

Voluntourism: more harm than good

Since the 21st century, voluntourism has become a hot topic. Some people believe that voluntourism can help less developed areas, while others believe that voluntourism may bring more hindrance than help. In my opinion, voluntourism does more harm than good. Next, I will argue my thoughts from four aspects.

First, voluntourism focuses only on the volunteer's quest for experience, not on the actual needs of the recipient community. According to a doctor in Malawi (2017) in Anderson's article (2017), many local doctors hate the idea of medical students rotating through his hospital. The doctor said it would be more helpful if these medical students, who think they know everything, stayed home and sent money (p. 5). Similarly, according to Freidus (2017), most volunteers bring few relevant skills and are not committed to long-term work. As a result, volunteers are mostly involved in service projects such as building infrastructure, painting, tutoring, distributing food or just being a friend. The ability of volunteers to change systems, alleviate poverty, or provide support to vulnerable children is limited (Anderson, 2017, p. 4). It follows that voluntourism are largely a volunteer investment in self-fulfilling trips rather than a true sense of helping the receiving community.

Second, voluntourism can lead to child abuse and developmental problems. Lu (2020) notes that Unethical agencies promise food, education, or a better life in order to recruit children from families into orphanages. The report calls recruiters "child finders" who use parents' concerns about poverty, conflict, natural disasters, and lack of resources for children

with disabilities to convince parents to surrender their children, who are then used to attract lucrative international donations and volunteers (para. 9). According Save the Children report (2009) in Lu's article (2020), at least four out of five children in institutional care have at least one living parent. Some institutions force children to perform traditional dances or interact with visitors to encourage more donations. In addition, the report notes that they are sometimes malnourished or don't receive enough medical care to garner more sympathy - money from tourists and donors (para. 10). If children have parents, why should they be admitted to orphanages. The volunteers' intentions are good, but with these unethical institutions in place, the children here are at risk of neglect and abuse.

Third, voluntourism may disrupt school education. Discoverny (2021) notes that the constant rotation of volunteers may disrupt their education. Because volunteers are not aware of the children's knowledge level, they cannot grasp what the children already know and what they do not know, which leads to a delay in teaching (para. 17). In addition, describing her experience as an English teacher in Kyrgyzstan, Thuha found it to be a wonderful cultural experience for herself and the children in her village. But she expressed concern about the lack of volunteer screening and lesson planning. She explained that there are no background checks for volunteers and no communication or set lesson plans. This increases the risk that the next volunteer will teach the same content (Discoverny, 2021, para. 18). As Thuha said, they may intern for just a few weeks, and they don't have a good teaching interface with their successors. In the long run, this is definitely going to have a negative impact on school education.

Finally, voluntourism perpetuates colonialist attitudes. Bansal (2021) notes that because

of a lack of self-awareness and perspective, volunteers are seen as falling into a toxic Instagram-style colonialism, often with a hint of well-meaning but ultimately damaging white saviorism. Some volunteers truly believe they are making an indelible impact on a community during a two-week vacation (para. 6). In addition, Discovery (2021) also notes that it may contribute to the stereotype that "developing" countries and communities are waiting for Westerners to solve their problems. Volunteering can be seen as another form of colonialism or a very arrogant form of help that sends the message "we are more capable than you" (para. 20). While the individual volunteer has good intentions, this unconscious behavior often highlights arrogance and undermines the original intent.

All in all, I think voluntourism does more harm than good. If you want to help others while you travel, voluntourism may not be the ideal choice for you. Even if your intentions are good, all of the above factors exist and you and the recipient can easily become victims of this marketplace where your good intentions can be exploited to make money. voluntourism is not the only form of expressing help. Remember, it is vital to think carefully before choosing how to help.

References

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