

SPORTS VOLUNTEERISM, A REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPING, OR A STAB AT THE GLASS CEILING?

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INTRODUCTION

Sport participation has long been a male domain, with women playing catch up for equity of access to opportunity, facilities, coaching and elite athletic systems. However, what of sports volunteerism? How, where and to what degree are female volunteers represented in the domain of sports volunteerism? Research in Ireland to date indicates that 18% of men and 12% of women volunteer in sport (Delaney & Fahey, 2005), for every four people who play sport regularly, three people volunteer. However behind this statistic, what tasks are women undertaking, what roles are assumed, what opportunities for input, progress and change are available?

Issues associated with retention of sports volunteers have been highlighted by Cuskelly, (2004), whereby the decline in sports volunteers over an eight year period was particularly significant amongst female referees/officials, in Australia, where 48,600 left their positions. This fact alone is a catalyst to the pursuit of an understanding of female sports volunteerism.

METHODS

Participants in this study were club level volunteers from six nominated sports in Munster. The definition of volunteer was delimited to those who acted in the capacity of administrator who willingly serve, without remuneration (excluding expenses), either as Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer or Public Relations Officer (PRO), or in a combination of these roles, in one of the following sports: Gaelic football (Men's & Women's), Hurling, Camogie, Soccer, Rugby and Badminton. A total of 353 clubs were asked to complete and return a postal questionnaire, eliciting a response rate of 111 questionnaires (31.4%).

RESULTS

While dissemination of questionnaires was random, the gender break down of responses was 47.7% (n=53) male and 52.3% (n=58) female. There was a significant difference between the mean age of males compared to females ($p = .038$, $p < .05$), whereby female volunteers were significantly younger than males (38.2 years versus 40.2 years). There was a similar pattern of volunteering between the genders across all age ranges, with voluntary activity increasing between 30 to 39 years, peaking between 40 to 49 and decreasing again in later life, this increase in voluntary activity showed a moderate correlation with the greatest likelihood of having dependent children living at home, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .28$ ($p = .004$, $p < .01$). On average, volunteers had 1.8 dependent children living at home. Female volunteers had 2.13 dependent children, significantly more ($p = .029$, $p < .05$) than male volunteers who had 1.44 dependent children living at home.

Eighty two per cent of volunteers worked either full time or part time outside of the home. Chi-square analysis suggested a significant association between gender and employment status ($\chi^2=6$, $df=34.3$, $p=.000$), indicating that men were more likely to work full-time outside of the home. Women were more likely than men to work either part-time outside of the home, or to work inside the home. Volunteers were skilled and well educated, with over 56% (n = 63) having received either professional skills training, professional accreditation or third level education to at least national certificate standard. Sixty four percent of males (n = 34) were educated to this standard as opposed to fifty percent (n = 29) of females.

The following table highlights the difference between the positions held by males and females in the clubs, with the most obvious differences being those of Chairperson, where men were more likely to occupy that role, and Secretary, where the opposite was true. Chi-square analysis indicates that there was a significant association between gender and role performed in the club ($p = .011$, $p < .05$), although the relationship was weak (Cramer's $V = .336$).

Role in the Club	Overall N = 107	Male N = 51	Female N = 56
Chairperson	17.8%	29.4%	6.9%
Treasurer	5.6%	3.9%	6.9%
Secretary	64.5%	58.8%	67.2%
P.R.O.	8.4%	7.8%	8.9%
Multiple Roles	3.7%	-	7.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

In regard to why volunteers initially became involved, inter-gender differences were relatively minor in most cases; men were more likely to want to help the club, whereas women valued the club as an important amenity and used the club as a means of meeting friends or other people outside of the home. The most striking differences between the initial motivation of male and female volunteers was in those areas related to the family. Participation in the club by family members was rated much more highly as a reason for initial volunteering by women than by men ($p = .023$, $p < .05$), as was personal and family benefits ($p = .003$, $p < .05$).

Ongoing volunteering seemed to engender a greater sense of organisational commitment to the club, as 'duty or commitment to the club' rated as the second most important reason for both male and female established volunteers. Family involvement and personal and family benefits remained more important reasons for female volunteers than for their male counterparts.

Female volunteers rated 'being active' ($\chi^2=8.9$, $df=2$, $p=.012$), 'meeting people' ($\chi^2=7.3$, $df=3$, $p=.041$), and 'gaining experience and skills' ($\chi^2=8.8$, $df=4$, $p=.042$) as statistically more important benefits of sports volunteering than their male counterparts. In regard to volunteer training needs, the specific areas of particular concern to females were in relation to the maintenance of 'health and safety,' 'code of ethics for children's sport', and 'volunteer recruitment and retention', (the soft skill areas), while for males the hard skill area of 'dealing with new technology' was deemed a significantly more important training area than females ($\chi^2=13.4$, $df=4$, $p=.007$).

DISCUSSION

One of the incentives to volunteering as outlined by Chelladurai (1999) was that of utilitarianism, whereby the benefit to the individual may be an extension of their household production role, i.e. child rearing and child minding. This is the strong theme emanating from this research, as was the case also found by Delaney & Fahey (2005), whereby Irish female sports volunteers were more likely to help out because their children were involved (57% of females as opposed to 34% of males selected this motivation to volunteer), over their own general interest in the game/sport.

REFERENCES

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