV (p<.01) Self-Sufficient V<NV (p<.001)
Strickland (1965)	53 black individuals, "pre-college students" (34M, 19F)	105 black college students (72M, 33F)	33 volunteers were members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Comm.; 20 were involved in protest activities	Internal-External Scale (Liverant et al., unpublished). Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964)	V's more internal than N-V's (p<.01) no difference
Tapp & Spanier (1973)	26 adults ("about equal #'s of males and females")	39 college students ("about equal #'s of males and females")	Telephone 'crisis' and counselling service	Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965) Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1966) Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (Jourard, 1971)	V's exhibited greater Moral-Ethical self-perceptions than did N-V's (p<.05) Spontaneity V>NV (p>.001) Self-Acceptance V>NV (p>.001) Capacity for Intimacy V>NV (p<.001) Time Competence V>NV (p<.001) Inner-directedness V>NV (p<.01) Self-Actualizing Values V>NV (p<.05) V's were more self disclosing than non-V's
Turner (1973)	64 college students (28M, 36F)	41 college students (20M, 21F)	Telephone crisis and counselling center; required 6 hr/week	Adjective Checklist (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965)	Favorable Adjectives V>NV Self-control V>NV Nurturance V>NV Supportive Attitude V>NV Defensiveness V>NV

example, in an early study, Knapp and Holzberg (1964) found mental hospital volunteers to have a higher "Need Nurturance" score than non-volunteers. Turner (1973) reported that volunteer telephone counsellors generally were more nurturant than either non-volunteers or "potential volunteers." In addition, volunteers expressed more supportive attitudes toward recipients of the telephone service than did the controls. Similarly, Adler and Graubert (1975) found that, in contrast to non-volunteers, volunteers placed less projected social distance between "themselves" and stimuli related to mental illness, thus suggesting that volunteers were more understanding of, and felt closer to, this client population. Crandall and Harris (1976; see also Crandall, 1980) showed that volunteers scored significantly higher than non-volunteer controls on the Social Interest Scale (Crandall, 1975), a scale that the author suggests is measuring both empathy and altruism. Jamison and Johnson (1975) also reported that male volunteers were more empathic than male non-volunteers. Finally, Schneider (1977) observed that individuals who volunteered to read to a blind student exhibited more "thoughtfulness" on a personality measure than did non-volunteers.

Taken together, these data strongly suggest that community volunteers are more empathic than non-volunteers.

Internal Moral Standards

The results of at least five studies support the view that community volunteers have more internalized moral standards than non-volunteers. Knapp and Holzberg (1964) observed that those who volunteered to be companions to hospitalized mental patients were more concerned than non-volunteers with societal and religious values and less with those of an economic nature. These authors characterized the volunteers as being "more morally concerned" and "more compassionate." Tapp and Spanier (1973) noted that, compared to a control group, volunteers perceived themselves as more ethical, and more concerned with religion, morality, honesty and the "rightness or wrongness of behavior." Both Smith and Nelson (1975) and Howarth (1976) found that volunteers had greater "superego strength" (conscientiousness) than non-volunteers. Finally, Benson et al. (1980) demonstrated that nonspontaneous helping (e.g., volunteer-ing) was positively correlated with subjects' scores on measures of social responsibility and measures of intrinsic religion.

Positive Mood and Attitudes

Since there exists considerable experimental evidence which suggests that good moods are conducive to helpful behavior (Rushton, 1980) it is reasonable to suppose that individuals who more habitually possess good moods will be more likely to behave positively toward others. Thus we may expect volunteers to be somewhat happier and self-accepting than non-volunteers. To the extent that one has a positive attitude toward oneself, s/he is more able to relate well to others.

Several studies provide evidence compatible with this viewpoint. For example, two studies have reported volunteers to be more capable of intimacy than non-volunteers (Fretz, 1979; Tapp and Spanier, 1973). Tapp and Spanier (1973) report that volunteers are more self-disclosing than non-volunteers; that is, they are more likely to discuss their own feelings and thoughts with others. Also consistent with this notion are reports that, compared with non-volunteers, volunteers are more happy-go-lucky, outgoing, sociable and

venturesome (Smith and Nelson, 1975), that they are more trusting of others (Howarth, 1976) and that they view themselves as more pleasant (Cowen, Zax, and Laird, 1966). Finally, Benson et al. (1980) found direct evidence that self-reported satisfaction with one's own life, and positive self-esteem, are correlated with a variety of volunteering and helping behaviors.

Self-efficacy

Related to the notion of self-acceptance (and the positive attitudes which it engenders) is the sense of competence or mastery over one's environment. There is evidence from the studies in Table 1 that volunteers perceive themselves as more self-efficacious, self-directed, and competent than non-volunteers. First, several studies found that volunteers have a greater sense of internal locus of control than do non-volunteers (Beckman, 1972; Benson et al., 1980; Strickland, 1965). Thus volunteers see themselves as having a greater control over their own lives and circumstances than do non-volunteers. Furthermore, compared to non-volunteers, volunteers are more self-sufficient (Smith and Nelson, 1975), more self-controlled (Fretz, 1979; Hersch, Kulik, and Scheibe, 1969), more persistent (Howarth, 1976) and more problem-oriented (Jamison and Johnson, 1975). Also related to this sense of self-efficacy is the greater independence and flexibility (Hersch, Kulik and Scheibe, 1969; King et al., 1980) and greater spontaneity and competent use of time (Tapp and Spanier, 1973) exhibited by volunteers.

Emotional Stability

That emotional stability characterizes the community volunteer has been found in a number of studies. Hersch, Kulik, and Scheibe (1969) and King et al. (1980), for example, report that volunteers are more flexible, more oriented toward independent achievement and more tolerant than non-volunteers. Tapp and Spanier (1973) found that these individuals possess more self-actualizing values than non-volunteers, while Howarth (1976) found them to be less anxious. As noted in a previous section, at least three authors (Fretz, 1979; Hersch, Kulik, and Scheibe, 1969; Turner, 1973) report that volunteers are more self-controlled than non-volunteers. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Benson et al. (1980) found that satisfaction with one's life is positively correlated with the amount of nonspontaneous help which subjects indicated they give to others.

DISCUSSION

Much of the evidence upon which the conceptualization of the altruistic personality is based comes from experimental-laboratory studies (Rushton, 1980). It is interesting to note, therefore, that the results of the naturalistic studies reviewed here are compatible with this conceptualization. Before firm conclusions are drawn, however, it should be noted that there exist several methodological problems associated with some of these studies. These will be discussed briefly below.

Methodological Issues

The first problem involves the demand characteristics which may have been operating in some of these studies. In at least nine studies, personality measures were administered either at the request of staff persons associated with the volunteer agency (Beckman, 1972; Smith and Nelson, 1975) or by presumably independent researchers who carried out their studies within the

volunteer agency setting (Cowen, Zax, and Laird, 1966; Pretz, 1979; Hersch, Kulik, and Scheibe, 1969; Holzberg, Gewirtz, and Ebner, 1964; Jamison and John- son, 1975; Sakowitz and Hirschman, 1975; Tapp and Spanier, 1973). It may be argued, therefore, that volunteers were simply responding to the demands of the situation; that is, in a manner which they felt was appropriate to the 'good volunteer'. Indeed, Hersch et al. (1969) report that volunteers scored higher than did non-volunteers on the Good Impression scale of the California Psychological Inventory - a finding which is compatible with the "role demand" explanation. As these authors point out, however, both the consistent pattern found in their own data (Hersch et al., 1969) and the results obtained by Knapp and Holzberg (1964), who tested subjects in an entirely different setting before they expressed any interest in doing volunteer work, suggest that this explanation may be inappropriate. Also noteworthy is the fact that in each of the studies reviewed here which utilized the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Benson et al., 1980; Hersch et al., 1969; Strickland, 1965), volunteers did not respond in a more socially desirable manner than did non-volunteers. Taken together, these findings suggest that a role demand concern may be some- what unfounded.

Three further methodological problems involve sampling considerations. First, while in many of the studies, personality measures were administered to subjects at the beginning of their volunteer work, in others this was done at some time after they had begun their volunteer duties (Howarth, 1976; Jamison and Johnson, 1975; King et al., 1980; Smith and Nelson, 1975; Strickland, 1965; Tapp and Spanier, 1973, Turner, 1973). Thus it may not be that volunteers possess these characteristics before undertaking volunteer work, as the "altruistic personality" would suggest, but rather that the characteristics emerged as a function of the volunteer experience itself. (Indeed, some evidence of personality change during volunteer work has been provided by King, Walder and Pavey, 1970; and Kirschenbaum and Mushkat, 1980.) Clearly, results of personality measures taken from non-volunteers should be compared only to those taken from volunteers at the time they express interest in volunteer work or, if possible, before. Knapp and Holzberg's (1964) design, mentioned above, is exemplary in this regard. Personality measures were taken from students long before they were asked to volunteer (and in a completely un- related context); those of students who subsequently volunteered were then compared to those who did not volunteer.

Secondly, in at least three of the volunteer activities examined in the studies reviewed here (Cowen et al., 1966; Jamison and Johnson, 1975; Tapp and Spanier, 1973) individuals underwent a "screening" process before being accepted as a volunteer. Because it is clearly necessary from a practitioner's perspective, it is likely that such screening occurred (and simply was not mentioned) in most of the volunteer groups studied. Regardless of their "suitability" for a particular volunteer program, however, individuals who actually make the effort to apply to do community volunteer work, are members of that "altruistic" group whose personality characteristics are of theoretical interest. It is somewhat unfortunate that they are not included, at least for research purposes, in this group.

Finally, in all but two studies reviewed here (Howarth, 1976; Smith and Nelson, 1975) either the volunteer group or the non-volunteer (control) group (or both) consisted of college or university students. It would seem that attempts must be made to examine a more representative sample of community volunteers. While many volunteers are students, they in no way constitute the entire group nor

is it likely that they adequately reflect the wide diversity found within it.

Conclusions and Theoretical Considerations

Clearly, the idea that community volunteers, as compared with non-volunteers, possess more of the characteristics postulated to underlie the "altruistic personality" must be put to a more rigorous, methodologically sound test. Despite the methodological problems enumerated above, it would seem that, taken together, the results of the studies reviewed here are in accord with the data from the experimental-laboratory studies and conceptualization of the altruistic personality put forward by Rushton (1980). Moreover, further evidence for the altruistic personality has more recently come from studies of altruism using self-report measures (Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken, 1981). In these studies respondents who reported engaging in a high frequency of altruistic behavior (e.g. letting people in front of them in a queue; lend-ing neighbors valued items) also tended to score higher on self-report measures of empathy and personal norms. There is, therefore, increasingly diverse evidence for the hypothesized altruistic personality and the motivational constructs of empathy and personal norms. Thus, as this theoretical position would predict, community volunteers tend to be more empathic and have higher "moral" standards than non-volunteers. In addition, they appear to have more positive attitudes toward themselves and others and, as such, possess greater feelings of self-efficacy. Finally, compared to non-volunteers, these individuals can be characterized as being more emotionally stable.

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