

A Qualitative Investigation Into the Motivation of Volunteers in the Youth Sector

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Abstract

Background and Aims: There is a vast amount of quantitative research into what motivates volunteers but very few of these studies focus on the youth sector and fewer again are qualitative in methodology. This study aims to explore the subjective motivation and drive of volunteers in the youth sector in order to gain a greater understanding of why they volunteer.

Method: Participants in this study were recruited using purposive sampling (N=7). All participants in this study were active volunteers in the Gluais youth leadership training program. The age range of participants was 23-45 years old and the length of time volunteering varied from 1-19 years (M=7.28). All semi-structured interviews took place via Microsoft Teams and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's method for thematic analysis.

Results: Four key themes were identified in the study: 1. Values, 2. Commitment to Organisation, 3. Personal Development, 4. Barriers/Challenges. **Conclusion:** Motivations of volunteers in the youth sector can vary but through a greater understanding of these motivators we can improve retention rates and recruitment processes for youth organisations that rely on volunteers for day-to-day operations.

Keywords: Motivation, Youth, Volunteers, Thematic Analysis, Gluais

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Introduction

Volunteering can be best defined as an activity undertaken by an individual where time is given freely to benefit another individual, group or cause (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Wilson 2000). This study actively looks in depth into why volunteers give up their time to give back, this study has a focus on the youth sector. Volunteers are often valued for the work they do, but, unfortunately, very few individuals show an actual interest in participating in volunteer work, A surprising statistic seen was in relation to pre-covid pandemic in Ireland, 43% of individuals surveyed as part of Volunteer Ireland research reported volunteering whether that be formally, informally or non-assigned (emergencies), this statistic had then risen to 75% of the population during the covid pandemic (Mulcahy, 2020).

All participants in the present study came from the Gluais leadership training programme. Gluais, along with a large number of charitable organisations, are run solely by volunteers and that is why it is extremely important to have an understanding of their motivations and satisfaction. O'Dwyer (2019) found that organisations are eager to hold onto hard-working volunteers and one way of doing this was through recognition of the volunteer's work. The current study has a broad range of volunteers with various lengths of volunteer experience in the youth sector between them but previous involvement in the Gluais program can be seen as a pattern throughout the study.

The following study starts by looking at relevant literature relating to the area. The methodology of the study includes the data collection process, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The results from the data collected were then discussed in depth whilst noting limitations to the study, recommendations for future research and a conclusion.

Volunteer Motivation

Batson et al (2002) developed the four motives for community involvement. The literature explored in this study supports these motives whilst the current study also shines a

light on how potentially individuals could have multiple motivations behind volunteering. Batson's first motive is egoism, this is where an individual's goal when entering volunteering is for their benefit such as a student volunteering for the experience. One notable piece when looking further into the literature was the vast number of studies on undergraduate students which identified future career opportunities to be the main reason behind volunteering which links back to the egoism motive. Unfortunately, retention rates are not always high with this group, and this can be known as episodic volunteering. Kelly (2014) found future career opportunities to be a major theme arising from their study this study sample came solely from final-year undergraduate students. Although contrary to this often volunteers have a passion for the area, they're volunteering in and take away just as much from the experience of volunteering as they put in. Volunteering is not just beneficial for those who receive the service but also for those who provide it (Piliavin, 2003; Wilson & Musick, 1999). The second motive of Batson's motive theory is altruism. Clary and Stukas (2012) elaborated further on altruism in their study which drew distinctions between altruism and egoism, they defined altruism as a "helping behaviour motivated by concern for the person in distress". The motive behind altruism is to specifically support one or multiple individuals to whom a personal connection is had, this could be an ill family member or friend.

The third motive in Batson's motive theory is collectivism which is when an individual aims to support specific causes or groups through volunteering. An example could be in this case if a volunteer aimed to support young people, they could volunteer for a youth organisation but in this case, an individual may also be specifically aiming to support a specific organisation. Collectivism was found to be associated with stronger altruistic motives in general which could lead to the development of a volunteer role identity when compared to individualistic motives (egoism) which had a closer association with career-driven motives for an individual (Finkelstein, 2010).

The final motive that Batson et al (2002) discussed in the four motives for community involvement was principlism. Principlism involves holding one's principles and beliefs as a motivator for the volunteer work being carried out, an example of this would be Jehovah's Witnesses' volunteers (Parilla & Ferriter, 2016). One notable study by Radovanović and Simeunović (2020) looked at the motives and value orientations of 1528 Serbian volunteers through face-to-face interviews. Radovanović and Simeunović built upon Barton's four motive theory and found principlism to be significant within the sample of participants which primarily showed that younger individuals were willing to volunteer in Serbia rather than older and they strived towards self-transcendence rather than other outcomes mentioned prior for younger cohorts elsewhere such as career progression which falls under egoism. Although Barton's four-motive theory is commonly used to establish motive, Clary et al (1998) also developed the Volunteer Function Index (VFI) which can also be viewed as the gold standard for measuring volunteer motivation. The VFI is a 30-item measure which then focuses on 6 individual motives which are protective motives, values, career, social, understanding and enhancement. The current study considers both Batson's four motive theory and Clary's volunteer function index.

Volunteer Satisfaction and Retention

Volunteer satisfaction as well as performance management and recognition have been reported to have a direct correlation with longer volunteer retention rates (Al Mutawa, 2015; Senses-Ozyurt, & Villicana-Reyna, 2016).

O'Dwyer (2019) found that the more involved a volunteer is within an organisation in the community or previous involvement within the organisation the more enjoyment and likelihood for retention to the program the volunteer will have. This is something to note when investigating a program that has volunteers that have been with the program for a number of years. Research also suggests that individuals that volunteer for altruistic reasons

rather than self-motivated reasons are more likely to stay with an organisation (Cornelis et al, 2013). Locke et al (2003) conducted an in-depth literature review around volunteer retention to find out why exactly volunteers may stay with an organisation or what might cause them to leave. The results of this study were inconclusive but what researchers did report is that poor management can lead to poor volunteer retention within an organisation and that having management that is “explicit, developmental, supportive and appreciative” of volunteers may lead to higher volunteer retention rates within organisations. Al Mutawa (2015) also carried out a study to help understand the relationship between volunteer management practices and volunteer retention, this study used volunteer satisfaction and motivation as mediators in this study. Al Mutawa found two significant findings. The first being volunteer training and support influenced volunteer retention through volunteer motivation, this also had a significant effect on volunteer satisfaction. The second finding found that volunteer performance management and recognition influenced volunteer retention through volunteer satisfaction.

Episodic volunteering is another aspect of volunteering which is currently having an impact on retention. Episodic volunteering is when an individual volunteers on an irregular basis or at a one-off event, this is popular with the likes of students as mentioned previously in order to gain experience. Those that generally get involved with this form of volunteering generally have different motives and characteristics from general/frequent volunteers (Hersberger-Langloh et al, 2022). Episodic volunteering is becoming more popular in the likes of sporting events and even becoming a trend, especially with the younger population but unfortunately episodic can also come with its disruptions to organisations such as lack of familiarity, lack of retention due to non-altruistic motives, lack of consistency, lack of experience or even many organisations not supporting this form of volunteering due to

rigorous selection processes (Cnaan et al, 2022; Compion et al, 2022; Compion et al, 2022; Dunn et al, 2022; Okada et al, 2022)

Personal Development

Musick and Wilson (2007) discuss personal growth as an outcome of volunteering. Examples of this self-growth can be self-confidence growing in a volunteer from experience over time or a sense of self-identity which can be established from a sense of purpose. This personal growth differs from the aforementioned egoism, as egoism involves the motive for an individual focusing on the self-whereas personal growth looks at what can be gained for an individual although contrary to this, some research suggests that personal growth alone can be a motivating factor for volunteering (Chacón et al, 2010). Greenfield and Marks (2004) conducted a study on 373 participants between the ages of 65-74 who had role identity absences in specific life domains such as a deceased partner or unemployment. Greenfield and Marks found that participants that were formally volunteering showed feelings of purpose in life which moderated the negative effects of the role identity absences.

Volunteering with Young People

A large quantity of research has been done previously into the motivations of volunteers, the support given and even volunteer development but one area where there is a clear gap in the literature is the motivations of volunteers specifically those volunteering with young people (Miller & Trzesniewski, 2020). Miller and Trzesniewski (2020) wrote an interesting journal article which covered appropriate topics around the area of the impact volunteer work has on the youth sector, volunteer competencies, support structure and skill development. This article was solely focused on youth development programs and highlighted both the struggles youth development organisations face due to primarily being run by volunteers, This study also highlighted the importance of recruiting and retaining volunteers in order to nurture relationships with young people to gain greater outcomes for

the young person. Dooley et al (2019) discussed their theory of “one good adult” in the My World Survey 2. My World Survey 2 showed that young people that felt like they had an adult that was consistent and there for the young person during their time of need were more likely to be in the normal range of such mental health disorders as depression and anxiety whereas young people who did not have the presence of a special adult in their life were at risk to suffering with their mental health.

Current Study

This study sets out to elaborate further on an area that lacks the depth of qualitative research in the area of volunteer motivation in the youth sector by taking an inductive approach to expose any notable themes in relation to volunteer motivation. The following research questions are addressed throughout the study. What motivates volunteers to volunteer in the youth sector? Are the volunteers satisfied with their role? Is there a sense of gratitude for the work that the volunteers do and does this affect volunteer motivation? The overall aim of the study is to explore the subjective motivation and drive of volunteers in the youth sector in order to gain a greater understanding of why they volunteer. The following research will lead to a broader understanding of volunteer motivation and highlights what are some of the current challenges faced by volunteers today.

All participants in this study are active volunteers of the Gluais leadership training program. According to Gluais.org “Gluais is a voluntary organisation working with Transition Year Students in schools in the Lucan, Clondalkin, and Leixlip areas. Gluais aims to teach young people leadership skills that they can then take back to their schools and use for the benefit of their entire school. Gluais Students undertake an intensive 5-day training course where they engage in a variety of exercises with their trainers, most of whom are former Gluais Students themselves”.

Methodology

Participants

Purposive sampling was used in this research study as it is the most widely used qualitative research sampling strategy when it comes to participant recruitment for the current study the researcher made initial contact with training and communication coordinators who then circulated information to all volunteers within the organisation. The inclusion criteria for the study involved participants being over the age of 18 years old and actively engaging as a volunteer in a youth organisation. There is not currently a high quantity of studies that agree upon the appropriate sample size for participants, although saturation could be viewed as the gold standard for determining sample size (Guest et al, 2006; Morse, 2015). Saturation is not always an aim in an interpretative phenomenological analysis study such as this which focuses on getting deep, meaningful personal accounts from participant data (Hale et al, 2008; Saunders et al, 2018). A total of 10 participants expressed interest in participating in the current study. However, due to illnesses, cancellations and general lack of availability when the interviews were taking place, the final sample size was 7 participants which included the senior volunteer which took part in the pilot study. Participants' ages ranged from 23 -45 years old and the breakdown of gender was as follows (Male = 2, Female = 5). 6 of the participants were Irish and one participant was from Spain. Length of time volunteering ranged from 1 year – 19 years (Mean = 7.28).

Materials

The researcher recorded and transcribed all 7 interviews using Microsoft Teams on a MacBook Pro. Zoom was tested by the researcher and the decision was made that Microsoft Teams would be used due to the higher efficacy rate for transcription. Transcription was then cross-checked by the researcher manually by listening back to the recording and correcting

any inaccuracies in Microsoft Word. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was devised by the researcher in order to get an accurate representation of participant motivation and experiences.

Study Design

When deciding upon what methodology to use for this study it was decided that in order to get an accurate representation of the perspectives, feelings, experiences and overall motivation of volunteers, a qualitative analysis was best suited to this research study (Roulsten & Choi, 2018). In order for an interviewer to be successful in interviewing participants, an interviewer must be open-minded, empathetic, actively listening and reflective throughout the interview process and this was done throughout the entire process of this study (Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). The researcher carried out 7 semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions throughout, the interview guide allowed the conversation to remain on track although some questions were slightly altered throughout at the researcher's discretion due to the context of some interviews. According to Kallio et al (2016), "Rigorous development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide contributes to the objectivity and trustworthiness of studies and makes the results more plausible".

Study Procedure

The researcher first sent the information sheet (see Appendix B) to Gluais' training coordinator who circulated this to all active volunteers. Upon, expression of interest from volunteers, the individual participants then corresponded with the researcher via email to organise an interview time that was convenient to them and that would last approx. 15-25 minutes over Microsoft Teams, this interview only went ahead at the arranged time upon completion of an informed consent form (see Appendix C) which was sent digitally over email to participants using DocuSign and returned to the researcher. Participants are informed on the day that they can pause or stop the study at any time. Participants were led through a

series of open-ended questions focusing on their motivations, this interview was led by an interview guide. Interviews were all recorded and transcribed on Microsoft Teams and participants were reminded of this before the commencement of the interview and when the recording started. Upon completion of the interview, the participant was thanked for their participation and asked if they had any questions regarding the study before being sent a debriefing sheet (see appendix D). Total interview times ranged from 10 – 20 minutes (Mean = 15.45). It was identified that larger gaps in interview times were due to a lack of information provided regarding experience and some volunteers with longer experience volunteering having more to say.

Ethical Considerations

No risk or harm has been identified in this study, this is due to the nature and questions involved in this study and due to the researcher being completely transparent with participants from the commencement of the recruitment process throughout the entire study. This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the National College of Ireland and the Psychological Society of Ireland. Ethical approval was also obtained from the National College of Ireland's Psychology Departments Ethics Committee. The sample taking part in this study are trained volunteers all over the age of 18 who gave informed consent (See Appendix C). All video-recorded files were saved on a locked MacBook Pro and encrypted until the transcription process was completed within 30 days, this involved removing any identifying information from transcription. All participants' files were allocated a unique ID so personal identifiers could not be identified once transcribed. These unique IDs allowed the researcher to identify participants by number (participants 1, 2, 3 etc). Coding and thematic analysis occurred through Microsoft Word. video-recorded files were deleted once cross-checked across transcription. All signed consent forms were saved onto a locked folder on MacBook Pro for 5-year storage once sent back to the researcher. The researcher has the sole

responsibility for data generated and storage as mentioned above and it will be kept in accordance with the NCI Data Retention Policy & GDPR. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw consent or view data under the freedom of information legislation, this was also included in the information sheet, informed consent form and debriefing sheet. The debriefing sheet was sent to all participants after the completion of the interview.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of Microsoft Teams' transcription to a Microsoft Word file, the researcher ensured no errors within the data. An inductive thematic analysis was used by the researcher to identify patterns in the data. An inductive approach was used to identify themes as they immerse from the data rather than assumptions being made from researchers' theory, this allows the researcher to make clear links between the initial research question and the finding from the data. Braun & Clarke (2006) introduced the six phases of thematic analysis, this form of analysis was used for the purpose of the study. Firstly, the researcher continuously read and familiarised himself with transcripts on Microsoft Word to begin the process of searching for patterns. After this, codes were created manually from interesting pieces emerging from the transcripts. After this, the researcher then sorted patterns that emerged into subgroups and themes, each of these themes led the researcher back to the initial research question. Following this step, these themes and groups were revised and reviewed several times to group or alter where appropriate. The researcher then finalised the themes and ensured that there was appropriate data to support each theme accurately.

Results



Figure 1. Themes and Related Sub-Themes

The following results break down the data from the seven interviews conducted. Braun and Clark's (2006) method for thematic analysis was utilised to identify themes which had emerged from the transcripts. From this research, four themes were presented. Three main themes which intertwined in regards to motivations of volunteers in the youth sector. A fourth separate theme in relation to barriers/challenges that are currently facing and possibly hindering motivations of volunteers in the youth sector was also presented with its emerging subthemes. All of these themes had clearly identifiable sub-themes (see figure 1) which emerged from the data. The three main themes presented in the research in relation to the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector were Values, Commitment to Organisation, and

Personal Development. Supporting quotations from interviews are used throughout the results to help support each theme and subtheme.

Theme 1: Values

“Big reason in why I volunteer is. You know, like so many people help you out in life and guide you through life, help you through difficult patches, help you through good patches in life and while you may not necessarily be volunteering for them. One good deed will always follow another good deed and I am a strong believer in paying it forward” (P1)

Individual values were a clear emerging theme that was presented from the data. The values were split into three subthemes (Helping the community, Helping young people, and Gratitude) Helping the community appeared to be extremely important to participants in this study as a motivator with one participant stating “I'd say the main thing is that like, I just like to give back to the community is what I'm trying to say” (P3) and another participant explaining "I suppose I just wanted to give back to the community any way that I could" (P4), Many participants went onto describe their passion for helping young people. Participant 2 stated, "It's just incredible getting to see the growth in the youth as you're helping them and just seeing the difference we can make. It's just a really great feeling” (P2) Participant 2 stated this whilst describing a recent experience with a young person which made them feel positive about volunteering and their role. Participant 5 describes how volunteering was not on their schedule when they were younger as this was not the traditional norm. “like volunteering, was never on my schedule because it wasn't really something you heard of a lot but then kind of going through it and seeing what it was like. Yeah. I think if you're gonna volunteer, why not help the younger generation as well, like.” (P5). Participant 7 went on to state “I think we need to support young people to face the challenges and I

think that's what gluais does. It gives them skills and I know that they don't realize it at the time, but then it gives them skills to better face challenges". Gratitude presented as an extremely interesting subtheme as this was unexpected. This subtheme emerged from the prompt, "Do you feel recognized or have a sense of gratitude for your volunteer work." The sense of cohesion within the volunteer group and consistency of answers framed this unexpected subtheme. Participant 5 began by describing their experience with gratitude from volunteering with young people by stating "I think that's the biggest thank you, you can get from it if you're helping someone and you're making a difference in their life, even in the slightest. Doesn't have to be a drastic change, but it's just you should feel Gratitude" (P5). When asked about their experience with gratitude or recognition participant 7 responded "I don't think it matters. I recognize what I do and I think that's sufficient. I volunteer elsewhere and If I was doing it for recognition or that, you'd had stopped doing it a long time ago I think volunteering is about knowing why you're there and knowing that even though you might not get a thank you. Knowing that what you're doing is benefiting somebody and that's enough." (P7) Two participants elaborated further on this piece discussing how participants' enjoyment of the program is the only gratitude required. Participant 6 stated that "You can see that they come to you. Maybe they don't know me as much, but you know they can feel happier and they can feel like they are doing something good, you know and then come back to me. I see, you know you do something good and you feel good as well" (P6). Participant 5 describes how "if you have been through gluais, then you know exactly how those students are going home. So for me, that's gratitude enough because I'm like grand. It's not like my job's done, but it's like, that's my effectiveness of it and how I delivered the program. I'm happy with that. I can tell that they're happy with it. That's all the thanks I need." (P5)

Theme 2: Commitment to Organisation

“There’s always one thing every year that I look forward to and it’s Gluais and you know it’s also one of the main reasons that I miss home from being over here. Like, yeah, you get your whole family and things like that but. like Gluais is one thing every year that I’m like, oh, I’m gutted I’m not home” (P5)

The commitment to the organization (in this case gluais) was a clear theme when analyzing the transcriptions. This theme was broken down into two sub-themes which are reciprocity and, aligned interests with other volunteers. All of the themes discussed in this study except for theme three will have three sub-themes. The reasoning behind this is that the vast amount of supporting data provided from the transcripts made the sub-theme reciprocity easily identifiable. Six out of seven volunteers that participated in the current study took part in gluais as young people and identified to the researcher that they gained a lot from this program and wanted to give back. Participant 1 discussed being “drawn back” to volunteer work when they said “I did that In my Fourth year of school and I got an awful lot out of it and helped me big time. You know, I was kind of drawn back to the whole program then just to be able to give back to the program, but also help kind of bring other young people out of their shells then as well” (P1). Participant 3 elaborated further on this during the interview speaking more in-depth about wanting to volunteer since they volunteered as a young person and stating that “The main reason that I choose to volunteer in the youth sector is that when I was in the program myself as a teenager, I just. I just knew that when I became of age that I would like to volunteer with it. So basically it was the program that got me interested in volunteering in the youth sector and I feel like if I hadn't done that, I never would have been interested”. Participant 4 went on to speak openly about their participation in the gluais leadership training program as a youth, mentioning skills learned and wanting to pass them on to the young people. Participant 4 stated “I participated in the program and when I was in

school, so like, as a young person, and I really enjoyed it and it gave me loads of like life skills that I like enjoyed, I enjoyed the young people and I enjoyed like the volunteers that worked with me in it. When I got to the age of being able to actually volunteer myself, I wanted to see how it affected my life and how I was able to use the skills that I was taught as a young person. So then I wanted to be able to give that to young people” (P4). All volunteers in Gluais report the same aligned interest, this interest is volunteering with Gluais which brings a great sense of cohesion to the volunteers. Participant 7 reported being inspired by all the various traits that the other volunteers bring and believed that this was important to the young person experience in the program, participant 7 stated: "I'm inspired by the other volunteers and you know, everybody brings something different and their own uniqueness and I think that's important for the young people to see and experience”. Some volunteers described their peers as “friends”, or “family” or described the sense of community within the organization with participant 3 stating “You make really good friends through volunteering. Like, as in the other volunteers, you have people that are like-minded to you and are interested in some of the things that you're interested in. And I think it's a great way to find new friendships and new people in your life.” (P3). Further to this participant 2 stated that the benefit of volunteering in a youth organization brings “This kind of community of getting to help people. you get this. like Gluais, are like a family You get these new connections with people you get to experience new things and try things you haven't. You wouldn't have tried before and you meet so many new people and learn so many new things. You wouldn't get to learn without volunteering.” (P2).

Theme 3: Personal Development

“I would say that I am very selfish and volunteering makes me better. I feel better whenever I volunteer for different things and I like to feel better about myself. So it's a little bit selfish. I would say, yeah. (P6)

Personal development allowed the focus to shift to a less altruistic view around individuals' motivations. Three sub-themes were identified in relation to the study which were sense of purpose, personal growth, and future prospects. A sense of purpose presented as a strong motivator and driving factor for volunteers with one participant stating that “Believing in what I'm doing and believing in the other volunteers that, we're giving young people something beneficial for them and it's needed that we have, I suppose kind of a sense of purpose. So as long as that purpose is needed. We keep returning.” (P7). Participant 7 continued to elaborate on this sense of purpose and motivation when prompted further on motivations of volunteering in the youth sector and responded by saying "It keeps you motivated, keeps you focused. It gives you a bit of purpose. You know, especially in the last couple of years when people have been struggling a lot with mental health issues and trying not to get caught up in their own little world. You know, volunteering, makes you feel you're a part of something bigger.” (P7). Some participants discussed how they get just as much from the young people as they do from them and that is their motivator to volunteer as it brings out the best in them, with one participant stating that “It is in Gluais that every team I've helped out with or volunteered with, every group I've led on Gluais training, I've gotten probably just as much, if not more, out of that then what the kids have. You know that they'll always teach you different things and they'll always help you to continue trying to be the best person you can be while you're also trying to bring out the best in them" (P1). Personal

growth in volunteers over time could be identified with participants of the study identifying that they were originally motivated to volunteer for personal reasons but the motivator to continue changed over time with one participant stating that "As a child, I was fairly quiet and I lacked confidence but after completing Gluais training as a student, I felt like it was somewhere that I actually could fit in and without trying too hard. So when I got the opportunity to go back as a leader. Initially, it was for me, but once I went back it was so students or young people could get the same experience"(P7). One participant described themselves as selfish for volunteering when they stated "I would say I am very selfish and volunteering makes me better. I feel better whenever I volunteer for different things and I like to feel better with myself. So it's a little bit selfish. I would say, yeah" (P6). Future prospects of an individual came up during interviews on various occasions where participants explored finding their passion for working with young people through volunteering, one participant stated "I like that through volunteering, I figured that I love working with young people and because of my love of working with young people, it's helps me go on and actually figure out what I want to do in my life and as a career. So I found it very, very rewarding" (P2). When prompted further into why the participant volunteers, participant 4 explained the criteria needed for current education and building hours through volunteering, Participant 4 stated "another reason that I participated in volunteer work is because I want to go on to have a career in working with young people and in the sector. So to do that you have to have a good few hours of volunteer work, like under your belt, so it allowed me to get the hours of working In the community with people one to one dealing with the community and because of that It allowed me then go on and it allowed me to get into college and it allowed me to get into my masters. So it helped me with my career essentially." (P4).

Theme 4: Barriers/Challenges

"The biggest thing is, the pressure and struggles of being able to get a proper work-life balance for some people and that just isn't an easy thing to come by and which is probably contributing negatively in terms of the number of volunteers within the country"
(P1)

As previously mentioned barriers/challenges were not an expected theme to present but due to this presenting frequently in the research, it was important to present the findings clearly surrounding this. Barriers/Challenges can also be split into three subthemes relating to the research, these themes are lack of volunteers, lack of time, and impact of covid. Participants in this study naturally spoke throughout interviews about challenges and barriers that face regularly and which can also lead to a lack of motivation. Participants were also prompted on this. One participant spoke in depth about the change in volunteer participation over the last number of years stating that "participation has just plummeted, even when people thought that they had more spare time. And we're like, oh, we're going to give volunteering a go now, which was maybe 2019, I think it was the last time we had a really full leaders weekend and then maybe two or three months later they just dropped off and I have never seen any of them ever again which is really hard." (P3). Further to this one participant spoke about the only barrier to volunteering being fearful of having enough volunteers to carry out the program, Participant 5 stated "I can't give a set example of a barrier that has come up, other than like the fear of lack of leaders for training or like that would probably be the biggest one." (P5). Interestingly, one participant spoke about this

barrier they are facing to be both a barrier and a motivator stating “from an organizational point of view, the lack of volunteers is probably a motivation” (P7). When prompted about what challenges are facing volunteers, participants explained that finding time to volunteer on top of personal commitments and employment can be extremely difficult with one participant stating “I think one of the main ones is for, especially for like work-life balance it's difficult I find sometimes without volunteer work to try to find balance and especially if you're in a full-time job and work-life balance can be difficult enough as is.” (P4). . Participant 1 also identified time to be the biggest challenge for a volunteer stating that the “biggest challenge a lot of it is down to time” (P1). Further to the two points made by the above participants, One participant went on to describe the difficulty that time constraints can have but how the benefits of volunteering far outweigh these challenges, participant 3 stated “So overall, my experience with being a volunteer is that. While sometimes it can be hard to get the time off and maybe take no pay at all for it, the rewards of just memories and also like benefits for myself outweigh, the kind of negatives.”. The final emerging subtheme identified was the impact that covid appeared to have on the motivation of volunteers with one participant identifying the only barrier to volunteering to be covid, this participant stated that “the only kind of barrier I can kind of think of that's affected us in the past few years has been covid and everything but I can't think of anything different really.” Participant 4 spoke more about this barrier and the change in volunteer mindset and motivation over the last number of years stating that “I think since covid has happened there has been a feeling in the volunteer world where there is not as many people getting into it or staying in it. Due to covid, I think a lot of people's answers changed. Some people work from home a lot now, or some people have to go back into the office full time and again that work-life balance can be difficult and I think as well people have a lot more commitments now.” (P4)

Discussion

A qualitative analysis was used for this study in order to gain a more in-depth insight into volunteers' motivations to volunteer in the youth sector. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse the seven interviews conducted by the researcher, from this analysis four main themes emerged. Three of these focused on the motivations of volunteers. These are Values, Commitment to Organisation, and Personal Development. Further to this, a fourth theme emerged which was barriers/challenges. This theme gives a greater understanding of what may impact a volunteer's motivation or potentially hinder volunteer retention. All four of these themes will be discussed in order but it should be noted that these themes often intertwine due to the nature of the study.

Firstly, the theme of Values will be discussed, which had three sub-themes that emerged upon analysis which are helping the community, helping young people, and gratitude. Participants embedded value to help others arose frequently within the interviews with participants naming that they wanted to "give back" to the community any way they could. Although the amount of time volunteering ranged from 1-19 years, due to the length of time senior volunteers have spent volunteering and the general embedded value of support for the community, this would stand to support previous research by O'Dwyer (2019) which suggested that the more involved a volunteer is in the community the higher the satisfaction and retention rate.

As the Gluais leadership training program is a youth organisation solely run by volunteers, the drive to help young people as a motivator was heard widely throughout the participant group with participants describing how they would not volunteer with other

cohorts and meaningful experiences to them. Miller and Trzesniewski (2020) previously mentioned research would identify closely with the participants in the current study due to them also being from completely volunteer-run organisations and the impact this has on the volunteer working in the youth sector. Gratitude was an extremely interesting and unexpected sub-theme. There was a sense of cohesion that came from the participant group in their selfless answers such as “I think that's the biggest thank you, You can get from it is your helping someone and you're making a difference in their life”(P5) or “I don't think it matters. I recognize what I do and I think that's sufficient” (P7). No participants were looking for any form of thanks and found motivation in the benefits given to the youth.

The second theme that emerged was Commitment to Organization. This was broken down into two subthemes reciprocation and aligned interest with other volunteers. Previously mentioned research such as Batson et al (2002) four motives for community involvement discussed collectivism as the third possible motive. Collectivism correlates quite strongly with the theme of commitment to organisation due to the participant's strong ties to the specific organisation from a young age and drive to return as a volunteer with participants stating they were “drawn back”. Participants in this study also mentioned being driven by the other volunteers within the group with one stating “I'm inspired by the other volunteers and you know, everybody brings something different and their own uniqueness and I think that's important for the young people to see and experience”.

Theme 3 explored the personal development of a volunteer with three subthemes emerging. These sub-themes are sense of purpose, personal growth, and future prospects. Musick and Wilson (2007) discussed personal growth as an outcome of volunteering. Musick and Wilson discuss the effects that a sense of purpose from volunteering can have on an individual such as building self-confidence. An example of a participant interview supporting both the previous research and current theme was participant 7 who stated "As a child, I was

fairly quiet and I lacked confidence but after completing Gluais training as a student, I felt like it was somewhere that I actually could fit in and Without trying too hard. So when I got the opportunity to go back as a leader. Initially, it was for myself, but once I went back it was so students or young people could get the same experience”(P7).

Theme 4 explored the Barriers and Challenges that face volunteers in the youth sector currently. These barriers/challenges can have a negative impact on the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector and also on potential future volunteers. Barriers/challenges were also split into three sub-themes which are lack of volunteers, lack of time, and impact of covid. Initial research showed that pre-covid pandemic 43% of individuals surveyed in Ireland volunteered in some way and that post-pandemic 75% of individuals surveyed reported volunteering. This is a surprising statistic when two of the emerging sub-themes in this study are the impact of covid and the lack of volunteers with participants in the current study commenting on the current lack of volunteers and stating that “due to covid, I think a lot of peoples answers changed” (P4). One participant then referenced back to the higher volume of volunteers the program had in 2019 pre-covid and the issues they’re currently facing “participation has just plummeted, even when people thought that they had more spare time. And we're like, oh, we're going to give volunteering a go now, which was maybe 2019, I think it was the last time we had a really full leaders weekend and then maybe two or three months later they just dropped off and I have never seen any of them ever again which is really hard." (P3). Time seemed to be a major factor facing volunteers at present with participants stating that the “biggest challenge a lot of it is down to time" (P1). Although, for this particular program volunteer participation has declined since 2019. Removing the barrier of some time constraints facing individuals during the covid pandemic would explain the rise in volunteer participation.

Strengths and Weaknesses

There was a clear gap in the literature upon initial research into the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector which makes this one of the major strengths supporting this study. One weakness in the methodology that can be observed is the sample size of this study. Although this would be considered a weakness in methodology the researcher achieved the initial goal due to this study being qualitative and the aim being to report on individuals' lived experiences. Purposive sampling was used in this research as it is the most widely used sampling method, although it can be prone to selection bias. Due to the nature of the research, the researcher required a specific cohort that other sampling methods would not allow. Another limitation to note following this was that this sample was specifically from the gluais leadership training program and did not expand from this cohort. All interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams, although this method is convenient in terms of location. Removing face-to-face interaction could hinder the information received due to distractions, comfort levels etc...

The researcher received interest from further participants but due to time commitments on both the researcher's and participants' side, some participants withdrew interest in the study. Another strength of this study was that the researcher set clear aims and research questions which were adhered to throughout the study, the use of an interview guide allowed the interviews to stay in line with the research.

Future Research and Research Implications

The current studies' research suggests that volunteers' motivations although similar, can still vary. It highlights that values, commitment to organisation and personal development are key motivators which all pull from previous research as seen in Batson et al (2002) batson's four motive theory and Clary et al (1998) volunteer function index.

The present research also addressed barriers/challenges facing volunteers which if addressed could improve volunteer satisfaction and retention rates. This research should inform youth organisations and voluntary organisations of the motivations of their volunteers in order to best support them, and improve volunteer satisfaction and retention.

Further research is needed in the area of volunteer motivation and more specifically volunteer motivation in the youth sector, this research is a good foundation for further research to occur. Further research could broaden the sample to multiple organisations and investigate the relationship between the volunteers and the organisations in order to nurture these relationships and improve retention. Further studies could implement both qualitative and quantitative methods whilst increasing sample size.

Conclusion

Qualitative research can give a specific and deeper understanding of the motivations of volunteers in the youth sector. There is a lack of qualitative research in this area but a broader understanding of these motivators could lead to improvements in retention rates and recruitment processes for youth organisations that rely on volunteers for day-to-day operations.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Interview Guide

A Qualitative investigation into the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector

Opening Questions

- Tell me about yourself (not transcribed)
- Tell me why you choose to volunteer in the youth sector?
- Tell me why you chose to volunteer for Gluais?

General Questions

- How long have you been volunteering for the gluais leadership training program
- Tell me about your overall experience as a volunteer? Have you enjoyed it?

Motivation

- Why do you participate in volunteer work?
- What motivates you to volunteer in the youth sector
- Have you learned any skills/qualities through volunteering that you have adapted to your day-to-day
- What are the benefits of engaging in volunteer work?
- Do you feel recognised or a sense of gratitude for your volunteer work?

Barriers

- Have you experienced any barriers or challenges whilst engaging in volunteer work in the youth sector? If so, what are they?

Conclusion

- From your experience in volunteering in the youth sector do you believe the number of people volunteering is increasing or decreasing and why?

Appendix B.**Study Information Sheet****An investigation into the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before deciding if you would like to take part in this study, please take the time to read this information sheet which explains what is being done in this study and what is involved for you should you choose to participate. If you have any questions regarding the information provided, please don't hesitate to contact me at my contact information provided below.

Who am I and what is this research about?

My name is Aaron Murphy, and I am a final year studying psychology at the National College of Ireland. As part of the degree curriculum, a final year project is carried out and I have chosen to carry out my research on the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector. I will be looking for male and female participants all of whom must be females within the Gluais leadership program.

What is involved if you choose to take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview over Microsoft teams/zoom that will last approximately 45 -55 minutes. These interviews will take place at a time convenient to you. You will be asked a series of questions in relation to your motivation to volunteer and then potential barriers. An audio recording of the interviews will be taken using zoom/Microsoft team in order to collect data. All information will be strictly confidential, and you will be asked to sign a consent form in advance of the interview which will indicate both your willingness to take part in the interview and your permission to record the interview.

Who can take part?

All participants must be over the age of 18 and be volunteers in the gluais leadership training program.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no reward for taking part in this study. If you do choose to participate in the study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable for any reason. You can withdraw the data from the study after the interview up to the point that the results for the research project have been written up.

Are there any risks or benefits involved?

Benefits – you will not directly benefit from this study in any way, however, information from this study may be beneficial to future research in the area and also raise awareness of the meaningful work that the gluais leadership program does.

Risks – there are no risks involved in this study.

Will taking part in the study be confidential?

All data in this study is strictly confidential. All participants in this study will be interviewed online over microsoft teams one on one with the researcher. All interviews will be recorded using the same platforms. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim within 30 days of completion of interviews and all audio files will then be deleted. Any information that may be identifiable to a participant (I.E: names, locations) will be anonymised. Each participant will be assigned a unique ID code where their data is then stored. This data is stored separately from names or any identifying information. Only the researcher and academic supervisor will have access to this data. However, in the unlikely event that a researcher or academic supervisor believes that a law is broken or that a participant is at harm to themselves or others, the relevant authorities will be notified, and they would be required to share this data. The researcher would make every attempt to discuss this with you first but

may need to breach confidentiality with or without your permission. All electronic recordings will be kept on encrypted files on the researcher's computer which will be password protected at all times. The files will be deleted after transcription takes place. All informed consent forms will be scanned and saved in a password-protected folder. All transcribed (redacted) files will be stored electronically, and password protected. All interview transcripts and consent forms will be stored for 5 years in accordance with the NCI data retention policy.

What will happen with the results and information gathered from the study?

The results from this study will be presented in a final year dissertation project and submitted to the National College of Ireland. This is a qualitative study so direct quotes may be taken from participants and presented in the results. These participants will remain anonymised. The results from this study may be presented at conferences internally within the college, at National level or submitted to academic journals for publication.

Who should you contact for further information?

Aaron Murphy

Undergraduate researcher

National College of Ireland

Email: x14540187@student.ncirl.ie

Research supervisor: Dr Brendan Cullen, Lecturer in Psychology, National College of Ireland

Email: brendan.cullen@ncirl.ie

Appendix C.**Informed Consent Form****An investigation into the motivation of volunteers in the youth sector**

- I agree to participate in the above study voluntarily.
- I agree with the knowledge that I can withdraw at any stage of the interview process and no penalty will occur.
- This study has been explained clearly to me both verbally and in writing and I have been given the opportunity to raise any queries with the researcher.
- I understand that I will be taking part in a semi-structured interview that can take 30-60 minutes.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio recorded and that once this has been transcribed by the researcher the audio recording will be erased.
- I understand that all information provided will be treated confidentially for this study and that information such as names, places and other people will be changed and will not be identifiable.
- I understand that extracts from my interview may be quoted in a final year project and that it may or may not be published. These quotes will not have any identifiable information.

- I understand that the researcher is obliged to report to the relevant authorities any information that I relay that may be a potential risk to me or another party. They may do this with or without permission.
- I understand that under the freedom of information of legislation, I can access my information at any time by contacting the researcher of this study on the information provided.
- I understand that both the researcher and academic supervisor are available for me to speak with if required and information for both the researcher and the academic supervisor has been provided.

Signature of Research Participant:

Date:

Researcher: Aaron Murphy

Appendix D.**Debriefing Sheet**

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day for this interview and showing interest in the research. You have just taken part in an interview. It aims to explore the subjective motivations of volunteers within the youth sector with a specific focus on youth leadership training programs. My focus for this study is on gluais and the incredible work you and your fellow volunteers continue to do, and I hope to also highlight this through your motivations in this study. As not much research has previously looked into this area, I feel like it could be valuable to the field.

If you would like to know the findings of this research, please don't hesitate to contact me at x14540187@student.ncirl.ie

It is also important to note that you can contact me to view your own individual data under the freedom of information act. Should you wish to view your data it can be viewed at any time for up to 5 years from the interview taking place under the national college of Ireland data retention policy. You can withdraw the data from the study after the interview up to the point that the results for the research project have been written up. However, in the event of a disclosure of criminal offences during the interview or any information that highlights you are at risk to yourself or others. Confidentiality may be broken, and the relevant authorities may be contacted.

Kind Regards,
Aaron Murphy