

Summary of the PhD dissertation

Empirical studies on the psychological background of volunteering

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1. The structure of the dissertation

The primary aim of my dissertation is to provide an overall picture of the psychological background of volunteering as an especially important prosocial activity based on the current Hungarian and international studies enabling researchers to use them as primary resources for further studies. My second aim is to give an insight into current Hungarian research activities within the framework of international studies. Finally, I wish to highlight opportunities for further research.

In the theoretical background, we focus on the factors that influence helping behavior (prosocial tendencies in early childhood, civic commitment, philanthropy, and helping behavior in adulthood) and its main explanatory theories and emotions (bystander apathy, diffusion of responsibility, gratitude, sympathy, forgiveness, mindfulness). In addition, we expound the conceptual differences between altruism and prosociality with the main explanatory theories of altruism (kin selection, reciprocal altruism, negative-state relief model, empathy-altruism hypothesis, reputation-building model, and costly signaling theory) addressing the issue of pure-impure altruism and including other constructs underlying helping behavior (moral outrage, empathic anger). I also describe the behavioral economic framework in connection with the research of altruism. Afterwards, I turn to the description of the concept and characteristics of volunteering where the psychological focus is gradually gaining more space (sociocultural factors, personality background, motivations, biopsychosocial factors). I also devote a chapter to presenting the psychological aspects of voluntary blood donation including the importance of approach and avoidance motives for blood donation (prosocial value motivation, moral and social responsibility, and ego-oriented needs). Finally, I describe the four empirical studies with their conclusions and indicate areas for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Definition and types of volunteering

Penner (2002) describes volunteering as a long-term, planned prosocial behavior which is aimed in particular at helping strangers and can be seen as a form of social participation. An important feature is the lack of direct financial benefit to the actor and the volunteer is not a substitute for paid labor. Volunteering is based on the volunteers' own determination, and no external coercive effect can prevail in its initiation (Czike & F. Tóth, 2007). Volunteering is a social behavior, neither a reaction, nor an attitude or a habit, rather it is based on a decision in a certain social space. It is dominated by personal commitment and values and it serves certain

goals. Volunteering is a product of group relations, social influences, and identity elements. It also contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). It differs in nature from other forms of prosocial behaviors (sharing or donating money) in that it depends on the use of resources like time, energy, and physical strength (Bekkers, Konrath & Smith, 2016). In addition, volunteering can result in an increased emotional burden when serving specific client groups through services such as hospice, telephone helpline, legal or psychological counseling for victims of abuse.

Volunteering can be formal, accomplished through associations or organizations, or informal, performed outside of formal institutions, for example helping family, friends, or neighbours without any financial compensation. Volunteering is a heterogeneous activity based on the frequency and intensity of participation, with a continuum ranging from episodic volunteers to long-term volunteers (Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal & Handy, 2008), but either for organizations employing long-term volunteers or others employing episodic volunteers at mega events, it is important to find the appropriate volunteers who also find the activity rewarding (Bartal & Kmetty, 2011).

Volunteering can be aimed at helping one's own community (in-group), or another group (out-group). We can differentiate volunteering for religious and non-religious groups, volunteering for intellectual or practical motives, and volunteering based on different levels of intensity (Bekkers, Konrath & Smith, 2016). In Hungary, according to the latest survey (2014) of the Central Statistics Office¹, 34 % of the population between the ages of 15 and 74 (2 million 557 thousand people) performed volunteer services during the past 12 months.

2.2. Factors underlying helping behavior

Helping behavior occurs early in childhood (consoling, sharing), therefore we can state that helpfulness has at least partly a genetic basis: „there is a prosocial personality disposition that emerges early and is somewhat consistent over time” (Eisenberg, Guthrie, Murphy, Shepard & Carlo, 1999: 1368). Environmental factors contribute to the development of prosocial disposition as well: Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols & Drummond (2013) stated that children who helped and shared more quickly and more often - especially in tasks that required more complex emotion understanding - had parents who frequently asked them to label and explain the emotions depicted in the books.

¹ <http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/pdf/onkentes.pdf>

2.3. The concept of altruism

Altruism covers prosocial acts in which a person does not expect any monetary compensation in return for his or her action. That is, altruism shifts the emphasis from the beneficiary of the action to the actor, from open behavior to the covert intent. Thus, there are acts that can be regarded as prosocial, but not altruistic (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder & Penner, 2006). We can identify the internalized social norms in the background of altruistic actions: the norms of helping others (social responsibility or philanthropy), fairness (equality) and reciprocity (Vályi, 2008).

3. Methods

Many disciplines have researched volunteering during the last decades. Studies in sociology (Czike & Kuti, 2006; Bartal, 2010; Bartal & Kmetty, 2011), education (Fényes, 2014; Székely, 2014), social politics (Czibere & Rácz, undated) were conducted; meanwhile, only a limited number of studies in psychology have been published in Hungary (e.g. Pólya & Martos, 2012). Review articles had also been published scarcely before we completed our research. We attempted to fill this gap by writing the present dissertation, which is, although by no means complete, may induce further research in many directions in the following years.

4. The procedures and samples of the empirical studies

Title of research	Sample	Procedure
I. Investigation of the motivational and emotional background of adolescent and youth volunteering	43 respondents (33 females and 10 males, $M_{age}=17,9$) regular volunteers	Semi-structured interview
II. Personality profile and life satisfaction of volunteers and non-volunteers	226 respondents (113 volunteers $M_{age}=41,15$; $SD=15,32$ and 113 non-volunteers $M_{age}=40,69$; $SD=15,08$). The two subsamples are matched by sex, age and education	Paper-pencil questionnaire
III. Factors influencing volunteer blood donation on a sample of	512 respondents (262 blood donors $M_{age}=24,05$; $SD=5,04$) and 250 non-donors, $M_{age}=22,85$;	Online survey

students studying in higher education	SD=4,29), 116 males and 396 females	
IV. Examining the attitudes to donate and share: Does the blood donor status matter?	1727 respondents (cross-cultural sample), out of which 185 Hungarian university students (117 females and 68 males) ($M_{age}=20,58$; $SD=1,85$)	Charity dictator game (CDG): distribution of 10 coins of 200 Ft among himself, a stranger and a charity, across 4 frames (standard CDG, paid CDG, blood money CDG and blood gift CDG)

5. Summary of the research results for each study

Based on the existing domestic and international research, we aimed to draw up a framework for continuing research on a Hungarian sample either. In the following, we briefly present the results of all four studies performed.

5.1. Investigation of the motivational and emotional background of adolescent and youth volunteering

We investigated adolescent volunteers, who had been volunteering for a social organization long before School Community Service appeared. Thus, the motivational background behind becoming a volunteer and continuing the activity on long term was examined objectively. In addition, our goal was to identify the perceived difficulties and obstacles as well as to reveal the perceived positive - i.e. change in personality - effects.

As a result of the semi-structured interviews, we observed that school staff, teachers, and volunteer coordinators informed more than half of our sample about volunteering, and information from the host organization often paved the way for volunteering. The guidance of friends and parents was also significant. The decision was significantly influenced by people emotionally close to the volunteer (friends, classmates, or family) or active volunteers (remember that volunteering can also “enter” into a person’s activity repertoire through reference people, especially peers), mainly if they had strong persuasive power, such as a suggestive lecture on volunteering. Occasionally, even adolescents start volunteering due to personal reasons (e.g. loss of a relative). The decision about the kind of activities to choose mainly depends on the opportunities provided by the social organization, so adapting it to the person's field of interest and motivational background is an extremely important task.

The first volunteer activity is usually associated with positive emotions such as joy or satisfaction (e.g., due to the sense of importance or a well done job), which are also key factors in becoming a long-term volunteer. However, sometimes the service to be accomplished is unknown, strange, and occasionally unpleasant. The constant help of coordinators in emotional processing and the feeling of social support – i.e. belonging to a familiar, emotionally supportive community - may balance the negative feelings.

A significant motive in becoming a long-term volunteer is that adolescents can thus express their prosocial values, and their willingness to provide help may manifest itself in actual activities. Social factors are of great importance at this age, as volunteering provides opportunities for frequent interactions, which is the basis for deepening relationships. Memorable experiences facilitate this process. Another attraction to volunteering is personal growth. Volunteers may gain knowledge, develop new skills, and get to know other cultures, and this might be more difficult to acquire through other activities. Volunteering usually lasts longer, if the person finds himself competent and considers the activity meaningful. An important result, especially in the healthcare industry, is that volunteering is often seen as an internship, attunement to later work, which enhances skills through training, and it is often important for volunteers to participate in rewarding and meaningful activities. The frequency and duration of volunteering is primarily determined by the balance between available free time and school assignments, but the volunteering time required and the volunteer peers' personality and number of on site are also determinants. To a lesser extent, transportation options and physical-emotional state also impact the frequency and duration of volunteering.

Regarding the perceived effects of volunteering, individuals most often pointed out that they had become more helpful, open-minded, and understanding, and many had made new friends. In many cases, their way of thinking has changed, some have found themselves more purposeful and attentive, and some have reported increased physical condition and mental resilience. To a lesser extent, though, there has also been an increase in responsibility, perseverance, and employability. As a result of several well-accomplished tasks (e.g., wound dressing), their sense of self-efficacy often increased a lot. An important benefit might be that some individuals self-reported that they were able to cope with failures and client rejections more successfully. Also important emotional catalysts are spontaneous reactions and feedback from clients, satisfaction caused by a well-solved task, a sense of usefulness, and effective structuring of leisure time. Adverse emotions are caused by the negative, sometimes hostile behavior of the clients, unexpected or emotionally difficult situations, lack of preparedness for

the task, low quality of equipment, and the sight of the poor physical or mental condition of the patients. It's also difficult to process the fact that they cannot help everyone they want to.

5.2. Personality profile and life satisfaction of volunteers and non-volunteers

Significant differences in agreeableness ($t_{(224)}=2,204$; $p<.05$), energy ($t_{(224)}=2,001$; $p<.05$), and openness ($t_{(224)}=3,521$; $p<.01$) have been found for volunteers among the Big Five personality traits, while there are no significant differences regarding conscientiousness and emotional stability. No significant differences have been found in the satisfaction with life of volunteer and non-volunteer subjects ($t_{(224)}=.166$; $p=.868$) either. Regarding BFQ facets, we can state that dynamism ($t_{(224)}=2,233$; $p<.05$), politeness ($t_{(224)}=2,482$; $p<.05$), and the two openness facets, openness to culture ($t_{(224)}=2,53$; $p<.05$) and openness to experience ($t_{(224)}=3,277$; $p<.001$) showed significant differences for volunteers, and no other significant differences have been found between volunteers and non-volunteers.

We conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses using a stepwise method to analyse the predictive power of the most significant demographic variables (age, gender, and education), big five traits and volunteer variables (have done volunteer activities before or not, and if so, how much and since when) on life satisfaction. In the first step of the analysis, the demographic variables (age, gender, and education), in the second step, volunteer factors (volunteer status, time spent with volunteering, and length of service) were entered as independent variables. In the third step, big five traits (energy, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness) were finally entered into the model. Finally, the two models emerged. In the first model, only education ($\beta=.235$, $p<.001$) had a significant positive effect on life satisfaction, which explained 5,5 % of the total variance of LS. In model 2, education ($\beta=.218$, $p<.001$) and emotional stability ($\beta=.315$, $p<.001$) contributed positively explaining 15,4% of the total variance in life satisfaction.

5.3. Factors influencing volunteer blood donation on a sample of students studying in higher education

Nearly two-third of both blood donors and non-blood donors have blood donor friends or school mates, one-third have blood donor friends or family members, while the proportion of blood donor instructors and neighbors is lower. In both groups, the number of those who do not know blood donors at all is less than 10%. The decision to donate blood was mostly influenced by parents and friends, as well as active blood donor acquaintances, and to a lesser extent, the role of educators, fellow students, medical staff, and people in need of blood products can be

highlighted. With one exception (blood transfusions can only be obtained from donors), donation information was significantly better known by blood donors.

Current information about blood donation is most often found on the Internet (blood donation websites or events on social networks), but the impact of posters and brochures is still significant these days (e.g. notice board), and volunteers are frequently informed by acquaintances as well; on average, running into the issue once a month on each platform. Through television, radio, and study management systems, on the other hand, such information is encountered less frequently than monthly on average. The role of text messages is significant, and donors also run into such advertisements more often on Internet platforms. We also asked for donors' opinions on how effectively they are reached by the different communication channels. They found Internet as the most effective one, but the persuasive power of active blood donors and acquaintances who were previously in need of blood products was also mentioned as a significant factor. While Internet and lectures given by experts working in blood supplies are more effective according to blood donors, at the same time, the study management system seems to be more effective according to non-blood donors. When planning blood donation campaigns, it is worth being aware of what types of communication messages our subjects find effective in reaching out their fellow students. A thought-provoking slogan, involving a well-known person for an image campaign, a well-known person, fellow student or educator with personal experience, and the use of strong and influential images were highly rated by both blood donors and non-blood donors. In the case of motivations for blood donation, a component matrix of 22 items with 4 components was created by principal component analysis.

The most important motive was found to be Altruism and change of perspective, followed by the Habit and identity component. Self-growth, as a mainly ego-oriented motivational component, and Social Reference are of less importance. Analyzing the factors behind avoiding blood donation, fear reactions seem to be the most significant, but avoidance due to some physiological parameters (e.g. hemoglobin level), and fear of exclusion from donation are also determining.

5.4. Examining the attitudes to donate and share: Does the blood donor status matter?

Students enrolled in higher education in Hungary donated to others at a rate above average in all four frames, from which we can deduce their strong altruistic motivational background. Examination of the hypotheses performed on the whole sample showed that the majority of the participants perceive blood donation as an intrinsically motivated behavior, as they gave

away a significantly higher amount from the „money for blood donation” frame than from other frames. However, the motivational background might rather be called impure altruistic, as both their own interest (ego-oriented background) and the recipient's interest (altruistic background) played an important role for them. If it was pure altruism, they should have given away 100% of the endowment. However, slightly more than 60% of the total amount was donated to others, and 22% of participants were identified as purely intrinsically and 11% as purely extrinsically motivated. We can also see that under all conditions, blood donors donate more (and have shown more charitable activity), which naturally vary across cultures. In addition, our hypothesis that people donate less in the „payment for work” frame confirmed, although the assumption that we get similar results under the „voucher for blood donation” condition were not confirmed. In the whole sample, we can see that while moral outrage shows a significant difference between blood donors and non-blood donors, we did not find a significant difference in reluctant altruism and empathic anger, so it seems that “freeriding” does not elicit much stronger willingness to help in the case of blood donors than in the case of non-blood donors; at the same time, the unfair treatment of others causes them to be more outraged. We have found mixed results regarding the helping behavior of blood donors in other contexts. In some countries, we can see signs of the validity of the theory of “saintly sinning” (Ferguson, 2015; Sachdeva, Iliev & Medin, 2009) that blood donors are less active in other types of prosocial behavior outside the context of blood donation.

6. Conclusions

Our research included the process of becoming a volunteer in adolescence, the determinants of long-term volunteering, and the attempt to identify a volunteer personality profile. We also wish to establish that in addition to traditional self-reported comparative studies of blood donors and non-blood donors - along various variables that potentially determine blood donation - we can also apply economic games designed to explore altruism behaviourally (e.g. charity dictator game, ultimatum game, etc.) as well, from which we can infer real distribution tendencies (Ferguson & Lawrence, 2018). Our study supports that decisions about donations may also be examined from a cross-cultural perspective, as different cultures may impose different norms on its members, which may be accompanied by different prosocial tendencies, which, naturally, are still strongly influenced by individual factors.

7. Further research

In connection with the theoretical background, a number of factors have been described, which we have not examined in a Hungarian sample so far, but we believe that future investigations would be valuable. Among the social psychological aspects of volunteering, this includes the role of *theory of planned behavior* (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005) and the *volunteer role identity* (see Finkelstein, Penner & Brannick, 2005; Grube & Piliavin, 2000) in becoming a long-term volunteer. In relation to the retention of blood donors, the application of *blood donor identity* and *self-efficacy* (see France, Kowalsky, France et al, 2014) as well as *self-determination theory* (see France, France, Carlson et al, 2017) are of particular importance. Regarding the involvement of non-blood donors, we plan a detailed research on the correlates of *fears and anxiety* (see France, France, Carlson et al, 2014; France, France, Himawan et al, 2013) and the *experiences of novice donors* (see Jansen et al, 2019; Schreiber et al, 2005), for instance, the effect of experiences of the first blood donation on attitudes and blood donation intention in the future. We plan to examine the latter through an interview, which also makes it possible to explore the deeper motivational and emotional background. An increasing number of empirical studies are emerging in the international literature to effectively reduce anxiety, pre- and post-donation fears (Predonation hydration, adjusting of beds, predonation consumption of caffeine, applied muscle tension, relaxation, post-donation interview) (see France, France, Himawan et al, 2013; France, France, Carlson et al, 2015; France, France, Wissel et al, 2013). Furthermore, the longitudinal impact assessment of the use of mild incentives would also be informative (see, for instance Sanchez, Ameti, Schreiber et al, 2001).

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (3)

1. Dorner, L.: A serdülő- és ifjúkori önkéntességgel kapcsolatos tapasztalatok empirikus vizsgálata.
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Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (1)

4. Dorner, L., Rózsa, S.: Personality profile and life satisfaction of volunteers and non-volunteers:
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List of other publications

Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (1)

5. Ferguson, E., Dorner, L., France, C. R., France, J. L., Masser, B., Lam, M., Marta, E., Alfieri, S., Merz, E. M., Adams, B., Huis in, ' V. E., Scerri, J.: Blood donor behaviour, motivations and the need for a systematic cross-cultural perspective: the example of moral outrage and health- and non-health-based philanthropy across seven countries.
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