The Experiences, Psychological Well-Being, and Motivations of New Volunteers at a Mental Health Charity

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Abstract
Volunteering makes a significant impact on society as it contributes to the global economy, enhances the social connections between different sectors, including the government and private sectors, and helps build a stronger, more cohesive and safer community (Wu, 2011). The aim of my research study is to explore the experiences and development of new volunteers during the first year of volunteering at a mental health charity.

The study takes an interdisciplinary approach, which focuses on five areas: the experiences of volunteering, challenges of volunteering, the psychological well-being of volunteers, their motivation for volunteering, and training and support. The rationale for exploring these topics is based on the results of a pilot study that was conducted with existing volunteers. The study confirmed that a major issue at the charity in question is recruiting more volunteers and retaining volunteers. It is important to explore this issue further because the mental health organisation has 201 branches across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, providing essential services to the community, which are necessary as more people are experiencing mental illness. There are approximately 1 in 6 adults every week that experience a mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression in the UK (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). In addition, in England and Wales, there were 5,691 suicides in 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Devaney et al. (2015) suggested the importance of recruiting and retaining volunteers, as charitable organisations rely on volunteers to provide services, which indicates that volunteers are a valuable resource to the charitable organisations. Pahl et al. (2010) indicated that recruiting and training new volunteers is expensive, therefore it is important to retain volunteers.

The main research study focused on seven branches of the mental health charity. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, which consisted of two phases. The first phase involved the new volunteers completing a questionnaire on three occasions, resulting in a longitudinal element. The second phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the new volunteers. The results showed that the new volunteers had both positive and negative experiences and there were challenges of volunteering, which might influence the retention of volunteers. The positive experiences of volunteering included making new friends, enjoying the working environment, and finding the tasks conducted as a volunteer rewarding because they involved helping other people. A negative experience of volunteering was dealing with people that misused the service provided by the organisation. The volunteers reported that the challenges of volunteering were dealing with difficult calls, and managing
voluntary work alongside academic work, a full-time job and parental commitments. The results of the study may be useful for the participant mental health charity to improve the experiences of new volunteers, which may help with the retention of the volunteers, and maybe instructive to other mental health charities worldwide.

**Keywords:** motivation, psychological well-being, experiences of volunteering, training and support

1. **Introduction**

In this article, I explore a study conducted with new volunteers at a well-established mental health charity that is dedicated to helping people who are experiencing despair, including those who are feeling suicidal. The services offered by the charity to the public include telephone, email, face-to-face meetings or text messages (Samaritans, 2020). The organisation operates a telephone service that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, although only a few branches operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as telephone calls can be diverted to another branch that is open. The mental health organisation works with schools, colleges, universities, health and welfare services, workplaces, homeless shelters, and train prisoners to offer peer support within prisons. In addition, the charity undertakes outreach work at festivals and other outdoor events (Samaritans, 2020).

My research study takes an interdisciplinary approach to explore the topic of ‘volunteering’, within the disciplines of Education, Sociology and Psychology. The use of an interdisciplinary approach to explore volunteering is a relatively new approach as most research on volunteering is focused on a single discipline, such as Psychology (Paterson, Reniers, and Vollm, 2009), Sociology (Son and Wilson, 2012), Education (Chen, 2016; O’Shea, 2011), Health Studies (Molscher and Townsend, 2016), Economics (Epure, 2013), and Leisure Studies (Butcher and Smith, 2010). An interdisciplinary approach is appropriate for this research project because it enables a more holistic perspective to be gained about volunteering. My study focused on five areas: the experiences of volunteering, challenges of volunteering, the psychological well-being of volunteers, their motivation for volunteering, and training and support.

The overall research question for the study is: what are the experiences of training and volunteering at a mental health charity for new volunteers, and how does this impact on the psychological well-being of a volunteer?
There are four sub-questions for the study, which are:

1) Are the motivations and expectations of volunteers fulfilled by the experiences of volunteering at a mental health charity?

2) What are the positive experiences and negative experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity?

3) What are the challenges of volunteering at the mental health charity?

4) What is the impact of training and support from colleagues on the psychological well-being of a volunteer?

The article has four further sections. The second section presents a literature review. The third section explores the methodology. The fourth section presents the findings from the questionnaires and the interviews. The last section is the discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature Review
This section presents a review of the literature in the field of ‘volunteering’ and introduces the key concepts that are intended to address the aim of the research study: to explore the experiences and development of new volunteers during training and the first year of volunteering at the mental health charity.

The literature review section is divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section examines the motivations for volunteering, particularly the functional approach to volunteering, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the human givens approach. The second sub-section examines the impact of volunteering in relation to the psychological well-being of individuals. The third sub-section discusses the benefits of training and supporting volunteers.

2.1 Motivations for Volunteering
2.1.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations
Motivation can be defined as a driving force that moves individuals to perform an action. Motivation can influence an individual's behaviour (Carlson, Buskist and Martin, 2000). One of the theories in the area of motivation is self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory can be defined as a ‘broad theory of human personality and motivation concerned with how the individual interacts with and depends on the social environment’ (Legault, 2017, p.1). According to self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), there are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation can be
defined as a person gaining satisfaction and enjoyment when engaging in an activity or task (Ryan and Deci, 2017). In contrast, extrinsic motivation involves performing an activity to receive an extrinsic reward, such as money, good grades, praise, and fame (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2013).

There are various studies that explore the motivation of volunteering. O'Brien, Townsend, and Ebden (2010) investigated the motivations, benefits, and barriers of 88 individuals that engaged in environmental volunteering. The results suggested that participating in environmental volunteering was rewarding and generated a sense of satisfaction in making a positive contribution to the environment and the community, which indicated intrinsic motivation for volunteering. Individuals that participate in voluntary work do not receive an extrinsic reward of money; however, there may be other kinds of extrinsic rewards. These include individuals volunteering to gain work experience and develop existing skills and learning new skills, particularly for university students (Holdsworth, 2010). In addition, older adults had other extrinsic motivations for volunteering, which included spare time, role replacement and bereavement (Devaney et al., 2015).

A motivation theory devised by Ryan and Deci (2000) identified three psychological needs that are important for self-motivation and psychological well-being, which are relevant to my research study. These needs are relatedness, competence and autonomy. Relatedness refers to feelings of being cared and connected to other people and a sense of belonging to an organisation. Competence is when individuals experience mastery in knowledge and skills in completing tasks. Autonomy involves individuals making their own choice to perform certain actions and tasks. Armour and Barton (2019) investigated 4 women that volunteered at a food bank. The study used a framework related to the self-determination theory. The results indicated that the psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy were satisfied by participating in voluntary work at the food bank, which enhanced the volunteers’ social and psychological well-being. The participants experienced feelings of social connection with fellow volunteers and a sense of belonging to a community.

The next sub-section discusses the work of Clary and Snyder (1991) and Clary et al. (1998), which explores the motivations of volunteers. I decided to focus on these scholars in the literature review because their work is frequently used by researchers within the field of ‘volunteering’. In addition, previous studies of volunteering (e.g., Stukas et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2014) have used the Volunteer Functions Inventory devised by Clary et al. (1998). It
therefore seemed relevant and useful to apply this work of Clary and Snyder and colleagues to my research study.

2.1.2 The Functional Approach to Volunteers’ Motivations

Clary and Snyder (1991) explored the motivations for volunteering from a psychological perspective. Their work is based on existing psychological theories of functional analysis, which suggests that all individuals have the same basic psychological needs. The functional approach indicates that there is a link between behaviour and motive. This means that some individuals perceive volunteering (behaviour) as satisfying a need (motivation) (Rochester et al., 2010). Clary et al. (1998) applied the functional approach to the area of volunteering and devised the Volunteer Functions Inventory, which consists of 30 questions and assesses an individual’s motivations for volunteering. Clary et al. (1998) identified six categories of motivation that can be related to volunteering, which are: values, understanding, career, social, protective and enhancement. According to the functional approach to volunteerism (Snyder et al., 2000), an individual’s motivations that are fulfilled in the volunteering environment can lead to increased satisfaction and influence individuals to continue volunteering.

The next sub-section discusses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which explores human motivation. I decided to explore Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in this literature review because Maslow’s work is used by scholars in the field of motivation, therefore it seemed appropriate to explore Maslow’s work in my research study.

2.1.3 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Another theory that explores motivation is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which takes a humanistic approach. Abraham Maslow (1943) suggested that humans are motivated to achieve specific needs, which are indicated in a hierarchy of needs comprising five levels: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualisation. Maslow (1970) expanded the model to include cognitive needs and aesthetic needs. Maslow (1987) also suggested that most behaviour is multi-motivated. This means that the behaviour of an individual can be motivated by several needs simultaneously. The needs for belongingness and love and for esteem indicated in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs are similar to the psychological needs of relatedness and competence identified by Ryan and Deci (2000).

In contrast to the work of Clary et al. (1998), Maslow’s hierarchy of needs does not focus specifically on volunteers’ motivations. However, there are specific needs in the model that can be satisfied through volunteering. This includes belongingness and love, as indicated in the
study of Simha et al. (2011), which found that volunteering enabled individuals to make friends and to meet other people. In addition, volunteering can enable an individual to satisfy esteem needs due to a sense of competence and accomplishment during participation in voluntary activities. Low et al. (2007) found that a motive for volunteering was to gain knowledge and learn new skills, which may satisfy the cognitive needs indicated in the model. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is used as a framework for my research study to examine the new volunteers’ fulfilment of specific needs by volunteering at the mental health charity.

The next sub-section presents the human givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003), which further explores motivation. The human givens model is relevant to my research study.

2.1.4 Human Givens Approach
The human givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003) is another theory in the area of motivation. According to this approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003), people are born with physical and emotional needs. The physical needs are water, air, food, sleep and shelter. These physical needs in the human givens model are similar to the physiological needs suggested in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. However, the emotional needs are the main focus of the human givens approach. According to the theory, here are nine emotional needs, and these are: security, status, attention, privacy, autonomy and control, being involved in a wider community, intimacy and friendship, meaning and purpose, competence and achievement. According to the human givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003), individuals that had met their physical and emotional needs had higher physical and mental well-being. There are similarities in some of the emotional needs in the human givens model and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as both models focus on security and safety needs, intimate relationships and friendship and being connected in a wider community, esteem needs related to status, competence and achievement. However, Maslow’s model (1970) did not consider the privacy needs of an individual.

The human givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003) has not been used in research in the field of volunteering; this approach is usually implemented in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy to treat people with mental health and behavioural problems (Tsaroucha et al., 2012). It is interesting to find that the physical needs and some of the emotional needs of the model are similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which highlights that the human givens model is useful as a framework in my research study and expands on previous theories in volunteering research.
The next section focuses on the impact of volunteering on an individual’s psychological well-being, as individuals that have a higher well-being are more likely to continue volunteering. In contrast, individuals that have a low well-being could leave the mental health charity.

2.2 Volunteering and Mental Well-Being

2.2.1 Definition of Mental Well-Being

There are different types of well-being, which include psychological well-being, physical well-being and social well-being. My study explores the topic of psychological well-being because well-being might influence the retention of volunteers and be affected by volunteering. Psychological well-being can be defined as emotions that are experienced by individuals, such as happiness, sadness or anxiety and their self-regulation of these emotions. In addition, psychological well-being refers to how people ‘function both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole’ (New Economics Foundation, 2012, p.6).

2.2.2 The Five Steps to Improve Mental Well-Being

The Centre for Well-being at the New Economics Foundation (2008) developed five steps to improve mental well-being, based on psychological and economic literature. The first step is connecting with other people, which include friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. These people may provide support in a person's daily life. The second step is being active by engaging in a sport, walking, cycling or participating in an activity. The third step is learning new skills. The fourth step is giving to others, and the fifth step is being mindful, which is being more aware of the present moment. These steps were subsequently adopted more widely e.g., by NHS (2019). Volunteering improves mental well-being because it usually involves connecting with other people. Volunteering often enables people to learn new skills and volunteering often involves helping other people. This suggests that volunteering fits into the criteria for three of the steps to improve mental well-being (New Economics Foundation, 2008). My study explores these three steps of well-being in relation to volunteering at the mental health charity.

2.2.3 Previous studies on the Impact of Volunteering on Psychological Well-Being

Previous studies (e.g., Son and Wilson, 2012; Molsher and Townsend, 2016; O'Brien et al. 2010; Rogerson et al., 2017; Tabassum, Mohan and Smith, 2016; McGarvey et al., 2019) have suggested that volunteering can improve psychological well-being. O'Brien et al. (2010) investigated the physical, mental and social well-being benefits of 88 individuals that participated in environmental volunteering. The participants reported an improvement in mental well-being, as mental fatigue and stress were reduced. In addition, the volunteers were
physically active, and volunteering was found to be rewarding due to a sense of satisfaction in making a positive contribution to the environment and the community. Similarly, Rogerson et al. (2017) investigated the mental well-being of 139 new volunteers and existing volunteers that participated in nature conservation volunteering programmes over the course of 12 weeks. The results indicated that the mental well-being of both new volunteers and existing volunteers improved significantly during the 12 weeks of volunteering, and the greatest improvement in well-being was found in individuals that had low well-being at the beginning of the programme. Also, new volunteers reported significantly greater increase in well-being than existing volunteers.

There is limited research about the impact of volunteering on an individual’s psychological well-being within a mental health setting, as most scholars have focused on individuals that participated in environmental volunteering. It is important to explore the well-being of volunteers in mental health organisations, as there are more psychological threats compared to environmental volunteering that has more physical threats and less psychological risks. In addition, there have been few studies that have investigated the influence of training on a person’s psychological well-being. My research study expands on previous studies by examining the psychological well-being of adults that engaged in training and voluntary work at a mental health organisation.

The next section explores the training and support of volunteers, which could influence the retention of volunteers (Keith, 2000; Deslandes and Rogers, 2008; Devaney et al., 2015).

2.3 Training and Supporting Volunteers
The training of volunteers is important to an organisation; according to Devaney et al. (2015), training that left individuals feeling motivated during the training and perceiving they had received high quality social support could contribute to a reduction in attrition rates. Keith (2000) also found that the quality of a training programme was an important factor in influencing both the recruitment and retention of volunteers and could improve the quality of an individual’s performance while completing tasks. In addition, Deslandes and Rogers (2008) suggested that training volunteers benefited the organisation and the community; as the confidence of a volunteer increased, the quality of the service improved. It is therefore important that volunteers receive adequate training and support to improve learning and provide a better service to the community (Deslandes and Rogers, 2008).
Philips et al. (2014) and Claxton-Oldfield (2016) found that self-care strategies (e.g., taking a break, reducing volunteering hours) are important in preventing burnout among volunteers, particular hospice palliative care volunteers that have a higher psychological risk as they deal with individuals that are terminally ill. These studies recommended that self-care should be incorporated into the training courses that are provided to volunteers. Self-care is an area that I will explore in my study, especially as the volunteers at the charity deal with distressing calls.

The support provided to volunteers at various charities could be explored using the growth zone model devised by Lee and Johnston-Wilder (2018). This model was used previously to help anxious learners to understand their feelings when faced with the challenges in mathematics, and to seek appropriate support enabling learners to stay in the growth zone and to use strategies when in the anxiety zone. The growth zone model could be used in a different context in relation to the challenges experienced by the new volunteers at the mental health organisation. It is important that individuals are able to seek sufficient support from the existing volunteers to enable them to develop growth in character virtues, rather than a threat to their psychological well-being. The growth zone model has not been previously used in the field of volunteering and therefore my study investigates a new area of research regarding the support of new volunteers.

The next section discusses the methodology of the research study.

3. Methodology
The methodology section considers the epistemology, research design, sampling, and research methods in relation to the study of new volunteers.

3.1 Epistemology
I have taken a pragmatic research approach to the epistemology of the study, which is linked to the research questions. This is because a pragmatic approach usually does not prioritise between qualitative and quantitative methods; instead, the two different methods can be combined to explore different aspects of my study (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). However, there is an interpretive stance involved at times, as I am intending to gain an understanding of the multiple constructions of meaning and different perspectives on the experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity (Robson and McCartan, 2016). There is also at times a positivist stance as I am analysing the data for the psychological well-being objectively (Bryman, 2016). Previous studies of Molsher and Townsend (2016) and Tabassum,
Mohan and Smith (2016) have also taken a positivist approach by measuring objectively the well-being of the volunteers.

The next sub-section explores the research design of the study.

3.2 Research Design

The research design for the study consisted of a single case study of new volunteers at the mental health charity with two subunits: (1) Four branches of the charity not operating 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. (2) Three branches of the charity operating 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, which consisted of two phases (Creswell, 2014). The first phase of the study involved new volunteers completing a questionnaire on three occasions. The participants completed the first questionnaire at the beginning of the initial training. The second questionnaire was completed at the end of the training, and the third questionnaire was completed after volunteering for 4 months at the charity to measure changes in psychological well-being. The study therefore included a longitudinal element. Gorard (2001) argued that a strength of using a longitudinal design is that changes can be measured over time, which produces richer data.

The second phase of the main study involved collecting qualitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews with individuals that had volunteered for four months at different branches of the mental health charity. The second, qualitative phase was intended to answer the research questions on the motivations and expectations for volunteering, positive and negative experiences, challenges of volunteering, and training and support.

A diagram of the research design for the main study can be found in Figure 1.
In a case study, a variety of research methods can be used for data collection; this is discussed in the next sub-section in relation to my research study.

### 3.3 Research Methods

The research instruments used in the study were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, taking a mixed methods approach (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The questionnaire incorporated the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), a validated measurement for psychological well-being. The WEMWBS was selected and adapted for this study on volunteering because according to previous studies, this scale was found to be clear, easy to complete and unambiguous (NHS Health Scotland, 2016). In addition, the WEMWBS was used in the study of Rogerson et al. (2017) to explore the mental well-being of adults that participated in nature conservation volunteering programmes over the course of 12 weeks. Alternative mental well-being scales include Ryff’s scale of Psychological Wellbeing (Ryff, 1989, 1995). The questions in the Ryff scale are not relevant to volunteering and are focused on the psychological well-being of individuals during their daily life. The questionnaire used in my research study also included additional questions about age, ethnicity, religion, gender, employment and education.

### Figure 1: Research Design of the Study

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase 1 - Quantitative Phase</th>
<th>Complete a questionnaire on three occasions - longitudinal element.</th>
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<td>First questionnaire completed at the beginning of the initial training.</td>
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<td>Second questionnaire completed at the end of the initial training.</td>
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<td>Third questionnaire completed after 4 months of volunteering.</td>
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| Phase 2 - Qualitative Phase | Conduct semi-structured interviews. |
The research method of semi-structured interviews was used to collect data in the study. The semi-structured interviews were used to explore further the responses provided by the participants in the questionnaires. In addition, semi-structured interviews enabled in-depth and rich data to be collected from the volunteers (Hobson and Townsend, 2010). The strength of semi-structured interviews is that probes can be used by the interviewer to gain more detailed responses from the volunteers, and, if the responses provided are ambiguous, the interviewer can seek clarification from the volunteer, which is not possible in questionnaires (Hobson and Townsend, 2010). A limitation is that conducting interviews with the volunteers and producing transcripts of the interviews can be time consuming (Robson and McCartan, 2016). However, in this study the benefit of gaining in-depth and rich information to answer the research questions was more important than the limitations associated with time. The research study was granted ethical approval by the University of Warwick.

The sampling for a study depends on the research methods that are used. The next subsection explores the sampling for the study.

### 3.4 Sampling

There were 160 new volunteers, 104 females and 56 males, which ranged in ages from 18 to 73 years old, that voluntarily participated in the study. Rogerson et al. (2017) recruited a similar sample size that consisted of 139 participants to measure the well-being of individuals that engaged in environmental volunteering, which indicated that the sample size of 160 new volunteers was sufficient for the study.

Based on the questionnaire responses, some participants were invited to take part in the second phase: semi-structured interviews. The second phase of the study involved conducting 20 semi-structured interviews with willing new volunteers from different branches of the mental health charity. I decided to select the sample size of 20 interviewees because previous studies that explored volunteering (Hopkins et al., 2015; Chen, 2016) had recruited a similar number of interviewees, which indicated that the number of interviewees was sufficient to provide in-depth and rich data. I used purposive sampling to select the volunteers for the interviews. The volunteers invited had a wide range of characteristics, which included religious beliefs, student status, working part-time, working full-time, retired, different ages and different gender, which resulted in maximum variation sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This type of sampling was selected for the study as a more holistic perspective.
could be gained from the participants about their motivations and experiences of training and volunteering at the charity and enabled a comparison to be made between the interviewees.

The next section presents the findings of the study.

4. Findings

The findings section begins with the analysis process and findings of the interviews. Then the results from the questionnaires are discussed.

4.1 Interviews

4.1.1 The Analysis Process for Interviews
Braun and Clarke (2006, p.6) defined thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. I decided to use the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) for analysing the data collected for the interviews at each branch of the mental health charity, which was a generic process. This is because thematic analysis is flexible; meanings and patterns in the data can be explored. In addition, Maguire and Delahunt (2017) argued that Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis provide a clear and appropriate framework for identifying and analysing themes within the data. Thematic analysis is appropriate in my research study for making comparisons between the new volunteers regarding their experiences of the training and volunteering at the charity.

4.1.2 Findings of the Interviews
I decided to combine the analysis of the interviews for the seven branches of the mental health charity because I found there were recurring themes at each branch. There were twenty new volunteers that participated in an interview. The names of the interviewees have been changed because of confidentiality. I identified four main themes, which are related to the research questions. The main themes are:

- Motivations for volunteering
- Experiences of volunteering
- Challenges of volunteering
- Training and Support of Volunteers

The four main themes are explored in the following sub-sections.
4.1.3 Motivations for Volunteering

There were different factors that motivated individuals to volunteer at the mental health charity, which included spare time, worthwhile experience, family and friends, meeting and interacting with other people and personal development.

Spare Time

Kate believed that participating in voluntary work was important, especially as she had spare time:

I wanted to volunteer. That is something that I believe is an important thing to do if you have time to do it and can fit it into your life. That was my main motivation, and my children are older now. They are both at university, so I have a bit more time on my hands. (Kate, lines 56-58)

Similar to Kate, three new volunteers reported that a motivation for volunteering was that they had some spare time, as they were retired and had finished their voluntary role at another organisation:

Because in retirement I have more free time than I had previously. (Lewis, line 92)

I wanted something to replace the Magistrates, and therefore it would have to be something substantive rather than little things, and that would involve a reasonable commitment because obviously the Magistrates was a reasonable level of commitment. (Duncan, lines 100-103)

Worthwhile Experience

Six out of twenty interviewees suggested that volunteering at the mental health organisation was a worthwhile experience:

It is just the privilege of supporting people when they need it most. I quite like that idea. (James, lines 99-100)

I thought, give something back (Ben, lines 110-111)

I wanted to do something to help people. I wanted to do something that I felt would make a difference to somebody’s life. (Barbara, lines 67-69)

Family and Friends

Six out of twenty interviewees were influenced by family and friends to participate in voluntary work at the charity. Jessica indicated that the experience of her sister suffering from depression had influenced her to volunteer at the organisation. Similar to Jessica, Duncan suggested that his sister had motivated him to volunteer:
I also had a sister who did similar work, which she does in America. They have a similar set-up there, so she was also encouraging me to go for it. (Duncan, lines 116-117)

Kate reported that her sister was currently a volunteer at the charity and her husband was previously a volunteer, which contributed to Kate’s interest in volunteering at the organisation.

Meet and Interact with Other People
Both James and Patrick reported that a motive for volunteering at the mental health charity was to meet and interact with other people. James was interested in ‘meeting some new people in Bristol … that shared my values’ (James, lines 97-98) at the organisation. Patrick wanted to interact with service users and volunteers:

I was looking for a charitable organisation, which I could volunteer for that was local and that would involve mixing with other people either face-to-face, or on the phone, or like a people-based charity that would make use of my listening and speaking skills. (Patrick, lines 72-75)

Personal Development
Both Edward and Harry reported that a motive for volunteering at the charity was the opportunity for personal development. Edward was interested in volunteering because he wanted to learn new skills, which would be useful for his role as a teacher, enabling him to provide better support for his pupils. At the initial training, he learnt ‘to empathise and appreciate what people are experiencing and as such I get to be a better teacher as a result, and I get to be a better supporting person as a result as well’ (Edward, lines 143-145).

Most of the new volunteers indicated that their motivations and expectations had been met by volunteering at the mental health charity. However, five volunteers suggested that the time commitment, dealing with sex calls, the unprofessional behaviour of other volunteers and the services provided by the organisation were different from their expectations.

The next section explores the second theme, the experiences of volunteering.

4.1.4 Experiences of Volunteering
The new volunteers had both positive and negative experiences while volunteering at the mental health charity. I deal with each set of experiences in turn.

Positive Experiences of Volunteering
Seventeen out of twenty interviewees found it rewarding to help other people through the phone calls, e-mails and text messages:
It is always good when you end a call and the person who has called in is more optimistic, hopeful and happier than when they called in, because some people, when they call in, are extremely distressed. It is nice when they end the call and they are less distressed, and also, we answer e-mails and texts, so it is nice to receive some e-mails and texts that say, ‘Thank you, you really helped’. (Barbara, lines 104-108)

I have gained satisfaction. I think, all of these things are part of approaching one’s feeling of worth and one’s self-esteem. (Matthew, lines 209-210)

It can be rewarding to know that you have been there for someone who needs to be listened to at a point in their life. (Adrian, lines 131-132)

I really enjoy when I do shifts and I get to the end and I feel that I had some really good calls and I really made a difference, and there are times when I can go home, and I wake up the following day buzzing just remembering a call and how well I think it went. (James, lines 156-159)

I enjoy, sort of, I get a good feeling from helping people. (Thomas, line 78)

Ten out of twenty interviewees suggested that another positive experience of volunteering was developing friendships and interacting with other volunteers:

A new circle of mates that I also see socially—and that doesn’t often happen in later life. They are a decent bunch, and they are prepared to buy me a pint at the pub. (Duncan, lines 221-223)

I have met some very good friends through volunteering. (Adrian, line 129)

I really enjoy the other volunteers, the friendship, the support, the loyalty, the fun times and the tough times, so just the relationships I have built with others. (James, lines 155-156)

I enjoy the social side of talking to the other volunteers and trying to support each other. (Matthew, lines 152-153)

Holly enjoyed the working environment at the charity: ‘I feel it is not pressurised at all. I never felt that I needed to take a call before I was ready, and I like how calm it is.’ (Holly, lines 151-152)

The next sub-section explores the negative experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity.

*Negative Experiences of Volunteering*

Six out of twenty interviewees suggested that the least attractive aspect of volunteering at the charity was dealing with abusive calls, which indicated a misuse of the service:
Sometimes it is very difficult when people are not very nice on the phone and I suppose that is less enjoyable. (Matthew, lines 156-157)

Sometimes they are difficult personally because the caller might make some hurtful remarks to me. (James, lines 192-193)

Some of the people have real anger problems, and you do get a lot of personal abuse potentially, but I could say in my working life that is the sort of thing that I have become used to. It is not personal, they don’t know me, and I don’t know them, so that can be a challenge sometimes. Everyone has their armour, so they protect themselves from serious things. (Robert, lines 196-200)

Five out of twenty interviewees reported that a negative experience of volunteering was dealing with other kinds of inappropriate calls:

And probably one doesn’t enjoy getting sex calls too much, but it happens. (Duncan, lines 173-174).

I think also sometimes we get callers that are misusing the service. They are not calling because they want emotional support. They are calling for other reasons that are not enjoyable and that is negative. (Rachel, lines 117-120)

Six interviewees suggested that the least enjoyable aspect of volunteering was the night shifts because the volunteers found these shifts tiring:

I suppose the only one that I don’t particularly relish is getting up at 1:00 am in the morning to do the 2:00 am to 6:00 am shift. (Ben, lines 201-202)

I don’t enjoy working at night because I never have done. I am not a nocturnal person. I am much more of a morning person who likes to get up in the morning and likes the daytime and the daylight, and I never stayed out very late at night even when I was younger. I suppose I did sometimes, but it wasn’t something that particularly appealed to me, so I do find it difficult having to do those night shifts. (Jessica, lines 143-147)

The challenge sometimes is that I work full-time for quite long hours and sometimes it is tiring, and I have to do night shifts and I can feel quite tired. (Thomas, lines 88-89)

The interviewees suggested similar positive experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity, which were helping people through the phone calls and e-mails, developing friendships and they enjoyed the working environment. However, the negative experiences of volunteering were dealing with abusive calls and inappropriate calls. In addition, the new volunteers reported that the night shifts were the least enjoyable.

The next section explores the third theme, the challenges of volunteering.
4.1.5 Challenges of Volunteering

The new volunteers experienced several challenges of volunteering at the mental health charity, which included the phone calls, volunteer colleagues and other commitments.

Fifteen out of twenty volunteers reported that they had received difficult calls:

I have had three or four really tough calls, very close together, um, that have been quite affecting and I find that quite hard. Ideally you want them spaced out a bit, but it is not like that. I understand that. (Holly, lines 175-177)

There have been occasions where I have finished a shift and there have been things happen on that shift, and even though I know I had to switch off, and detach and leave them behind, sometimes that is a little bit more challenging occasionally, but I am working on getting better at that and I know that you need to do that. (Patrick, lines 133-136)

Well, I can’t be specific, but some people ring and tell you things that have happened. They may or may not be telling the truth, we don’t know. The things that some people can potentially have been through are horrendous and it can be difficult to swallow sometimes. (Barbara, lines 120-123)

Edward, Adrian and James suggested that a challenge was managing their time with another commitment of having a full-time job:

The night shifts, certain shifts can be tricky, just fitting it into the rest of your life, you know, it is a big commitment timewise. (Adrian, lines 144-145)

My main challenge would be fitting in the time. Once you have booked a shift, when you get to within four weeks of that shift, you cannot easily back out of it, so once or twice when I have booked a shift, my work diary has changed, making it really difficult. I have had to limit the amount of sleep I get or drive halfway across the country to get to a shift, so, yeah, it is just that commitment. (James, lines 176-180)

I am sometimes concerned that I don’t have enough time. (Edward, lines 232-233)

In contrast to the other volunteers, Henry indicated that a challenge was that he missed a few volunteering shifts to focus on completing his academic work as he was in the final year of his undergraduate degree. Kate suggested that a challenge of volunteering at the charity was managing other commitments in her personal life:

The only thing that I can think of is sometimes I have, um, pressures in my diary that if I volunteered for a session and then something comes up in my personal life, it can feel difficult to cancel your shift. (Kate, lines 115-117)
Similar to Kate, Jenny had other commitments as she had young children, and she felt uncomfortable leaving her children at home while she volunteered at the mental health organisation:

One of the challenges for me personally would be, for me it is a bit of a distance for me to drive to Leicester, and, um, sometimes when I have to go to volunteer and my husband is working, I have to leave the kids on their own for maybe an hour or two, so that for me is, um, is not easy to do, um, even though my oldest is sixteen, um, I just don’t feel comfortable leaving them on their own. (Jenny, lines 112-116)

In addition, Jenny reported that during a shift there was another volunteer that distracted her from listening to a caller:

When I was working with another volunteer, … and he’s got a very loud voice, so whenever he was on a call, he would speak really loud, and that was very distracting for me to listen to the caller that I have got on my line, and, um, I ended up not taking a call when he is on his call, and I have done an e-mail or an SMS instead. (Jenny, lines 119-123)

The interviewees suggested similar challenges of volunteering at the Samaritans, which included dealing with difficult calls, and managing voluntary work alongside academic work, a full-time job and parental commitments.

The next section focuses on the fourth theme, the training and support of volunteers.

4.1.6 Training and Support of Volunteers
The new volunteers were mostly satisfied with the support received from mentors, volunteer colleagues and the volunteer support team. However, Adrian occasionally found it difficult working with his mentor:

My mentor was supportive, but sometimes depending on how people learn, it can at times be a slight hinderance to allowing you to find your own voice and use your own, um, intuition and initiative, you know, sometimes you can become reliant or they might be slightly overbearing in terms of how they would, um, listen and their responses, and sometimes that can be different to how you naturally answer … but that is very much dependent on what mentor you get. (Adrian, lines 157-164)

Jessica experienced a difficult call during a night shift, she wanted support from a volunteer colleague, but he was busy taking phone calls and mentoring another volunteer:

But there was one call that was perhaps the most difficult. It was on the 10:00 pm-2:00 am shift, and the experienced volunteer I was working with that evening was meant to ring somebody, which meant that, because they were on calls and he was mentoring at
the time and I was taking this call, there was just nobody I could ask. I might have asked, had somebody been available if he could come and listen into this call and there just wasn’t anybody for me to turn to really, and I found that difficult, yes, because I would have liked to have a bit of support on that call. (Jessica, lines 159-166)

Robert felt that he did not need the help of the volunteer support team. There were several volunteers that had a less positive experience regarding the shift leaders, indicating that it was emotionally draining debriefing the shift leader on the calls and sometimes a shift leader was patronising, not supportive or unavailable. The new volunteers at two branches of the mental health charity reported that their training groups had a WhatsApp group, which enabled them to provide support for each other. At one branch of the charity, new volunteers were allocated a buddy, an experienced existing volunteer that provided support to the new volunteer if they had experienced any problems.

The next sub-section explores the initial training that occurred before individuals started to take phone calls at the charity.

**Initial Training**
The new volunteers attended an initial training (SIT 1 and SIT 2) at the mental health charity, which the volunteers found to be useful because it covered the different types of calls, including difficult calls, e-mails and text messages that volunteers could encounter:

I think that both SIT 1 and currently I am coming to the end of my SIT 2, so I think both of those, um, were brilliant in having modules on challenging calls, and also, ongoing training as well. There are unusual situations, and they are all really good for getting a good grasp of how to deal with these calls. (Daniel, lines 176-179)

The training has been brilliant. (Adrian, Bristol, line 172)

I know everybody hates the skills training, but I think it is so important to practise talking about difficult subjects, and I think having those, um, kind of role play calls I think is absolutely crucial in particular for me, having them around talking about death, talking about suicide, knowing you can ask those sorts of questions were crucial for me. I really valued that, um, so I think the role plays were great and I think that prepared me really well. (Holly, lines 214-219)

However, Harry, Holly, Jenny and Jessica found that the role play in the training was different, more challenging and unrealistic compared with the real calls on shift:

Yeah, when we went for the training, the mock telephone calls were always a lot more difficult than the actual calls because they are trying to compress all of the abuse and all
of the pain and all of the pressure in quite a small confined 5-10-minute interview or phone call, whereas in reality, you know, it takes a long time. (Harry, lines 289-293)

I thought it’s very hard. It is like anything when you are training, you know, you do role plays and they are never entirely realistic. They can’t be and it is no criticism of the people that were good enough to volunteer to do them, but I didn’t think it was a natural situation, and I thought that was particularly true of when we were doing the safeguarding because they were supposed to be children maybe, you know, teenagers and they were grown up people, and they are not going to be able to be convincing when a 40-year-old man can’t be a convincing 10-year-old, no matter how hard you try, so I thought it had some value, but I didn’t think it was realistic enough, but I think they are changing that I gather. (Jessica, lines 280-287)

Henry felt that there needed to be more training dedicated to dealing with difficult calls:

It would be good to have sort of, you know, just waves of audio recordings of difficult calls, um, because that is something you would have to experience on the phones. I think, you know, maybe if you had an extra session that was almost dedicated to just abusive, sexual, or just emotionally draining calls. (Henry, lines 159-163)

The next section presents the results from the questionnaires.

4.2 Questionnaires
The data analysis of the questionnaires involved comparing four branches of the mental health charity that are not operating 24 hours a day and 7 days a week (NS), with three other branches that operate 24 hours a day and 7 days a week (OS). The advantage of this comparison enables similarities and differences regarding the initial training and the experiences of volunteering to be explored between the different branches of the charity, which could have an impact on the retention of new volunteers.

The responses from the three questionnaires were coded and analysed with the use of the statistical software package SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used for organising and summarising the data (Thomas, 2013). The mean is typically used to describe a central tendency when the data are interval or ratio, and the number of participants is large. The median is more flexible and can be used when the data are interval, ratio or ordinal; the median is more stable than the mean with respect to extreme values (Bryman, 2016). The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) scores are from 14 to 70 indicating interval data that approximate to a normal distribution, therefore it was appropriate to use the mean to measure the changes in the psychological well-being of the new volunteers (Warwick Medical School, 2020).
4.2.1 Psychological Well-Being

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was used in the current study to measure the impact of the training and support from the trainers and of volunteering on the psychological well-being of the volunteers. A higher WEMWBS score indicated improved well-being.

The WEMWBS was completed on three occasions. On the first occasion, the WEMWBS was used to measure the psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the beginning of the initial training at the NS branches and OS branches. On the second occasion, the WEMWBS was used to measure the psychological well-being of the volunteers at the end of the initial training. On the third occasion, the new volunteers completed the WEMWBS after they had volunteered for four months at the mental health charity. The results of the WEMWBS scores for the new volunteers at the NS branches are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: WEMWBS Scores for NS Branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEMWBS</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS1-before training</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53.12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS2-after training</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52.67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS3- 4 months volunteering</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53.52</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reveals that the psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the NS branches had decreased at the end of the initial training, which might be unduly influenced by one new volunteer at one branch of the mental health charity who found it difficult to deal with the topics of suicide, inappropriate calls and safeguarding covered in the initial training, and that volunteer reported that the role plays were ‘anxiety inducing’ (New Volunteer 9). Also, at another branch, two new volunteers reported that the initial training was challenging and quite long, indicating that they were not satisfied with the training, and that might be connected to the decrease in psychological well-being. In contrast, the psychological well-being of the volunteers had increased after they had participated in voluntary work for 4 months at the charity. A one-way within-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the WEMWBS scores to investigate the changes in psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the mental health charity (Field, 2018). The results show there was no statistically significant difference in
psychological well-being between the beginning of the initial training, end of the initial training, and after volunteering for 4 months at the charity: F (2, 64) = 0.309, p = 0.736.

The WEMWBS scores of the new volunteers at the OS branches can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: WEMWBS Scores for OS Branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEMWBS</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS1-before training</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53.29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS2-after training</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54.85</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS3- 4 months volunteering</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>55.88</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reveals that the psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the OS branches had increased at the end of the initial training, which is different from the overall results at the NS branches. The increase in psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the end of the initial training might be influenced by the excellent training and supportive, and friendly trainers. Also, the psychological well-being of the new volunteers increased after they had volunteered for 4 months at the mental health charity, which might be influenced by the emotional support received from a wide range of people within the charity including, ‘other listeners, shift leaders, people leading training, and from the charity’s internal support group’ (New Volunteer 27). A one-way within-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the WEMWBS scores to investigate changes in the psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the charity (Field, 2018). The results show there was a statistically significant difference in psychological well-being between the beginning of the initial training, end of the initial training, and after volunteering for 4 months at the charity: F (2, 66) = 4.337, p = 0.017.

The next section is the discussion and conclusion.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This section examines the results obtained from the different branches of the mental health charity in the light of the literature and is organised into four sections, which are intended to answer the research questions of the study. The sections present the results from the
questionnaires and interviews in relation to the literature about motivations, experiences and challenges of volunteering and psychological well-being.

5.1 Motivations for Volunteering

This section reviews the findings of the interviews in relation to the first research question: Are the motivations and expectations of volunteers fulfilled by the experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity? According to previous studies in relation to the functional approach to volunteerism (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Papadakis, Griffin and Frater, 2004; Stukas, Snyder and Clary, 2016; Stukas et al., 2009), an understanding of the motivations for an individual to volunteer, and the fulfilment of these motivations in the volunteering environment, can lead to increased satisfaction and might influence the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The new volunteers reported similar motivations for volunteering at the different branches of the mental health charity. The interviewees suggested that volunteering at the charity was a worthwhile experience, which involved supporting individuals that were distressed and contributing to the community, indicating intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Previous studies of O'Brien et al. (2010) and Bramston, Pretty and Zammit (2011) also suggested that participating in environmental volunteering was worthwhile and rewarding, as there was a sense of satisfaction in making a positive contribution to the environment and the community, which indicated intrinsic motivation for volunteering.

The interviewees at the mental health charity were interested in volunteering as they had retired, and therefore they had some spare time. There were similar findings suggested in previous studies (e.g., Gottlieb and Gillespie, 2008; Kovacs and Black, 2000), which found that older adults participated in voluntary work because they had more spare time as they had retired, and the older adults had wanted to remain active and busy during their retirement.

Three out of eighteen interviewees at three branches of the mental health charity indicated that the experience of family and friends that had suffered from a mental illness and committed suicide influenced them to participate in voluntary work. Cassidy et al. (2019) also reported that the participants were interested in volunteering with a befriending scheme because they had personal experience of a family member or close friend that had a mental illness, and they had wanted to contribute to the society as their family member or friend had received professional support from the community.
Two out of three new volunteers at one branch of the charity reported that a motive for volunteering was to meet and interact with other people. Both the studies of MacNeela and Gannon (2014) and Yamashita et al. (2019) suggested that adults were interested in volunteering because they wanted to meet other people, develop friendships and a social network with other volunteers, which was similar to the results of my research study. Both Clary et al. (1998) and Abraham Maslow (1943) identified that one of the motivational functions for volunteering was to develop social relationships with other people, as individuals could build friendships with other volunteers.

Two interviewees at one branch of the charity suggested that a motive for volunteering was the opportunity for personal development, which indicated extrinsic motivation for volunteering (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2013). One of the interviewees was interested in learning new skills, which could be useful in his career as a teacher as he would be able to provide better support for his pupils. Holdsworth (2010) and Barton et al. (2019) also suggested that one of the motives for the university students to volunteer was to learn new skills and gain work experience related to a future career. Clary et al. (1998) identified a motivational function for volunteering was the opportunity to have new learning experiences and develop skills for a career, which was similar to the results of my study.

All the new volunteers at the different branches of the mental health charity indicated that their motivations had been fulfilled by the experiences of volunteering, as they had helped people that were distressed and received positive feedback from the callers. The findings suggested Clary et al.’s (1998) functional approach to volunteerism, as the volunteers’ motivational need for altruism was satisfied from the experiences of helping the callers. Clary et al. (1998) had not investigated individual’s expectations for volunteering, which according to the findings was an important area to explore. The new volunteers indicated that most of their expectations had been fulfilled by the experiences of volunteering at the charity.

The next section discusses the experiences of volunteering.

5.2 Experiences of Volunteering
This section reviews the findings of the interviews in relation to the second research question: What are the positive experiences and negative experiences of volunteering at the mental health charity? There were several positive experiences of volunteering, which were similar between the different branches of the charity. The new volunteers found it rewarding to help other people through the phone calls, e-mails and text messages. In addition, the interviewees
developed friendships with other volunteers. Previous studies (e.g., McGarvey et al., 2019; Kelly-Gillespie and Wilby, 2012) found that volunteering was rewarding as the volunteers felt they had helped other people by making a difference to their lives, which was similar to the results of my research study. Low et al. (2007) identified that the most important benefit of volunteering was a sense of satisfaction when achieving positive results. In addition, many volunteers indicated that another important benefit of participating in voluntary work was meeting people and making new friends.

Research studies suggested that a benefit of volunteering for the different age groups of students, adults and older adults was developing friendships and social networks. Simha, Topuzova and Albert (2011) reported that the undergraduate students made friends through volunteering. Similarly, Connolly and O’Shea (2015) reported that 77% of the older adults experienced feelings of socialisation as volunteering had enabled an increase in acquaintances and friends. Also, Cassidy et al. (2019) found that the adults that participated voluntarily in befriending schemes increased their social networks by meeting other volunteers or the friends and family of their befriendedee.

The negative experiences were related to the tasks performed as a volunteer at the mental health charity, which involved dealing with abusive calls and inappropriate calls, indicating a misuse of the service. In addition, six out of nine new volunteers at three branches of the charity suggested that the least enjoyable aspect of volunteering was the night shifts. Williamson et al. (2018) found that a few of the university students experienced verbal abuse from service users during volunteering within health settings, which was similar to the results of my study.

The next section focuses on the challenges of volunteering.

5.3 Challenges of Volunteering
This section explores the findings of the interviews in relation to the third research question: What are the challenges of volunteering at the mental health charity? There were similar challenges of volunteering at the different branches of the mental health charity, as fifteen out of twenty new volunteers reported that they had experienced difficult calls. Kan (2017) also found that a challenge of volunteering at the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong was dealing with service users that were feeling suicidal, which is similar to the UK Samaritans.

Five out of thirteen interviewees at four branches of the charity reported that there were problems with the support system, which might be a threat to a new volunteer’s psychological
well-being, especially if the individual had a difficult call. The interviewees suggested that support from volunteer colleagues was sometimes not possible, particularly if they were busy taking phone calls. In addition, the volunteers reported that a shift leader was occasionally unavailable, patronising and not supportive. It is important that the volunteers at the mental health charity receive sufficient support or engage in self-care practices (Philips et al., 2014; Claxton-Oldfield, 2016) while they are dealing with difficult calls, as according to the growth zone model (Lee and Johnston-Wilder, 2018), a challenge can become an opportunity for growth with sufficient support rather than a threat to a person’s well-being. The growth zone model (Lee and Johnston-Wilder, 2018) has previously been used to explore anxious learners that experienced challenges in mathematics. However, I found that the model could be applied to my study to investigate the challenges and support given to the new volunteers at the charity, which demonstrated an original contribution to volunteering research.

Seven out of fifteen volunteers at five branches of the mental health charity suggested that a challenge was managing their time with other commitments, such as a full-time job, academic work and young children. Previous research studies found similar findings; Barton et al. (2019) reported that university students experienced a challenge of balancing their time of volunteering with academic work, family commitments and paid work.

The next section explores the psychological well-being of the new volunteers.

5.4 Psychological Well-Being
This section reviews the results in relation to the fourth research question: What is the impact of training and support from colleagues on the psychological well-being of a volunteer? The psychological well-being of individuals that volunteer at the mental health charity might influence the retention of volunteers, as individuals that have a lower psychological well-being might be more likely to leave the charity. There were several factors that could influence the psychological well-being of the new volunteers, which included the experiences of the initial training and support from existing volunteers and shift leaders.

The results of the questionnaires revealed there was a non-significant slight decrease in the average psychological well-being for the new volunteers at the NS branches at the end of the initial training. The decrease in the average psychological well-being might be unduly influenced by three new volunteers. They reported that the initial training was quite long, and the role plays and the topics covered in the sessions were challenging. The results indicated that the three new volunteers could have benefited with more support from the trainers, as
according to the growth zone model devised by Lee and Johnston-Wilder (2018), this would enable the volunteers to stay longer in the growth zone with new experiences and seek to prevent them from entering the anxiety zone. The findings were different from the study conducted by Rogerson et al. (2017), which found that the mental well-being of the new volunteers significantly increased during 12 weeks of participation in the nature conservation volunteering programmes. However, Rogerson et al. (2017) had not examined the mental well-being of the new volunteers while they had attended training and there were also fewer threats to psychological well-being.

The results of the questionnaires showed there was a non-significant increase in the psychological well-being of the volunteers at the NS branches after they had participated in voluntary work for four months at the mental health charity. This increase in psychological well-being of the participants during volunteering might be natural variation or influenced by the support provided by the More Knowledgeable Other (Vygotsky, 1978), that is the mentors, for dealing with the callers. In addition, the new volunteers learnt new skills from their mentors, who are experienced volunteers, highly skilled in dealing with callers that might be distressed.

The results also revealed there was a significant increase in the psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the OS branches at the end of the initial training, which was different from the results at the NS branches. The increase in psychological well-being of the new volunteers at the OS branches might be influenced by the excellent training, which was thorough, well-organised and covered all the different topics. The findings regarding the initial training at the OS branches are important and could contribute to the retention of volunteers, as, according to Devaney et al. (2015), training programmes that individuals perceived to be motivating and which offered high quality social support could contribute to a reduction in attrition rates.

There was also a significant increase in the psychological well-being of the volunteers at the OS branches after they had volunteered for four months, which might be influenced by the meeting of their three basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000), while volunteering, namely relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The new volunteers experienced relatedness as they developed social networks and had similar values to the other volunteers at the organisation. Tabassum, Mohan and Smith (2016) also found that individuals experienced an increase in their social network while participating in voluntary work.
Individuals at the mental health charity received support and advice by the mentors and volunteer colleagues, which might have contributed to an increase in psychological well-being, as according to the human givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2003), individuals with strong support networks of friends and family tend to have higher physical and mental well-being. The initial training groups at two branches of the charity had a WhatsApp group, which was found to be effective in providing support. The volunteers had learnt and developed competence in the skills needed to deal with the service users after volunteering for four months at the charity. The psychological need of autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000) was satisfied as individual’s made their own decision to volunteer at the charity. Also, they enjoyed speaking to the callers, particularly when they felt they had made a difference to a person’s life.

This article has focused on the experiences of new volunteers at a mental health charity. A future study could explore the experiences of existing volunteers at the mental health charity, which would provide a different perspective on the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The new volunteers have appreciated and realised the importance of their volunteering role at the mental health charity in helping service users that are distressed. In addition, they overall had a positive experience of volunteering at the organisation. However, there could be amendments made to the training and support provided at the charity, which would improve the experiences and psychological well-being of the new volunteers and could impact on the retention of the volunteers.
References


