

# Working Paper No.5



## Why are some volunteers more committed than others? A socio-psychological approach to volunteer commitment in community services

Gianni Zappalà & Tracy Burrell

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**Working Paper**

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By

**Gianni Zappalà & Tracy Burrell**

## Preface

The Research and Social Policy Team provides an internal research capacity to ensure that The Smith Family's programs are evidence-based. A general theme that integrates all of our research activities is *social capability*, the capacities of communities and individuals in them to draw from their own strengths and social capital and to move beyond the limitations of disadvantage. We also investigate a range of issues with national and community relevance, such as trends in financial disadvantage, education and social policy. In addition, we also contribute to policy debates in government and the community sector. This is an integral component of our vision for a more caring and cohesive Australian community.

The Smith Family's strategy for program development is one of collaborating with a range of stakeholders that are interested in working for societal change. As well as conducting our own research, therefore, we also form strategic alliances with other research centres and social sector organisations.

A range of publications makes our research findings and activities accessible to those who have either an interest in or a commitment to The Smith Family's agenda for societal change. **Background Papers** identify areas to be researched as well as provide important pre-evaluation information of Smith Family programs and activities. **Working Papers** present research findings that contribute to the development of evidence based social policy and initiate professional dialogue on critical research questions. **Briefing Papers** provide analysis of Smith Family programs and wider social policy issues in a more concise timely manner. A regular **E-Bulletin** publicises the Team's publications as well as provides current updates on TSF research and policy. These publications, as well as occasional reports, submissions and monographs are either produced in-house, the product of collaborative efforts with other researchers or arise from commissioned research. All publications are subject to a refereeing process.

We trust that you find the following Working Paper a worthwhile contribution to evidence based social research and to the development of social policy that unlocks opportunities and builds capacity for all Australians.

**Dr Rob Simons**  
***National Manager Research & Social Policy***

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines why some volunteers donate more of their time than others. In other words, it explores the factors associated with volunteer 'commitment'. Although there is a substantial body of research looking at the factors that distinguish volunteers from non-volunteers, there is less research on the factors that may explain differences in the commitment of volunteers. It has recently been argued that 'highly committed volunteers' are important for the continuous functioning of civil society. The paper examines the factors associated with volunteer commitment using data from a national survey of volunteers at The Smith Family (TSF), a large public-serving nonprofit organisation in the community services sector.

The paper applies multivariate techniques to examine the factors associated with volunteer commitment defined as the number of hours volunteered per month as well as the number of times volunteered per year. It finds that volunteer commitment is associated with a range of volunteers' socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age, geographic location, labour market status), socioeconomic status, social participation, and motivations for volunteering. The results support a multidimensional model of volunteer commitment that includes all relevant groups of variables, in particular, those that capture both sociological and psychological aspects of volunteering.

## Introduction

Why do some volunteers donate more of their time than others? In other words, what are the factors associated with volunteer 'commitment'? While volunteering is generally acknowledged to have both societal and individual benefits, it has recently been argued that 'highly committed volunteers' are important for the continuous functioning of civil society (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Understanding the factors that may be associated with volunteer commitment is also important for organisations that rely on volunteers for their activities, and may assist their volunteer recruitment and management strategies. An activity is generally classified as volunteering if it is freely chosen, does not involve remuneration, and helps or benefits the community. Volunteering is defined as formal when it occurs within an organisational setting (e.g. volunteering through a nonprofit organisation), while it is informal when it occurs outside an organisational setting (e.g. general informal care carried out for neighbours or friends). This paper focuses on formal volunteering.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the recent research and policy interest in volunteering, however, has been more concerned with understanding the factors that may be associated with the extent of volunteering (Zappalà 2000a). These studies are usually based on surveys of the population that include both volunteers and non-volunteers (ABS 1996, 2001a). The concern has also been with whether the rate of volunteering has been increasing or declining over time (Lyons & Fabiansson 1998; Wilkinson & Bittman 2001), the factors that motivate people to volunteer (Zappalà 2000a), and its influence on social capital (Baum et al 1999; Zappalà 2000b; Warburton & Oppenheimer 2000).

Several models and hypotheses have been put forward to explain the extent or rate of volunteering. Some predict that people who volunteer are 'characterized by socially approved or have "dominant" statuses, such as higher education, greater income, middle age, married status, longer time in the community, and more children under eighteen in the household' (Smith 1994:254). Other models maintain that whether people volunteer depends on the amount of discretionary time they have available. For instance, single parents with young children are less likely to volunteer than those with partners, or people working longer hours will be less likely to volunteer than those who work fewer hours or not in full time employment (Smith 1994). Some focus on the importance of social and religious participation in providing opportunities and the motivation for people to volunteer (Jackson et al 1995).

In a review of the determinants of volunteering, Smith (1994) reached several conclusions that are pertinent to the issue of volunteering commitment discussed in this paper. First, while several models that attempt to explain volunteering have been put forward, most focus on only one set of factors in their empirical estimations. He argued that any model of volunteering should analyse all relevant groups of variables. These include the availability of socioeconomic resources, discretionary time, peoples' religious and associational ties, as well as the individual attitudes and personalities of the volunteers.<sup>2</sup> Second, he argued that insights from both the sociological and psychological research on volunteering should be taken into account in studies of volunteering. Third, he noted that most studies of volunteering have focused on how particular groups of variables are associated with volunteers compared to non-volunteers. What was also needed, he argued, was 'research on the impact of these variables once a person has become a member of a volunteer program or association' (Smith 1994: 249).

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1 Volunteering Australia defines formal volunteering as an activity that takes place in nonprofit organisations, is of benefit to the community, is carried out by choice for no financial payment and occurs in designated volunteer positions only (Cordingley 2000).

2 Smith (1994) mentioned five specific categories of variables that should be included in models of volunteering: Contextual (factors that characterise the environment of an individual); Social background (Socioeconomic status, gender, family structure & size, age, ethnicity, employment status); Personality; Attitudes (motivations such as altruism); Situation (e.g. being asked or encouraged to join a volunteer group); and Social participation (participation in societal discretionary time activities).

This paper takes these observations on board in an analysis of the factors associated with the commitment of volunteering among a group of people who volunteer for a large nonprofit organisation in community services. Based on a national survey of volunteers at The Smith Family (TSF), it examines the factors associated with volunteering commitment. The second section reviews the factors that may influence volunteering commitment, focusing in particular on Australian studies. The third section describes the data and methods used to estimate the effects of socio-demographic, social participation and motivation variables on the commitment of volunteering in terms of hours volunteered and frequency of volunteering. The fourth section discusses the key findings from the models, while the fifth section discusses the main implications of the findings before concluding.

## Factors that may influence volunteer commitment

Volunteer commitment can be understood as the number of hours a volunteer contributes in a certain time period. For instance, Lyons and Hocking (2000) defined *Highly Committed Volunteers* (HCVs) as all those who volunteer on average more than 300 hours per year or 6 hours per week. Using the 1995 ABS survey of volunteering, they then went on to examine various characteristics of HCVs as well as the ratio of the number of highly committed volunteers with certain characteristics to the number of all volunteers with these characteristics – the HCV concentration ratio (HCVCR) (Lyons & Hocking 2000).

Describing the degree of commitment solely in terms of the number of hours that may be volunteered in a particular week or month is limited. For instance, it may be appropriate to describe committed volunteers in nonprofits whose activities and jobs are crucial to ensuring the continuity of services to people in need. This has elsewhere been described as the ‘charity’ model of volunteering (Zappalà 2001). In more recent forms of volunteering for nonprofits the regularity of a volunteer’s time contribution is not as important. Volunteer opportunities are often task-based and require an intense period of volunteering hours over one month or one week (but only once a year), rather than the same amount of hours distributed throughout a year. It would be incorrect to suggest that such volunteers are any less ‘committed’. It may be more appropriate therefore to also examine volunteer *frequency* as well as hours (Zappalà et al 2001). Frequency compares volunteers on the basis of the number of times per year that they may volunteer for the same organisation. This analysis examines volunteer commitment in terms of both hours as well as the number of times per year that individuals volunteer.

Before we move onto an examination of the data, the remainder of this section discusses some of the factors that may influence commitment among volunteers. Hypothesising the direction of influence of these variables on volunteering commitment is difficult for three reasons. First, as mentioned above, most studies focus on the factors associated with volunteer participation rather than commitment. Furthermore, the few studies that do examine commitment have primarily been based on descriptive statistics rather than multivariate analyses (Lyons & Hocking 2000; Zappalà et al 2001). There are therefore few competing hypotheses about volunteering commitment that we can test with our data.

Second, restricting the focus of study to a group of volunteers means that if they share particular characteristics (e.g. such as socioeconomic status or gender), it is unlikely that these characteristics will be useful in predicting the commitment of volunteering. In other words, the sample is likely to be homogeneous in terms of key background variables so that the impact of these variables is attenuated and reduced (Smith 1994). Third, the effect of particular variables is likely to be influenced by the particular characteristics of the organisation and sector they volunteer in. For instance, in this study, it is unlikely that factors such as religious activity are important determinants given that The Smith Family is a secular organisation in the community services field.

## Socio-demographic factors

Age: Studies of volunteering have mixed findings with respect to the relationship with age. While some find that older people are more likely to volunteer than younger people, others suggest that people in the middle-age group have the highest rate of volunteering. For instance, surveys of volunteering in Australia in both 1995 and 2000 found people in the 35-44 age group have the highest volunteer participation rate, followed by those in the 45-54 age group (ABS 2001a). Those aged less than 34 and over 75 had the lowest rates of volunteering (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

The pattern of volunteering among age groups changes, however, when the focus is on the number of hours volunteered by age group. Although the volunteer rate is greatest among people aged 35-44, both the 1995 and 2000 survey found the median number of hours volunteered per week to be highest for those aged 65 and over and lowest for those aged under 34 (ABS 2001a). The median number of hours increases steadily with age in both survey years between the 35-44 age group and the 65-74 age group. Studies based on time-use surveys, also find volunteer hours increase peaking with those aged 60 to 69 (Wilkinson & Bittman 2001).

**Table 1 Volunteer rate and volunteer hours by selected characteristics, 2000**

| Characteristic                       | Volunteer rate (%) <sup>a</sup> | Volunteer commitment (annual hours) <sup>b</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Sex</i>                           |                                 |  |
| Female                               | 33.0                            | 165  |
| Male                                 | 30.5                            | 154  |
| <i>Age</i>                           |                                 |  |
| 18-24                                | 26.8                            | 123  |
| 25-34                                | 27.5                            | 109  |
| 35-44                                | 40.1                            | 128  |
| 45-54                                | 35.4                            | 166  |
| 55-64                                | 32.5                            | 255  |
| 65-74                                | 30.3                            | 236  |
| 75 +                                 | 17.8                            | 218  |
| <i>Country of birth</i>              |                                 |  |
| Australia                            | 34.3                            | 165  |
| Overseas                             | 25.4                            | 143  |
| <i>Labour market status</i>          |                                 |  |
| Full-time                            | 32.8                            | 128  |
| Part-time                            | 40.9                            | 146  |
| Unemployed                           | 27.0                            | 164  |
| Not in labour force                  | 25.6                            | 230  |
| <i>Family status</i>                 |                                 |  |
| Partnered with dependent children    | 41.6                            | 131  |
| Partnered with no dependent children | 28.5                            | 191  |
| Total partnered                      | 34.5                            | 157  |
| Lone person                          | 26.5                            | 199  |

Source: Calculated from ABS (2001a).

*Notes:*

- a) The number of volunteers in a particular group expressed as a percentage of the total population in the same group.
- b) This figure is calculated by dividing the number of volunteers in a particular group by the number of annual hours volunteered by that same group.

<sup>3</sup> Voluntary work connected with the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games was excluded from the survey as it represented a once-off extraordinary event that led to an increase in volunteer numbers and would reduce comparability with the 1995 survey (ABS 2001A).

Table 1 also shows the number of hours volunteered annually per person by certain demographic characteristics. This shows a different pattern of results to the median number of hours per week, with those aged 55-64 contributing the most hours, followed by those 65 and over. Young people contributed the least number of hours per year. This confirms the earlier finding that older volunteers are more likely to be highly committed (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Age is also likely to have a different influence on volunteering according to the sector or type of volunteering. Most studies of volunteering in community services suggest that volunteers are more likely to be older (aged 60 or more) rather than younger (aged 30 or less) (Baldock 1990).

*Gender:* According to the assumptions of the 'dominant status model' of volunteering, males should have higher rates of volunteering than females. This prediction does not tend to be borne out in general surveys of volunteering. The latest survey of voluntary work in Australia found that the female volunteer rate was higher (albeit slightly) than for males (see Table 1). In terms of volunteer hours females also contributed a greater number of hours per week and per year compared to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, while Highly Committed Volunteers are more likely to be female than male, males have a higher HCVCR (Lyons & Hocking 2000: 50). That is, while in absolute terms there are more female HCVs, of all male volunteers, there is a higher proportion of those that are highly committed relative to all female volunteers. Similar to the ABS findings, Evans and Kelley (2000) also found females to have a slightly higher rate of volunteering than males (35% vs. 30%). In contrast to the ABS findings, however, they found no difference in the number of hours volunteered by sex. As with age, the influence of gender is more likely to be evident when the sector and type of volunteer activity is examined. Previous research suggests that females are more likely than males to volunteer in the community services sector (Baldock 1990). Although gender seems to be related to volunteer participation (perhaps due to labour market and discretionary time factors), its relationship to volunteering commitment is less clear.

*Marital status:* Marital status may also be related to both the propensity and intensity of volunteering. Many studies show that people who are married or partnered have a higher volunteering rate compared to people who are single (ABS 2001a). A study of volunteering among older Australians, however, found no relationship between marital status and volunteering (Warbuton et al 1998). In contrast, some have found that the influence of marital status on volunteering may operate through changes in the life cycle, often associated with events such as the loss of a partner (Baldock 1990). It may be the case, therefore, that volunteers who are widowed have higher levels of commitment than do those who are not (Jackson et al 1995). Table 1 suggests that 'lone people' (which includes widowed) have a higher volunteer commitment in terms of annual hours compared to people with partners.

Having children may also be associated with volunteering at different stages of the life cycle. Parents of school-aged children may be more likely to volunteer in educational and school-related activities. Table 1 suggests, however, that while couples with dependent children have the highest volunteer rate, they have the lowest volunteer commitment in terms of annual volunteer hours. Like widowhood, however, having children leave home often acts as a catalyst for voluntary activity (Baldock 1990). The volunteer commitment of couples without dependent children, for instance, is similar to that for 'lone people' (see Table 1).

*Ethnicity:* The survey of voluntary work in Australia showed that people born in Australia have a higher rate of volunteering as well as contribute a greater number of volunteering hours compared to people born overseas (ABS 2001a). Similarly, the majority of HCVs are born in Australia (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Some suggest this is because volunteering is part of the old social structures of anglophone cultures where the more well off are obliged to assist the less

well off, as well as contribute to the community (Cox 2000).<sup>4</sup> It may also be that people from ethnic minorities have lower volunteer participation rates as a result of their lower socioeconomic status rather than as a result of any intrinsic cultural characteristic (Smith 1994).

*Geographic location and length of residence:* A person's geographic location has been shown to be associated with the propensity to volunteer (Smith 1994). Australian studies confirm that the volunteer participation rate is generally higher in rural areas than metropolitan areas (ABS 1996, 2001a; Evans & Kelley 2000). The relationship between geographic location and volunteer commitment, however, is mixed. For instance, while there are more highly committed volunteers living in capital cities than in the balance of the states, the concentration of HCVs is greater in the non-capital city areas (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Similarly, the more recent ABS survey (2001a) suggests that people from non-metropolitan areas have slightly higher median weekly hours of voluntary work than their metropolitan counterparts. In their study of volunteer participation and frequency, Evans and Kelley (2000) found that although those who grew up in rural areas had a higher propensity to volunteer than their urban-raised counterparts, there was no association between geographic location and the number of hours volunteered.

Related to geographic location is the length of time a person has resided in a particular area or community. Studies in the US suggest that the longer a person has resided in a particular community the more likely it is that they will be involved in voluntary work (Smith 1994). This may be because residing for longer periods of time in the one place or community increases a person's sense of social trust and reciprocity, which in turn is associated with volunteering (Baum et al 1999).<sup>5</sup>

## **Socioeconomic status**

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to a person's overall social position as determined by their achievement in education; occupational status; and income and wealth. In general, higher socioeconomic status is associated with higher rates of volunteer participation, although it has less or little influence on volunteer commitment (Smith 1994). This relationship is evident in recent Australian survey-based studies of volunteering, with one finding that higher levels of education were associated with higher rates of volunteering (Evans & Kelley 2000). The relationship between education and volunteer commitment, however, is less clear, with almost half of HCVs having no post school qualifications, while one-third have a degree or diploma. Furthermore, the HCVCR for those with a degree was not greater than for those with no-post school qualifications (Lyons & Hocking 2000).

With respect to occupation, the survey of voluntary work showed the volunteer participation rate to be highest among higher status occupations such as professionals and managers compared to lower status occupations such as labourers (ABS 2001a). A multivariate study of volunteering among older Australians also found a significant relation between higher occupational status and volunteering (Warburton et al 1998).

While most surveys of volunteering do not have data on income levels, the 'dominant' status model of volunteering predicts that those with higher incomes are more likely to volunteer (Smith 1994). Those with higher incomes may have more resources that enable them to volunteer. In contrast, those with higher incomes may be more likely to be employed on a full-time basis than those on lower incomes (e.g. students, unemployed, the retired) and hence

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<sup>4</sup> While people from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds have lower rates of formal volunteering they may have higher rates of informal volunteering within their own communities (see Kerr et al 2001 for a recent examination of this issue).

<sup>5</sup> The fact that many immigrants are likely to have lived in Australia for shorter periods of time compared to those born here may also be an explanation for the lower rates of formal volunteering among the overseas born.

have less discretionary time available to volunteer. In their study of older Australians, Warburton et al (1998) found that income levels were negatively (although not statistically significant) related to volunteer participation.

Overall, the findings on socioeconomic status have tended to reinforce the traditional view of volunteering (especially in community services) as a primarily middle-class activity. In particular, the 'lady bountiful' stereotype of the volunteer was associated with women who may not have been in the labour force but had husbands or fathers in relatively higher status occupations (Baldock 1990). There is some evidence, however, that volunteering in Australia has crossed class and socioeconomic boundaries in the past (Baldock 1990; Oppenheimer 1997). The influence of SES on volunteering commitment, however, remains unclear.

### **Labour market status**

The 'discretionary time' model of volunteering predicts that those people not in the labour force (e.g. retirees) are more likely to volunteer as well as contribute greater volunteer hours given their relatively greater amount of discretionary time. The survey of voluntary work in Australia, however, found that people in full-time or part-time employment made up a greater percentage of those who volunteered (ABS 2001a). Table 1 shows that people working part-time had the highest rate of volunteering, while the rate for full-time employees was almost one third. Those not in the labour force have the lowest rate of volunteering. Similarly, multivariate studies of volunteer participation among older Australians found those working full-time or part-time were just as likely to volunteer as retirees (Warbuton et al 1998). In contrast, a smaller scale survey of volunteers in Adelaide found that volunteers were more likely to be older and retired than non-volunteers (Baum et al 1999).

Consistent with the discretionary time model, however, Table 1 suggests that volunteers not in the labour force contribute more hours to volunteering than those in the labour force. Those not in the labour force volunteered the most number of hours annually per person, followed by the unemployed, then part-time workers, with full-time employees performing the least number of hours annually. In other words, those volunteers who are not in the labour force are more likely to be highly committed volunteers (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Once again, the sector in which volunteering takes place needs to be considered, as studies of volunteers in community services have found support for the 'discretionary time' model, with the majority of volunteers being retirees (Baldock 1990).

### **Social participation**

Membership and involvement in a range of voluntary associations has also been found to be associated with high levels of volunteering (Jackson et al 1995). It has been found that 'the more one participates in one kind of socioculturally approved discretionary time activity, the more one will tend to participate in other kinds of such activity, including volunteer participation' (Smith 1994:255). Australian research has found that volunteers are significantly more likely to attend a social club, hobby group or self-help/support group (Baum et al 1999). This study also found that civic participation was significantly higher for volunteers than non-volunteers for both individual civic activities (e.g. attending a council meeting) and collective civic activities (e.g. involved in a resident or community action group). Greater civic and social participation through clubs and groups may provide more opportunities to volunteer or it may produce greater civic engagement, stimulating people's willingness to volunteer (Baum et al 1999). While higher levels of social participation may have the effect of increasing volunteer activity in general, it may have the perverse effect of reducing volunteer commitment for particular organisations, if the number of organisations people volunteer for increases. This is because it may reduce the amount of time volunteers can allocate to each volunteering episode in each particular organisation they volunteer for.

## Religious activity

Often related to social participation is religious activity since it may involve group functions and gatherings with others from the community. Religious activity such as church attendance has long been associated with volunteering for charitable organisations as well as more direct involvement with secular community activities (Smith 1994; Jackson et al 1995). The influence of religious activity is not only limited to older age groups as church membership has also been found to be positively associated with volunteering among teenagers (Sundeen & Raskoff 1994).

A recent study of Australian volunteers also found a strong relationship between church attendance and volunteering activity (Evans & Kelley 2000). The authors found that holding other variables constant, 57 per cent of all those who attended church weekly engaged in weekly volunteer work compared to 23 per cent of those who never attended church engaging in weekly volunteer work. Church attendance, however, was not related to the number of hours volunteers contributed each week.

## Motivations

A key conclusion from Smith's (1994) review of the literature on volunteer participation was the importance of including 'psychological' variables such as individual personality traits, attitudes (e.g. altruism), and situation (e.g. being asked to join a volunteer group by an important peer), as well as the 'sociological' variables discussed above. Many aspects of these psychological variables have been examined in the extensive literature on volunteer motivations (Clary & Snyder 1991). A particularly influential approach to volunteer motivations is the functional approach which is concerned with, 'the needs being met, the motives being fulfilled, and social and psychological functions being served by the activities of those people who engage in volunteer work' (Clary & Snyder 1991:123). It allows and enables a wide range of factors to be involved in understanding the often complex interrelations of volunteer motivations.

**Table 2 Functions served by volunteering and their assessment on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI)**

| <i>Function</i> | <i>Conceptual definition</i>  | <i>Sample VFI item</i>   |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Values          | The individual volunteers in order to express or act on important values like humanitarianism.                | I feel it is important to help others.   |
| Understanding   | The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused.              | Volunteering lets me learn through direct, hands-on experience.                            |
| Enhancement     | One can grow and develop psychologically through volunteer activities.  | Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.  |
| Career          | The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.                         | Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work. |
| Social          | Volunteering allows an individual to strengthen his or her social relationships.                              | People I know share an interest in community service.                                      |
| Protective      | The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems. | Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.  |

Source: Clary & Snyder (1999:157)

The functional approach, using a survey instrument known as the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), has identified six categories of motivations or psychological functions met by volunteering (Clary & Snyder 1991, 1999; Clary et al 1996; Clary et al 1998). The functions and a corresponding sample VFI question are summarised in Table 2.

Findings based on the VFI have generally shown that the most important functions served by volunteering are Values, Understanding, and Enhancement. The less important functions are those related to Social, Protective and Career motivations. The profile of motivations, however, does vary depending on the demographic (e.g. age, sex, ethnicity), socioeconomic (e.g. education, income), and behaviour (e.g. type of volunteering, length of time spent volunteering) of the volunteer. Longer serving or more frequent volunteers, for instance, may also develop different motivational profiles compared to volunteers that are relatively new or only volunteer occasionally (Clary et al 1996).

## Data and methods

The data for this study comes from a national survey of all known volunteers at The Smith Family (TSF) conducted in May 2000. The Smith Family is a public-serving nonprofit founded by volunteers in 1922, and continues to rely on the skills, time and talents of almost 2000 volunteers for many of its service delivery activities. Volunteers work in a broad range of Smith Family programs and undertake a wide variety of tasks that includes: sorting clothes, conducting interviews with people in financial crisis, packing hampers, and mentoring tertiary students.<sup>6</sup> While the demographic profile of volunteers at The Smith Family is similar to the traditional 'charities' that operate in the community services sector, it also has a large number of volunteers that do not fit this mould. For instance, almost two-thirds of volunteers are aged between 20 and 59, and almost one-third are in full-time employment in primarily professional occupations (Zappalà et al 2001).

The survey asked questions relating to the reasons people volunteer at TSF (the VFI item scale), the nature and extent of their volunteering work at TSF (e.g. program areas, tasks performed, hours volunteered), socio-demographic information as well as aspects of their community and religious involvement. A response rate of 53 per cent was achieved which was high given that no reminder follow-up letters were sent to volunteers.<sup>7</sup> The analysis reported in this paper is based on 426 responses.<sup>8</sup>

The statistical analysis used two types of multivariate techniques. First, ordinary least-squares (OLS) models of indicators of volunteering commitment were run to test the effects of socio-demographic, socioeconomic status, and motivational characteristics. The measure of volunteer commitment (the dependent variable) used in this analysis was based on volunteers' responses to a question on the average number of hours they volunteered at TSF in the last month.<sup>9</sup> Respondents could tick one of six options: none, less than 5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours, 16-20 hours, or more than 20 hours and were assigned scores from 1 through to 6

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<sup>6</sup> See Zappalà et al 2001 for further details on the survey and the nature of volunteering at TSF.

<sup>7</sup> Two modes of distributing the survey were used. The questionnaire was mailed-out to 1,513 volunteers whose primary volunteer activity meant they did not regularly visit a TSF Centre (e.g. Christmas hamper and toy packing and delivery, Tertiary student mentors). The questionnaire was distributed personally through TSF Centre managers to 406 volunteers who volunteer on a regular basis at TSF premises (e.g. Emergency Help caseworkers, clothing workers). The response rate for the mail-out survey was 44% and 81% for the handout survey, giving an overall response rate of 53%. Overall, there were 989 usable responses.

<sup>8</sup> As only cases where data was available on the full set of variables used in the regressions were used, 563 respondents were excluded as they did not complete at least one of the questions in the survey that pertains to this particular analysis. Questions that were not completed (in rank order) were: occupation (212), income (152), and educational qualifications (101). While only eleven respondents did not complete any of the questions that related to their motivations for volunteering, there were 322 respondents that failed to answer all items pertaining to at least one VFI factor (meaning that a mean score could not be calculated for that particular factor). Overall, the distributions of the reduced sample used here were similar to that of the overall sample (see Zappalà et al 2001 for details).

<sup>9</sup> It has been argued that examining the number of hours volunteered using categorical rather than continuous coding is preferable when seeking to identify differences between key groups of volunteers (Cnaan & Amroffell 1994).

respectively. Table 3 shows that just over half of the sample had not volunteered in the last month while one-quarter had volunteered 16 hours or more in the last month.

**Table 3** **Summary statistics for hours volunteered in last month**

| <i>Hours in last month</i> | <i>N</i>   | <i>%</i>   |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| None                       | 253        | 59         |
| Less than 5 hours          | 30         | 7          |
| 6-10 hours                 | 18         | 4          |
| 11-15 hours                | 21         | 5          |
| 16-20 hours                | 37         | 9          |
| More than 20 hours         | 67         | 16         |
| <i>Total</i>               | <i>426</i> | <i>100</i> |

To ensure that the findings were not affected by the numerical scoring two other scoring methods were used for the dependent variable. The second assigned scores according to the midpoint of hours represented by each category, giving scores of 0, 2.5, 7, 13, 18, and (arbitrarily) 25. The third score added 1 to the midpoint scale (to avoid taking the log of 0) and took the natural log. All regressions reported in this paper were done using all three scorings of volunteer commitment.<sup>10</sup> There was little difference between the three models, so all results are reported based on the midpoint of hours measure as the dependent variable.

The second multivariate technique used was binomial logistic regression to examine the relationship between the same set of control factors (independent variables) and volunteer frequency. The measure of volunteer frequency was based on volunteers' responses to a question on how often they undertook volunteering work at TSF. Respondents could tick one of seven options: once a year, a few times a year, monthly, fortnightly, weekly, a few times a week, every day. Volunteers were classified as 'Infrequent' (0) if they had volunteered less than a few times per year or once per year; while 'frequent' volunteers (1) were categorised as those who contributed their services on more than a monthly basis. Table 4 suggests that most volunteers in the sample were infrequent.

**Table 4** **Summary statistics for frequency of volunteering**

| <i>Frequency of volunteering</i> | <i>N</i>   | <i>%</i>   |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Less than a few times per year   | 266        | 62         |
| More than monthly                | 160        | 38         |
| <i>Total</i>                     | <i>426</i> | <i>100</i> |

The key independent variables used in the analyses are summarised in Tables 5 to 8. Table 5 contains summary statistics for the sociodemographic variables used in the regressions. Age was entered as a nominal variable for each category as descriptive statistics showed that age was not linearly related to volunteering hours.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of years lived in the current local area, which was entered as a continuous variable (ranging from a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 75 years) all of the other sociodemographic variables were dummy coded as shown in Table 5.

<sup>10</sup> The OLS analysis and approach closely followed that used and reported in Jackson et al (1995).

<sup>11</sup> Age was not entered as a nominal variable in the logistic regression. See notes to Table 10.

**Table 5 Summary statistics for sociodemographic variables**

| <i>Variable</i>                    | <i>Variable type</i>             | <i>N</i>             | <i>%</i>           |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Age</i>                         | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| 20 to 29                           | (1 if 20-29; 0 all other ages)   | 44                   | 10                 |
| 30 to 39                           | (1 if 30-39; 0 all other ages)   | 92                   | 22                 |
| 40 to 49                           | (1 if 40-49; 0 all other ages)   | 105                  | 25                 |
| 50 to 59                           | (1 if 50-59; 0 all other ages)   | 107                  | 25                 |
| Over 60                            | (1 if over 60; 0 all other ages) | 78                   | 18                 |
| <i>Sex</i>                         | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| Male                               | (0)                              | 155                  | 36                 |
| Female                             | (1)                              | 271                  | 64                 |
| <i>Ethnicity</i>                   | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| ESB                                | (0)                              | 395                  | 93                 |
| NESB                               | (1)                              | 31                   | 7                  |
| <i>Marital status</i>              | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| Single                             | (0)                              | 131                  | 31                 |
| Married                            | (1)                              | 295                  | 69                 |
| <i>Children under 18 at home</i>   | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| None                               | (0)                              | 302                  | 71                 |
| 1 or more                          | (1)                              | 124                  | 29                 |
| <i>Geographic location</i>         | Nominal                          |                      |                    |
| Rural                              | (0)                              | 42                   | 10                 |
| Urban                              | (1)                              | 384                  | 90                 |
| <i>Years in current local area</i> | Ratio<br>(1-75)                  | <i>Mean</i><br>16.41 | <i>SD</i><br>13.66 |

Most volunteers in the sample were from older age groups, almost two-thirds were female, most were married with no children below the age 18 still living at home. The majority was from English-speaking backgrounds and lived in capital cities.

The key socioeconomic status variables are summarised in Table 6. The income variable was based on responses to a question that asked volunteers to tick the category that reflected their gross annual household income from all sources. Income level was evenly distributed across the sample with almost a quarter of volunteers having incomes less than \$30 000, and just over one-third having incomes in excess of \$70 000.<sup>12</sup> Responses to a question on volunteers' current or last regular occupation were coded to four-digit level using ABS ASCO codes. These were in turn divided into occupational status quartiles using the ANU scale of occupational status.<sup>13</sup> A volunteer whose occupation was listed in the bottom quartile, for instance, was given a score of 1, while one whose occupation was listed in the top quartile was given a score of 4. The sample was relatively evenly distributed across the four occupational status quartiles, with a slightly greater representation of volunteers in the 'high status' category. Educational attainment was entered as a dummy variable (1 if the volunteer had a university degree and 0 otherwise). Just over half of the sample had no tertiary qualifications.

The current labour market status of volunteers was also entered as a dummy variable. For those in the labour market, we controlled for whether volunteers were in full time or part-time employment, or unemployed. For those not in the labour force, we controlled for those who

<sup>12</sup> Consistent with previous findings that those from higher SES have a higher propensity to volunteer, our sample is skewed towards higher income households compared to the general population. For instance, while the bottom quintile of households in Australia has annual household incomes of below \$8,000, only 5% of this sample had incomes below \$10,000. Alternatively, while 60% of households in Australia have annual household incomes below \$36,000, 61% of this sample have annual household incomes above \$50,000 (National figures calculated from ABS 2001b).

<sup>13</sup> The ANU scale of occupations assigns scores from 1 to 100 to each occupation based on the characteristics of the job, the skill level required and its prestige rating (McMillan & Jones 2000).

were retired or in full time home duties as well as those who were studying full time. Over half of volunteers were not in the labour force, with just less than one-third in full time employment and 15 per cent engaged in part time work. Ten per cent of the sample comprised of volunteers who were either in full time study or unemployed.

**Table 6 Summary statistics for socioeconomic status variables**

| <i>Variable</i>                      | <i>Variable type</i>           | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <i>Gross annual household income</i> | Ordinal                        |          |          |
| Less than \$10,000                   | 1                              | 21       | 5        |
| \$10,001 to \$30,000                 | 2                              | 69       | 16       |
| \$30,001 to \$50,000                 | 3                              | 76       | 18       |
| \$50,001 to 70,000                   | 4                              | 64       | 15       |
| \$70,001 to \$100,000                | 5                              | 82       | 19       |
| More than \$100,000                  | 6                              | 114      | 27       |
| <i>Occupational Status</i>           | Ordinal                        |          |          |
| Very low status                      | 1                              | 101      | 24       |
| Low status                           | 2                              | 72       | 17       |
| High status                          | 3                              | 152      | 36       |
| Very high status                     | 4                              | 101      | 24       |
| <i>Education</i>                     | Nominal                        |          |          |
| Tertiary qualifications              | 1                              | 198      | 46       |
| No tertiary qualifications           | 0                              | 228      | 54       |
| <i>Labour Market Status</i>          | Nominal                        |          |          |
| Full-time                            | (1 if FT; 0 all other)         | 203      | 30       |
| Part-time                            | (1 if PT; 0 all other)         | 76       | 15       |
| Unemployed                           | (1 if unemployed; 0 all other) | 18       | 4        |
| Retired/home duties                  | (1 if retired; 0 all other)    | 119      | 45       |
| Studying                             | (1 if student; 0 all other)    | 10       | 6        |

Table 7 summarises the social participation and religious activity variables. Social participation measures were based on responses to two questions. First, whether volunteers were members of associations. We asked specifically about belonging to Veterans/Returned services, Service clubs, VIEW Clubs,<sup>14</sup> Youth/school service groups, Political or lobby groups, Occupational and professional groups, Religious associations, and Ethnic associations. A dummy variable was used in the regression: 1 for those who belonged to one or more associations (excluding membership of occupational or professional groups).<sup>15</sup> Second, volunteers were asked whether they also volunteered for other organisations. Again, a dummy was used in the regression: 1 for those that did. Almost 40 per cent of volunteers were members of a voluntary association, while almost half of the sample also volunteered for another organisation.

<sup>14</sup> VIEW Clubs (Voice, Interest, Education of Women) is a voluntary association that provides strong financial and volunteering support to TSF. There are 32,000 women in VIEW clubs around Australia.

<sup>15</sup> Membership of occupational groups was excluded as many people may be required to be members for professional reasons, although may not be active in the organisation.

**Table 7** **Summary statistics for social participation and religious variables**

| <i>Variable</i>                           | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|----------|----------|
| <i>Associational membership</i>           |          |          |
| 1 or more                                 | 165      | 39       |
| None                                      | 261      | 61       |
| <i>Volunteer for another organisation</i> |          |          |
| 1 or more                                 | 185      | 43       |
| None                                      | 241      | 57       |
| <i>Religious activity</i>                 |          |          |
| Less than once a month                    | 323      | 76       |
| At least once a month                     | 103      | 24       |

Responses to a question on how regularly volunteers attended religious services (excluding weddings, funerals and baptisms) were entered as a dummy variable: 1 for all those who attended church at least once a month. Regular church attendance was relatively low (just less than one-quarter) among the sample of volunteers, which is not surprising given that TSF is not a church-based or religiously affiliated organisation like many other community service based nonprofits. It is therefore likely to attract volunteers without strong religious beliefs or convictions.

**Table 8** **Summary statistics for motivational variables**

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>α</i> |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Values          | 3.44        | 0.56      | .71      |
| Understanding   | 2.60        | 0.74      | .49      |
| Enhancement     | 2.45        | 0.65      | .55      |
| Protect         | 1.57        | 0.58      | .81      |
| Social          | 1.50        | 0.65      | .59      |
| Career          | 1.36        | 0.67      | .43      |

Motivational variables were based on individual's responses to 30 questions that followed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) approach discussed previously. Respondents were asked to rate each statement (see examples in Table 1) along a four-point scale (not at all important, not too important, somewhat important, and very important). An option was also allowed for 'don't know / not applicable'. Each individual factor was entered as a separate variable based on the mean score achieved on a four-point scale. The higher the average score for each factor, the more important the factor. Reliability analysis was also conducted for each of the six VFI factors, with Alpha scores suggesting good internal consistency. Table 8 shows that Values was the most important motivational factor, followed by Understanding and Enhancement. Career was the least important factor.

## Findings

### Determinants of volunteering commitment – hours

Table 9 reports on the variables that affect volunteering commitment in terms of the number of hours volunteered in the last month. The table contains three columns, each column reporting an OLS regression of volunteering commitment on a set of possible determinants. The regressions are cumulative from left to right. The first column (model 1) shows the results of regressing socio-demographic, socioeconomic and labour market status variables on the number of hours volunteered in the last month. The second column (model 2) adds variables that reflect aspects of social participation; while the third column (model 3) adds variables that reflect the main motivational reasons people volunteer at TSF.

**Table 9 Determinants of volunteering commitment (hours volunteered in the last month)**

| <i>Independent Variables</i>             | <i>Cumulative Models</i>                          |          |                                       |          |                              |          |
|--|---|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|----------|
|  | <i>Model 1</i>                                    |          | <i>Model 2</i>                        |          | <i>Model 3</i>               |          |
|  | <i>Socio-demographic, SES &amp; LMS variables</i> |          | <i>Social participation variables</i> |          | <i>Motivations variables</i> |          |
|  | $\beta$   | <i>t</i> | $\beta$                               | <i>t</i> | $\beta$                      | <i>t</i> |
| Female (0-1)                             | -0.15   | -0.20    | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Age 30 to 39                             | -0.08   | -0.06    | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Age 40 to 49                             | 2.17  | 1.66     | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Age 50 to 59                             | 2.91*   | 2.18     | 2.23**                                | 2.68     | 3.02***                      | 3.76     |
| Age 60 and over                          | -3.22*  | -2.06    | -3.80***                              | -3.66    | -1.81                        | -1.80    |
| NESB (0-1)                               | 0.79  | 0.61     | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Married (0-1)                            | 0.79  | 0.93     | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Children under 18 at home (0-1)          | -0.11   | -0.12    | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Urban (0-1)                              | -2.97*  | -2.52    | -2.72*                                | -2.34    | -1.97                        | -1.74    |
| Years in current local area              | 0.02  | 0.68     | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Full-time employment (0-1)               | -10.71***   | -10.10   | -11.16***                             | -11.82   | -9.84***                     | -11.00   |
| Part-time employment (0-1)               | -6.08***  | -5.77    | -6.13***                              | -6.09    | -5.69***                     | -5.89    |
| Unemployed (0-1)                         | -1.46   | -0.83    | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Studying (0-1)                           | -5.10*  | -2.17    | -4.17                                 | -1.85    | -                            | -        |
| Annual income                            | -1.36***  | -4.41    | -1.10***                              | -4.11    | -0.77**                      | -2.87    |
| Occupational Status (1-4)                | -1.88***  | -4.54    | -1.63***                              | -4.45    | -1.44***                     | -4.06    |
| University qualifications (0-1)          | 1.06  | 1.28     | -                                     | -        | -                            | -        |
| Associational membership (0-1)           | -   | -        | -0.43                                 | -0.59    | -                            | -        |
| Volunteer for another organisation (0-1) | -   | -        | -1.21                                 | -1.77    | -                            | -        |
| Church attendance (0-1)                  | -   | -        | 0.41                                  | 0.50     | -                            | -        |
| Career                                   | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | 1.91**                       | 3.35     |
| Social                                   | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | -1.48**                      | -2.71    |
| Values                                   | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | -1.59*                       | -2.46    |
| Understand                               | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | 0.85                         | 1.51     |
| Enhance                                  | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | 2.68***                      | 3.63     |
| Protect                                  | -   | -        | -                                     | -        | -0.94                        | -1.23    |
| Constant                                 | 24.17   | 11.90    | 25.05                                 | 17.34    | 18.35                        | 7.12     |
| $R^2$                                    | 0.541   |          | 0.534                                 |          | 0.576                        |          |
| Adjusted $R^2$                           | 0.522   |          | 0.522                                 |          | 0.562                        |          |

Notes:

i) \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The measure of volunteering commitment was regressed on the set of socio-demographic, socioeconomic and labour market status variables to estimate their effects and more accurately estimate the effects of social participation and motivations to volunteer. Five variables had significant effects on the number of hours volunteered in the last month (see Model 1, Table 9). First, compared to the youngest group in the sample (those aged 20-29), only those aged 50 to 59 were significantly likely to volunteer more hours per month. In contrast, those aged 60 and over volunteered fewer hours compared to the base group of 20 to 29 year olds.

Second, volunteers who lived in rural areas had higher levels of volunteering commitment than volunteers who lived in urban areas. Third, volunteers who were full time students or in the labour market in either full-time or part-time employment volunteered fewer hours per month than those who were retired or not in the labour force. Fourth, as annual household income decreased, the number of hours volunteered per month increased. Finally, another socioeconomic variable, occupational status was also negatively related to volunteer

commitment. Volunteers who had or were in lower status occupations volunteered more hours per month compared to volunteers in higher status occupations. Gender, ethnicity, marital status, number of children at home under eighteen, the length of time people had lived in their current local area, being unemployed and level of educational attainment each had no significant net effect on hours volunteered, so they were removed from the model.

Retaining the significant socio-demographic, labour market status and socioeconomic variables as controls, the second model examined the influence of the three social participation variables on the number of hours volunteered in the last month. As the second model of Table 9 indicates, none of the social participation variables were significant. The socio-demographic, labour market status (with the exception of full-time students) and socioeconomic variables continued to be significant in this model.

Finally, the effects of individuals' motivations for volunteering were examined (see the final column of Table 9). The third model suggests that four of the six VFI motivations variables were statistically significant. In particular, volunteers that were motivated to volunteer because they believed it would benefit their *Career* were likely to report having volunteered more hours in the last month than those who were not motivated to volunteer to fulfill a career function. Similarly, those motivated to volunteer because it fulfilled an *Enhancement* function were likely to report volunteering more hours than those who did not volunteer for enhancement purposes. In contrast, the *Values* motivation revealed a significant relation in the opposite direction, namely, those volunteers for whom altruism was an important motive for volunteering, contributed fewer hours in the last month compared to those for whom altruistic motives were less important. Similarly, those who were motivated to volunteer for its *Social* function volunteered fewer hours than those for whom social reasons were less important.

The addition of the motivational variables did not substantially change the effects previously established, except that geographic location and those aged over 60 lost significance. Finally, the last row in Table 9 suggests that the third model, has the best adjusted  $R^2$  (accounting for 57% of the variance in the number of hours volunteered in the last month).

### **Predictors of volunteering commitment – frequency**

The second dependent variable we examined was volunteer frequency. In order to determine the extent to which the same set of independent variables influenced the frequency of volunteering while keeping the effects of other variables constant, we ran a binomial logistic regression on volunteer frequency (1 if volunteers were 'frequent' and 0 otherwise). This approach allows us to estimate the 'pure' effects of, for instance, geographical location on the frequency of volunteering, adjusted for the effects of other variables.

The results of the logistic regression are summarised in Table 10, estimating the extent to which socio-demographic, labour market status, socioeconomic, social participation and motivational variables contribute to volunteer frequency. The model Chi-square statistic was significant ( $\chi^2 = 349$ ,  $df = 24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the Hosmer and Lemeshow test revealed a good fit between the data and the model (Goodness-of-Fit  $\chi^2 = 4.742$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = .79$ ).

**Table 10 Logistic Regression equation predicting frequency of volunteering**

| <i>Independent Variables</i>       | <i>β</i> | <i>S.E.</i> | <i>Wald</i> | <i>Exp (β)</i> |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Female                             | -0.11    | 0.42        | 0.07        | 0.89           |
| Age (midpoint)                     | 0.27***  | 0.06        | 19.63       | 1.31           |
| Age (midpoint squared)             | -0.00*** | 0.00        | 18.16       | 1.00           |
| NESB                               | 0.40     | 0.68        | 0.35        | 1.50           |
| Married                            | 0.89     | 0.48        | 3.45        | 2.43           |
| Children under 18 at home          | -0.31    | 0.44        | 0.49        | 0.73           |
| Urban                              | -1.76*   | 0.69        | 6.45        | 0.17           |
| Years in current local area        | 0.01     | 0.01        | 0.34        | 1.01           |
| Full-time employment               | -4.00*** | 0.55        | 53.63       | 0.02           |
| Part-time employment               | -1.96*** | 0.48        | 16.70       | 0.14           |
| Unemployed                         | -1.04    | 0.88        | 1.42        | 0.35           |
| Studying                           | -2.22*   | 1.12        | 3.94        | 0.11           |
| Annual income                      | -0.62*** | 0.16        | 14.88       | 0.54           |
| Occupational Status (1-4)          | -0.36    | 0.21        | 3.13        | 0.69           |
| University qualifications          | 0.71     | 0.44        | 2.61        | 2.02           |
| Associational membership           | 0.31     | 0.38        | 0.67        | 1.36           |
| Volunteer for another organisation | -0.79*   | 0.36        | 4.74        | 0.45           |
| Church attendance                  | -0.12    | 0.43        | 0.08        | 0.88           |
| Career                             | 1.04**   | 0.32        | 10.38       | 2.84           |
| Social                             | -0.77*   | 0.32        | 5.83        | 0.46           |
| Values                             | -1.12**  | 0.36        | 9.71        | 0.33           |
| Understand                         | 0.50     | 0.33        | 2.33        | 1.66           |
| Enhance                            | 0.96*    | 0.44        | 4.83        | 2.61           |
| Protect                            | -0.06    | 0.44        | 0.02        | 0.94           |

*Notes:*

i) \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

ii) When the model was run with age as a dichotomous variable for each age category as in the OLS, the model Chi-square was significant but the Goodness-of-fit  $\chi^2$  was weak. For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, the age variable was entered as the midpoint of age and the midpoint of age squared due to the non-linear relationship between age and hours volunteered.

With respect to the independent variables, the Wald test of significance showed that the coefficients were statistically significant for age, geographic location, being in full time or part time employment, being a full time student, income, volunteering for another organisation, and four of the six VFI motivational factors (career, social, values, and enhancement). Variables that did not significantly predict volunteer frequency were sex, ethnicity, marital status, number of children under eighteen at home, years lived in current local area, being unemployed, occupational status, level of education, associational membership, and church attendance.

The results from the OLS models in Table 9 are broadly similar to those from the logistic model in Table 10. The effect of the main sociodemographic, socioeconomic and motivations variables remained stable and consistent in both analyses, suggesting that the two measures of commitment are closely related. Nevertheless, four differences can be noted when comparing the results from the two analyses. First, while living in an urban area was negatively associated with volunteering hours and frequency, it was not significant in the final OLS model but was significant in the logistic model. Second, while being a full-time student was negatively associated with volunteering hours and frequency, it was significant in the logistic model but only significant in the first OLS model. Third, while occupational status was also negatively associated with volunteering hours and frequency, it remained significant in all the OLS models but failed to reach significance in the logistic model. Fourth, while volunteering for another organisation was negatively associated with volunteering hours and frequency, it was not

significant in the OLS model but was significant in the logistic model. These are marginal rather than substantive differences and involved variables that bordered on significance.

## Discussion

Why are some volunteers more committed than others in terms of the number of hours they contribute or how frequently they volunteer? The findings from both multivariate analyses support a multidimensional model of volunteer commitment. They confirm the points made in the introduction about the importance of including all relevant groups of variables, in particular, variables that capture both sociological (structural) and psychological aspects of volunteering (Smith 1994).

One interesting finding in the context of previous studies was that gender was not significantly related to volunteer commitment once other factors are controlled for (Evans & Kelley 2000; Lyons & Hocking 2000). So while women may be more likely than men to become volunteers a volunteer's sex does not influence their level of volunteering commitment.<sup>16</sup>

The findings for age were broadly consistent with previous studies, namely, that volunteer commitment peaks in the older years. We found that those aged 50 to 59 had the highest levels of commitment even after controlling for differences in labour market and socioeconomic status. In contrast to other studies commitment among our sample of volunteers began to decline after age 60, a slightly earlier turning point than that found in studies of volunteering based on broader surveys of the population (Lyons & Hocking 2000; Wilkinson & Bittman 2001). The fact that the variable for those aged 50 to 59 remained significant even when factors such as labour market status and marital status were controlled for suggests that people may volunteer as they get older for reasons unrelated to them having a greater amount of discretionary time available. Some researchers in the U.S. have expressed concern that we may see a decline in volunteering among the 'baby boom' generation (e.g. those now aged 50-59) (Putnam, cited in Wilkinson & Bittman 2001). It is argued that the 'baby boom' generation has less sense of civic responsibility and engagement compared to the pre-war generation. Our findings, like those based on cohort analyses of volunteering using Australian time use data (Wilkinson & Bittman 2001) do not support this thesis. Others suggest that although 'baby boomers' may continue to volunteer, they are more likely to be motivated by reasons related to self-interest rather than a broader sense of civic duty (Heartbeat 2001). This may well be the case, although the 'baby boomers' in our sample were the most committed, even when the motivational functions related to self-interest (e.g. Enhancement and Protection) were controlled for.<sup>17</sup>

While some studies have found that being single or widowed may lead to volunteer participation as it may assist in meeting new people or gaining a sense of purpose, its effect may be more in influencing the decision to become a volunteer rather than the subsequent degree of volunteering commitment. Similarly, it is not that surprising that having children still living at home was also not significant. This may be more influential in volunteering at school or other child-related activities rather than for a community services organisation like TSF.

The findings with respect to geographic location, however, were consistent with previous studies that have found volunteers in rural areas to have higher levels of commitment than those who live in capital cities (ABS 1996, 2001a). Possible reasons for these results include

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<sup>16</sup> This finding may also be due to what we earlier referred to as the 'attenuation effect', namely, that restricting the analysis to a group of volunteers who may be broadly homogeneous in terms of certain characteristics, means that the impact of these variables is reduced. This may also be a reason for the lack of influence of ethnicity.

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the 'baby boomers' in our sample were no more likely to be motivated to volunteer for reasons associated with the Enhancement and Protect functions than were volunteers from other age groups.

the fact that rural areas often suffer from a relative lack of government services and resources and volunteering is a way of making up the shortfall. The smaller size and relative remoteness of rural communities may also facilitate higher levels of connectedness and reciprocal social relations that may lead to higher levels of commitment from volunteers.

One of the most consistent variables that influenced volunteer commitment was labour market status. Those in full-time employment in particular were much less likely to have volunteered hours in the last month and were much more likely to be infrequent volunteers. These findings therefore provide strong support for the 'discretionary time' model that predicts that those people not in the labour force are more likely to volunteer as well as contribute greater volunteer hours given their relatively greater amount of discretionary time.

Our findings provide little support for the 'dominant status' model of volunteering suggesting that people from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to volunteer than those from lower SES backgrounds. They do provide support however for the notion that volunteering in Australia does cross class boundaries and is not just a middle class phenomenon (Oppenheimer 1997). Volunteering commitment was strongly associated with people who had a lower SES in our study. A possible explanation for the association between income and commitment may be that as a large proportion of volunteers in the study were older and retired, they were also likely to have lower incomes although they may have been relatively asset rich.<sup>18</sup> This is unlikely to explain the association between volunteer commitment and lower SES as measured by volunteers' occupational status. No association was found, however, with the third measure of SES, the level of educational attainment.

Membership and involvement in voluntary associations has often been associated with high levels of volunteering (Jackson et al 1995; Baum et al 1999). Our findings showed that being a member of one or more associations did not influence volunteer commitment. In further support for the 'discretionary time' model, our analyses showed that infrequent volunteers were more likely to volunteer for another organisation. Frequent volunteers, however, were less likely to volunteer for another organisation, perhaps because their commitment at TSF left them with less time to contribute elsewhere. These findings suggest that being an infrequent volunteer at one organisation is not necessarily associated with having lower levels of civic involvement. Indeed, the combinations of volunteering for other organisations as well as being in the paid workforce may be a key reason for the infrequent nature of volunteering for TSF.

As was also noted in the earlier discussion, a person's religious belief and their religious involvement are factors that have been associated with volunteering (Jackson et al 1995). In contrast to the Evans and Kelley (2000) finding that those who attend church weekly are more likely to undertake 'regular volunteer work', we found that church attendance was not related to volunteering commitment. This should not be surprising given that TSF is not a church-based or religiously affiliated organisation like many other nonprofits in the community services sector. It is therefore likely to attract volunteers without strong religious beliefs or convictions.

Finally, our findings on the significant association between motivational factors and volunteer commitment support the thesis that the psychological aspect of volunteering is essential to understanding volunteer behaviour (Smith 1994; Clary et al 1996, 1998). A key finding was that those who were motivated to volunteer through a strong *Career* function (i.e. those who saw volunteering as a way to improve their employment prospects or explore different career options) showed higher levels of commitment than those for whom *Career* was a less important motivator (all else held constant).<sup>19</sup> It is not surprising that a longer, more consistent period of

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<sup>18</sup> Even though the survey was confidential it is also possible that respondents under reported incomes. Piloting of the survey suggested a general reluctance by volunteers to complete questions that were considered 'personal' or 'private'. As noted earlier, 15% of respondents did not complete the question on income.

<sup>19</sup> Analysis of variance showed that those aged 20 to 29 were significantly more likely to have been motivated to volunteer for reasons associated with the 'Career' function compared to older age groups. This was also the case for those who were unemployed or studying full-time compared to those who were retired, or in full-time or part-time work.

volunteering would be necessary to learn new skills or improve one's employment prospects. The Enhancement function was also positively associated with volunteer commitment. Items related to enhancement included statements about volunteering being a way to increase self-esteem, feel needed, and a way to make new friends.

In contrast, volunteers motivated by a need to express altruistic values volunteered fewer hours than those who rated this as a less important motivation. Items related to this function included feeling concern for those less fortunate, feeling compassion toward people in need and generally feeling that it is important to help others. This finding may suggest that altruism, the traditional motive associated with volunteering can be met through a once off or occasional volunteer experience. Packing and distributing hampers once a year at Christmas, for example, is enough to satisfy the Values function. Being motivated to volunteer for career or self-esteem reasons, however, requires that the voluntary activity occur on a more regular and intensive basis.

Finally, those who were motivated to volunteer to satisfy a Social function were also likely to be less committed than those for whom a social motivation was less important. The term 'Social' is perhaps somewhat misleading because the items in this function more accurately describe the effects of peer or social pressure on peoples' motivation to volunteer. For instance, items included: 'My friends volunteer; People I'm close to me want to me to volunteer; People I know share an interest in community service; Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service'. In other words, people who may feel 'pressured' to undertake voluntary activity are unlikely to make committed volunteers.

## Conclusion

Much of the recent research and policy interest in volunteering in Australia has focused on the factors associated with the extent or rate of volunteering. The few studies that have examined volunteer commitment, while having the advantage of being based on national surveys have not used multivariate techniques that can isolate the influence of particular characteristics by controlling for the effect of other variables (Lyons & Hocking 2000). While this paper used multivariate techniques, a limitation of the study is that the findings are based on volunteers in one community service organisation and caution should therefore be taken in generalising the findings to the wider population of volunteers. One way of extending this study would be to replicate the survey and analysis with samples of volunteers in other community services organisations. At the very least, the findings pose challenges and questions for volunteering in large organisations in the community services sector. In particular, what, if any are the implications of these findings for the changing nature of volunteering? The recruitment and management of volunteers? Increasing the level of commitment among current and future volunteers?<sup>20</sup>

The findings suggest that some socio-demographic characteristics such as age, geographic location, and labour market status; aspects of socioeconomic status (e.g. income and occupational status); volunteering for another organisation and the reasons that motivate people to volunteer are all significantly related to volunteer commitment. The results were broadly consistent and robust across the different model specifications. The results therefore support a multidimensional model of volunteer commitment that includes all relevant groups of variables, in particular, variables that capture both sociological and psychological aspects of volunteering.

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<sup>20</sup> These issues will be addressed in a forthcoming paper.

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