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Analysis of Psychological Characteristics of College Student Volunteers Based on the PREAM Model

Li Xie^{1,2}, Xiaoyan Jiang^{1,2}, Shaoqing Wang^{1,2}

Abstract: This study, grounded in the PREAM model (Protective Factors, Risk Factors, Exposure, Awareness, and Motivation) and integrating theories from Positive Psychology, explores the current state and psychological characteristics of college students participating in volunteer services. Through questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews, the study analyzes the motivations, psychological needs, and the impact of volunteer service on the mental health and well-being of college students. The results reveal that volunteer service not only helps enhance college students' psychological resilience but also significantly improves their subjective well-being. Based on these findings, the study proposes corresponding policy recommendations to further promote volunteer activities among college students.

Keywords: PREAM model, college student volunteer service

1. Introduction

Volunteer service, as an important component of college life, not only helps cultivate college students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness but also has a positive impact on their psychological development ^[1]. By participating in volunteer activities, students can engage deeply with society, understand others' needs, and increase their attention to and understanding of social issues, thereby enhancing their sense of social participation and responsibility ^[2]. In recent years, with the development of Positive Psychology, an increasing number of studies have begun to focus on the positive effects of volunteer service on individuals' mental health and well-being, particularly in terms of boosting self-esteem, enhancing psychological resilience, and improving overall life satisfaction. However, there is still a lack of research on the motivations, psychological needs, and the impact of service experiences on the mental health of college student volunteers. This gap in research limits a comprehensive understanding of college student volunteerism. Therefore, this study aims to systematically explore the current state of college student volunteer service and its psychological impact through the PREAM model, uncovering the motivations, psychological needs, and specific mechanisms by which volunteer service influences mental health, to provide theoretical support and empirical evidence for future policy formulation and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship Between Volunteer Service and Mental Health

In recent years, numerous studies, both domestic and international, have demonstrated that volunteer service has a significant positive impact on individuals' mental health, specifically by enhancing subjective well-being, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, and promoting the development of psychological resilience. The realization of these mental health benefits is primarily associated with increased self-efficacy, enhanced social belonging, and the expansion of social support networks. Through volunteer service, individuals can gain a sense of accomplishment and meaning in the process of helping others. This positive self-assessment contributes to increased self-efficacy, thereby improving individuals' ability to cope with challenges. Moreover, volunteer service activities often involve teamwork and social interaction, providing volunteers with a broader social network platform. By participating in volunteer activities with others, volunteers not only receive emotional support but also find a sense of belonging within the group, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

However, although volunteer service generally has positive mental health effects, individuals' psychological experiences during volunteer service vary significantly. Personal characteristics such as gender, age, and personality

1. Weifang Nursing Vocational College, China;

2. Philippine Christian University Center for International Education, 1004, Manila City, Republic of the Philippines;

Email: 362713096@qq.com, 826664927@qq.com, wangshaoqing891@gmail.com

traits can significantly influence their volunteer service experience. For example, studies have shown that female volunteers typically exhibit higher levels of empathy and emotional involvement during service, which may lead to greater psychological satisfaction post-service. Differences in age and life experience can also result in volunteers displaying different coping strategies when facing service challenges. Additionally, external factors such as the type of volunteer service, service frequency, and intensity also impact volunteers' mental health [3]. Direct service (such as face-to-face assistance) usually brings stronger emotional connections and a greater sense of meaning but may also result in higher emotional burdens and challenges.

The intrinsic differences in volunteer service motivation are also important factors affecting psychological experiences. Altruistic motivation is often associated with higher volunteer service activity levels, as this intrinsic drive makes volunteers more willing to continue participating in service activities and derive deeper psychological satisfaction [4]. In contrast, if volunteer service is primarily motivated by external recognition or resume enhancement, volunteers may experience less psychological benefit during service, and may even feel frustrated if the expected external rewards are not achieved [5].

Therefore, understanding the complex relationships between these variables is crucial for optimizing the mental health benefits of volunteer service. When designing and implementing volunteer service programs, it is essential to consider individual differences and provide targeted support and guidance to ensure that volunteers can achieve the best psychological health outcomes during their service activities.

2.2 The PREAM Model and Positive Psychology

The PREAM model (Protection-Risk-Exposure-Awareness-Motivation) provides a systematic framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying individual behavior. According to this model, an individual's behavior is influenced by protective factors, risk factors, susceptibility, motivation, and awareness of the consequences of their actions. Positive psychology emphasizes the promotion of mental health and well-being through the cultivation of positive psychological traits such as optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

Protective factors include positive psychological traits like social support, psychological resilience, self-esteem, and optimism. These factors can enhance college students' ability to face various challenges in volunteer service and improve their service experience. For instance, students with strong social support are more likely to receive emotional encouragement and recognition during volunteer service, which enhances their motivation for continued participation [6]. On the other hand, risk factors may undermine the effectiveness of volunteer service, such as stress from participation, setbacks encountered during service, or fatigue from prolonged service hours [7]. These risk factors can lead to negative psychological experiences like anxiety and burnout during the service process, which, in turn, can affect their overall mental health.

Exposure refers to the actual circumstances of college students' access to and participation in volunteer service. Students who frequently engage in volunteer service may accumulate more experience, helping them better cope with and adapt to challenges. Moreover, the frequency and intensity of volunteer service also influence their psychological reactions and behavioral choices [8].

Awareness involves an individual's cognition of their behavior and its consequences. In volunteer service, college students' deep understanding of the service's significance, recognition of their actions, and positive expectations of the service outcomes all enhance their intrinsic motivation [9]. This awareness not only encourages them to continue participating in volunteer activities but also increases their satisfaction and happiness during the service.

Motivation is the core factor driving college students to participate in volunteer service. Positive intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to help others, a sense of social responsibility, and the need for personal growth, typically result in better psychological experiences [10]. Positive psychology emphasizes cultivating psychological traits like optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, which help to strengthen college students' intrinsic motivation for volunteer service and reduce the potential negative impacts during service.

In summary, the PREAM model aids in understanding the psychological processes involved in college students' volunteer service. By analyzing protective and risk factors, exposure, and motivation, educators and organizers can design more targeted interventions to enhance the positive psychological effects of volunteer service, thereby promoting the mental health and well-being of college students.

2.3 Factors Influencing College Students' Volunteer Service

Research indicates that college students' motivation for participating in volunteer service is complex and diverse, encompassing both altruistic motivations and self-enhancement motivations related to personal growth and social recognition. In terms of altruistic motivation, many college students aim to help others and contribute to society through volunteer service to fulfill their need for social responsibility [11]. This intrinsic motivation is closely linked to their moral values, sense of social responsibility, and often leads to strong inner satisfaction and psychological well-being.

On the other hand, many college students participate in volunteer service driven by self-enhancement motivations, such as gaining social recognition, accumulating practical experience, expanding social networks, and enhancing employability. Through volunteer service, they can gain social praise and recognition, boosting their self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, volunteer service provides a crucial platform for acquiring practical skills and social

experience, laying the foundation for their future careers. This self-enhancement motivation often increases their sense of participation and persistence, while also promoting better psychological health benefits during the service process.

Apart from intrinsic motivations, external factors also significantly impact college students' volunteer service experience and their mental health. The type of volunteer service, the amount of time invested, and the organizational support received are all critical factors. Different types of volunteer service have varied psychological impacts on college students, and the amount of time invested directly affects volunteers' fatigue and burnout. A moderate time arrangement helps maintain their enthusiasm and mental health.

Studies have shown that systematic volunteer training and organizational support are essential to improving the quality of service and psychological benefits for volunteers. Through systematic training, volunteers can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge, enhancing their ability to cope with challenges and reducing psychological stress and frustration during service. Moreover, strong organizational support, such as providing psychological counseling, team-building activities, and recognition mechanisms, offers emotional support and motivation for volunteers, increasing their service satisfaction and psychological benefits^[12]. Ultimately, these measures effectively enhance the positive effects of volunteer service, promoting lasting mental health and well-being among college students during service.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a questionnaire survey and interview methods. The questionnaire includes the "Adolescent Mental Toughness Scale (AMTS)" and the "General Well-being Schedule (GWB)." Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the impact of volunteer service on the psychological development of college students.

The Adolescent Mental Toughness Scale (AMTS), developed by Hu Yueqin and Gan Yiqun, evaluates the mental toughness of Chinese adolescents. The scale includes five dimensions: goal focus, emotional control, positive cognition, interpersonal support, and family support.

The General Well-being Schedule (GWB), originally developed by American psychologist Fazio, was revised by Chinese scholar Duan Jianhua. The revised scale was reduced from 33 items to 18 items.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants in this study were 472 college students aged 18 to 24 from a university in Weifang, Shandong Province. Additionally, 25 volunteers participated in in-depth interviews.

3.3 Data Statistics

The research results show that university students in the observation group who participated in volunteer services scored higher on psychological resilience than those in the control group who did not participate, with an average score of 82.47 compared to 71.36 in the control group. In terms of subjective well-being, the students who participated in volunteer services had an average score of 98.47, while the control group had an average score of 93.68.

4. Results

4.1 Psychological Resilience and Subjective Well-Being of Student Volunteers

University students who frequently participate in volunteer services, especially those with strong service motivation and sufficient organizational support, typically demonstrate higher psychological resilience and subjective well-being. These students tend to exhibit greater adaptability and coping skills when facing life's challenges. Psychological resilience is not only associated with participation in volunteer activities but is also closely linked to the positive emotions and sense of achievement they experience during the service. These feelings significantly enhance their subjective well-being, helping them find deeper meaning and value in life.

Volunteering provides students with a unique platform to confront real-life challenges, thereby enhancing their problem-solving abilities and psychological resilience. In the process of helping others and overcoming difficulties, volunteers gain a sense of achievement and fulfillment, which are important components of subjective well-being. As they face various challenges, student volunteers gradually develop a stronger sense of purpose, further strengthening their psychological resilience. This resilience enables them to better cope with stress and recover more quickly from setbacks, contributing to a more balanced and fulfilling life.

The positive experiences and emotions gained from volunteering help students build resilience against stress and foster a more optimistic outlook on life. This optimistic attitude is a key factor in maintaining high levels of subjective well-being. Students who frequently participate in volunteer services are usually better at managing their emotions, maintaining a positive self-image, and building healthy interpersonal relationships. These traits not only benefit the students but also enhance their ability to contribute to society.

4.2 Students' Motivation for Participating in Volunteer Services

The motivations driving university students to participate in volunteer services are complex and varied, including altruism, personal growth, and social recognition. Altruism is a strong motivation for many students who wish to fulfill their sense of social responsibility by helping others and contributing to society. This intrinsic motivation is closely

related to their moral values and social awareness, providing them with deep inner satisfaction and psychological well-being.

For these students, volunteering is not just about participating in activities but is also a manifestation of their moral beliefs and a way to make a tangible difference in the world. The satisfaction they gain from helping others reinforces their commitment to service and enhances their moral character. This sense of achievement not only boosts their self-esteem but also helps them form stronger social connections and a sense of purpose.

On the other hand, personal growth and social recognition are also significant factors influencing students' participation in volunteer activities. Many students seek to gain social recognition, accumulate practical experience, expand their social networks, and improve their employability through volunteering. Through volunteer services, they can gain praise and recognition from society, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, volunteering provides valuable opportunities to practice and hone skills, gain experience, and establish relationships beneficial to their future careers.

This dual motivation — altruism and self-improvement — creates a dynamic interaction that sustains students' engagement in volunteer activities. Achieving personal growth through volunteering not only satisfies individual aspirations but also contributes to community development.

4.3 The Impact of Volunteer Services on Social Support Networks and Mental Health

Interviews with student volunteers reveal the potential mechanisms through which volunteer services expand social support networks and improve mental health. Participation in volunteer activities provides university students with opportunities to communicate and interact with others, helping them build broader social support networks. This social support is crucial for alleviating psychological stress and enhancing emotional satisfaction and a sense of belonging.

Volunteering is not only an act of helping others but also a way to promote self-growth and mental health. Through volunteer activities, students experience the joy of helping others while also gaining friendship, understanding, and support. The social support networks developed through volunteering have a profound impact on students' mental health. The establishment of these social networks can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Moreover, the emotional bonds formed during volunteer activities can serve as a source of strength and resilience, helping university students navigate difficult times.

Additionally, organizational recognition and support enhance the positive impact of volunteer services on mental health. Systematic training and organizational support ensure that volunteers are well-prepared and confident, thereby reducing the psychological stress and frustration that may arise during service activities. Strong organizational support, such as providing psychological counseling, team-building activities, and recognition mechanisms, can offer volunteers emotional support and motivation, improving their satisfaction with the service and psychological benefits.

Volunteer service is a powerful tool for fostering personal growth and improving the mental health of university students. Through participation in volunteer activities, students not only contribute to society but also develop their subjective well-being, psychological resilience, and sense of purpose. As they continue to engage in volunteer services, their social networks are strengthened, and their mental health levels are enhanced, making them more well-rounded individuals.

5. Conclusion

This study, based on the PREAM model, systematically explores the psychological state of college student volunteers involved in volunteer service. The research finds that volunteer service is not only an important pathway for cultivating social responsibility among college students but also a vital means of promoting their mental health and well-being. Future volunteer service programs should further consider the psychological needs of college students and provide more systematic training and support to improve the quality and effectiveness of volunteer service. By promoting the development of college student volunteer service, we can better help them achieve personal growth and mental health while serving society.

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