

Article

Selected Motivations of Student Sports Volunteers in Terms of Professional Activity and Previous Volunteering Experience

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Abstract: Involvement in sports volunteering is not only a way to improve mental health by increasing a sense of appreciation or respect, but it also allows participants to take on an individual challenge, meet new people, or gain specific knowledge. The aim of this study was to analyze selected motivations of students from the University of Physical Education in Krakow to get involved in sports volunteering during the 2023 European Games organized in their city and verifying them in terms of gender, age, previous volunteering experience, and pursuing a career. A total of 535 students took part in the survey, of whom 52.71% (282) were female, and 47.29% (253) were male. Selected motivation statements were indicated by respondents through a 5-point Likert scale. The results of the completed study confirmed that pursuing a professional career alongside studies and previous experience in sports volunteering had an impact on undertaking sports volunteering ($F = 11.754$; $r = 0.674$; $p = 0.003$ and $F = 10.241$; $r = 0.611$; $p = 0.002$). The obtained research results may be important for sports psychologists and organizers of sports events in the context of recruiting volunteers or improving the process of managing sports volunteering.

Keywords: volunteering; motivation; student; sport; volunteer management; career pursuit; professional activity; sports volunteering experience; 2023 European Games; Poland



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1. Introduction

Improving the quality of life and psychosocial health is increasingly associated with sports or physical activity as part of a broader physical culture [1,2]. In recent years, regular exercise has been considered in the context of a trend, and the widespread availability of sport for all, led by running, Nordic walking, or cycling, has brought many benefits to individuals and society [3]. Admittedly, in some countries, due to the enforcement of various governmental restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for sports or physical recreation were limited or, in some respects, altogether banned. This intensified the induction of psychological stress [4,5] and mental disorders [6,7]. Physical activity was recognized as one of the most effective forms of prevention against the psychosocial disorders caused by the worldwide situation [8]. Initially, the only alternative was virtual sport or sport practiced in the comfort of the home with the support of electronic mass media [9], as well as outdoor activities in isolation [10,11]. However, with the cessation of the pandemic restrictions, sporting events and thus participation in them

were reintroduced not only in an active form among athletes but also in a passive form among fans and those cheering on the sporting struggle. The existing conditions have also contributed to the return of volunteering opportunities, including sports volunteering, defined as a form of support in the preparation and organization of various sports events.

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that sporting events have specific health, environmental, social, cultural, political, or economic effects, and by attracting locals and tourists, they have a reception function and contribute to tourism [12–15]. Their organization, irrespective of the size and scale of the event, is directly linked to several tasks, at the forefront of which are the search and booking of the venue, liaising with several external entities, organizing accreditation, logistics, risk management, or staff retention [16]. The group of support staff who voluntarily and without remuneration support organizers to make sporting events run as smoothly and in the best possible image are volunteers [17]. There is a wide variety of theories about why people engage in volunteering. The leading one seems to be self-determination theory (SDT), which shows the relationship between an individual's psychological needs and the motivation to act. Authors of the theory, Ryan and Deci [18], take as their basis the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, distinguishing separately between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [19]. The former can arise from, among other things, the joy of helping others or interest in an event. The latter considers extrinsic factors, for example, in the form of giving volunteers gifts or event clothing or offering free entry to an event [20]. Participants involved in volunteering have mentioned different types of reasons that encouraged them to become active, led by social values and norms, social and community relationships, passion, direct benefits, opportunism, or intrinsic and extrinsic psychological benefits [21–23]. Involvement in a volunteering role has many potential benefits for health and well-being, particularly in aspects of mental health. Volunteering provides an opportunity to increase confidence and self-esteem, as well as integrate with a community with similar interests [24]. As well as providing opportunities to engage in interesting, worthwhile, or simply enjoyable activities, it is very often a platform for establishing all kinds of contacts, both personal and professional [25]. Another important motive for volunteering is to gain positive life experience in the form of a break from daily routine to broaden new horizons or simply to fill one's free time with interesting activities [26,27]. Having free time is a particular factor that reinforces the willingness to engage in volunteering, as having other life responsibilities performed permanently, led by a professional job, can create barriers that make volunteering difficult or impossible.

A special type of sports volunteering is volunteering that involves a temporary, often one-off, commitment by a group of people to help at an event lasting a specific period. This form of activity can be seen during occasional sports mega-events, such as the final championship game of American football [28], the Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games [29–31], the Continental Games, or the World Cup [32]. Such volunteering can attract the widest variety of people to work, who may have completely different motivations from those undertaking more permanent volunteering activities [33]. It is currently particularly important to check motivations among university students since, as Francis [34] pointed out, they are a particularly underused and under-researched group in the field of volunteering. Consideration of them in the context of sporting events has been undertaken by only a few researchers. Mirsafian and Mohammadinejad [35], in their study on a representative sample of Iranian students, showed that social aspects were the highest factors influencing the motivation of sports volunteers. Ledford and colleagues [36], surveying students who volunteered at the National Football League Experience and Super Bowl played in the United States, saw the importance of professional development, altruism, and a desire for overall experience among them. In turn, Johnston and colleagues [37] studied with a group of students from Western Europe and found the main motivations to be career-related factors and a love of the sport. However, no studies verified their motivation in the context of combining studies with a career or previous experience of

volunteering in sports. Meanwhile, volunteering is increasingly seen by young academic people as a space to develop their interests and gain additional experience.

Researchers turned their attention to studying the different motivations of volunteers at the end of the twentieth century [38]. Investigating the potential of gender, age, and other demographic characteristics on interest in volunteering has already been reviewed by researchers on several occasions, but changing trends in event organization and management means that such research needs to be repeated to check for possible new phenomena. Previous research has repeatedly shown that men indicated the motivation identified as 'love of sport' more often than women, and women have a far greater appreciation of community contribution [39]. Some studies have also confirmed the role of age and its relationship with volunteering motivation, showing, for example, a willingness to volunteer more often among older people [40] and an increase in social motivation with age [41]. Previously, the motivations of those interested in volunteering at the event have been verified using the Olympic Volunteer Motivation Scale [42], but this scale did not include several important items in its factorials, such as gaining knowledge about different languages and cultures, belonging to a team, or feeling appreciated and respected, which it was also decided to verify among respondents. Given that Poland has so far hosted only a handful of competitions classified as sports mega-events or giga-events [43], including the 2012 European Football Championships played more than ten years ago [44], investigating the relationship between motivations and socio-demographic factors of respondents, such as age, gender, professional activity or previous experience in sports volunteering, is to be extremely important in the context of improving the management of sports volunteering in future events.

This study aimed to analyze the motivations of students from the University of Physical Education to get involved in sports volunteering during the 2023 European Games organized in their city and verifying them in terms of gender and age, but also prior volunteering experience and pursuing a career. The 2023 European Games was selected as the event identified for the study that reported a need for volunteers. This is an event organized under the auspices of the European Olympic Committee, which will see more than 7000 athletes compete in 29 sporting distances at 25 venues. Participation in the games has been confirmed by 48 countries and over 8500 volunteers. The authors assumed that age, gender, career aspirations, and previous experience in volunteering were important in terms of motivation to undertake sports volunteering. The researchers assumed that the study would confirm the following hypotheses: (1) the higher the age, the higher the motivation to undertake sports volunteering; (2) the male gender is correlated with higher motivation to undertake sports volunteering; (3) prior experience with volunteering and professional career pursuit has an impact on higher motivation.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Instrument

The study used a questionnaire on motivation to undertake sports volunteering, including the author's socio-demographic metric and a short scale to measure the motivations of sports volunteers consisting of six items, identified by Giannoulakis et al. [45] as important motivations of a broad dimension, which by their specificity go beyond the factorials known in the scientific literature. These items include (1) 'Individual challenge'; (2) 'Belonging to a team'; (3) 'To feel valued and respected'; (4) 'To gain knowledge of different languages and cultures'; (5) 'To meet new people and make new friends'; (6) 'I am involved in sports'. The questionnaire was prepared in Polish. Study participants decided on the agreement of statements according to a standardized 5-point Likert scale: "I strongly agree", "I rather agree", "I have no opinion", "I rather disagree", and "I strongly disagree", where total agreement with a statement was scored as 5 points and total disagreement as 1 point. The survey instrument was validated on the first 100 participants taking part in the study. The questionnaire was translated into Polish from the original English. The translation of the scale was performed by the three authors of the article, two sports psychologists and an

English philologist. Each person's translation was assigned the following scales: 2, 1, 1, 2, 2, and 3. If an item of the questionnaire was translated in the same way by all persons, it was accepted. If there were differences in translation, the version with the highest total weight was chosen. The study estimated the internal consistency of the scale at $\alpha = 0.80$, which meant that the statements in the scale had good reliability and that the study could continue to the end. All data collected in the study have been appropriately protected by the authors on an external drive and are available on request from the corresponding author.

2.2. Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire developed in Google Forms, which was open for one month throughout January 2021. All respondents were provided with detailed information about the conduct and nature of the study, and by entering the study, they also gave their informed consent. The survey was voluntary and confidential. A total of 535 students completed the questionnaire. Anyone interested in volunteering at the event was able to take part in the survey.

Participants were treated ethically by the guidelines in the American Psychological Association's code of ethics regarding anonymity and consent and in accordance with the generally accepted principles for the conduct of research contained in the Declaration of Helsinki. The study did not require formal approval from the Bioethics Committee because, according to the rules in Poland, the Bioethics Committee does not consider applications for standardized surveys used for their intended purpose when statistically selected survey items are analyzed in the study.

2.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were presented as means and standard deviations or percentages (%). The measurement data of the six motivational factors meet the assumption of normality in statistics. The Fisher's variance test was used to verify the statistical hypotheses for scale consistency, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to make comparisons between variables, which in most cases showed moderate to high strength of correlation and multivariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). All calculations were performed using the Statistica 13.0 software package.

Due to the large sample size, parametric tests were used. A parametric approach was used to verify statistical hypotheses, following Francuz and colleagues [46]. Reliability analysis was also carried out using Cronbach's Alpha method. Statistics were calculated separately for each item. Reliable values were obtained for all the items, falling in the range of Cronbach's alpha between 0.84 and 0.76.

3. Results

The survey was conducted on a group of students at the University of Physical Education in Krakow, who expressed online their willingness to volunteer during the 2023 European Games. Respondents were collected through the University Students' Association. The socio-demographic characteristics were as follows (Table 1).

Among the 535 respondents in the study group, 52.71% (282) were female, and 47.29% (253) were male. 56.64% (303) of all respondents were 22 years old or older. The group of younger respondents, aged 21 years or less, comprised a total of 43.36% (232). In total, as many as 85.79% (459) of all respondents were not working professionally, focusing only on their studies. In contrast, taking up a job at the same time as studying was indicated by 14.21% (76) of all respondents. The vast majority of respondents had no previous experience volunteering. Any previous volunteering practices were declared by 13.46% (72) of respondents.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for all questionnaire items scored from the highest to the lowest. The results were as follows.

Table 1. Participants.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Male	%	Female	%	All	%
	N = 253	47.29%	N = 282	52.71%	N = 535	100%
Age						
≤21	112	44.27%	120	42.55%	232	43.36%
≥22	141	55.73%	162	57.45%	303	56.64%
Professionally active						
Yes	46	18.18%	30	10.64%	76	14.21%
No	207	81.82%	252	89.36%	459	85.79%
Experience in sports volunteering						
Yes	35	13.83%	37	13.12%	72	13.46%
No	218	86.17%	245	86.88%	463	86.54%

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all questionnaire items.

Item no.	Motivations	Mean	Min	Max	SD	α	F	r	p-Value
1.	Individual challenge	3.67	1	5	1.02	0.82	10.827	0.632	0.002
2.	Belonging to a team	3.35	1	5	1.06	0.78	9.635	0.543	0.001
3.	To feel valued and respected	3.35	1	5	1.06	0.76	11.235	0.711	0.001
4.	To gain knowledge of different languages and cultures	4.22	1	5	0.87	0.84	10.342	0.456	0.003
5.	To meet new people and make new friends	3.81	1	5	0.88	0.80	9.786	0.523	0.001
6.	I am involved in sports	4.05	1	5	0.96	0.80	9.262	0.519	0.001

The Fisher's variance test indicated the highest scores for the items 'to feel valued and respected' (11.235), 'individual challenge' (10.827), and 'to gain knowledge of different languages and cultures' (10.342). The same first two items received the highest Pearson's r correlation coefficient (0.711 and 0.632), and the next item with the third highest score was 'belonging to a team' (0.543).

Table 3 shows the results of statistical inference regarding the concordance of the scale used in the context of gender and age. The following table retains the item numbering presented in Table 2. The results were as follows.

Table 3. Motivations in the context of gender and age.

Variable		Motivations						F	r	p-Value
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.			
Gender	Male	3.63	3.29	3.28	4.18	3.88	4.03	16.528	0.041	>0.05
	Female	3.71	3.41	3.42	4.25	3.74	4.06			
Age	≤21	3.82	3.50	3.45	4.28	3.88	4.15	16.984	0.032	>0.05
	≥22	3.55	3.23	3.28	4.16	3.75	3.97			

Gender and age are not statistically significant, so there is no effect on taking up volunteering activities ($p > 0.05$). However, it is noteworthy that in both genders, in terms of mean, the item 'to gain knowledge of different languages and cultures' was the most frequently chosen (4.25 in women and 4.18 in men). In turn, the male students least frequently chose the item 'to feel valued and respected' (3.28), and the female students 'belonging to a team' (3.41). In addition, in both age groups, in terms of mean, the item 'to gain knowledge of different languages and cultures' was the most frequently chosen (4.28 in ≤ 21 and 4.16 in ≥ 22). In turn, the younger students least frequently chose the item 'to feel valued and respected' (3.45), and the older ones chose 'belonging to a team' (3.23).

Table 4 shows the results of statistical inference regarding the concordance of the scale used in the context of professional activity and experience in volunteering. The following table retains the item numbering presented in Table 2. The results were as follows.

Table 4. Motivations in the context of professional activity and volunteering experience.

Variable		Motivations						F	r	p-Value
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.			
Professional activity	Yes	3.64	3.07	3.01	3.99	3.96	4.09	11.754	0.674	0.003
	No	3.67	3.39	3.41	4.25	3.78	4.04			
Volunteering experience	Yes	4.11	3.67	3.71	4.28	4.15	4.22	10.241	0.611	0.002
	No	3.60	3.30	3.31	4.21	3.75	4.02			

Holding a paid job alongside studying has an impact on undertaking volunteering ($F = 11.754$; $r = 0.674$; $p = 0.003$). In terms of the mean, the professionally active most often indicated 'I am involved in sports' (4.09), and the least frequently 'to feel valued and respected' (3.01). In turn, not being professionally active most often indicated 'to gain knowledge of different languages and cultures' (4.25), and the least frequently 'belonging to a team' (3.39). Moreover, the experience in sports volunteering also has an impact on undertaking volunteering ($F = 10.241$; $r = 0.611$; $p = 0.002$). In terms of the mean, the students with and without experience in sports volunteering most often indicated 'to gain knowledge of different languages and cultures' (4.28 in the group with previous experience and 4.21 in the group without experience), and the least frequently the item 'belonging to a team' (3.67 in the group with previous experience and 3.30 in the group without experience). However, large divergences occurred with the item 'individual challenge' (as high as 4.11 in the group with previous experience and only 3.60 in the group without experience).

To summarize the results, a multivariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test differences between groups and verify the established hypotheses. It was determined that it was impossible to conclusively establish differences between gender and age, as these groups exhibit different motivating factors (motivators) associated with undertaking sports volunteering ($p > 0.05$). Nevertheless, it was found that the previous experience in volunteering and the lack of seniority significantly influenced the choice of this activity—those who had not worked before but participated in sports events as a volunteer were more likely to choose this activity again because they felt more motivated based on the questionnaire ($p < 0.05$).

4. Discussion

This study aimed to analyze selected motivations of students from the University of Physical Education in Krakow to get involved in sports volunteering during the 2023 European Games organized in their city and verifying them in terms of gender, age, previous volunteering experience, and pursuing a career. We assumed that other motivations would be indicated by men and others by women, as such correlations have already been demonstrated in their study by Downard et al. [47]. We made similar obser-

variations in the correlations related to age, professional activity, and previous experience in sports volunteering.

In effect, the results did not confirm the relationship between motivations and gender. A similar result of no statistical significance was obtained in the Pauline and Pauline [48] study, although other studies have shown important differences [28,47]. Interestingly, of all the items available in the survey, the biggest difference in terms of mean was with the item 'to meet new people and make new friends' (3.88 for men vs. 3.74 for women). This is an atypical result because establishing new interpersonal relationships is indicated as part of women's collectivist and social orientation, as has been previously shown in studies by Mestre and colleagues [49] or Trivedi and Teichert [50]. Women are more likely to be able to take the perspective of another person and are more empathetic, sensitive, understanding, and willing to help, which may be a result of being more socialized to demonstrate such qualities. By helping, they reduce the discomfort of not being involved in situations where there is a need for help [51–53]. This approach is consistent with C. Daniel Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis [54], which believes that people give help out of the goodness of their hearts, although internally, they also do not exclude an additional selfish motive for helping. The relevant socio-cultural context existing in the country of the study should also be considered when considering the results, as the culture in Poland is considered to be quite traditional and conservative, in which women are often seen as housewives, responsible for children or the family and thus devoting their free time to the day-to-day responsibilities of their life role [55]. Men are more likely to maintain relationships with acquaintances and are more open to new relationships. Volunteering at a sporting event, analogous to, for example, festivals [56], can therefore provide a new environment for men to meet new people. Indeed, volunteering, classified in the strand of undertaking prosocial activities, is a key factor for maintaining quality interpersonal relationships or friendships [57]. On the other hand, people who are not in a relationship can use the opportunity to participate in sports volunteering to find a potential life partner to have an active and happy life in the future [58].

The study also showed that the motivations of participants willing to engage in sports volunteering do not differ by age. Although involvement in volunteering is higher for the better educated [59], it should be noted, however, that our study included people with student status, i.e., in Poland, most often people under 25 years of age, i.e., at a turning point in the profile of human cognitive development [60], called early adulthood [61] or emerging adulthood [62]. According to Erikson [63], this period is referred to as the sixth developmental stage of young adulthood, and during this time, people tend to establish and develop meaningful relationships with close friends and partners, seeking companionship or love while exploring and finding their identity. Moreover, apart from the issues of interpersonal relations and the functioning of the family, young people today are also remodeling all the institutions of today's life, from jobs and markets to politics and education [64]. These trends are reflected in the findings of the present study.

Distinct differences emerged in the context of comparing volunteers working during their studies with volunteers without a job. The latter indicated mostly a significantly higher relevance of motivational items, which shows that they maximally focus their attention on the idea of volunteering and the values derived from it. Those in paid work can organize their work appropriately and are often able to engage in multiple tasks at the same time, as confirmed in their study by Wilson and Musick [65]. Combining paid work with a study is also somewhat of a challenge, and the ability to reorganize one's life and align study and work schedules with other activities makes sports volunteering a more thoughtful and informed life decision. In contrast, students not pursuing a career can use volunteering as a platform to support their professional life. In addition, by observing the members of the group they want to work with, they confront it with their idea of work and their expectations of themselves [66]. As Osipov and colleagues [67] pointed out, many skills can be learned through volunteering, such as teamwork, self-management, creativity, work ethic, or flexibility, which are extremely valuable to modern employers.

Respondents with previous experience of volunteering in sports indicated a higher relevance of all items included in the questionnaires compared to participants not previously involved in volunteering. Frequent involvement in volunteering involves regularly discovering something unknown, is intriguing, and generates a dose of curiosity as to whether the activity undertaken will meet predetermined expectations each time. There is also a slight degree of uncertainty because when the decision is made to engage in a group activity, the individual has to trust, often based only on previous experience, that the other collaborators will, at every level, act in favor of the event [68]. Those whose expectations of volunteering turn out to be quite different from what they had anticipated will, over time, decide to give up. As noted by Yanay and Yanay [69], volunteers expect to feel good, and resignation is not always the result of waning motivation but, for example, disappointment as a result of situations not meeting expectations or even feelings of anger. Other reasons for resignation may be the duration of volunteering, the type of volunteering, priorities for other productive activities, problems related to the administration of the volunteering program, or even deteriorating health, especially in older volunteers [70].

Our survey had some limitations. One of them was the fact that the survey was conducted exclusively online, which, due to the lack of direct contact with the respondents, may involve the risk of questionable authenticity of the data indicated. The conditions of anonymity created by the internet may result in the assumption of completely different identities in the virtual world, not always in line with reality. In addition, each respondent was likely to have had different conditions for completing the questionnaire and uploading data, limited, for example, by the mundane problems of interrupting participation in the survey for technical reasons or different computer and internet skills. The selection of the research sample may, therefore, also have involved a limitation, as it excluded digitally excluded respondents. Moreover, the questionnaire offered the possibility to select only male and female sexes, which may have excluded people who identified with another gender. Finally, the survey was carried out on a group of students from one of the six sports universities involved in sports in Poland. Perhaps a survey of students at other universities, including non-sports universities, would show different findings.

5. Conclusions

Based on the research, it was found that it is not possible to definitively determine the level of motivation in undertaking sports volunteering in terms of age and gender, as there are other motivational factors for these variables, so the hypotheses undertaken in this regard were disproved. However, it was observed that previous experience has a significant impact on undertaking sports volunteering.

Several managerial implications should be presented. The completed study can serve to sustainably manage volunteers at sports events and improve the effectiveness of the recruitment strategy carried out in sports volunteering. The results of our study indicate that organizers of sports events need to be aware of the fact that the motivations of people involved in volunteering activities vary. To meet the needs of volunteers and offer them appropriate benefits, managers need to understand the broad spectrum of reasons why people volunteer. Taking into account the different motivations of sports volunteers due to their career entry and previous volunteering experience is extremely important for sports organizers, who can use the results of this study to encourage volunteers to cooperate, support volunteers, or maintain regular contact with them. In addition, the managers should use different advertising messages to attract non-volunteers and to retrain their volunteers. However, further research is needed to further understand the impact of sports volunteers' motivations.

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Informed Consent Statement: The questionnaire did not require the completion of a separate participant information sheet or consent form but clearly indicated that all questionnaire takers give informed consent to the study. Respondents were informed about the course and character of the survey. The survey was voluntary and confidential.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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