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# The Transformative Power of Volunteering: A Qualitative Analysis of Three Retired Individuals' Experiences

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## Abstract

It is uncommon for pensioners to share their resources with other members after retiring from their jobs, as most would focus on enjoying what they consider as their hard-earned rewards for their labour. As this is a rare moment, whenever it occurs, it warrants due attention. This study explores the personal and community-level impacts of volunteering in later life by examining the experiences of three retirees: Mrs A, Ms B, and Mr C. Their involvement in volunteer activities varies widely, from community-based projects to combating crime, yet all share a profound sense of personal growth, community contribution, and emotional fulfillment. Through interviews, this research uncovers the transformative power of volunteering in the later years, with a particular focus on its psychological, social, and physical effects. This paper sheds light on how volunteering can revitalize older adults to advance social cohesion and contribute to personal development by analyzing the narratives of these volunteers.

## Keywords

Community engagement, Personal transformation, Social change, Well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent and youth periods are experimental periods where mistakes are made and sometimes not apologetically and with no remorse (Gavron, 2024). Some youths and adolescents may have not erred recklessly, and as such, have no regrets. However, the former and the latter gain experiences when they reach working age, they may reflect on their past. Brown (2024) explains that some may start regretting their past deeds, while others become proud of their past. There will be some who will care less regarding the welfare of society while others from the regretting group may want to continue with their good work when they get a chance while many who erred may wish to make up for their evil deeds of the past. For all of them, days of pension are the only guaranteed days in which people can use to have time for 'making up' (Tcherneva, 2020). There will be many who only get the opportunity when they reach a pension. During the pension, many pensioners may be tired and willing to rest. However, others may find working with communities to be 'therapeutic' or refreshing (Hutton, 2024).

Volunteering in the context of ageing is viewed as an effective implement for enhancing social engagement, advancing personal fulfillment, and upgrading the quality of life (Kabadayi et al., 2020; von Humboldt et al., 2024). Courtin and Knapp (2017) explain that older adults, mainly retirees, often experience challenges such as a decreased sense of purpose, diminished social roles, and isolation. Kelly (2024) counsels that volunteering provides a delightful opportunity to survive these challenges. It can provide retirees with a renewed sense of meaning and connection to their communities (Jalongo, 2022). This study investigates the experiences of three retired individuals involved in various forms of volunteering. It analyses the way their contributions have shaped their identities, relationships, and personal well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The convergence of community engagement literature and volunteering

Community engagement (CE) and volunteering represent interconnected concepts that together form the foundation of active civic participation. There are significant overlaps in their principles, motivations, and outcomes. The discussion below examines the way these fields converge to understand effective approaches to fostering meaningful participation and strengthening community bonds.

### Theoretical foundations of CE

CE is a multifaceted blend of science and art realizable by drawing insights from diverse academic disciplines such as sociology, political science, cultural anthropology, organizational development, psychology, social work, and other disciplines (Trott et al., 2020). It is therefore an interdisciplinary foundation offering a vigorous theoretical basis for understanding community dynamics and collective action as it enables practitioners to draw from different perspectives when developing strategies for engagement. According to Tang et al. (2025), various fundamental principles that guide effective CE include empowerment, fairness, justice, participation, and self-determination. These values highlight equity, inclusive decision-making, and community members being involved in processes affecting them. CE that prioritizes these principles can realistically represent community interests and adopt sustainable initiatives that address genuine community needs.

### Conceptual frameworks in CE

CE frameworks offer organized approaches for practically executing these principles. These frameworks guide the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community initiatives for meaningful participation. O'Brien and Cooney (2025) explain that engagement is not a one-size-fits-all concept but a responsive to "the needs of that community as defined by the community itself" and therefore is adjustable to specific contexts. They regard CE as a community-centered approach that values the distinctive cultural norms and priorities of distinctive communities. CE therefore weighs perspectives from both the theoretical foundations and the practical realities of working with diverse communities. According to Bruce McLean (2025), this method enables CE efforts to be evidence-based while being culturally responsive.

### Volunteering as a practical expression of CE

**Meeting community needs through volunteer action:** Volunteering is a concrete way in which CE principles are executed. Volunteers are crucial in satisfying unfulfilled community needs, bridging service gaps, and supporting vulnerable groups, community organizations and nonprofits (He et al., 2025). This function aligns with the CE principles of fairness and justice, as volunteering strives to address inequities and ensure that community members have access to necessary resources and support. Volunteers contribute to essential services such as giving food to the homeless, tutoring disadvantaged children, and supporting the elderly to improve quality of life for vulnerable individuals and strengthening the community's overall well-being.

**Strengthening social connections and community bonds:** One main convergence between CE literature and volunteering research is encouraging social connections. Panahi and Moayerian (2025) concur that volunteering nurtures social connections and strengthens community connections by uniting people for mutual purposes. These social connections enhance the social fabric of communities and contribute to increased civic engagement. Developing these connections initiates mobilizable and sustainable networks and structures for future community initiatives and ongoing engagement. Strong social bonds improve the sense of communal responsibility and inspire individuals to support community well-being while promoting their immediate volunteer activities (Zhang, 2025).

### Facilitating broader CE

There is a multiplier effect of volunteering on CE. Voukkali et al. (2024) concur by explaining that volunteers are catalysts for CE by modeling civic participation and inspiring others. The volunteers' visible actions and shared experiences inspire others to get involved and create a ripple effect that expands CE. Thus, volunteering represents a form of CE and promotes broader participation throughout the community. According to Subbarao et al. (2021), this catalytic function converts individual volunteer acts into community-wide programs for positive change. Volunteers sharing their experiences and demonstrating the impact of their contributions raise awareness and motivate others to contribute their time and resources. The enhanced CE enthuses a more active and participatory community, where individuals work collectively to address challenges and create positive change.

### Types of volunteering in the context of CE

The two broad types of volunteering are formal, which are structured community contributions, and informal, entailing spontaneous community support. These are discussed below;

**Formal volunteering:** Formal volunteering (FV) entails voluntary contributions within an organization that entails structured programs and initiatives to address specific community needs (Potluka & von Schnurbein, 2025). Organizations that facilitate FV often train, coordinate, and supervise volunteer efforts for effective direction toward community goals. FV formations can be particularly valuable for engaging diverse populations in sustained community

participation. The structured nature of formal volunteering provides clear pathways for participation and skill development.

**Informal volunteering:** Informal volunteering (IV) takes place outside of an organization to support non-household individuals (Zeynep Sadıkoğlu et al., 2025). IV activities include looking after an elderly neighbor, removing trash from a leisure playground, and so on. It is less structured than FV. However, it is an important form of CE that contributes to social cohesion and meets community needs. IV is usually more accessible to individuals who struggle to participate in FV opportunities. Khatri and Khadka (2025) suggests that many nonvolunteering participants achieve minor benefits by engaging in IV outside of organizational auspices, which shows that community members can contribute and help others even without formal structures. Moreover, IV opens doors for deeper CE.

### **Volunteering and CE in diverse populations**

This section consists of two sections: volunteering as a path to social integration and overcoming barriers through CE. They are discussed below;

**Volunteering as a path to social integration:** Volunteering affects specific populations, mainly immigrants. Sveen et al. (2023) concur that volunteering can prepare immigrants toward job-market entry and tool of self-improvement. Zhang and Meijering (2025) add that volunteering is a way immigrants can repay the social system that assisted their entrance into the country. Volunteering is therefore a meaningful pathway for social integration for immigrants. Wang (2021) reveals that volunteering immigrants are more likely to flourish in their host communities due to sustained cooperation, social engagement, and continuous positive interactions, and those volunteering formally may connect more to their communities and experience a stronger sense of belonging.

**Overcoming barriers through CE:** Russo et al. (2023) explain that immigrants often struggle to understand culture and language, and experience bias and discriminatory barriers within their host society, but by volunteering, they can acquire resources necessary for integration. These may include skills to navigate local bureaucracy and develop trust-based networks with nonimmigrants. Such volunteering directly connects to the CE principle of empowerment by helping immigrants to develop the capacity to participate fully in their communities. Paat (2021) warns that barriers to integration can limit opportunities to advance professional networks and other vital factors that promote social integration for immigrants seeking to engage in the host society. However, he counsels that immigrants can overcome these barriers through practical experience and relationship building by participating in volunteering activities.

### **Theoretical nature of volunteering**

Mateiu-Vescan et al. (2021) describe volunteering as a selfless activity which individuals use to offer their time, skills, or resources that benefit others and contribute to a beneficial cause. In general, the theoretical nature of volunteering entails understanding the various motivations, dynamics, and societal impacts that frame this kind of activity. In exploring volunteering from a theoretical perspective, Mortimer (2018) has examined psychological, sociological, economic, and cultural dimensions. According to Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017), these theoretical bases help to understand *why* people volunteer, and the deeper structures that influence volunteering behaviour.

### **Psychological theories of volunteering**

According to Ezzine-de-Blas et al. (2019), psychological theories tend to pay attention to the internal stimulations and personal motivations behind volunteering. Lichy and McLeay (2018) state the major psychological theories as motivational theories, functionalist approach, and self-determination theory. These theories often emphasize the way individual needs and desires interact with volunteer work.

**Motivational Theory:** Scholars such as Dayé (2018) and Butt et al. (2017), have recommended models that emphasize intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for volunteering. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), intrinsic motivations comprise personal satisfaction, the desire to help others, and the development of skills or a sense of purpose. On the other hand, van Schie et al. (2019) explain that extrinsic motivations might include gaining social recognition, enhancing one's resume, or fulfilling a social obligation. Intrinsically motivated volunteers are therefore inspired by internal values, beliefs, and the innate satisfaction of helping others while extrinsically motivated ones, by contrast, may be motivated by external factors such as requirements, recognition, or personal benefits. This distinction helps explain the diversity of volunteer experiences and outcomes, and enables organizations to recruit, retain, and support volunteers using their primary reason for volunteering. It also explains brief or sporadic participation and long-term commitments by various volunteers.

**Functionalist Approach:** According to Fan et al. (2025), the functionalist theory suggests that people volunteer to fulfill specific psychological functions. These might include understanding oneself (values expression), seeking personal growth (enhancing self-esteem), or creating a sense of community (social integration). This shows that individuals volunteer to satisfy these psychological needs, often unconsciously.

**Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** This theory, primarily developed by Ryan and Deci (2020), views volunteering as supporting satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to Ganzevoort and van den Born (2025), SDT shows that volunteering provides opportunities for autonomy to make meaningful choices, build skills (competence), and promote connections with others (relatedness).

## Sociological Theories of Volunteering

From a sociological standpoint, volunteering extends from an individual activity to a social process deeply inserted in societal structures, norms, and expectations (Dury et al., 2020). Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2025), name Social Exchange Theory (SET), Altruism and Social Capital (ASC), and Role Theory (RT).

**Social Exchange Theory:** According to Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2025), the SET considers volunteering as a reciprocal exchange form where individuals offer their time and resources expecting non-material rewards, such as social approval, a sense of belonging, or future assistance. The notion of “exchange” can include indirect benefits, such as gaining social networks, building relationships, or contributing to societal well-being.

**Altruism and Social Capital:** ASC considers volunteering as frequently connected to the concept of altruism or philanthropy: the selfless concern for others’ well-being (White, 2021). Uddin and Antara (2025) explain that sociologists view volunteering as a way of accumulating “social capital”, which are resources rooted in social networks. Therefore, volunteering enables individuals to form relationships that can later be beneficial in various forms, including career opportunities, emotional support, or material help.

**Role Theory:** In the RT framework, volunteering is a part of an individual’s social role (Cho et al., 2021). The role of a volunteer is modelled by societal expectations and norms, and individuals perform these roles based on their understanding of how they are expected to behave. In RT, cultural norms around community involvement and social responsibility influence volunteering roles.

## Economic theories of volunteering

According to Ehrenberg et al. (2025), economists regard volunteering as a transaction involving time and effort, which has inherent costs and benefits, both to the individual and to society. The theories include Opportunity Cost Theory (OCT) and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT). They are:

**Opportunity Cost Theory:** Collins (2025) states that the OCT focus is on the trade-off individuals experience when planning whether to volunteer or not. When individuals volunteer, they often sacrifice other opportunities to use their time or resources that could be spent on paid work or leisure activities. Therefore, OCT views volunteering as only occurring when individuals recognise the non-material rewards, such as personal satisfaction or social prestige, to compensate for these opportunity costs.

**Resource Mobilization Theory:** Volunteer organizations involve RMT to highlight that volunteers are primary resources for non-profit organizations or social movements (Piatak & Sowa, 2024). Georgeou (2021) explains that while volunteers usually offer labour, they also mobilize other resources such as funds and public awareness. It is from this perspective that the RMT perceives volunteering as an instrumental act that is necessary for the effectiveness and success of various organizations (Morris, 2025).

## Cultural and normative theories

Cultural theories, consisting of Cultural Capital Theory (CCT) and Normative Theories (NTs), explore the way volunteering is influenced by norms, values, and societal expectations (Sarver et al., 2015; Chakravorty et al., 2024).

**Cultural Capital Theory:** Volunteering can be evaluated using Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital lens. Meissner and Meissner (2021) view the Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital as the non-economic social assets such as education, tastes, and cultural knowledge used by individuals to gain social mobility and access to resources within society. In the CCT framework, individuals gain or demonstrate cultural capital by volunteering (Gilleard, 2020). In CCT, individuals volunteer to gain experiences, knowledge, and skills that are recognized by society. Therefore, individuals enhance their social status or opportunities for upward mobility.

**Normative Theories:** According to He et al. (2025), NTs theories explain that the moral or ethical imperatives of a given society model volunteering. Some cultures regard volunteering as a civic duty and an ethical responsibility (Sandberg et al., 2025). Therefore, social norms might encourage individuals to contribute to the welfare of others and to support communal efforts (He et al., 2025). NTs, therefore, promote an environment where volunteering becomes both a personal and societal obligation.

## Political theories of volunteering

In this context, according to Saunders (2020), political theorists investigate the way volunteering overlaps with political structures and power dynamics. These theories, therefore, portray volunteering as both a response to and a reflection of political and societal needs. Two prominent of these theories are, according to several authors (Lottholz & Kluczevska, 2024; Lu & Lu, 2021), the Civic Engagement Theory (CET) and Neoliberalism and Volunteering (NaV).

**Civic Engagement Theory:** CET often considers volunteering as a form of civic engagement, where individuals contribute to the social and political health of their communities (Henry & Mostafanezhad, 2019). Civic engagement can advance democratic participation, enhance social cohesion, and empower marginalized groups. The CET perspective positions volunteering as an instrument for citizens to actively shape public life.

**Neoliberalism and Volunteering:** Sometimes in contemporary political discourse, volunteering gets appraised through the lens of neoliberal policies (St-Amant et al., 2018). Karakaya (2020) explains that this may urge volunteerism to substitute for government social services or welfare. The NaV therefore describes volunteering as a way for individuals and communities to absorb the costs of public services or to play the role that is generally the state’s responsibility.

## The Intersection of Theories

Each theoretical approach offers valuable insights, but volunteering is multifaceted and involves the interaction of different factors (Fouad, 2025). Motivations for volunteering are often complex and influenced by psychological desires, social norms, cultural values, and political circumstances. Moreover, volunteering is dynamic and evolves practice that adapts to changing societal conditions, technological advancements, and global challenges. Rochester (2021) attests that volunteering presents novel ways for individuals to engage in acts of service. Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of volunteering helps to model volunteering activity as a significant social phenomenon with personal, communal, and global implications. No single theory or model can explain volunteering. Piatak and Sowa (2024) concur that volunteering is an activity influenced by a blend of psychological, sociological, economic, cultural, and political factors. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of volunteering requires considering all these dimensions and reflecting the way to interact in the broader context of human behaviour and societal development.

## Volunteering role in the retirement experience: regret, pride, and personal fulfillment

The pension phase of life presents a critical opportunity for many retirees to reflect on their past deeds, be it the feeling of regret or pride (Silver, 2018). Retired people can engage in community service that aligns with their values. Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2021) pinpoint volunteering as a commanding tool for enhancing well-being, encouraging connections, and providing a renewed sense of purpose. As such, it plays a vital role in shaping the post-retirement experience for individuals seeking to make amends or simply enrich their lives through meaningful engagement.

**Regret, pride, and volunteering in retirement:** At the pension stage, every pensioner has experienced life and contributed many other experiences, good and bad. As a result, the experiences of retired individuals often encompass a spectrum of emotions regarding their past actions and societal contributions (Fineman, 2012). As highlighted earlier, some may grapple with regret over previous choices, while others may feel pride in their accomplishments. This dichotomy influences how they perceive their roles in society during retirement. For many, the transition into retirement can serve as a pivotal moment for reflection and action, where the concept of pension days emerges as a unique opportunity to engage in meaningful activities that can lead to personal redemption or fulfillment (Vogel et al., 2024).

**The role of volunteering:** Volunteering during retirement is frequently viewed to enhance social engagement and personal fulfillment. Research indicates that volunteering can significantly improve the quality of life for older adults by providing a renewed sense of purpose and connection to their communities (Kabadayi et al., 2020; von Humboldt et al., 2024). Courtin and Knapp (2017) highlight that older adults often face challenges such as diminished social roles and feelings of isolation. In contrast, Kelly (2024) suggests that volunteering can effectively counter these challenges by fostering community ties and enhancing individual well-being.

**Therapeutic benefits:** While some retirees may feel fatigued and inclined to rest during their pension years, others find that engaging with their communities through volunteer work can be therapeutic. This perspective aligns with findings that suggest volunteering not only combats loneliness but also rejuvenates the spirit (Hutton, 2024). The act of giving back can provide retirees with a sense of accomplishment and belonging, which is crucial for mental health.

**Identity and relationships:** The investigation into the experiences of retired individuals involved in various forms of volunteering reveals significant insights into how these activities shape their identities and relationships. For instance, volunteering allows retirees to redefine their roles within society, moving from passive recipients of care to active contributors (Jalongo, 2022). This shift enhances their self-esteem and strengthens social networks, thereby mitigating feelings of isolation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study design was qualitative and narrative to understand the mixed volunteering experiences of three pensioners. The qualitative design approach applies when exploring to understand the meaning of social problems from the opinions of individuals who have encountered the study phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Qualitative research is a considerable and methodical effort that requires asking questions, gathering data, analyzing data inductively, and deducing meaning from the analyzed data. According to Minikel-Lacocque (2019), qualitative researchers should be empathetic, sensitive, and mindful of the values intrinsic in individuals. On the narrative approach, Yu et al. (2023) explain that the narrative method is suitable for understanding phenomena and their exclusive context due to experience as they had personal encounters. Tisdell et al. (2025) concurs that this method explores the way people make sense of their experiences through storytelling as researchers collect narratives to identify themes and patterns in participants' experiences. This study used descriptive analysis to create themes and the essence of meaning. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants to respond to the research questions. Having been a volunteer during the pension stage enabled inclusion for participating in the study. The participants needed their reasons for volunteering to be known to motivate others. Rosenthal (2018) states that qualitative research does not require a significant sample size to understand the phenomenon's depth but rather enough to reach saturation. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) and Lowe et al. (2018) concur that a small sample can be adequate to enable saturation. Rosenthal (2018) and Vasileiou et al. (2018) explain that three (3) participants are the minimum that can lead to saturation. The participants were formally informed of the study details, and their identities were not revealed. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any stage of their participation if they no longer wanted to participate, with no penalties.

Data was collected by interviewing the participants. Watson (2018) describes interviewing as entailing a data collection method through dialogues with a specific purpose in mind. The interviewees were guided by questions based on an open semi-structured guide with the fundamental research question: What influenced your decision to volunteer? Analysis was done through thematic content analysis to create themes of the lived experiences. Blaikie (2018) expresses qualitative data analysis as a continual and iterative process in which data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting are interwoven. This study used these steps to guide the analysis. Recorded data were transcribed verbatim and transformed into written scripts and transcripts that were read. This led to preliminary identification of themes from the data. From these, substantive themes were developed to address the research questions. The researcher then transcribed, translated, and coded the data. Moser and Korstjens's (2018) viewpoints guided that themes that did not have enough data to support them were discarded. After fully working out the themes, this manuscript's final analysis and write-up occurred.

This qualitative study used in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of three retirees who are actively engaged in volunteer work. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with sample size  $n = 3$  based on their diverse volunteering activities and socio-economic backgrounds. The study followed ethical guidelines, obtaining approval under certificate REC/S/107/2024: IND. Data was analyzed thematically to uncover common themes related to personal growth, social impact, and the meaning of volunteering in later life. The three participants, Mrs A, Ms B and Mr C, provided rich insights into their experiences, contributing to a nuanced understanding of volunteering among older adults with the following profiles.

- **Mrs A:** A 77-year-old woman living in a village with her ageing husband. After retiring from her job as a cleaner, she became involved in various community projects alongside other retirees. She is particularly involved in agricultural and construction initiatives and credits her volunteering with bringing fulfillment and purpose to her life.
- **Ms B:** A 65-year-old former nurse who is heavily involved in anti-crime activities in her suburban community. She volunteers with a group focused on tackling crime and corruption, often working closely with police officers to ensure safety and justice in her neighborhood.
- **Mr C:** A 68-year-old retired police officer who engages in crime-fighting activities in his township. He is part of a volunteer syndicate targeting criminal networks, using his knowledge as a former officer to aid in the identification of drug dealers and criminal hot spots.

## RESULTS

### **Mrs A: A Journey of Personal Transformation and Community Empowerment**

Mrs A views volunteering as a deeply fulfilling experience that gives both personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. When she first joined community projects, it was mainly to support her husband. However, over time, she started to appreciate voluntarism and has later come to regard volunteering as an integral part of her own life. She narrated, "*Volunteering to me is a revelation. It has produced the best in many of us.*" Her involvement in voluntarism made Mrs A feel revitalized both emotionally and physically. She views her voluntarism work to give back to the community as support to her own family, meaning that she regards her community as her family.

One extremely important aspect of Mrs A's volunteering is the change it has brought to her attitude and emotional well-being. This is shown by her expressed feeling narrated as "*born again.*" Among these are a fresh appreciation for life and a sense of inner peace that she has gained through voluntarism. She indicated to have detected comparable changes in other volunteers. In one example she noted a shift from one volunteer who used to be confrontational and negative to the current positive, negotiating and cooperative spirit currently visible. Mrs A's voluntarist work has also enabled her to cultivate intergenerational learning by inviting youth to participate in the community activities within her voluntarism. Therefore, she promotes respect and collaboration across generations.

Mrs A's narrative illustrates the profound impact of volunteering on personal transformation that could take place in many other older adults. She has found purpose with and in her life. She has found happiness in her voluntarism work. She also experiences a pleasing shift in her relationships and perspectives, both on a personal and community level. Moreover, her voluntarism is of joyful value to society because community benefits from her initiatives.

### **Ms B: Volunteering as a Catalyst for Social Change and Justice**

Ms B's volunteering experience is grounded in her desire to combat crime and improve the quality of life in her community. Her volunteer work focuses on tackling corruption within the police force and supporting local law enforcement in apprehending criminals. Despite encountering resistance and challenges, particularly from corrupt officers, Ms B has found strength in collective action. As she reflects, "*Volunteering is a platform for participants to gain... and while we did not even know it, we, the volunteers, improve immensely.*"

Through her experiences, Ms B highlights the emotional and social benefits of volunteering, especially in her efforts to bring justice to victims of crime. She emphasizes the importance of community-based solutions to crime, which she believes have a more significant impact than relying solely on official channels. Her involvement has also made her more determined and resilient, particularly in the face of adversity. She notes that her physical strength has increased due to the demands of her volunteer work, reflecting the holistic benefits of active engagement.

Ms B's account demonstrates how volunteering can empower individuals to challenge systemic issues, such as corruption and crime, and foster a sense of solidarity and justice within a community. Her work has not only transformed her sense of purpose but also contributed to tangible improvements in her environment.

### Mr C: From Police Officer to Community Volunteer

Mr C's transition from a police officer to a volunteer working on crime prevention reflects a deepening of his commitment to justice. He describes volunteering as an opportunity to overcome the constraints he faced in his professional life as a law enforcement officer. "As a police officer, you are constrained by laws that may not bind communities... volunteering allowed me to extend what I could not do while in employment," he shares.

Mr C's volunteer work focuses on identifying and eradicating drug-related crimes, particularly those affecting children in his community. He uses his knowledge and experience as a former officer to support community-based efforts to combat crime. His volunteer work has given him a renewed sense of purpose and allowed him to make a tangible impact in his community. He also emphasizes the emotional satisfaction he derives from being able to enact real change, contrasting this with the frustrations he experienced within the confines of the legal system.

For Mr C, volunteering has been a path to personal redemption and a way to continue serving his community in a meaningful way. His experience highlights how volunteering can provide former professionals, such as retired law enforcement officers, with opportunities to use their expertise for social good and to regain a sense of agency and purpose after retirement.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion of the research findings are geared to focus on practical, theoretical and policy implication with the hope that incorporating these can enable governments to create environments that empower volunteers while addressing critical societal challenges effectively.

### Practical implications

The narratives of Mrs. A, Ms. B, and Mr. C underscore the transformative power of volunteering in fostering personal growth, community empowerment, and social change:

- *Personal growth and emotional well-being:* Volunteering enhances emotional satisfaction and self-esteem, as seen in Mrs. A's sense of revitalization and inner peace. This aligns with Alzaareer (2025) showing that volunteering creates self-confidence and promotes personal transformation.
- *Community engagement:* Mrs. A's intergenerational approach promotes collaboration across age groups, while Ms. B and Mr. C's work demonstrates how volunteering can address systemic issues such as crime and corruption. These examples highlight how volunteers can act as catalysts for community resilience and justice (Panter-Brick et al., 2024).
- *Skill utilization:* Mr. C's use of his professional expertise in crime prevention illustrates how volunteering can provide retired professionals with meaningful opportunities to contribute their skills to society (Windsor et al., 2023).

Danish et al. (2025) add that institutions can leverage these insights by designing volunteer programs that emphasize emotional fulfillment, intergenerational learning, and skill-based contributions to maximize both individual and community benefits.

### Theoretical implications

The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the psychological and social dimensions of volunteering:

- *Empowerment theory:* Mrs. A's narrative highlights the way volunteering promotes empowerment by creating a sense of purpose and community belonging (Zahari et al., 2025). Similarly, Ms. B's experiences illustrate collective action as a mechanism for challenging systemic issues (Zhao et al., 2025).
- *Transformational leadership:* Mr. C's transition from law enforcement to volunteering reflects transformational leadership principles, where individuals are inspired (when necessary) to challenge the status quo and enact meaningful change (Gupta, 2025).
- *Interpersonal dynamics:* The observed shifts in attitudes among volunteers (e.g., from confrontational to cooperative) provide evidence for the role of volunteering in enhancing social cohesion and emotional intelligence (Li, 2025).

These theoretical insights, according to Kemp and Fisher (2022), suggest that volunteering benefits individuals while serving as a platform for broader societal transformation.

### Policy implications

The narratives highlight several policy considerations for governments and organizations aiming to promote volunteerism:

- *Support structures:* Policies should focus on providing training, recognition, and support systems for volunteers to enhance satisfaction and retention (Ngah et al., 2022).
- *Community-based Solutions:* Ms. B's emphasis on grassroots approaches to crime prevention suggests that policymakers should prioritize community-driven initiatives over centralized interventions (Ehrenberg et al., 2021).
- *Inclusive programs:* Mrs. A's intergenerational efforts highlight the need for policies that encourage diverse participation across age groups to nurture collaboration and mutual respect (Vukobrat, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

Volunteering in later life offers retirees a unique opportunity to contribute to their communities, foster personal growth, and enhance their overall well-being. As demonstrated by the experiences of Mrs A, Ms B, and Mr C, volunteering can serve as a powerful tool for personal transformation and social change. The little space that a volunteer occupies seems to stretch large, showing that if there can be more volunteers, imperfections of the world can be corrected. The stories of these volunteers illustrate the potential for older adults to remain active, engaged, and fulfilled in their later years, contributing to both their own well-being and the betterment of society. Given the profound benefits highlighted in this study, encouraging older adults to volunteer may be an important strategy for promoting healthier, more active ageing.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

The study was self-funded by the authors.

## DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The volunteers are profoundly thanked, but due to POPI Act on South Africa, their identities cannot be revealed.

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