

**A Survey on Volunteering, Creativity and Mental Health – Release of Results**  
**Creativity Helps Combat COVID-19    Volunteering Enhances Creativity**  
**Volunteering Helps Maintain Mental Health**

To kick-off this year's Volunteer Symposium – From Innovation to Reconnection, the organiser Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service (The Service) would like to release their survey results on volunteering, creativity, and mental health. The survey was conducted from February 2020 to February 2021. A total of 445 volunteers from The Service participated in an online survey that examined the relationship between volunteering and creativity, and the impact of COVID-19 on volunteers' mental health.

Volunteers who showed altruism (e.g. aiming to help others without expecting anything in return), who were more willing to acquire new knowledge, and who participated in more diverse volunteer work, were more creative.

Past studies found positive influences of creativity on mental wellbeing. This study showed similar correlation. Noteworthy, the average mental health score of the volunteers in this study was 62.6, which is comparable to a similar study conducted by The Service in 2018 (62.7). According to the "Hong Kong Mental Health Index", citizens of Hong Kong scored a record low of 45.1 in 2020, dropping a significant 10% from that in 2018 (50.2). Taking the above into account, it could be concluded that volunteers were less susceptible to the influence of the pandemic. Volunteering might help people enhance their creativity, better cope with adversities, and maintain a positive attitude.

Changes in the society undoubtedly brought about anxiety in individuals. Prolonged and unavoidable issues also created helplessness and negative emotions. Indeed, each of us possesses problem-solving skills. If we are able to think from different perspectives and deploy our creativity, it might help us adapt to this new normal. The Service encouraged citizens of Hong Kong to volunteer. While making contributions to the society and stimulating our creativity, volunteering expanded our social and emotional resources, increased our psychological capacity in combatting the pandemic.

### **1. Background**

It has been The Service's belief that volunteering is one of the effective ways to solve social problems. Since 2016, The Service has held several symposiums and press conferences, in the hope of maximising social impact by encouraging citizens to volunteer and facilitating the exploration of future volunteer services. This year, The Service has invited **Prof. Eric Wing-hong Chui from City University of Hong Kong** and his research team to conduct a survey study that investigated the relationship between volunteering and creativity, and the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer's mental health.

From February 2020 to February 2021, 445 volunteers from The Service have participated in this online survey. The gender distribution of males to females was 25.1% to 74.9%, while their age ranged from 11 to 90 years old (Table 1).

Table 1 Age Distribution of Participants

Age Range (N=444)	≤ 20	21 - 40	41 - 60	≥ 61
N	66	79	144	155
%	14.9%	17.8%	32.4%	34.9%

In terms of educational background, the highest education of over half of the participants (54.9%) was secondary school or below, while 45.1% received tertiary education. Regarding their nature of occupation, over a third (34.4%) of participants were employed (including full-time, part-time, self-employed), the rest were retired (29.7%), students (18.0%), family carers (15.0%) and unemployed (2.9%) respectively.

Table 2 listed the target groups that the volunteers have served six months prior to the survey. Over 40% of them served children, adolescents and families, 30% served elderly, and over 20% served people in mental health recovery, with low income or who were in between jobs.

Table 2: Target groups that Volunteers have served 6 months prior to the survey

Target Group	No. of volunteers	Percentage
Children, Adolescents and Families	186	41.8%
Elderly	150	33.7%
People in Mental Health Recovery	113	25.4%
Low Income/In Between Jobs	102	22.9%

N.B.: As participants may serve more than one target group, percentage might be higher than 100%.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Being Altruistic as Volunteer's Primary Motivation

Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Chinese) was used to assess the participants' motives to volunteer. Six motivational functions include (a) Career: to increase future job opportunities, (b) Social: to improve social relationships, (c) Values: To express important values, such as altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others, (d) Understanding: To gain and sustain knowledge and skills, (e) Enhancement: To enhance self-esteem, and (f) Protective: To protect oneself from negative feels about oneself. There are a total of 27 items, scores are rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the stronger the motivation.

In this survey, the three highest motivational functions were Values ( $\bar{x} = 6$ ), Understanding ( $\bar{x} = 5.8$ ) and Enhancement ( $\bar{x} = 5.3$ ) accordingly. In other words, being altruistic to those in need was the main factor for participants to volunteer.

Table 2 Subscale Means in Volunteer Functions Inventory

<b>Volunteer Motivational Functions</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Career	4.4
Social	4.8
Values	6.0
Understanding	5.8
Enhancement	5.3
Protective	4.1

## 2.2 A Better Mental Health among Volunteers than the General Public

To measure participants' mental health state in the past two weeks, the widely-adopted World Health Organisation Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) (Chinese) was administered. There are a total of 5 items, with the highest possible score of 100. The higher the score, the better the mental health state. A mean score of 28 – 50 indicates poor mental health, whereas 28 or below signifies possible symptoms of depression and professional consultation is recommended.

Similar to previous study carried out by The Service in 2018 (62.7), volunteers in the current study scored a mean of 62.6, suggesting their mental health was not influenced by the pandemic. Alternatively, as reported by the committee of Mental Health Month 2020, a new low of 45.1 meant that the mental health of Hong Kong citizens was far from satisfactory, facing a 10% drop from that of 2018 (50.2). In light of the current unprecedented changes, volunteers in this survey were nonetheless more mentally healthy when compared to the general public.

## 3. Analysis

### 3.1 Higher Creativity observed among Local Volunteers

Creativity is considered to be characterised as the ability of using innovative and pragmatic thinking in solving problems<sup>1</sup>. To measure participants' creativity, The Self-rating Creativity Scale was adopted in this survey study. Results of this scale was analysed with the six volunteer motivational functions to find out the correlations between these two constructs.

Positive significant associations between volunteer motivational functions and creativity were found. Among them, the highest correlations were creativity with Values ( $r=.324^{***}$ ) and Understanding ( $r=.3127^{***}$ ). This suggested that higher creativity was discovered for participants who decided to partake in volunteer work because they would like to follow their values (for instance being altruistic), broaden their perspectives and developing their skills.

<sup>1</sup> Zampetakis, L. A. (2008). The role of creativity and proactivity on perceived entrepreneurial desirability. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 3(2), 154-162.

Table 4 Correlations between the Six Volunteer Motivational Subscales and Creativity

<b>Volunteer Motivational Functions</b>	<b>Correlation with Creativity</b>
Career	0.240***
Social	0.255***
Values	0.324***
Understanding	0.327***
Enhancement	0.275***
Protective	0.243***

N.B. :  $p < 0.001$ \*\*\* (significant correlations)

### 3.2 Diverse Volunteer Work Boosts Creativity

Participants who took part in more volunteer projects (including those within and outside The Service) scored higher on creativity (Table 5). Post-hoc analyses indicated that creativity mean score of those who participated in two or more volunteer projects was significantly higher than that of those who only took part in one volunteer project. In other words, higher creativity was found in those who engaged in more diverse volunteer service.

Table 5 The relationship between Volunteer Participation and Creativity

<b>Number of Participated Volunteer Projects</b>	<b>Creativity Mean Score</b>
1	4.9
2	5.2*
3 or more	5.4***
N	5.1

N.B.:  $p < 0.05$ \* ;  $p < 0.001$ \*\*\* (significant correlations)

### 3.3 Volunteering Enhances Mental Health in Combatting Pandemic

Pearsons correlation was carried out to investigate the relationship between six volunteer motivational functions (Career, Social, Values, Understanding, Enhancement and Protective), creativity and mental health. Significant positive associations were found in all correlations, demonstrating that volunteering boosted creativity, which then enhanced mental health.

Table 6 Correlations between Volunteer Motivational Functions, Creativity and Mental Health

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Correlation with Mental Health</b>
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Career	0.117*
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Social	0.128**
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Values	0.180**
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Understanding	0.157***
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Enhancement	0.128**
Volunteer Motivational Functions – Protective	0.111*
Creativity	0.128**

N.B.:  $p < 0.05$ \* ;  $p < 0.01$ \*\* ;  $p < 0.001$ \*\*\* (significant correlations)

Considering the changes brought about by the pandemic, it is clear that creativity has a positive influence on mental health. Previous studies have proposed that creativity promotes problem-solving skills, in turn maintains confidence, positive attitudes and mental wellness in individuals facing adversities<sup>2</sup>. The pandemic has altered the life and work patterns of many, creating uneasy and anxious feelings. As the ongoing situation is unavoidable, it is easy for individuals to feel helpless and for negative emotions to intensify. Thus, it is precisely now that we are needing creativity more than ever to solve problems and construct solutions to adapt to societal changes.

#### **4. Conclusion and Suggestions**

The current survey investigated the relationship between volunteering, creativity, and mental health. Results suggested that when volunteers have more altruistic beliefs, seek to acquire more knowledge, participate in more diverse volunteer work, they demonstrate higher creativity and better mental health.

Under the influence of social distancing, one may feel lonely and helpless. Raymond Chiu, CEO of The Service suggests that citizens should not combat this pandemic alone. On the contrary, we can choose to participate in volunteer work, contribute to the society and be creative. Moreover, volunteering expands our social support network, promotes mental health, and boost our psychological resources to fight against the pandemic.

Social service is people-oriented. Limitations and needs of the public increase because of the pandemic. Mr Chiu is glad to know that workers at The Service are implementing innovative ways to adapt to changes, and utilising online and offline resources to provide service. Mr Chiu further recommends workers in the field to target and incorporate these needs into their volunteer services, especially social issues brought about by the pandemic, such as unemployment, mental health, domestic violence, and depression among older adults.

##### **• More Participation**

Citizens can actively choose the type of volunteer service they would like to participate in. They may do so by reviewing their interests, abilities, intended target group or particular social issue that they would like to focus on. With the new norm of working from home, numerous services have reacted quickly by organising online volunteering activities. This helps to maintain social distancing and minimise commuting time.

##### **• More Diverse**

The survey discovered that volunteers who participated in two or more volunteering work are more creative. We encourage volunteers to take part in more diverse or at least two volunteering services. Moreover, we encourage volunteers to get in touch with different target groups or services to get to know new people. This promotes creativity and expands social circle of the volunteer. For The Service, besides encouraging volunteers to engage in more volunteering activities, we encourage volunteers to design diverse goals that specifically aims at pandemic-related social issues, such as unemployment, mental health, domestic violence and depression among older adults.

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<sup>2</sup> Flood, M. (2007). Exploring the relationships between creativity, depression, and successful aging. *Activities, Adaptation, & Aging*, 31(1), 55-71.

- **More Encouragement**

Numerous studies advised agencies to encourage employees to contribute to society to increase their work performance, sense of belonging and team spirit. In addition, this can help agencies to build social capital and long-term relationships with people of different socioeconomic backgrounds<sup>3, 4</sup>. The Service recommends employers to encourage employees to participate in volunteer service. Employers can increase or implement volunteer leaves, promote the idea of helping those in need among employees, share volunteering experiences and integrating volunteering work into work cultures. Allowing young employees to lead volunteer work can train their leadership skills and promote harmony within the agency.

**Attachment:** Information related to the symposium, From Social Innovation to Reconnection Volunteer Symposium

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<sup>3</sup> Cao, Y., Pil, F. K., & Lawson, B. (2021). Signaling and social influence: The impact of corporate volunteer programs. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 36(2), 183-196.

<sup>4</sup> Muthuri, J. N., Matten, D., & Moon, J. (2009). Employee volunteering and social capital: Contributions to corporate social responsibility. *British Journal of Management*, 20(1), 75-89.