An exploration into the motivations, barriers, and benefits associated with volunteering among final year full-time undergraduate students.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the motivations, barriers, and benefits of volunteering among final year full-time undergraduate students in Ireland. Qualitative research methods was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with six suitable participants. The data was subsequently analysed using thematic analysis. The findings illustrated that development of career opportunities was the most important motivation for students to participate in volunteering. Lack of time was cited as the core restricting barrier which inhibited students from participating in volunteering. The research recognised that, increased sense of satisfaction and happiness was the principal benefit to students and this stemmed from making a positive impact in society.

Introduction

This chapter outlined the value of volunteers, and the impact they can make in society. Reviewing previous literature on the motivations, barriers and benefits of volunteering developed a comprehensive understanding of the area. Holdsworth (2010) recognised that for some students the opportunity to enhance employability was the main reason for initial participation in volunteering. The increase in positive mental and physical health was established as a key benefit of volunteering. (Wilson, 2000). Other important benefits included, gaining experience in a professional area and learning new skills and qualities through volunteering. A report conducted in Ireland entitled "Tipping the Balance" illustrated how lack of time was a significant barrier to volunteer involvement (National Committee of Volunteering, 2002). The literature highlights the complexity of volunteering by recognising that the area is made up of important, interconnected issues which can each influence volunteering experiences.

Method

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to generate in-depth and extensive data on the experiences and opinions of students who volunteer.

Snowball sampling was used to gain access to participants suitable to answering the general question.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted for this research. This form of interview provides structure while also offering the participants the opportunity to expand on any topics and issues that arise over the course of the interview. "The semi-structured interview provides the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned, combining the structure of a list of issues to be covered together with the freedom to follow up points as necessary" (Thomas, 2009, p. 164).

The interviews were recorded, with consent from the participants using the voice memo application on an I-phone 4s. Pseudonyms were given to each participants to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported to the Nvivo 10 software programme. The researcher applied thematic analysis on the transcripts to develop key themes and patterns for use in the findings section.

Results

The main focus of this research project was to explore and analyse the experiences and views of student volunteers in Ireland, by concentrating on the motivations, barriers, and benefits of volunteering. Three sub-themes were identified for each central theme. Students motivation to engage in volunteering activities was centered on career opportunities, creation of a positive impact in society, and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills. The barriers in this research were the lack of time available, inexperience due to young age, and financial constraints. Increased satisfaction and happiness, positive impact on college course content, and development of valuable contacts were the fundamental benefits identified by final year full-time undergraduate students.

Discussion

The students in this research provided informative and noteworthy data on the topic of volunteering. The value of volunteers in society is much more important than ever before. It is vital to acknowledge the opinions of students and remove the barriers that exist in society towards volunteering. It is paramount to encourage student volunteering and grant this group in society the recognition they deserve for their generosity and effort. Further research is required in the area in order to maximise the potential of student volunteers in Irish society.

References

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