

COLLEGE STUDENTS
VOLUNTEERING FOR
NONPROFIT ORGANISATIONS

ABSTRACT

College students are an important source for future nonprofit work. In order to build and strengthen relationship with student volunteers, organisations need to understand how students choose an organisation and what influences their decision. A questionnaire was conducted with a sample size of 59 fulltime students studying at Bond University, Queensland. The main goal was to identify what criteria have been used by college students when choosing a nonprofit organisation they want to volunteer for. The available data about motivation of college student volunteers sets the foundation for this research paper. The findings indicate that family and friends represent a main influential factor. In addition, the research shows that the initial motivations as well as the benefits that students expect from volunteering are important during the decision-process.

INTRODUCTION

“Volunteering is a contribution to society in one form or another without monetary compensation” (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Volunteering has been practiced since the ancient Greek and Romans (Cass and Manser, as cited in Simha, Topuzova & Albert, 2011). Nowadays, volunteerism plays an essential role particularly for nonprofit organisations since many of their programs and accomplishments depend on volunteers (Simha, Topuzova & Albert, 2011). The Australian government (2004) defines a non profit organisation as organisation that uses all its profit it makes to further the objectives of the non profit organisation and does not distribute it to any of its members. According to Australian Centre for Co-Operative Research and Development (2006), Australia has about 700,000 nonprofit organisations. Most of those organisations are small and rely entirely on the voluntary commitment of their members. In 2000, the number of voluntary labour hours worked for nonprofit organisations of all sizes reached 600 million and 3.7 million Australians contributed to this number. This contribution represented \$ 8.9 million of additional income to the nonprofit sector. If this amount is added to the financial data of Australia, the nonprofit sector accounts for \$29.6 billion or 4.7 % of the GDP. This economic contribution is even larger than that of the mining industry in Australia (Australian Centre for Co-Operative Research and Development, 2006).

According to Burns, Toncar, Reid, Anderson, Wells, Fawcett and Gruben (2005), nonprofit organisations are experiencing shortages of people who are willing to spend their time and effort and this often represents a major obstacle for these organisations in fulfilling their missions. Burns et al. (2005) state that young adults in college donate a significant amount of time to voluntary activities and are an important source for future nonprofit work. Even though nonprofit organisations do not have to pay volunteer labour, their recruitment requires the use of very limited

organisational resources: funding, staff and time (Martinez & McMullin, 2004). Therefore, understanding how college students choose their nonprofit organisation of choice appears to be of importance to those organisations who want to identify efficient and effective methods for recruitment and retention. According to Francis (2009), the increased competition for unpaid workers has led organisations to the use of traditional marketing strategies and customer relationship development. In order to build and strengthen relationship with volunteers, organisations need to understand how volunteers think and behave.

Past research provides a range of general volunteer data and information about the motives of college student volunteers but no research has been done focusing on college student's decision-making process when choosing a nonprofit organisation to volunteer for. Therefore, this research examines college students' volunteer activities and on what evaluation criteria they base their decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Question 1: Do Bond students volunteer for non-profit organisations?

Little research has been conducted that focuses on the volunteer rate of college students in nonprofit organisations, although there has been a great deal of data collected regarding volunteer work participation. The estimated number of volunteers in Australia has doubled from 3.2 million in 1995 to 6.4 million in 2010 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010) and this increase in volunteering is a global growing trend. The General Social Survey 2010 conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics states that 593,700 people between the age of 18 and 24 have undertaken voluntary work for an organisation in the 12 months before the survey. This number represents 9.4 % of all people who had volunteered and 27.1 % of all people in this age group who had volunteered in the previous year in Australia. The two main types of organisations that these volunteers worked for were sport and physical recreation and religious organisations. 184,300 of these young adults volunteered for sport or physical recreation organisations and 162,800 for religious organisations. 43.5 % of those young people who volunteered did this for at least once a week throughout the 12 months. Furthermore, the survey states that the volunteering behaviour of parents has an impact on whether their children decide to volunteer or not. In 2010, the volunteer rate of people aged 18 to 24 whose parents participated in voluntary work was 46 % compared to 26 % of those whose parents have not volunteered.

Compared to any other age group, 18 to 24 year olds show the lowest level of volunteer involvement. However, even though volunteers in their twenties make up the smallest percentage overall, research has shown that those people with a college degree within this category are four

times more likely to participate in voluntary activities than those with less education (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), the number of volunteers rises with the level of education obtained. However, the average hours volunteered decline with increasing education received. This means, undergraduate, certificate or diploma holders and post graduate are most likely to work for no profit but donate less hours than high-school level volunteers. High-school volunteers spend significant more hours than other groups and make up 56 % of total hours volunteered. The other group consisted of undergraduate, certificate or diploma holders and post graduate represents 23 % of total hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). In addition, Carlo, Okun, Knight & de Guzman (2005) discovered through their research that up to 90 % of college students declared that they participated in voluntary work at some point in their lives. Research on three universities in Brisbane showed that there was a relatively high number of students who were involved in voluntary work (36.1 %) (Auld, 2004). This suggests a tendency for students to volunteer. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this research states:

There is a minimum of 30 % rate of Bond students volunteering for nonprofit organisations.

College students represent a high potential for nonprofit organisations and are worthy of research because of their propensity to volunteer and for their viability as well-educated source for nonprofit service.

Question 2: If Bond students volunteer for nonprofit organisations, what evaluation criteria do Bond students use to choose a non-profit organisation they want to volunteer for?

At the moment, there is no data available that identify what evaluation criteria are used by student volunteers. However, a great deal of research has been conducted on motivation of college student volunteers. Kurt Lewin refers to motivation as “the psychological force that enables action” (as cited in Toure-Tillery and Fishbach, 2010). The reviewed data for this paper about student’s motivation built the basement for understanding what college students hope to gain from their volunteer experience and helped to define the questionnaire for this research.

Even though there is no financial return for volunteering, research has shown that individuals who commit to such work expect other trade-offs (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). According to Gage and Thapa (2012) many people who want to support others do this with the intention to fulfil their own needs. The area of volunteer motives is multifaceted and complex and even though a great amount of material can be found, researchers do not agree on many aspects of volunteer motives. There are several different approaches to look at what motivates somebody to become a volunteer. Many of the models base volunteer behaviour on functional or reasoned motives. For example, the functional perspective pays attention to the benefits that individuals gain from being a volunteer. This could be

such things as career development, self-actualization or fun. One of the leading functional approaches is Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen and Miene's (1998) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). This model specifies six functional motives for volunteering: values, protective, enhancement, understanding, career and social. The importance of the different functions is measured through 30 scale items. The VFI is cited in over 200 journal articles and there are a variety of different VFI applications. This shows that Clary et al.'s model is widely used as generic approach for defining volunteer motives (Francis, 2009). Nevertheless, also the VFI has limitations such as the little attention that is paid to the power of reference groups that shape individual's behaviour. According to a survey of 282 students, the VFI does not adequately define the motivations of today's university students who volunteer (Francis, 2009). In addition, the research by Francis (2009) suggests that instead of appealing to the functional benefits of volunteering, nonprofit organisations should focus on the social norms and promote volunteering as the normal thing to do. All the same, this result was based on a convenience sample of students from one university and did not pay attention to demographic issues such as culture, social class and race nor did the study take into consideration other reference groups such as work colleagues and celebrities (Francis, 2009).

During other research at three different universities in Brisbane, 208 university students were asked to respond to a variety of statements concerning their volunteer motivation (Auld, 2004). The importance of the different reasons was ranked using a five point Likert-type scale. Of all the respondents 36.1 % participated at the moment of the questionnaire in a voluntary activity, 39.9 % had stopped volunteering and 24 % had never volunteered. Those who were currently volunteers had personal factors as motivator. The eight most important reasons for volunteering were:

1. I wanted to gain experience that might help with future paid employment.
2. I wanted to learn and develop new skills.
3. I wanted to help others.
4. I thought that volunteer work would be enjoyable.
5. I felt I had the competence to help solve problems.
6. I wanted to have fun.
7. I wanted to be active and involved in the community.
8. I wanted to put something back into the community.

Even though these results are mainly personal in nature, there are a variety of factors that nonprofit organisations can control and that have an impact on their volunteer choice: For instance, volunteer training, nature of volunteer work, quality of supervision and perceived outcomes. If

nonprofit organisations take advantage of these findings they are able to get a better understanding what volunteers expect from their experience with the organisation, how to best advertise and administer to this market segment (Auld,2004).

The second hypothesis is:

The initial motivation of Bond students to volunteer is part of the criteria to choose a nonprofit organisation they want to volunteer for.

The third hypothesis is:

The initial motivation does not represent the most important evaluation criteria used to choose a nonprofit organisation.

METHOD

The Social Exchange Theory states that both individuals in a relationship have to gain something from it in order for the relationship to sustain. The satisfaction of both parties' self-interest represents the major factor in interpersonal relationships. Self-interest can enhance a relationship and is not necessarily negative. In the business world relationships between two parties is only maintained if both benefit from it. The Social Exchange Theory applied to the research topic explains that students must gain something from volunteering. When deciding which organisation to choose to work for this theory shows that the students will only pick a nonprofit organisation that offers them a fair return to their expenditures. Benefit and cost of volunteering is often not tangible but nevertheless the benefit of volunteering must exceed the cost of it so that the outcome is perceived as positive by the individual. Examples of what people can gain when volunteering are emotional comfort and social status. Costs to volunteers are often the time and effort sacrificed as well as lost opportunities.

Sampeling

As previous research showed university students represent an important resource for volunteer support. A better understanding for student's decision to volunteer for nonprofit organisations and how they choose the organisation will help those businesses to attract more student volunteers through offering them the information and benefits they are looking for. The sample chosen for this research were 59 Bond University students who represent the general population of the students studying at this university. The participating students had a minimum age of 19 and maximum age of 30. All of the participants were either fulltime undergraduate or fulltime postgraduate students. The research solely focused on students whose main activity was studying at

university level. Part-time students tend to have fulltime jobs or other main responsibilities which means their lifestyle varies from those of fulltime students. Therefore, part time students require a separate research. The selection of the participants occurred randomly and by grab sampling which means that students were recruited without the consideration of any demographics or degree aspects such as faculty, degree program or subjects undertaken.

Procedure

The research was conducted over a period of three days during the semester, starting Tuesday and ending Thursday, and at various times throughout the three days. Handing the questionnaire to students at various times during the day was intended to exclude the factor time as an extraneous variable. The students' willingness to respond might have been lower in the late afternoon after lectures and studying than in the morning when they had just started their day and had more energy. Further, the students were asked to fill out the questionnaire only if they had enough time and were not feeling pressured by anybody or anything to avoid false and limited answers or no answers at all. Even so, risk factors such as tiredness or stress could not be completely eliminated; the way the research was conducted decreased the risk that those factors influenced the validity of the answers and research results. The questionnaire was distributed to students at the library and the multimedia learning centre on campus where students spent their time during lecture breaks or after their lectures to study. A researcher approached individual students or student groups while they were sitting in front of university computers or at study desks. Then the students were asked if they would be willing and had the time to answer a few questions. Furthermore, it had been explained to them that this questionnaire was confidential and they were not obligated to answer these questions.

Instrumentation

Students had to answer a questionnaire consisting of 16 questions. The questions were focused on their age, volunteer experience, initial motivation of becoming a volunteer and the different aspects influencing their decisions. Since no literature that had been reviewed for this paper indicated that men and women differ in regards to volunteer work, the gender factor was not taken into account when the questionnaire was created and the sample was chosen.

The semi standardised questionnaire meant that this questionnaire had a moderate degree of structure and standardisation had a funnel format. The questions moved from being general to specific and from impersonal to more personal. All questions except the first one about the participant's age were primary questions and were directly related to the research topic. Half of the

questionnaire (questions 1, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 16) contained open-ended questions which means the respondent could answer in his or her own words. For instance, question 7 was: What kind of volunteer work have you done for nonprofit organisations? The other half were precoded questions (questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 14) and the respondent had to choose one of the given answers. For instance, question 4 was: Have your parents ever volunteered for a nonprofit organisation? The given answers the respondent could choose from were yes and no.

The questionnaire, which represented the instrument of the study, was used to measure the accuracy of three hypotheses and to get a better understanding for student's decision-making process when choosing a nonprofit organisation to volunteer for.

Hypothesis 1:

independent variable (IV) = nonprofit organisations

dependent variable (DV) = rate of Bond students

Hypothesis 2:

IV = initial motivation

DV = part of the criteria

Hypothesis 3:

IV = initial motivation

DV = most important evaluation criteria

RESULTS

The majority of the 59 Bond students who participated in the research were between 19 and 25 years old. Only eight of the participants fell into the age group 26 to 30. At the time the research was conducted, 47 students out of 59 were completing their bachelor degree at Bond University, the rest were postgraduate students. The findings showed that about 75 % of the students had at least once in their lives volunteered for a nonprofit organisation while the rest of the students had not. Even though the previous question (question 3) was answered with yes by the majority of the students only 17 of them were at the moment volunteering for a nonprofit organisation. The question if their parents had ever volunteered for a nonprofit organisation answered 36 of the respondents with yes and 23 with no. Out of all participants, 23 students volunteered every year and 13 students volunteered never. The variety of volunteer work that students were engaged in can be found in Table 1.

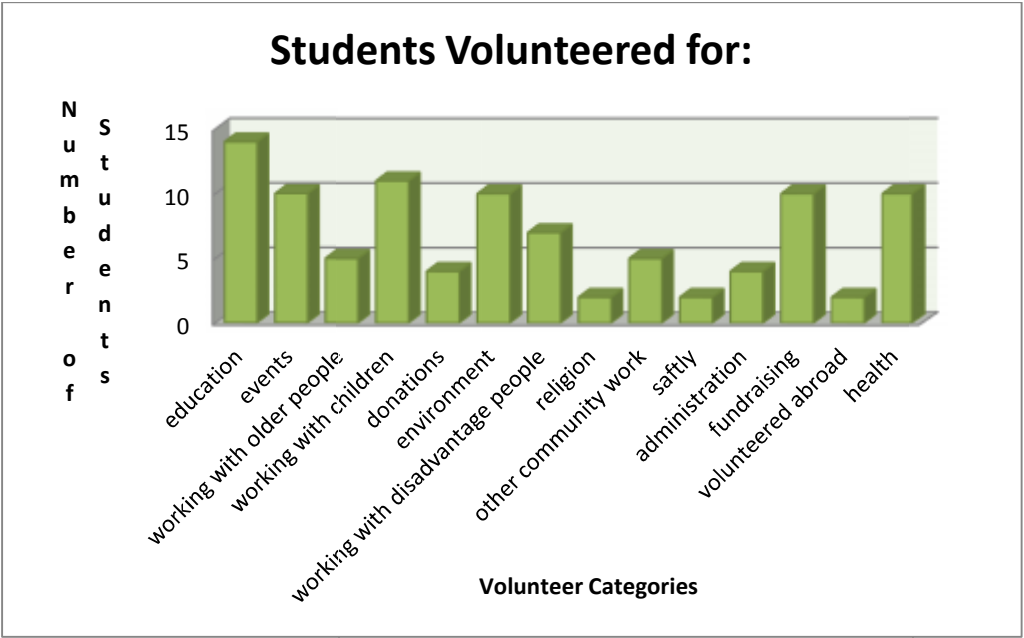


Table 1

Education represented the category with the highest number of volunteer experience within the sample followed by working with children. The categories health, environment, event and fundraising were ranked at the third place each with 10 Bond students who had experience in this area. Of all respondents 38 had friends that they knew were volunteering whereas 21 students had no volunteers in their friend circle. The reason why 20 of the students decided to become a volunteer was to do something that benefits others followed by the motivation of improving one’s resume and the influence by family and friends (see Table 2).

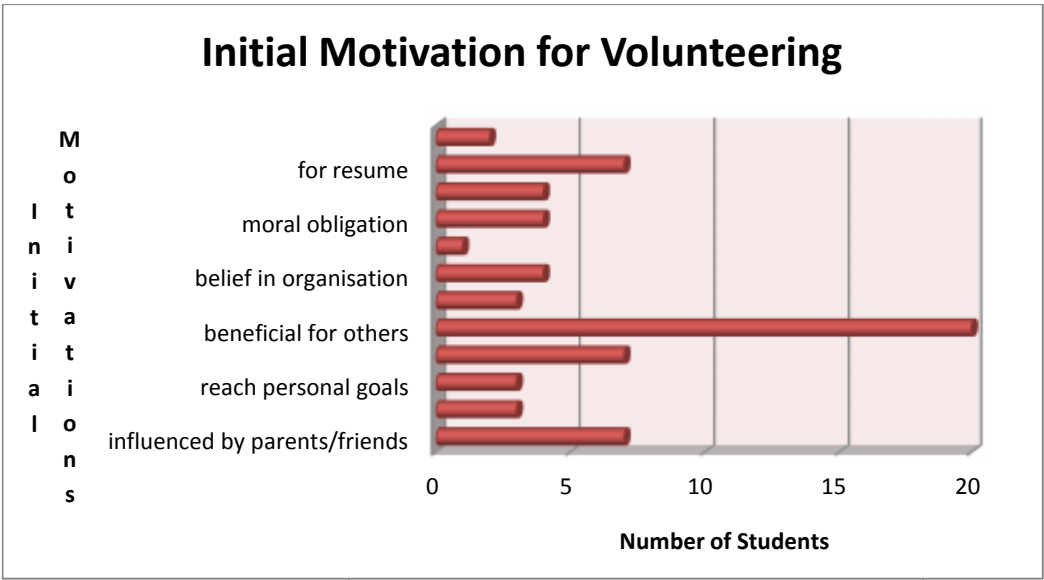


Table 2

The two most popular factors that influenced students’ decision to become a volunteer were firstly friends and family and secondly their personal interest (see Table 3).

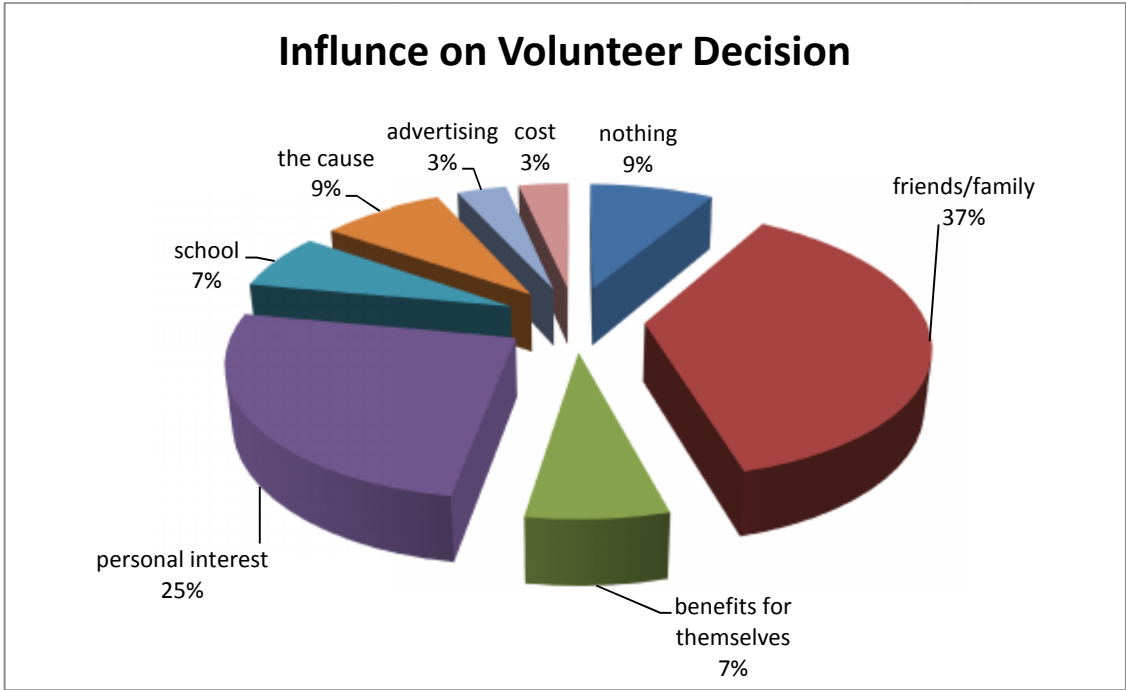


Table 3

Table 4 shows the different benefits Bond students wanted to gain from volunteering. Social responsibility was on top of the list and was mentioned by 23 % of the respondents. Gain experience, increase personal development and establish the feeling of self-satisfaction were common answers.

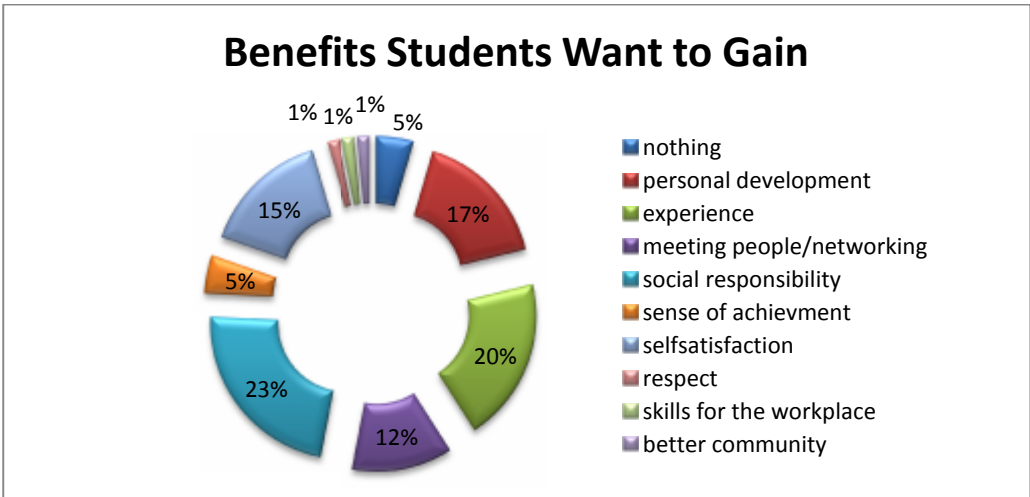


Table 4

When the students were asked if they plan on volunteering in the future 48 of them responded with yes and 11 with no.

The most common criteria that had been used by students to choose a nonprofit organisation was that they agreed and supported the cause represented by the organisation. Other criteria that had been identified were for instance that the values of the company had to fit with the personal values of the individual, the reputation of the company as well as the working environment and the volunteer task (see Table 5).

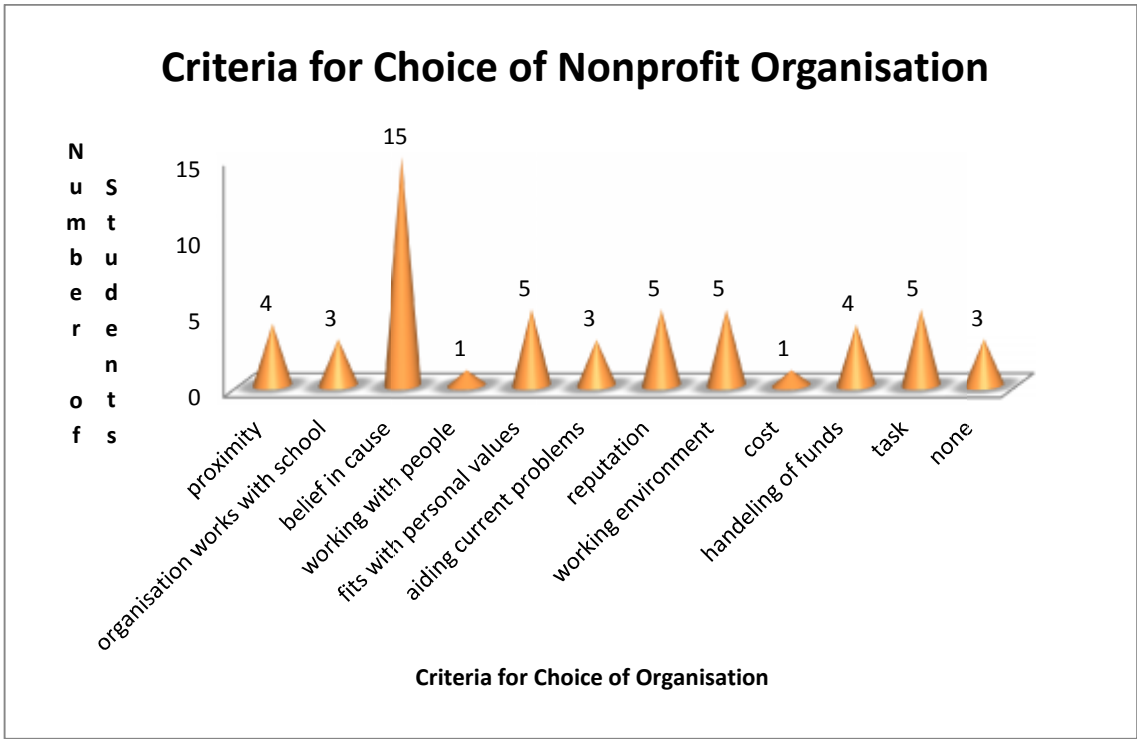


Table 5

Out of the 39 Bond students, who stated that they had experience in working as volunteer for a nonprofit organisation, 26 answered that they used their initial motivation as one of the criteria to choose a nonprofit organisation. The most important criterion for picking an organisation was for 14 of 39 students the good cause of the volunteer position. The second most frequent respond was that the students had more than just one main criterion to make this decision (see Table 6).

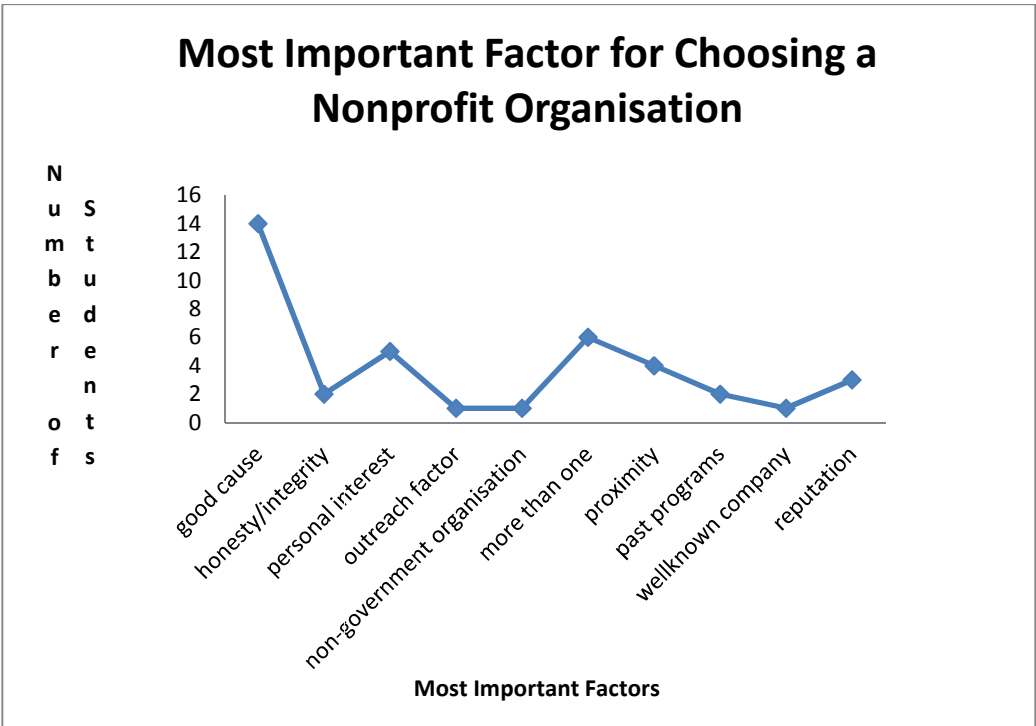


Table 6

When the students answered the question about how they heard about the organisation the first time, 18 responded through friends and family and 10 answered that they found out about the organisation through their own research. Further, 6 out of 39 participants, who had volunteered for a nonprofit organisation, stated that they connected with the organisation through their university or work place (see Table 7).

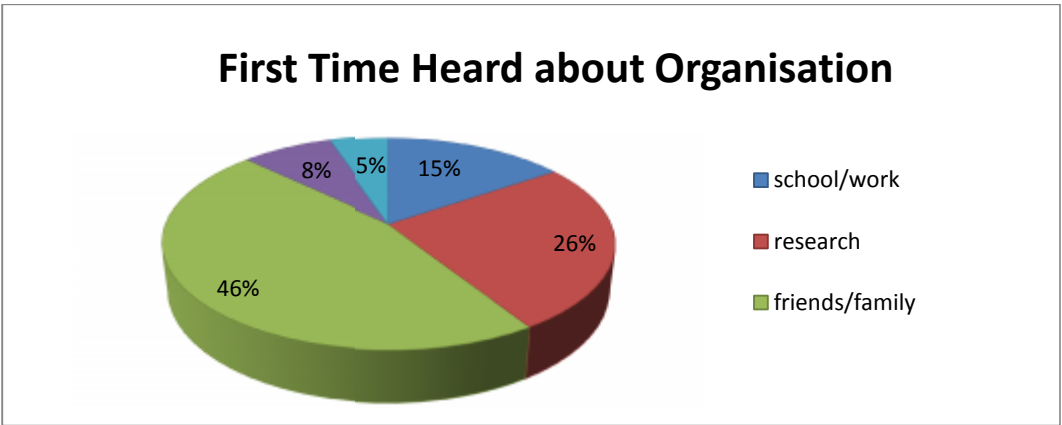


Table 7

DISCUSSION

The two research questions that were meant to be answered through this research were: Do Bond college students volunteer for nonprofit organisations and if so what evaluation criteria do they use to choose a nonprofit organisation? The results of the questionnaire showed that 44 out of 59 students had volunteered for a nonprofit organisation which in other words means about 75 %. Due to this result, the null hypothesis was rejected and hypothesis one was accepted. There is a minimum of 30 % rate of Bond students volunteering for nonprofit organisations.

Since the answer to the first research question is yes, Bond students volunteer for nonprofit organisations, what are the evaluation criteria used to choose an organisation? The most frequent answers were that they needed to belief in the cause the organisation represented, the values of the company had to align with personal values, the company had to have a good reputation and work environment, and the task had to fulfil their expectations.

Hypothesis two stated that the initial motivation of Bond students to volunteer is part of the criteria to choose a nonprofit organisation they want to volunteer for. Responds to question number 14 indicate that about 67 % of the students, who had volunteered for a nonprofit organisation, used their initial motivation as one of the criteria to choose a company. In this case too, the null hypothesis was rejected and the results of the questionnaire support hypothesis two.

The third hypothesis asserted that the initial motivation why Bond students decide to volunteer does not represent the most important evaluation criterion used to choose a nonprofit organisation.

Of the 67 %, 14 students initial motivation was to do something that benefits others and used this motivation as their primary criterion to choose the right organisation for them. Even though this is opposed to hypothesis three, 14 students out of 39 represent only about 36 % which means that the majority of the participants did not use their initial motivation to volunteer as their most important criterion to choose a nonprofit organisation to volunteer for. Therefore, hypothesis three was as well accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Implication

The findings of this research support the statement that people with college degrees are very likely to volunteer but an increase in education also means that the time donated to volunteering decreases (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Even though 75 % of students had volunteered for nonprofit organisations before and even more (81 %) are planning to volunteer in the future, most of the students volunteer on a yearly basis.

However, the findings suggest that 19 to 25 year old college students are showing a higher level of involvement (70 % of people in that age group) than previous research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) who reported 27.1 %. Further, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) published that volunteers between 18 and 24 are mainly volunteering for sport and physical recreation and religious organisations. Whereas the results of this research defines education and working with children as the main categories. Nevertheless, the fact that the sample for this study only consisted of Bond students and they are more willing to volunteer than people in this age group with less education might have caused the different research results.

In addition, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) explained that children with parents who have volunteered before are more likely to become a volunteer themselves than children whose parents never volunteered. This statement is supported by the research results of this questionnaire. Of all students that had volunteer experience about 82 % had parents who volunteered too. According to the findings, parents and friends represent the main factor that influences young adults decision whether to volunteer or not. Furthermore, about 46 % of the students heard about the nonprofit organisation they volunteered for the first time through their family or friends. Others found out about the organisation through their own research on the web or through their university or work place which had already established a relationship with the organisation. Gage and Thapa (2012) wrote that people who help others do this with the goal to fulfil their own need. Almost all of the respondents declared that they want to gain something from volunteering. The most common benefits people were looking for were social responsibility, experience, personal development and self-satisfaction. Only three people answered that they do not want to gain anything from helping others.

CONCLUSION

The way this research has been conducted lead to limitations in the paper. The sample size represents a very small proportion of the whole Bond student population and therefore, the results might not be appropriate for generalisations. In addition, during the conduction of the questionnaire students might have been influenced by other factors such as time pressure, willingness to participate and peer pressure which might have lead to limited or false answers. One of the disadvantages of open-ended questions is the risk of miss interpretation of the answers since participants use their own word to respond.

Future research is needed to better understand the influence that reference groups have on college students and their decision to volunteer for nonprofit organisations. Not much information is available about this topic and the findings of this research clearly state that family and friends have a

strong impact on whether or not a Bond student becomes a volunteer. This information can then be used by nonprofit organisations to increase their membership number and improve the relationship with their volunteers.

Even though college students are not only aware of nonprofit organisations but also a high percentage of them have been involved in volunteering for and the majority plans on working together with them in the future, the frequency of interaction is one of the lowest compared to other age-groups. In other words, college students present a big support force that nonprofit organisations do not take advantage of. This can be changed through effective communication and offering the students what they are looking for. Organisations have to understand that for students helping others represents their initial motivation of becoming a volunteer. Furthermore, they also have to believe in the cause and gain something from this engagement such as social responsibility, experience and personal development. Companies have to take in consideration that family and friends have a powerful influence on their decision.

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