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Volunteerism influences on student resilience and gratitude

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We assessed the relative impact of volunteerism on the resilience and gratitude of students based on participation. A convenience sample of 80 students (female = 53.75%; age range = 18–25 years) participated in the study, of which 38 (47.50%) had volunteer experience. The students completed measures of self-report for volunteer work hours, the Brief Resilience Scale, and the Gratitude Questionnaire. Following linear regression analysis, results indicated that volunteers reported significantly higher resilience and gratitude scores than peers who were non-volunteers. No notable interaction effect emerged after controlling for age, sex, and family monthly income. Among those with volunteer experience, results indicated that the more hours they spend volunteering, the higher their sense of resilience and gratitude. Findings suggest volunteerism is important in improving students' well-being.

Keywords: community outreach, gratitude, resilience, volunteerism, well-being

Introduction

Volunteerism is a willingness of an individual to contribute personal time, resources, effort, and skills to a need, cause, or mission without financial return (Musick & Wilson, 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, 2016). This pro-social behaviour extends over weeks, months, or years rather than a one-time event (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Additionally, volunteerism plays a significant role in society by supporting youth education, social inclusion, the employment and improvement of the health condition of marginalised people, strengthening social connectivity, and delivering humanitarian and public services (Llenares & Deocaris, 2018; Volunteurope, 2018; Wu, 2011).

Students who regularly volunteer to a cause benefit in the long run (Hall et al., 2009; Llenares & Deocaris, 2018; Smith et al., 2010). For instance, students with volunteering experience have a higher sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998) and achieve well in their studies from applying their field experiences to their academic work. Volunteerism develops leadership potential in students, boosts self-confidence (Astin & Astin, 2000), and improves their soft skills (Llenares & Deocaris, 2019). Moreover, students who volunteer regularly are more likely to engage in varied political behaviours, such as voting and working for political campaigns in later life (Astin & Astin, 2000; Youniss et al., 1999). Further, students who have volunteered tend to choose service-oriented professions (Sax et al., 1999), expanding their career paths and personal well-being (Nazroo & Matthews, 2012). However, we do not yet know whether volunteerism enhances students' sense of resilience in the face of challenges and or their sense of gratitude from the volunteering experience.

Resilience and gratitude are mental health attributes associated with the 'good life' (Bellah et al., 1996). Resilience is a dynamic process in which individuals display positive adaptations despite their negative

experiences (Masten, 2009). In itself, the act of helping or giving generates happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-control, and resilience (Johnson & Post, 2017; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Adolescents who identified helping others as their primary motive were happier than those who lacked such a motive to help (Magen, 1996). This pro-social behaviour tends to improve self-realisation and social connection and act as protective factors that buffer negative emotions (Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Son & Wilson, 2012). Gratitude also acts as a protective factor against stress and mental illness (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Mason, 2019). Gratitude is defined as an emotion, virtue, moral sentiment, motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; McCullough et al., 2002). However, studies connecting volunteerism to gratitude are scarce. We expect a sense of gratitude through volunteering a pro-social behaviour may enhance student's well-being (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Mason, 2019; Wood et al., 2010).

A sense of resilience would follow from service-learning programs or merging of community service with pedagogy and research (Bourner & Millican, 2011; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Clinton & Thomas, 2011; Eyler, 2002; Govekar & Govekar, 2008; Gullatt & Jan 2003; Kielsmeier et al., 2004; Levesque-Bristol, 2011). This would be a benefit from enhancing one's mental health and soft skills in negotiating community partnership, parallel with curricular skills. The volunteering benefits may depend on the time commitment in civic and community engagement, perhaps with greater benefits at a higher number of hours. The minimum number of hours for the benefit from community and civic engagement is unclear from existing research studies.

Goal of the study

Student volunteerism and its impact on well-being is relatively under-researched in the Philippines. We focused on civic activities, membership, and volunteer work hours of college students because they are susceptible to stress and depression. Filipino college student's incidence of mental health challenges is rising (Cleofas, 2020; de Santos, 2019). With community activities students are expected to learn new adaptive life skills to help them become more resilient. We aimed to test the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1. Students with volunteer experience would have higher self-report on a sense of resilience and gratitude than with no volunteer experience.
- Hypothesis 2. A higher sense of resilience and gratitude is associated with more hours invested in volunteerism than with fewer hours invested.

Method

Participants and setting

As indicated in Table 1, participants were a convenience sample of 80 students from a private higher education institution in Manila City, Philippines (age range = 18 years to 25 years, mean age = 19.29 years, SD = 2.19 years; females = 53.75%). They were in their junior (3rd) year (55%) and senior (4th) year of study (45%). Their college majors were as follows: accounting (7.50%), civil engineering (12.50%), computer engineering (12.50%), education (22.50%), information technology (17.50%), marketing (11.25%), and psychology (16.25%). All were single and most were from low socio-economic background, P20,000 or below family monthly income equivalent to US\$400.91 (Philippine peso 52.00 = 1 US dollar).

Of the 80 students, 38 self-identified with volunteer experience in the past 12 months while 42 reported no

volunteering experience in the community. As indicated in Table 2, most were involved in community activities organised by a non-government organisation (22.50%) such as the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity. Some were involved in literacy and numeracy programs for out of school youth (17.50%), youth build (housing for the poor: 12.5%), peer counselling and psychoeducation (6.25%), and tree planting (6.25%). About 16.25% reported to have spent 70 to 99 hours in civic activity, while 13.75% spent 100 to 129 hours in community engagement.

Measures

The students self-reported their demographic information such as age, sex, combined family monthly income, marital status, civic status (volunteer and non-volunteer), degree programs, and academic level. Regular volunteers are those who consistently provide time, effort, and skills to support civic activities, such as initiating community outreach planning, organising fellow volunteers, and implementing volunteer activities (Llenares & Deocaris, 2019). Non-volunteers are those who never experience volunteering and are free from the mandated requirement, for example, the National Service Training Program (NSTP) course. The students also completed the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS: Smith et al., 2008) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6: McCullough et al., 2002).

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

The BRS comprises of 6-item (Cronbach α = 0.81). It is a measure of student's self-assessment of ability to recover from stress (Smith et al., 2008). The BRS is scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. Example items are: "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times"; "It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event"; and "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble".

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Age	18 years old to 20 years old	66	82.50
	21 years old to 25 years old	14	17.50
Sex	Female	43	53.75
	Male	37	46.25
Educational attainment	3rd year	44	55.00
	4th year	36	45.00
Academic program	Accounting	6	7.50
	Civil Engineering	10	12.50
	Computer Engineering	10	12.50
	Education	18	22.50
	Information Technology	14	17.50
	Marketing	9	11.25
	Psychology	13	16.25
Marital status	Single	80	100.00
Family income	Below P20,000	36	45.00
	P21 000 to P25 000	20	25.00
	P26 000 to P30 000	12	15.00
	P35 000 to P40 000	4	5.00
	P45 000 to P50 000	4	5.00
	P55 000 to P60 000	2	2.50
	P61 000 to P65 000	2	2.50

Table 2. Volunteering behaviour of students

		Frequency	Percent
Volunteered in the past 12 months	Yes	38	47.50
	No	42	52.5
Area of volunteering	Community activities	8	10
	University clubs or organisations	12	15
	Non-government organisation	18	22.50
Type of activity	Literacy and numeracy program for out of school youth	12	17.50
	Tree planning and bamboo planting	5	6.25
	Peer counselling and literacy	5	6.25
	Youth build (housing for the poor)	7	12.50
	Design and transfer of technology	3	3.75
	Financial literacy and livelihood training	3	3.75
	Computer repair and computer literacy	3	3.75
Volunteer hours	None	42	52.5
	70 hours to 99 hours	13	16.25
	100 hours to 129 hours	11	13.75
	130 hours to 159 hours	3	3.75
	200 hours to 229 hours	6	7.5
	230 hours and above	5	6.25

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)

The GQ-6 comprises of 6-items (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.81$). It is a measure of the student's disposition to experience gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002). The GQ-6 is rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree. Example items are: "I have so much in life to be thankful for"; "If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list"; and "I am grateful to a wide variety of people".

Hours volunteered

In terms of volunteering experience, students self-reported time spent in volunteer work the last 12 months, areas of volunteering, type of activities, and volunteer hours.

Procedure

Permission for the study was granted by the National University research ethics committee. The students consented to the study in writing. For the recruitment of participants, the inclusion criteria were

- Full-time 3rd year and 4th-year college students;
- Regular volunteer who has one year's experience on volunteer work;
- Non-volunteer who have no experience in any volunteer activities; and
- Willingness to participate in the study by answering an online survey and agreeing in the electronic consent form.

The exclusion criteria were

- Students 2nd-degree takers or graduate of technical or vocational course; and
- Students enrolled in the National Service Training Program (NSTP).

We administered the surveys online, providing the participants with information on the purpose and background of the study as well as the guidelines for completing the surveys. We did not collect any personal identifiers. Instead, a tracking code was assigned to the participants' data for anonymity.

Data analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 21 and GraphPad prism version 5. The data met the assumptions for categorical and linear regression analysis (Field, 2009; Howell, 2012). We computed categorical regression to predict resilience and gratitude scores from volunteer status controlling for age, gender, and family income at $p < 0.05$. We also, calculated independent sample t -tests to determine the differences between civic status. Cohen's d was calculated to measure effect size. We tested for significance of regression slopes at $p < 0.05$.

Results and discussion

The student participants were selected based on their community outreach experience. Figure 1 shows the resilience and gratitude level of student participants. As can be seen, the total sample scored 'average' resilience levels, suggesting healthy coping with academic and family situations.

Further, the total sample scored high on a sense of gratitude, suggesting a Filipino cultural factor effect to the appreciation of people, events, and situations that have been part of their lives (see also Reyes, 2015). Figure 1 describes the resilience and gratitude of the study participants: a) student resilience is classified as 'average' (3.30 ± 0.66), and b) student gratitude is categorised as 'high' (5.53 ± 0.94).

Figure 2 shows the differences between volunteer and non-volunteer groups on resilience and gratitude. Specifically, a significant difference between volunteer (3.68 ± 0.48) and non-volunteer groups (2.97 ± 0.62) was noted in resilience, with $t(78) 5.74$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.28$. Similarly, a significant difference between volunteer (6.00 ± 0.49) and non-volunteer (5.11 ± 1.05) groups in gratitude was noted, with $t(78) 4.78$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.09$.

In terms of volunteer experience, students who performed volunteer work self-reported with higher resilience scores compared to those students who did

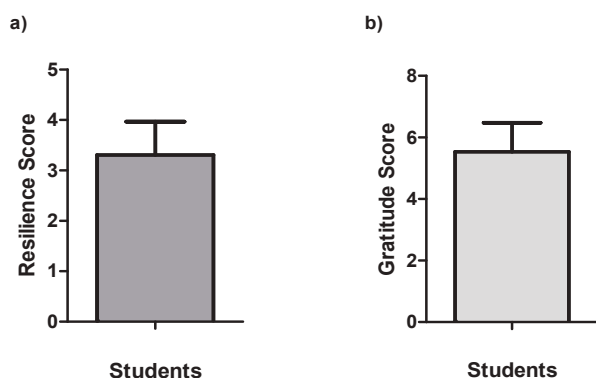


Figure 1. Resilience and gratitude of study participants

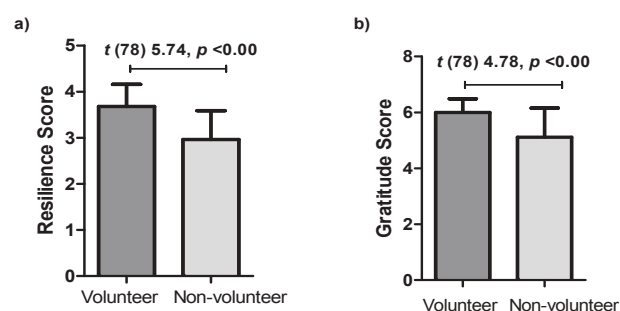


Figure 2. Differences between volunteer and non-volunteer groups on resilience and gratitude

not volunteer (see Table 3, Table 4 and Figure 2). This resilience effect may be from the fact that volunteerism is an important source of self-esteem and a sense of autonomy (Ryff & Singer, 2008). However, higher levels of gratitude were associated with students who performed community outreach regularly. This effect is likely explained by the student's interest to help and contribute to the community (Anik et al., 2009). As can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4, these resilience and gratitude effects sustained, controlling for age, sex, and socio-economic status.

Figure 3 shows the scatterplot diagram on the relationship of volunteerism to resilience and gratitude: a) positive relationship between volunteerism and resilience, $B = 0.52$, $t = 5.33$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $r^2 = 0.26$, $F(1, 78) 28.47$, $p < 0.001$ and b) positive relationship between volunteerism and gratitude, $B = 0.46$, $t = 4.59$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $r^2 = 0.20$, $F(1, 78) 21.08$, $p < 0.001$. This finding is consistent with the theory and previous studies of (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

Limitations and recommendations

This study followed an ex-post facto design, future studies may involve a longitudinal approach to better measure the impact of volunteerism on resilience and gratitude. Our sample size was small, limiting the generalisability of findings. Nonetheless, our findings suggest a volunteer

Table 3. The relationship between volunteer groups and resilience after controlling for age, gender, and family income

Variables	Mean (SD)	Adjusted r^2	Standardised Beta	SE	F-value
Volunteer groups	67.75 (96.32)		0.60	0.19	10.11**
Age	19.28 (2.19)		0.17	0.19	1.76
Sex	—	0.35**	0.08	0.13	0.11
Family income	P26 050.00 (P11 484.61)		0.10	0.00	0.38
Resilience score	3.30 (0.66)		—	—	—

Note: SS_{between} = 30.68, SS_{within} = 49.32, MS_{between} = 7.67, MS_{within} = 0.66; $F(75, 4) 11.67$, $p < 0.001$

Table 4. The relationship between volunteer groups and gratitude after controlling for age, gender, and family income

Variables	Mean (SD)	Adjusted r^2	Standardised Beta	SE	F-value
Volunteer groups	67.75(96.32)		0.45	0.09	25.07**
Age	19.28(2.19)		0.09	0.07	1.58
Sex	—	0.22**	0.05	0.07	0.59
Family income	P26 050.00 (P11 484.61)		−0.11	0.10	1.35
Gratitude score	5.53 (0.94)		—	—	—

Note: SS_{between} = 20.40, SS_{within} = 59.61, MS_{between} = 5.10, MS_{within} = 0.80; $F(75, 4) 6.42$, $p < 0.001$

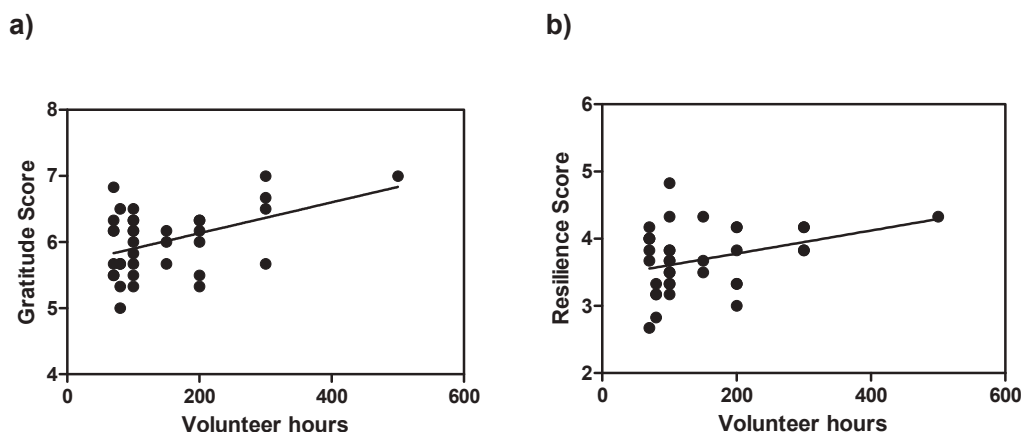


Figure 3. Relationship of volunteerism to gratitude and resilience

experience enhancement effect on student's sense of resilience and gratitude. The indicative effects of volunteerism on resilience and gratitude affirm the need to enhance policies and practices on community work that will promote student well-being.

On the methodology, we did not specify which volunteer hours e.g., 70-99 hours, 100-129 hours, etc. specifically are enhancing resilience and gratitude. It is difficult to determine its effects due to the small sample size.

Conclusion

This study concluded that volunteering experience may exert influence on student's resilience and gratitude. Also, the number of hours invested in volunteer work potentially enhances student's resilience and gratitude.

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