
Psychological Impact of Community Service

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1. Introduction

Community service is work that is not paid for that a person or a group of people do with the aim of bettering their communities. It is a product of both mandatory and voluntary reasons; thus, it is distinct from volunteering. Studies have shown that community service has a profound positive impact on communities around the globe. It has primarily helped solve or at least mitigate most of the challenges affecting communities like poverty, mental healthcare issues and drug addiction, and environmental challenges. However, the psychological impact of community service on the people who partake in the activity is still a vogue issue. Although some scholars share opposing views, community service significantly contributes to the psychological health of those who partake in it with a positive attitude. Therefore, this study delves into the psychological impact of community service on participants who embrace it.

2. Its Impact on Psychological Stress

It reduces psychological stress. Studies have shown that community service directly impacts the emotional well-being of individuals who participate in it because it serves as a source of healthy escapism (Han, Kim and Burr, 2019). Stress is the continuous feeling of distress. It can be negative or positive. Negative stress makes people become irritable and reduce their attention span. It also results in physical pain, restlessness, and hopelessness in some cases. Studies showed that the psychological stress levels of people who participate in community service reduced significantly after participating in the activity compared to those who did not partake in the activity but did nothing about their stress.

Partaking in community service reduces stress by changing the point of focus of participants, which disrupts the development of stress hormones. Stress develops because people become aware of situations that trigger the production of stress hormone and its rates increase as they focus on the triggers (Yeung, Zhang, and Kim, 2017). That means that distracting people from the activities stop the cognitive process that develops them. Community service distracts people from activities by giving them a sense of purpose or new things to focus on. In so doing, their brains process new thoughts. That, in turn, results in

the production of neurotransmitters that are not associated with stress, reducing stress.

3. Its Impact on Depression

It also reduces depression among participants. Depression is prolonged sadness. It is a mental disorder associated with symptoms like loss of appetite, sadness, insomnia, hopelessness, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Studies have shown that depression can reduce as a result of partaking in community service. The studies show that it that taking part in community service willingly reduces the amount of dopamine in the brain, which helps in eliminating depression. (Ballard et al., 2021) Dopamine is a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure; thus, increasing it creates happy feelings that counter sadness.

It also reduces depression by changing a person's perception of life and giving them a sense of meaning. According to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, depression stems from the thoughts a person thinks due to its role in triggering emotions (Nakao, Shiotsuki and Sugaya, 2021). For instance, one can develop a self-defeating thought like "I am a loser." The thought will influence the production of negative emotions, which will result in depression. Taking part in community service voluntarily improves a person's outlook of the world and the self, which in turn results in processing positive thoughts about himself. In so doing, the brain produces positive emotions.

4. Its Impact on the Psychological and Physical Health Among Older Adults

Community service fosters psychological and physical health among older adults. A study revealed that older adults who participated in community service had better health outcomes than those who did not (Jiang, Hosking, Burns and Anstey, 2019). They had a low likability of contracting heart disease and dementia than the ones who did not partake in the activity. It improves their physical health outcomes because it involves physical activities that have the same effects as physical exercise. The activities were also associated with mental outcomes like better sleep, increased self-confidence, and reduced frustrations. Their self-confidence increased because they had an improved sense of meaning that involved feeling that they were part of something greater than themselves.

It also enables older adults to transcend despair, a psychological conflict people who are above 65 years old experience according to Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. The conflict is centered on whether they led meaningful life (Malone et al., 2016). If they do not, they experience despair, which is characterized by feeling unproductive, ruminating over past mistakes, regret, hopelessness, and bitterness. Participating in community service gives the older adults who experience despair the opportunity to live meaningful lives and justify their existence to themselves. That prevents them from experiencing a concatenation of psychological disorders that are associated with despair.

5. Its Impacts People's Loneliness

It prevents feelings of isolation. Taking part in community service helps in eliminating loneliness, which prevents negative brain and physical outcomes. It allows people to break free from their zones of loneliness by interacting with other people. The lonely people become members of new communities in the process, which empowers them to prevent the negative effects of loneliness (McNamara et al., 2021). Although it is a normal condition that many people take lightly, loneliness can result in mental and physical health challenges. It is associated with cognitive outcomes like deterioration of communication and problem-solving skills. The competencies degenerate because people do not exercise them as effectively to achieve the necessary levels of mastery.

Some people also develop concentration issues and cultivate self-defeating beliefs. The latter stems from the fact that they are not around people who can debunk their negative self-talk. In the long term, loneliness can result in depression and anxiety and physical health problems like stroke and heart disease. The aforementioned physical diseases stem from the fact that loneliness increases the amount of cortisol hormone in the body, triggering heightened stress (Ranabir and Reetu, 2011). The stress is medically associated with muscle weakness, high blood pressure, and weight gain resulting in cardiovascular diseases. The profound role of community health in reducing loneliness substantiates that psychologists can use it as a therapy for people who are experiencing loneliness or those on the verge of chronic loneliness.

6. Its Relationship with Social Connections

Apart from eliminating loneliness, it enables those who partake in it to have healthy social lives. The psychological value of social interactions is predicated on the fact that human beings are social animals. Evolutionary psychology has revealed that human

beings need to have healthy social lives because it is the key to survival. The Red Queen Effect Hypothesis asserts that life advances towards entropy which compromises the existence of living beings (Brockhurst et al., 2014). That means the disorder is an integral aspect of nature and will pursue human beings everywhere they go. Disorder, in this case, means conditions that compromise the existence of human beings.

Tragically, most people lack all the resources necessary for transcending the disorder. The grim reality necessitates interdependence among human beings so that they can survive and thrive because distinct people have various resources (Sakman, 2019). If they merge them, everyone benefits from the other, which empowers entire communities to transcend their limitations. Some of the benefits they draw from being part of communities are using their prowess to help other people improve their lives. They helped people play their roles in society, which is also helping other people, including the ones who volunteer. It gives people access to new opportunities to achieve their goals. The result is a stable and effective society in which everyone thrives, eliminating or mitigating the environmental triggers of psychological disorders like social strife. Being part of a community due to community service also gives people a sense of belongingness. It also makes them feel valued and accepted as members of their communities and enables them to feel connected to other members of society. They also understand that they are part of something greater than themselves as they cultivate a good, worthwhile self-identity and strong self-esteem.

7. Conclusion

The analysis above has substantiated that community service is more than an opportunity to create value for the community. It can be considered a therapeutic alternative because it has a profound positive impact on people's psychological health. The study has found that it can reduce mental disorders like psychological stress and depression. It can also help older adults who are experiencing despair get over it. Community service also takes care of the esteem and belongingness needs of people by making them part of a system that is greater than themselves and giving them the opportunity to connect with other human beings and substantiate that they are acceptable and loved members of society. Eliminating loneliness and its impact on people, like loss of communication and problem-solving skills, is also among the primary benefits people who willingly participate in community service earn from it. Based on the above findings, researchers should delve into how specific categories

of people suffering from mental disorders can use community service as a therapeutic approach to mitigate and heal their psychological challenges.

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