

## Predicting Responses to Volunteering among Adolescents in Israel: The Contribution of Personal and Situational Variables

Liat Kulik

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**Abstract** The study examined positive and negative responses to volunteering (satisfaction with volunteering, perceived contribution to beneficiaries, and burnout) among 102 adolescents in Israel. The conceptual framework for explaining those responses was the ecological approach to the study of human development. In that context, the paper deals with the combined contribution of two ecological systems—the ontogenic system and the microsystem. The ontogenic system included sociodemographic variables (gender and religiosity), as well as empowerment resources. The microsystem included variables related to family context (parental volunteer activity and family support for volunteering), as well as to the context of volunteer activity (perceived rewards, difficulties with volunteering, and professional supervision). Sociodemographic variables and difficulties in relations with the provider organization predicted burnout, whereas rewards and professional supervision predicted satisfaction with volunteering. Empowerment contributed most to explaining volunteers' perceived contribution to the beneficiaries of services.

**Résumé** Cette étude a examiné les réponses positives et négatives du bénévolat (satisfaction du bénévolat, contribution perçue par les bénéficiaires et effet d'usure) parmi 102 adolescents en Israël. Le cadre conceptuel permettant d'expliquer ces réponses a été l'approche écologique à l'étude du développement humain. Dans ce contexte, l'étude traite de la contribution combinée de deux systèmes écologiques - le système ontogénique et le microsystème. Le système ontogénique inclut les variables socio-démographiques (genre et religion), ainsi que les ressources en initiatives. Le micro-système incluait des variables liées au contexte familial (l'activité de bénévolat parental et le support familial pour le bénévolat), ainsi que le contexte de l'activité de bénévolat (les résultats positifs perçus, les difficultés liées

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L. Kulik (✉)

School of Social Work, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel  
e-mail: kulikl@mail.biu.ac.il

au bénévolat et la supervision professionnelle). Les variables socio-démographiques et les difficultés en relation avec l'organisation prédisent l'effet d'usure, tandis que les résultats positifs et la supervision professionnelle prédisent la satisfaction du bénévolat. L'initiative a contribué le plus pour expliquer la contribution perçue par les bénévoles aux bénéficiaires des services.

**Resumen** El estudio examinaba las respuestas positivas y negativas (satisfacción, aportación percibida por los beneficiarios y desgaste) que, ante el voluntariado ofrecían 102 adolescentes israelitas. El marco conceptual para justificar estas respuestas es el enfoque ecológico en el estudio del desarrollo humano. En este contexto, el trabajo trata de las influencias combinadas de dos sistemas ecológicos: el sistema ontogénico y el microsistema. El sistema ontogénico incluía variables sociodemográficas (sexo y creencias religiosas), así como recursos de atribuciones de poder. El microsistema incluía variables relacionadas con el ámbito familiar (actividad voluntaria de los progenitores y apoyo de la familia al voluntariado), así como el contexto de la actividad voluntaria (recompensas obtenidas, dificultades del voluntariado y supervisión profesional). Las variables sociodemográficas y las dificultades en las relaciones con la organización proveedora causaban cierto desgaste, mientras que las recompensas y la supervisión profesional provocaban satisfacción con el voluntariado. La atribución de poderes fue el factor que más contribuyó a explicar la aportación de los voluntarios a los beneficiarios de los servicios.

**Zusammenfassung** In dieser Studie wurden positive und negative Reaktionen hinsichtlich gemeinnütziger Arbeit (Zufriedenheit mit gemeinnütziger Arbeit, empfundener Beitrag für die Dienstleistungsempfänger und Ausgebranntheit) unter 102 Jugendlichen in Israel untersucht. Diese Reaktionen wurden vor dem Hintergrund des ökologischen Ansatzes in den Studien der menschlichen Entwicklung erläutert. In diesem Zusammenhang geht die Abhandlung auf das Zusammenwirken zweier ökologischer Systeme ein – das ontogenetische System und das Mikrosystem. Das ontogenetische System schloss soziodemographische Variablen (Geschlecht und Religiosität) sowie Autorisierungsressourcen ein. Das Mikrosystem ging auf Variablen im Zusammenhang mit dem familiären Hintergrund (ehrenamtliche Tätigkeiten vonseiten der Eltern und familiäre Unterstützung der ehrenamtlichen Tätigkeit) sowie Variablen im Zusammenhang mit der gemeinnützigen Arbeit (empfundene Anerkennung, Schwierigkeiten bei der gemeinnützigen Arbeit und professionelle Leitung) ein. Soziodemographische Variablen und Schwierigkeiten mit der Organisation prognostizierten Ausgebranntheit, während Anerkennung und professionelle Leitung Zufriedenheit mit der gemeinnützigen Arbeit prognostizierten. Der Grad der Entscheidungsbefugnis hatte die größte Auswirkung auf den von den ehrenamtlich Tätigen empfundenen Beitrag für die Empfänger ihrer Dienstleistungen.

**Keywords** Adolescents · Burnout in volunteering · Family support · Empowerment · Israel

## Introduction

Volunteerism is deeply rooted in the Jewish religion and Israeli culture. The act of charity is founded on the saying “love thy neighbor as thyself,” which reflects the importance of helping needy persons. During the second half of the 19th Century, when the first groups of Zionists arrived in the Land of Israel, philanthropists such as Baron de Rothschild organized assistance for needy populations. With the establishment of the state in 1948, volunteerism in Israel focused on the two main issues: security and immigration. In the context of persistent state of war and terrorism, voluntary activities have emphasized assistance to soldiers, war casualties, and victims of terrorist activities. Furthermore, there has been emphasis on development of volunteer activities for new immigrants, which reached a peak in the 1990s, with the massive influx of immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. Moreover, cutbacks in government funding for social services since the 1970s have increased poverty in Israel. As a result, recent years have witnessed the steady growth of third sector organizations (Gidron & Katz, 1998), which engage volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to provide essential services to needy citizens.

This study focused specifically on volunteering among adolescent volunteers. The concept of adolescence refers to a period in the life cycle in which the youth are no longer children but not yet adults (Steinmetz, 1999). Muuss (1988) distinguished four stages of adolescence: pre-adolescence (ages 9–11, upper grades of elementary school); puberty (ages 11–14, junior high school); mid-adolescence (ages 15–18, high school); and late adolescence (19–21, college age). Because most Israeli adolescents engage in volunteer activity during high school, while college-age adolescents serve in the Israeli army, the paper refers to volunteers at the stage of “mid-adolescence” as defined by Muuss (1988). Research findings reveal that in some areas, adolescent volunteers can make a unique contribution to the beneficiaries of services (Allen, Philliber, & Hoggson, 1990). For example, when adolescents volunteer with clients their own age, their common language generates trust and facilitates interpersonal communication (Katan & Etgar, 1998). Moreover, adolescent volunteers can contribute a youthful spirit and sense of vitality in their interaction with elderly clients. Finally, adolescents can complement interventions by professionals, and often serve as intermediaries between the professionals and beneficiaries of services (Wolf, 2004).

Volunteer activity can also yield important personal benefits for adolescents, as part of the maturation process. When adolescents volunteer, they encounter a variety of social situations and populations, and they can gain experience through relationships that will be useful in their future careers, in addition to fostering a sense of commitment and belonging to the community. Additionally, researchers have found that volunteering contributes to the formulation of self identity, and enables adolescents to develop a sense of responsibility and independence (Damico, Damico, & Conway, 1998; Marta, Guglielmetti, & Pozzi, 2006; Stavitzky & Penso, 2002).

Besides the perceived benefits of volunteering, which generate positive responses, adolescents may experience difficulties and stress, which generate

negative responses. Young volunteers often lack experience in dealing with some of the problems faced by the people they work with, which may create difficulties in relations with the organization and with beneficiaries.

Against this background, the present study focused on examining positive and negative responses to volunteer activity among adolescents in Israel, in addition to identifying variables that can predict those responses.

### **Positive and negative responses to volunteer activity**

Positive responses to volunteer activity were defined as reactions and perceptions that enhance the young volunteer's personal well-being. In this context, two aspects of positive responses were examined: satisfaction with volunteering, and perceived contribution to beneficiaries.

*Satisfaction with volunteer activity.* This aspect refers to the volunteers' general assessments of their activity. The classic social exchange theory argues that people's satisfaction in different social contexts—e.g., family, the workplace, and the volunteer organizations—depends on the balance between costs and benefits of their activity (Blau, 1964). When the benefits of volunteering are greater than the costs, then the level of satisfaction will be high (for a review, see Fisher & Shaffer, 1993).

*Perceived contribution of volunteering.* The exchange approach to volunteer activity considers the positive experience of giving to others as an important transaction. Thus, the relationship between volunteers and beneficiaries is often reciprocal. When volunteers succeed in facilitating a client's situation, they also benefit from a positive experience, as expressed in perceived contribution to needy people (Wuthnow, 1995).

Negative responses to volunteer activity were defined as reactions and perceptions that detract from the volunteer's personal well-being. In this context, a cluster of responses that generate burnout was examined.

*Burnout in volunteering* is defined as a subjective experience of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by minor, irritating, and continuous stress (Maslach, Schaufell, & Leifer, 2001). Because it is difficult to identify these stressors, people usually do not protect themselves against them, and eventually experience burnout (Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998). Most of the research dealing with burnout since the 1970s has focused on the workplace, and especially on occupations that demand a considerable emotional and mental investment (Pines, 1993). Despite the importance of the topic, only a few studies have been conducted among volunteers (Capner & Caltabiano, 1993; Glass & Hastings, 1998), and no studies have focused specifically on burnout among adolescent volunteers. The lack of comprehensive research in this area can be attributed to the paradoxical combination of "burnout" and "volunteerism," which comprise the overall concept of "burnout in volunteerism." Although volunteerism is defined as activity for the benefit of others, which individuals perform out of their free will (Wilson, 2000), it may be accompanied by various stressors and difficulties that may develop into burnout (Chau-wai-yan & So-kum Tang, 2003).

The main goal of the present study was to examine how positive and negative responses of volunteers (outcome variables) are affected by four sets of independent variables (predictors): (1) sociodemographic characteristics; (2) empowerment resources; (3) family context; and (4) variables related to the context of volunteer activity. An ecological perspective was adopted to organize the research variables. According to that perspective, the groups of variables are considered as social systems that shape the individual's adaptation and responses to volunteering.

### **The conceptual framework: The Ecological approach**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) presented an ecological systems model, which explains human development and adjustment of individuals to changing environments. The underlying assumption of the model is that human development occurs in a continuing process of mutual interactions between individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These processes occur at the individual and subsystem levels: the microsystem, which encompasses the relationships between individuals and elements in their day-to-day living environment; the mesosystem, which reflects the links between the various systems in which the individual develops; the exosystem, which individuals do not belong to but has an indirect impact on their lives; and the macrosystem, which is the basic framework of a particular society and includes the prevailing cultural values and norms that affect the development of the individual.

Various researchers in the field of child and adolescent development have expanded Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and added the dimension of the individual system or ontogenic system (Belsky, 1980; Garbarino, 1985). This system includes psychological and emotional characteristics as well as objective demographic characteristics of individuals. However, researchers do not always apply all five of the ecological systems together, and sometimes they use only a few systems that encompass a variety of variables (Huebner & Mancini, 2003). Consistent with that approach, two of the ecological systems in Bronfenbrenner's expanded model were adopted—the ontogenic (individual) system, and the microsystem—and all of the independent variables were organized according to those systems.

#### **The ontogenic system**

The ontogenic system variables examined in this study were sociodemographic characteristics and empowerment resources:

*Sociodemographic characteristics.* The contribution of two sociodemographic characteristics—gender and religiosity—to explaining the responses to volunteer activity was examined. Gender was chosen because it is a major factor that determines a person's social position. To date, however, no comprehensive studies have examined gender differences in responses to volunteer activity among adolescents, and the few studies that have explored gender differences among adult volunteers do not reveal consistent trends. For example, some researchers have

found no differences between men and women in satisfaction with work (Black & DiNitto, 1992) or in burnout (Hurst & Hurst, 1997). Other studies, however, have found differences in certain dimensions of burnout, as revealed in a study by Sari (2004), where men reported less emotional exhaustion than women, but also had higher depersonalization than their female counterparts. The other variable, religiosity, was chosen because it provides a broad picture of the individual's perspectives of the world, including values, norms, and beliefs about helping others (Hardy & Carlo, 2005). Regarding the relationship between religiosity and responses of adult volunteers (e.g., burnout), findings are inconsistent. Some studies have revealed a negative correlation between religiosity and burnout in volunteer activity (Asante, 2000), whereas others have not established that correlation (Roberts, Flannelly, Weaver, & Rigley, 2003). Among adolescent volunteers, no studies have examined the relationship between religiosity and responses to volunteerism.

*Empowerment resources.* As an expressive and psychological dimension, empowerment resources are part of the ontogenic system. Initially, the concept was defined as an internal process, through which weak social groups acquire strength (Solomon, 1985; Staples, 1990). Broader definitions, however, relate to empowerment as a resource that helps people gain control over their lives, and applies to contexts that are not necessarily characterized by weakness (Peterson & Hughey, 2002). As a resource, empowerment has been portrayed as a sense of control over the environment, which is generated when people feel they are performing a task that has social value (Solomon, 1985). In the context of volunteer activity, empowerment enables individuals to feel that they can provide substantial assistance to needy persons and promote processes that benefit the community (Fisher, 1999; Rodich, 2001).

### The microsystem

In the present study, the microsystem consisted of the family context and the context of volunteer activity:

*Family context variables.* These variables included parental volunteer activity and family support for volunteering. Regarding parental volunteer activity, researchers have found that adolescents show a greater tendency to volunteer if their parents do so as well (Rosenthal, Feiring, & Lewis, 1997; Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994). The volunteering parents serve as a role model, and emphasize the positive aspects of volunteer activity, such as social responsibility and mutual interpersonal relations (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanava, 1998). The importance of volunteer activity for adolescents can also be enhanced by creating a family atmosphere that emphasizes values of altruism and contributing to society (Amato & Booth, 1997; Wuthnow, 1995).

*Variables related to the context of volunteer activity.* These variables, considered in turn, include perceived difficulties in relations with the provider organization, perceived rewards, and professional supervision:

*Perceived difficulties in relations with the provider organization.* In an extensive study, Fisher and Schaffer (1993) found that volunteers may experience ambiguity

resulting from a discrepancy between their own ideology and goals on the one hand, and those of the organization on the other. Moreover, they may experience frustration when the organization lacks resources necessary for ongoing activity, or when they feel stuck. Researchers have also found that volunteer activity in the community may conflict with other commitments in the lives of the volunteers, such as paid work and family (Blake & Jefferson, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

*Rewards of volunteering.* Studies have indicated that perceived rewards are related to satisfaction with volunteer activity (Blake & Jefferson, 1992; Field & Johnson, 1993) as well as to other positive outcomes such as longevity in volunteer activity (Driham, 1999). The main types of rewards are intrinsic ones, such as challenge, diversity, personal growth, and opportunities to learn (Fisher & Schaffer, 1993).

*Professional supervision.* Just as it is important to invest in supervision of professionals starting out in their careers, it is also necessary to invest in supervision of volunteers. Professional supervision plays a major role in defining the tasks to be performed by the volunteers, in helping them acquire relevant skills, and in helping solve problems that volunteers encounter from day to day. In these capacities, professionals enable volunteers to maximize their potential and gain a sense of success in their activity (Stebbins, 1996; Zakour, 1994). Consistent with this perspective, researchers have found a relationship between professional supervision and satisfaction with volunteering (Wilson, 2000).

Research focus

Overall then, the research model can be presented as shown in Fig. 1. And based on the empirical and theoretical background, the following research questions were formulated:

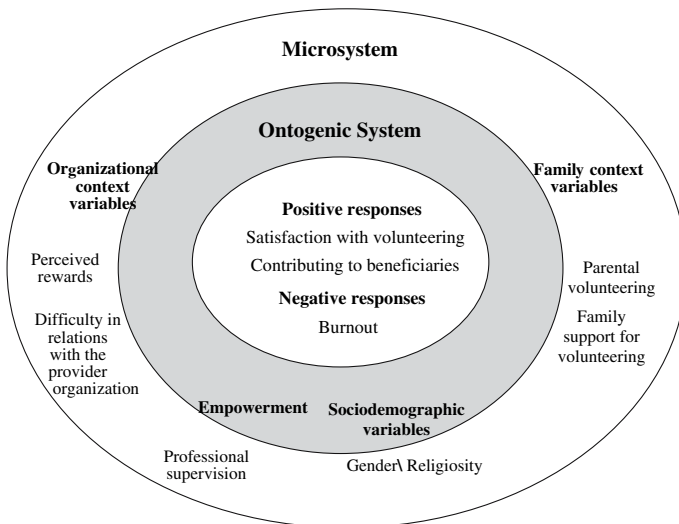


Fig. 1 The research model

### The ontogenic system

- (1) Do adolescent boys and girls differ in their responses to volunteering (satisfaction, perceived contribution to beneficiaries, and burnout)?
- (2) Is there a relationship between the adolescent volunteer's level of religiosity and responses to volunteering?
- (3) Is there a relationship between empowerment of adolescents and positive responses to volunteering?

### The microsystem

- (1) When adolescents have at least one parent who currently volunteers or has volunteered in the past, will they express more positive responses to volunteering?
- (2) Will family support enhance positive responses to volunteering?
- (3) Will adolescents who experience greater difficulties in volunteering express more negative responses to volunteering?
- (4) Will adolescents who receive more professional supervision express more positive responses to volunteering?
- (5) Will adolescents who receive more rewards express more positive responses to volunteering?

## Research methods

### Sample

Data were collected in 2003. The research sample comprised 102 adolescents (81 girls and 21 boys) volunteering in various programs for youth in Israel. Although the number of girls in the sample was considerably higher than the number of boys, the distribution of the sample by gender reflects the distribution of adolescent boys and girls who volunteer in social service organizations. The mean age of the participants was 16.3 ( $SD = 1.2$ ). Regarding participants' country of origin, 98% were born in Israel. As for fathers' ethnic origin, 48.4% of the fathers were born in Israel, 33.3% were born in Europe or America, and 18.3% were born in Asia or Africa. As for religiosity, 42.7% defined themselves as secular, 11.7% defined themselves as traditional, and 45.6% defined themselves as religious. Regarding economic status, 2.9% assessed themselves as being below the average level in Israel, 55.8% assessed their status as average, and 41.3% evaluated their status as above average.

### Instruments

*Burnout.* The questionnaire was developed by Pines (1984), and consisted of 21 items which examined burnout at work. Responses were based on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  internal consistency value of the questionnaire was .80. The questionnaire was found to have construct validity. For example, significant negative correlations were found between burnout and job



satisfaction ( $r = -.63$ ,  $P < .001$ ), as well as life satisfaction ( $r = -.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (Pines, 1984). In the present study, participants were asked to fill out the burnout questionnaire, which was adapted to the context of volunteer activity (e.g., “while you are volunteering, how often do you feel: fatigued, disappointed, trapped, despondent, etc.”). An overall score was derived by calculating the mean of the scores on all of the items, and the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient was .85: the higher the score, the greater the participant’s burnout.

*Satisfaction with volunteer activity.* Satisfaction with volunteer activity was examined on the basis of one question, in which participants were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with volunteer activity on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a great extent).

*Perceived contribution of volunteer activity.* Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed their volunteer activity contributes to promoting change among beneficiaries, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent).

*Empowerment.* The instrument was developed by Spreitzer (1995), and aimed to examine perceptions of empowerment at work. In this study, the questionnaire was adapted to the context of volunteering, and consisted of 12 items, e.g., “I am sure I have the appropriate skills to do my job.” Responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent): the higher the score, the greater the participant’s perceived empowerment. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  reliability value for the questionnaire was .82.

*Support from family members.* The questionnaire was constructed for the current study, and consisted of six statements related to various aspects of social support that family members provide volunteers, such as appreciation, emotional support, and instrumental support. Responses were based on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently). One overall score was derived by calculating the mean of the items on the questionnaire: the higher the score, the greater the extent of support from family members. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  reliability value for the questionnaire was .75.

*Parental volunteering.* This variable was measured by one question: “Do at least one of your parents currently engage in volunteer activity, or have they done so in the past?” Responses were based on a dichotomous scale: 1 (no) and 2 (yes).

*Difficulty in relations with the provider organization.* The instrument was based on Gidron and Griffel’s (1981) 17-item questionnaire, which examined various areas of difficulty that volunteers might encounter in their work. Responses were based on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Principal component analysis revealed three factors that describe distinctive areas, and combine to explain 49.5% of the variance in difficulty in relations with provider organizations. The first factor explained 19.2% of the variance, and included items related to ambiguity about the tasks to be performed (henceforth “ambiguity,” e.g., “I don’t know exactly what I am supposed to do”). The second factor explained 15.7% of the variance, and included items related to inefficient utilization of time (henceforth “wasting time,” e.g., “I spend a lot of time doing administrative jobs instead of dealing with clients”). The third factor explained 14.6% of the variance, and included items that reflected lack of appreciation by the provider organization (henceforth “lack of appreciation,” e.g., “The organization I work for doesn’t appreciate what I do”).

For each factor, one score was derived by calculating the mean of the respective items. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for all of the factors ranged from .80 to .90: the higher the score, the greater the participant's perceived difficulty in relations with the provider organization.

*Perceived rewards of volunteer activity.* The instrument was based on Gidron and Griffel's (1981) questionnaire, which examined the extent to which volunteers believe that volunteer activity provides them with rewards. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items, and responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they receive rewards such as challenge, interest, and responsibility: the higher the score, the more they perceived themselves as receiving rewards from volunteer activity. One score was derived by calculating the mean of the items on the questionnaire. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability value for the questionnaire was .90.

*Professional supervision.* This variable was measured by one question: "In the volunteer organization, do you receive professional supervision?" Responses were based on a dichotomous scale: 1 (no) and 2 (yes).

*Sociodemographic questionnaire.* The questionnaire included questions about various sociodemographic characteristics. As mentioned, only gender and religiosity are reported in this paper.

## Data collection

The study reported here was part of a larger project conducted through Bar Ilan University in Israel, in which various issues related to volunteer activity among volunteer populations of various ages were examined. Data were collected from volunteers in community service organizations, hospitals, old age homes, and schools throughout Israel. The data reported in this paper relate to a group of high school students who participated in various programs for volunteers in Israel. Questionnaires were distributed by volunteer activity coordinators in those organizations. Some of the participants filled out the questionnaire on the premises of the organization, and others took the questionnaires home and returned them to the coordinators. The average amount of time required to complete the questionnaire was about 30 minutes, and the response rate reached about 80% after repeated requests by the coordinators to return the questionnaires.

## Research results

### 1. Intercorrelations between the independent (predictor) variables: means and standard deviations.

(a) *Means and standard deviations.* The findings in Table 1 reveal high levels of empowerment among adolescents ( $M = 3.69$ , above midpoint 3.00 on the 5-point scale), as well as high levels of perceived rewards from volunteering and family support for volunteer activity ( $M = 3.67$ , and  $M = 3.47$ , respectively, both above midpoint 3.00 on the 5-point scale). By contrast, the levels of difficulty in relationships with the provider organization fell considerably below midpoint 3.00

**Table 1** Intercorrelations between the independent variables: means and standard deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Religiosity	1	.06	.12	.04	.01	.18	.06	-.13
2. Empowerment	–	1	.28***	.48***	-.31***	-.14	-.51***	.15
3. Family support	–	–	1	.23**	-.32***	-.17*	-.17*	-.15
4. Perceived rewards	–	–	–	1	-.34***	.01	-.28***	.32***
5. Appreciation	–	–	–	–	1	.41***	.35***	-.28***
6. Wasting time	–	–	–	–	–	1	.26**	-.13
7. Ambiguity	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	-.17*
8. Professional supervision	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
<i>M</i>	3.28	3.69	3.47	3.67	1.69	1.96	2.15	1.59
<i>SD</i>	.84	.58	.83	.79	.73	.68	.81	.53

\*  $P < .05$  \*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*\*  $P < .001$

(see Table 1). To determine which of the three difficulties with the provider organization was most serious, MANOVAs with repeated measurements were conducted, which revealed significant differences between the three types of difficulties [ $F(2, 100) = 13.29, P < .001, \eta^2 = .2$ ]. Paired comparison tests reveal that lack of appreciation ranked significantly lower than wasting time and ambiguity ( $M = 1.69$ , versus  $M = 1.96$  and  $M = 2.15$ , respectively).

(b) *Intercorrelations between the independent variables.* Table 1, which displays the intercorrelations between the independent research variables, shows a significant correlation between empowerment and several other variables: the higher the level of empowerment by volunteers, the more support they received from family members, and the more rewards they received from the provider organization. Conversely, empowerment correlated negatively with difficulties deriving from lack of appreciation and ambiguity.

Family support for volunteering also correlated positively and significantly with rewards of volunteering: the higher the level of family support, the more the volunteers feel that they receive rewards for their activity. Additionally, the findings reveal a negative correlation between family support and difficulties in relations with the provider organization: the higher the level of family support, the less the volunteers reported difficulties related to lack of appreciation, ambiguity, and wasting time. Furthermore, the greater the rewards they received from volunteering, the less the volunteers reported difficulties related to lack of appreciation. Additionally, the more the volunteers received professional supervision, the greater the rewards they received from volunteering, and the less they reported difficulty due to ambiguity. Correlations were also found between the three dimensions of difficulties in relations with the provider organization: the more the volunteers felt lack of appreciation, the more they felt they are wasting time, and the more they felt ambiguity. Moreover, when the volunteers felt they were wasting time, they also felt more ambiguity. Finally, there was a negative correlation between professional supervision in volunteering and difficulties in relations with the provider organi-

zation, including lack of appreciation, and ambiguity. Of all the intercorrelations between the independent variables, empowerment variables correlated most strongly with the other variables.

### 2. The ontogenic system: Sociodemographic variables and empowerment

*Sociodemographic variables.* Sociodemographic variables included gender and religiosity:

(a) *Gender.* MANOVAs conducted for the three outcome variables revealed no significant differences [ $F(3, 99) = 1.62, P > .05, \eta^2 = .07$ ]. However, separate ANOVAs revealed significant differences only in the extent of burnout, which was higher for girls than for boys (Table 2). With regard to the other outcome variables, no significant gender differences were found among the participants. As shown in Table 2 (total column), the experience of volunteer activity is positive, as reflected in a low level of burnout ( $M = 2.04$ , below midpoint 4.00 on a 7-point scale), and a high level of satisfaction ( $M = 5.54$ , much higher than midpoint 4.00 on the 7-point scale), as well as a high perceived contribution ( $M = 3.39$ , above midpoint 3.00 on a 5-point scale).

(b) *Religiosity.* Level of religiosity correlated negatively with burnout in volunteer activity—the more religious the volunteers, the lower their levels of burnout. No correlations were found between religiosity and the rest of the outcome variables (see Table 1).

*Empowerment.* Empowerment correlated with each of the outcome variables (Table 3): the more the volunteers perceived themselves as empowered, the greater their satisfaction with volunteer activity, the more they perceived themselves as contributing to beneficiaries, and the lower their levels of burnout (Table 3).

### 3. The microsystem

The microsystem included family context and the context of volunteering:

(a) *Family context.* The family context variables examined in the study were parental volunteer activity, and family support for the adolescent's volunteer activity. As for parental volunteer activity, 58.9% of the volunteers reported that at least one of their parents currently volunteer or volunteered in the past. MANOVAs performed for the three outcome variables revealed a borderline significant difference between volunteers who had at least one parent engaging in volunteer activity and those who did not [ $F(3, 97) = 2.88, P < .05, \eta^2 = .08$ ]. However, separate ANOVAs revealed no significant differences related to volunteer activity

**Table 2** Gender differences in the outcome variables

	Boys		Girls		Total		<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Satisfaction	5.90	1.07	5.44	1.54	5.54	1.46	1.57	.01
Perceived contribution	3.45	.88	3.37	.95	3.39	.93	.11	.00
Burnout	1.81	.36	2.10	.55	2.04	.53	5.08**	.03

\*\* $P < .01$

**Table 3** Correlation between independent variables and outcomes

	Satisfaction	Perceived contribution	Burnout
Religiosity	.03	.06	-.24**
Empowerment	.37***	.41***	-.23**
Family support	.19*	.16	-.17*
Perceived rewards	.43**	.31***	-.16*
Lack of appreciation	-.37***	.09	.45***
Wasting time	-.25**	.03	.33***
Ambiguity	-.35**	-.23**	.36***

\* $P < .05$ \*\* $P < .01$ \*\*\* $P < .001$

of family members for any of the outcome variables. Regarding family support for volunteer activity, a low but significant correlation was found between that variable and two of the outcome variables—satisfaction with volunteering, and burnout. The stronger the family's support for volunteering, the more satisfied the volunteers were ( $r = .19$ ,  $P < .05$ ), and the lower their levels of burnout. ( $r = -.17$ ,  $P < .05$ )

(b) *The context of volunteering.* In the present study, the context of volunteering included several variables: perceived rewards of volunteer activity, difficulty in relations with the provider organization, and professional supervision.

*Perceived rewards of volunteer activity* correlated positively with each of the three outcome variables: the greater the extent of perceived rewards, the more satisfied the volunteers were with their activity, the greater their perceived contribution to beneficiaries, and the lower their levels of burnout.

*Difficulty in relations with the provider organization* included three factors: lack of appreciation, wasting time, and ambiguity. Several significant correlations were found between those three factors and the outcome variables. The more the adolescents felt lack of appreciation, the lower their satisfaction with volunteer activity, and the higher their levels of burnout. "Wasting time" correlated negatively with satisfaction, and positively with burnout in volunteer activity. Similarly, the higher the level of ambiguity, the more the volunteers experienced burnout, the lower their satisfaction, and the lower their perceived contribution to beneficiaries. On the whole, difficulties in relations with the provider organization correlated more strongly with satisfaction and burnout than with the volunteers' perceived contribution to beneficiaries of services.

As for *professional supervision*, about 59% of the volunteers reported that they received supervision from at least one professional. MANOVAs performed for the outcome variables revealed significant differences between volunteers who received supervision and those who did not [ $F(3, 96) = 4.17$ ,  $P < .08$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ ]. Separate ANOVAs conducted for each of the outcome variables revealed significant differences for only one variable – satisfaction with volunteer activity [ $F(1, 98) = 11.89$ ,  $P < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ ]. Volunteers who received supervision from at least one professional felt greater satisfaction [ $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ] than did those who received no professional supervision [ $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ].

#### 4. *The combined contribution of the independent research variables to predicting the outcome variables*

To identify the combined contribution of the four sets of independent variables (sociodemographic characteristics, empowerment, family context, and context of volunteer activity) to explaining the outcome variables, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for each of the outcome variables (burnout, satisfaction with volunteering, and perceived contribution to beneficiaries). In accordance with the ecological model, ontogenic variables were entered in the first and second steps of the regression, because they are considered closest to the individual and we assumed that their impact is strongest.

Sociodemographic variables were entered in the first step to partial out their effect in relation to the variables that entered the regression in subsequent steps. Empowerment was entered in the second step, and microsystem variables (family context and organizational context) were entered in the third and fourth steps. Because the family context variables (parental volunteering and family support for volunteering) are relatively close to the individual, they were entered in the third step, whereas volunteer context variables (perceived rewards, professional supervision and difficulty in relations with the provider organization) were entered in the fourth step.

The independent research variables explained substantial percentages of the variance in outcome variables: 37% of the variance in burnout; 38% of the variance in satisfaction with volunteering; and 24% of the variance in perceived contribution to beneficiaries. Religiosity and gender entered the prediction equation for burnout, whereas family context variables did not enter the prediction equation. Of the volunteer context variables, the factors that reflected difficulty in relations with the provider organization entered the equation: lack of appreciation contributed more than wasting time and ambiguity. On the whole, sociodemographic variables explained about 10% of the variance in burnout, and empowerment explained another 5% of the variance. Thus, the ontogenic variables explained about 15% of the variance in burnout, and microsystem variables explained an additional 21% of the variance in burnout altogether. Of the microsystem variables, those related to the volunteer context contributed more to explaining the variance in burnout than did family context variables (see Table 4).

Regarding satisfaction with volunteer activity, empowerment entered in the second step of the prediction equation, and it remained significant in the third step. However, when the volunteer context variables entered, the effect of empowerment on satisfaction with volunteering was no longer significant. One of the volunteer context variables—perceived rewards—contributed significantly to explaining satisfaction with volunteer activity. The ontogenic variables explained about 16% of the variance in satisfaction with volunteer activity, whereas the microsystem variables explained about 22% (see Table 5).

With respect to the volunteers' perceived contribution to beneficiaries, a diverse set of variables entered the prediction equation: empowerment, family context variables, and volunteer context variables (Table 6). Of those variables, empowerment was the one that most significantly explained the volunteers'

**Table 4** Hierarchical regression coefficients (beta) for predicting responses to volunteering—burnout

Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Religiosity	-.21*	-.22*	-.20	-.27**
Gender	.21*	.20*	.24**	.14
Empowerment		-.23**	-.18	-.01
Parental volunteering			.03	-.01
Family support			-.15	.01
Lack of appreciation				.28**
Wasting time				.20*
Ambiguity				.19*
Rewards				-.04
Professional supervision				.06
$R^2$	.10**	.15**	.18**	.37***
$R^2$ change		.05*	.03	.19***

\*  $P < .05$  \*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*\*  $P < .001$

**Table 5** Hierarchical regression coefficients (beta) for predicting responses to volunteering—satisfaction with volunteering

Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Religiosity	.01	.01	-.08	.05
Gender	-.13	-.12	-.14	-.11
Empowerment		.38***	.33***	.10
Parental volunteering			-.09	-.02
Family support			.11	.10
Lack of appreciation				-.04
Wasting time				-.13
Ambiguity				-.11
Rewards				.25*
Professional supervision				.24**
$R^2$	.02	.16**	.19**	.38***
$R^2$ change		.14**	.03	.19***

\*  $P < .05$  \*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*\*  $P < .001$

perceived contribution to beneficiaries of services ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $P < .001$ ). Of the family context variables, parental volunteer activity was the one that significantly explained the variance in perceived contribution to beneficiaries ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $P < .01$ ). Of the volunteer context variables, only professional supervision significantly explained the variance in perceived contribution to beneficiaries ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $P < .01$ ). In general, the ontogenic and microsystem variables explained the volunteers' perceived contribution to beneficiaries to the same extent (13% and 11%, respectively).

**Table 6** Hierarchical regression coefficients (beta) for predicting responses to volunteering—perceived contribution to beneficiaries

Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Religiosity	.07	.08	.11	.09
Gender	-.02	-.01	-.04	-.09
Empowerment		.34***	.36***	.27*
Parental volunteering			.22**	.22*
Family support			.06	.16
Lack of appreciation				.12
Wasting time				.12
Ambiguity				-.05
Rewards				.13
Professional supervision				.17**
$R^2$	.007	.13***	.17**	.24***
$R^2$ change		.13***	.04	.07*

\*  $P < .05$  \*\*  $P < .01$  \*\*\*  $P < .001$

## Discussion

Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, the present study aimed to examine positive and negative responses to volunteering among adolescents in Israel, as well as to identify variables in different ecological systems that explain these responses. One of the limitations of the study was that the participants were volunteering only in social service organizations. To arrive at more generalizable conclusions on the issues examined in this study, it would be worthwhile to study adolescents participating in larger projects, and in organizations other than social services. Another limitation of the study derives from the sample size, which is small in comparison with the large number of independent variables. To alleviate this problem, the research sample should be expanded in future studies. Additionally, because the number of boys and girls was unbalanced, future samples should include areas of volunteer activity with a more substantial representation of males.

On the whole, the adolescents reported positive experiences with volunteering, as expressed by high levels of overall satisfaction and a sense of contributing to beneficiaries of services on the one hand, and by low levels of burnout on the other. Moreover, the adolescents' positive experience with volunteer activity was expressed by the strength of several independent research variables. In general, they reported high levels of empowerment and support from family members. Most of them also received professional supervision and felt that they benefited from intrinsic rewards such as challenge and interest. The positive experience with volunteer activity was also reflected in the relatively low level of difficulties in relations with the provider organization.

Another main finding relates to the substantial contribution of empowerment to the adolescent's experience with volunteering. This resource also correlated with all of the outcome variables. For example, empowerment correlated with the adolescents' perceptions of family support for volunteering as well as with



perceived rewards of volunteer activity. Additionally, the findings revealed a negative correlation between empowerment and the main difficulty in relations with the provider organization, i.e., ambiguity. These findings suggest that empowerment enhances perceptions of rewards from volunteering and support from family members, in addition to mitigating difficulties in relations with the provider organization. To arrive at clearer conclusions about the relationship between empowerment and the other variables examined here, future studies should be based on a longitudinal design.

Regarding the specific research questions, the findings indicate that there is no general explanation for all of the outcome variables, and that different sets of variables explain different outcomes. For example, sociodemographic variables (gender and religiosity) explained burnout in volunteering but did not explain satisfaction with volunteer activity or perceived contribution to beneficiaries of services. The negative correlation between religiosity and burnout is consistent with the findings of other studies conducted in Israel among elderly populations (Kulik, 2002). In a similar vein, religious values facilitate coping with stressors that generate burnout. Additionally, the finding that girls reported higher levels of burnout than boys is consistent with other studies that have revealed differences between the genders at work (Jing, 2003; Pines, 1993) and in the family (Kulik, 2002). This tendency can be explained by the women's social orientation, empathy, and sensitivity to human suffering (Wilson & Musick, 1999), which make them vulnerable to stressors that generate burnout. Furthermore, it is possible that the relatively high levels of burnout among women can be attributed to prevailing norms that allow women to express more weakness than men (Forbes & Martin, 1990).

In regard to the family context variables examined in the study, the impact of parental volunteering on satisfaction and burnout was insignificant in most cases. However, family support affected their responses, as in other cases where support increases adjustment to the environment (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993). Evidently, parents who volunteer can serve as a model for adolescents (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994). However, the responses and feelings evoked by volunteer activity are a personal matter, which parental volunteering does not affect. The relationships between parental volunteering and adolescents' responses deserve more comprehensive examination in future studies. To gain further insight into these relationships, it would be worthwhile to consider additional aspects of parental volunteering, such as the amount of time they devote to volunteer activity, and the extent of their satisfaction with volunteering.

As for the volunteer context variables, perceived rewards of volunteering correlated significantly with each of the outcome variables. Evidently, rewards enhance positive feelings about volunteer activity and reduce feelings that generate burnout. In addition, perceived rewards of volunteering contributed indirectly to the outcome variables through their correlations with the other independent variables: the more the participants felt that they received rewards from volunteering, the less they reported difficulties such as lack of appreciation and wasting time. Moreover, professional supervision and perceived rewards were significantly related to the volunteers' sense of contributing to the beneficiaries of services. In this case, it

appears that professional supervision enhances motivation to volunteer, and lends meaning to volunteer activity, so that the adolescents perceive their contribution to clients as more significant.

With regard to the correlations found among the three types of difficulties in relations with the provider organization and burnout in volunteering, the findings are consistent with research on other life situations such as work. Thus, it appears that the difficulties encountered by volunteers constitute minor stressors whose cumulative impact leads to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

In sum, the findings indicate that adolescents' responses to volunteering are not influenced by the same variables in both of the ecological systems examined, although each type of response is influenced by a different set of variables, and the nature of the explanatory variables depends largely on the specific characteristics of the response. Therefore, in examining the sources of responses to volunteering, a differential ecological model should be adopted for each response to volunteering, which gives varying weights to different explanatory variables for each of the responses examined.

As far as practical recommendations are concerned, the research findings elicit several recommendations for practice in the field. In light of the clear differences in the responses of boys and girls, as reflected in the higher levels of burnout experienced by girls, the results of the study suggest that professionals working with adolescent volunteers should organize support groups for them. Group sessions would enable the girls to express their problems and identify the stressors that generate burnout, and would give them tools to deal with stressors which lead to burnout. Toward that end, volunteer organizations can encourage adolescent girls to take more initiative and to engage in more challenging tasks.

Second, the significant impact of empowerment on the outcome variables and on the independent variables emphasizes the importance of this resource in the work of young volunteers. Adolescents can be empowered by enhancing their sense of control and increasing their involvement in formulating the goals of their activity. Additionally, because the main difficulty reported by the volunteers related to ambiguity, it is important to define tasks carefully and explicitly. Efforts should be made to clarify the goals and significance of volunteer activity, in addition to emphasizing the contribution of volunteers to beneficiaries of services. Educators and professionals can emphasize the value of continued volunteering as a type of career. Moreover, because volunteer activity is becoming a type of long-term career today, this development should be addressed in formal academic curricula, where instructors will emphasize the need for volunteering in postmodern society, and highlight the importance of contributing to the community. In that context, they can teach relevant skills for volunteering and instill methods for reducing burnout in volunteer activity.

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