

Study on Public's Reception and Perception Of Volunteer Services

Commissioned to
The University of Hong Kong
Public Opinion Programme

by
Agency for Volunteer Service

Executive Summary

1 Stage One: Quantitative Telephone Survey of the General Public

- 1.1 The first part of the telephone survey was conducted between 28 September and 5 October 2001. A total of 1,555 Cantonese-speaking population of Hong Kong aged 15 or above were successfully interviewed. The effective response rate was 64.2%, with a standard sampling error of less than 1.3%. All data in this part have been weighted according to the age and gender distribution of the Hong Kong population as reported in the 2001 Population Census.
- 1.2 This survey has found that only a quarter (22%) of the respondents have participated in organized volunteering before (donation excluded), whilst over half of them (55%) have participated in some form of mutual aid (defined as spontaneous behaviours aimed at helping others, which are not organized and would happen from time to time). All in all, over 60% of the respondents have participated in one form of volunteering activity or another.
- 1.3 As for the sociological profile of volunteers, female volunteers tend to slightly outpace the male ones in participation rate of both organized volunteering and mutual aid. Volunteers who attain a tertiary education level or above also appear to have contributed more to both forms of volunteering services. Besides, it is interesting to notice that younger volunteers display an overall higher participation rate in volunteering services. As regards their occupation, students topped the participation rate for organized volunteering whilst the participation rate of mutual aid was comparatively high among the professionals, clerical/service workers as well as students. Details and breakdown analysis of demographic profiles of different kinds of volunteers are shown in Appendix 1.

- 1.4 Around one-eighth (12%) of the respondents participated in organized volunteering over the past 12 months and these volunteers, on average, participated in volunteering 11.9 times or 34.8 hours over the year past. When asked to estimate how much each working hour was worth if the volunteer work they provided were to be done by paid workers of a private organization, the answer varied within a wide range from HK\$0 to HK\$3,000, but the average was HK\$76 per hour and the median HK\$30 per hour. Results also showed that most of these participants were involved in the volunteer work organized by some educational organizations, religious bodies as well as social service organizations. “Visiting” was the most popular kind of volunteering service that these volunteers have participated in, followed by “recreational activities”. Most of these volunteers learnt about the channels for taking part in volunteer service through their friends, their schools or teachers, religious bodies or social service organizations.
- 1.5 More than half (55%) of the overall sample reported that they have participated in mutual aid before. Nearly one-third (32%) of them volunteered over the past 12 months. Each of these volunteers, on average, participated in mutual aid 18.5 times or 21.9 hours in the year past. Again, when asked to estimate how much each working hour was worth if the volunteer work they provided were to be done by paid workers of a private organization, the average figure obtained for mutual aid was HK\$32 per hour.
- 1.6 Combining organized volunteering and mutual aid, it is found that 968 respondents (62%) out of 1,555 respondents interviewed have participated either in organized volunteering or mutual aid or both before. Over eighty percent (83%) of these current volunteers said they would continue to volunteer in the future.
- 1.7 Those who have never participated in any kind of volunteer work reported that they did not have time to volunteer and around two-fifths (40%) of them said they would consider volunteering in the future.
- 1.8 As regards the reasons for people who participated in any kind of volunteering, “to help others” (72%) topped the list, followed at a distance by the reasons “to serve the community” (33%) and also “to kill time” (24%).
- 1.9 On the other hand, they believed the main hindrances for people not participating in volunteer work were that they could not afford the time (55%), and volunteering could be troublesome (23%).

- 1.10 Nearly three-fifths (59%) of the general public have never encouraged others to participate in volunteering. Meanwhile, two-thirds (68%) have never been encouraged by people around either. For those who have been encouraged to volunteer (502 respondents), the main source of that encouragement came from their friends.
- 1.11 Concerning the main barriers to the local development of volunteering, “lack of time of Hong Kong people” (22%) was most frequently cited, followed by “poor economic conditions” (14%) and “lack of resources” (10%).
- 1.12 With regards to the way to improve the situation, most of the respondents suggested “to improve the economic conditions” (12%), “to inject more resources” (8%) as well as “to cultivate the atmosphere for volunteering” (7%).
- 1.13 In their opinion, the development of local volunteering should most preferably be supported by the government (38%). However, the people in Hong Kong (26%) and the non-government organizations (21%) should also share the responsibilities.
- 1.14 Over half of the respondents (56%) described the current social status of volunteers in Hong Kong as being respectable.

2 Stage Two: Quantitative Telephone Survey of the Service Recipients

- 2.1 The second part of the telephone survey was conducted between 24 October and 5 November 2001. Organization representatives who had ever received volunteering services before the time of interview were defined as the target population of this part. A total of 204 respondents were successfully interviewed. The overall response rate for this part was 97.6% and the standard error due to sampling was no more than 3.5 percentage points. The data collected in the second part were presented in raw figures as no weighting techniques were applied.
- 2.2 All of the 204 respondents re-confirmed their organization or department had received volunteering service before and a landslide majority (96%) reported that they received volunteering service over the past 12 months.
- 2.3 Excluding those who were certain that they have not received volunteering service over the past 12 months, each of these service recipients deployed 237 volunteers in the year past on average when taking all the definite answers provided. Meanwhile, the average number of service hours each volunteer contributed in the year past was

25.0 hours.

- 2.4 It is found that the types of volunteering service the organization received most were, in descending order, “recreational activities”, “visiting” and “clerical work”.
- 2.5 Respondents were in general satisfied with the services of the volunteer provider agencies. Besides, over four-fifths (86%) of them had positive evaluation of the performance of the volunteers.
- 2.6 Practically all respondents (99%) said they would deploy volunteers again or consider deploying volunteers in the future. As on the kind of volunteering service they would like to receive, “recreational activities” topped the list, followed by “visiting” and “clerical work” at a distance.
- 2.7 Results of this survey revealed that respondents (only answers of those “qualified” respondents who had personal experience with volunteering agencies were analyzed in this section) were generally satisfied with the services provided by the existing volunteer provider agencies and their management, and they thought that these agencies were easily accessible when in need.
- 2.8 Nearly three-fifths (58%) of the respondents regarded the current government policies were encouraging the development of volunteering. Almost the same figure (57%) was obtained for the culture of Hong Kong.
- 2.9 According to the opinions of the service recipients, the main barriers to the local development of volunteering were, in descending order, “lack of resources”, “lack of time of Hong Kong people”, “poor economic conditions” and “lack of atmosphere for volunteering”.
- 2.10 One-fifth (20%) of the respondents suggested injecting more resources to improve the situation, while more than one-sixth (17%) believed that there should be more governmental assistance.
- 2.11 The government (32%) was considered as the most preferred supporting body for developing local volunteering, whereas more than a quarter (28%) of respondents thought that non-government organizations should take up this responsibility, more than one-tenth (11%) said Hong Kong people should be responsible.
- 2.12 The majority of the respondents (72%) in this part regarded volunteers in Hong Kong as being respectable.

3 Stage Three: Qualitative Focus group Studies

Totally two sessions of focus groups were conducted. Each group consisted of two parts, namely a brief PowerPoint presentation of the survey results and an open discussion, which lasted for about one and a half hour in total.

3.1 Views of Volunteers

3.1.1 The first focus group was held on 21 December 2001. The target participants for this group were existing volunteers and there were 32 participants in this group.

3.1.2 Most of the existing volunteers believed that self-motivation was the most important determining factor for people to participate in volunteering. Lack of time and poor economic conditions were simply excuses for not participating.

3.1.3 Education institutions, business corporations, centers for teenagers, the elderly and new immigrants were all good entry points for promoting volunteerism.

3.1.4 Organizations should pay efforts to understand the needs and expectations of each volunteer before the deployment. Clear explanation of the job nature was equally important as the lack of communication would easily lead to "mis-matches".

3.1.5 Organizations had better carry out some post-service evaluations with the volunteers so as to make the volunteers feel respected, and being cared of, thus attaining their long-term commitment in return.

3.1.6 Training for both the organizers and individual volunteers was in need. For certain types of service, training on basic knowledge, skills and precautions should be delivered to the volunteers beforehand so as to enhance the success of volunteer services.

3.1.7 Genuine support from government was indispensable, for example, increasing the intensity and diversity of mass communication programs, granting non-paid leave to those who participated in volunteer services, and injecting more resources.

3.1.8 More civic education was called for to instill positive values of volunteerism among the general public and also to sweep out all the incorrect concepts, values, intentions, practices and even behaviours.

3.2 Views of Service Recipients

- 3.2.1 The second focus group was held on 31 January 2002. The target participants for this group were organization representatives who had ever received volunteer services, and there were 8 participants in this group.
- 3.2.2 Most participants admitted that, very often, the preparation time for coordinating an activity was not enough, hence resulting in insufficient supply of volunteers as well as other administrative problems.
- 3.2.3 Most recipients organizations started their own recruitment of volunteers because they had a better understanding of their own needs and the volunteers would be more likely to have long-term commitment if they shared the same values with the organizations, thus, demand for volunteer referral services would become diminished.
- 3.2.4 Regular training programs for volunteers should be organized so as to attract more new comers and maintain the experienced volunteers with good quality.
- 3.2.5 Minimal welfare and benefits that would not bring along extra financial burdens to the organization could be offered to the volunteers for maintaining their long-term commitment.
- 3.2.6 Participants recommended that the volunteer organizations should develop a systematic volunteer database which allowed easy retrieval of desired information.
- 3.2.7 Schools of all levels were superlative bases for promoting volunteerism, and the parents should also be encouraged to participate in volunteering in order to strengthen the bondage within a family.
- 3.2.8 Additional resources should be injected for the local development of volunteerism and the ultimate goal should be to arouse the society's attention, interest and eventually involvement in volunteering.
- 3.2.9 Up to date, professional researches on volunteering were scarce. Therefore, more research work should be done in order to fully comprehend the situation, to identify problems, and then move forward with clear directions.