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# Involvement in Voluntary Organizations: How Older Adults Access Volunteer Roles?

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**ABSTRACT.** This study examines how older adults access organizational volunteer roles and what socio-structural factors are associated with the access. Using the data from the Current Population Survey (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2002), bivariate analyses show that there are variations in access to volunteer roles across types of organizations. Results from multinomial logistic regressions indicate that education, income, age, and race are associated with the ways that older adults access volunteer roles. Voluntary organizations are advised to approach older adults directly, use current volunteers to recruit potential ones, publicize their organizational goals, and disseminate relevant information in efforts to improve access of older adults to volunteer roles.

**KEYWORDS.** Organizational volunteer, access, older adults, organization type, socio-structural factor

With the growing demand for social services and shrinking public funding, it is very likely that communities will increasingly rely on volunteers

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to deliver social services, and that social workers will have more chances to work with volunteers in public, private, and nonprofit, voluntary organizations (Jirovec, 2005). As older adults (i.e., those aged 65 and over) are increasingly involved in structured volunteerism and community service (Independent Sector, 2000), it is important to build a knowledge base and to understand how older adults access organizational volunteer roles. Do they approach volunteer organizations on their own initiative? Are they asked to volunteer by organizations or by their friends, relatives, and coworkers? Are they affected by their own or others' involvement in the organization? Does older adults' access to volunteer roles differ across various types of organizations? What socio-structural factors are associated with their access to volunteer roles? The answers to these questions will enable voluntary organizations to more effectively recruit older volunteers and assist them in engaging in volunteer roles. The research presented in this article answers these questions.

The burgeoning older population in the United States is experiencing increased longevity, improved health, and more financial security. Motivated, talented, and active older adults are considered great social resources for voluntary services (Independent Sector, 2000). A national survey for Civic Ventures conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates (1999) found that 50% of older adults, aged 50 to 75, planned to engage in volunteering and community service after retirement. Compared with younger people, older adults have the potential to make greater efforts in volunteering because they have more free time and take on fewer work and family responsibilities (Caro & Bass, 1995). Volunteering in later life is also associated with health maintenance and improved health and well-being (e.g., Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Musick & Wilson, 2003). Therefore, advocates of volunteerism call for expanding volunteering engagement in the older population because of its subsequent positive outcomes. How to effectively recruit older volunteers and improve their access to volunteerism becomes key to increasing the organizational volunteer pool in an aging society.

## **BACKGROUND**

Older adults vary in their access to organizational volunteer roles. Generally, people of all ages who have a strong interest in organizational goals and a strong sense of self-efficacy are likely to approach organizations and seek out volunteer opportunities by themselves; otherwise, they

are primarily recruited through social networks, such as friends, coworkers, and family members (Pearce, 1993). Descriptive statistics in a few studies demonstrate how older adult volunteers were recruited. Caro and Bass (1995) found that older adults were more likely to respond to a community leader or a close friend asking them to volunteer than they were to public media appeals through newsletter, radio, or TV. Personal experience is also an important means of involving older adults in volunteer programs. In a study about hospice volunteers of various age groups, 29% of respondents learned about volunteer opportunities through their personal experience with hospice, and 28% acquired information from a friend with such an experience (Black & Kovacs, 1999). The type of voluntary organization and/or the requirement of volunteer work may determine, to some extent, the recruitment of older adults. However, we know of no studies that concentrate specifically on the association of the voluntary organization type with the access to volunteer roles in the older population, nor examine the effect of socio-demographic characteristics on access to volunteer roles.

The literature indicates that age is also a factor in volunteer recruitment. Previous studies identify approaching older people directly as the most effective volunteer recruitment method (Caro & Bass, 1995; Kovacs & Black, 1999). Another effective method has been utilization of current volunteers to recruit newcomers (Kovacs & Black, 1999). Despite the effectiveness of the direct-ask approach, older adults are not as likely to be asked to volunteer as younger adults. In fact, the Independent Sector's 1999 national survey of giving and volunteering in the United States showed that less than one-third of all elders aged 65 and over were asked to volunteer (Independent Sector, 2000). This compares to 50% of all ages who were asked to volunteer in the 2001 survey (Independent Sector, 2001). Another factor contributing to age variance in volunteering is that structural opportunities are not equally accessible to people of all ages. For example, AmeriCorp, the largest program of national and community service, is biased toward youth, with fewer than 3% of volunteers aged 60 and over, and only 7% of total Peace Corps volunteers aged 50 and over. Unrecognized issues of ageism may also restrict volunteer organizations from soliciting potential older volunteers.

In addition to age, access to volunteer roles may be affected by socio-structural factors, including social class, race, and gender, all of which characterize and stratify the aging process and experience (Dressel, Minkler, & Yen, 1999). Volunteering is considered an activity of the middle class, or an elitist activity (Fisher & Schaffer, 1993; Smith, 1994). The inequality dynamics embedded in social class, gender, and race may,

therefore, impose barriers to older adults accessing volunteer roles (Dressel et al., 1999). Previous studies have focused on what demographic characteristics were associated with the likelihood of volunteering among older adults. Socioeconomic status (SES) measured through education and income determines the distribution of social resources that make volunteering possible (Wilson, 2000). Generally, higher SES is associated with a greater likelihood of volunteering. This association is confirmed by empirical evidence that has found that older volunteers are likely to be young-old (under age 75), female, White, married, highly educated, and with a high household income (e.g., Caro & Bass, 1995; Fisher & Schaffer, 1993, Kim & Hong, 1998). Education is one of the most significant factors affecting volunteering (e.g., Caro & Bass, 1995; Fisher & Schaffer, 1993). Educated people have more access to structured volunteer roles through their professional and social connections (Fisher, Mueller, & Cooper, 1991; Jirovec & Hyduk, 1998). Higher household income is also associated with more likelihood of volunteering (Fisher et al., 1991).

Racial differentials in volunteering are more evident in the older generations than in younger cohorts. The discrimination and segregation experienced by older Blacks has resulted in restricted access to certain types of volunteer organizations among these older people (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). Although the civil rights movement's resulting legislation has helped remove obstacles to volunteering participation among younger Blacks (Miner & Tolnay, 1998), Blacks are still less likely than Whites to be asked by organizations to volunteer, and not being asked is one of the main reasons for not volunteering reported by Blacks (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). Institutional racism exists in access to structured positions in certain type of volunteer organizations, especially in those job-related and social service organizations that have been historically dominated by and accessible to Whites (Miner & Tolnay, 1998).

It is not clear how gender affects access to volunteer roles. However, there are gender differentials in the type of organizations for which people volunteer. Studies have found that men were likely to participate in recreational groups, followed by religious, multidomain, and educational organizations, whereas women tended to be involved in religious groups, followed by education, health, and recreational groups (Day & Devlin, 1997). More male than female volunteers were committed to economy-related groups such as union associations and those concerning employment opportunities and consumer protection (Day & Devlin, 1997). There are variations in recruitment among different types of organizations. Gender differentials in types of volunteer organizations may, therefore, be associated with access to volunteer roles.

Age differentials in volunteering access are confounded by differences across gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, all of which constitute the social context of “institutionalized sources of inequality over the life course” (Quadagno & Reid, 1999, p. 356). Socio-structural differentials in volunteering may be more directly related to how organizations recruit older volunteers from different backgrounds rather than individual preference for organizational types. Volunteer organizations differ in their goals, missions, eligibility requirements, and roles in the community (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). The nature of volunteer work across types of organizations may determine eligibility for certain volunteer roles and thus affect access to structured opportunities; whereas information, incentive, and facilitation provided by organizations may help overcome the barriers to organizational volunteering (Caro & Bass, 1995; Sherraden, Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Rozario, 2001).

Volunteer organizations can be categorized based on activity (Hall et al., 1998), goals of activity (Van Til, 1988), or functions of the organization (Glanville, 2004). The list of organization types in the Current Population Survey (CPS; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2002) basically corresponds to the categorizations based on activity types, including culture and recreation; education and research; health; social services; environment; development and housing; law, advocacy, and politics; philanthropic; religious; and international (Hall et al., 1998).

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how older adults access and take on structured volunteer roles in organizations and to examine what socio-structural factors are associated with access to volunteer roles. Using nationally representative survey data, this study addresses the following research questions: (a) Are there variations in access to volunteer roles across different types of organizations? (b) What socio-structural characteristics are related to the access to organizational volunteer roles? (c) What characterizes older adults who were more likely to be asked to volunteer either by their social networks or by voluntary organizations?

## ***METHOD***

### ***Sample***

Data for this secondary analysis was obtained from the September 2002 CPS (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2002), collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. CPS is a monthly survey of

about 60,000 households, which has been conducted for more than 50 years. It is a primary information source of labor force characteristics in the United States, representing the national noninstitutional population. Since 2002, the September Supplement Survey has inquired about volunteering in organizations. This monthly supplement has provided information regarding the extent and type of voluntary activities and organizations that respondents were involved in during the past 12 months. Respondents who did volunteer work were further inquired about how they first become volunteers. Survey questions were asked of individuals aged 16 and older across the nation. For the purpose of this study, a subset of all individuals aged 65 and older ( $N = 18,109$ ) was used. In the multinomial analyses, the data was limited to only those who reported volunteering ( $n = 3,939$ ).

### ***Variables***

*Volunteers* in the CPS refers to persons who performed formal, unpaid volunteer activities through and for an organization at any time in the 12 months prior to the survey; those who volunteered in an informal manner are not included (U.S Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2002).<sup>1</sup> Two dependent variables, *how you first became a volunteer* and *who asked you to volunteer*, derive from information obtained from those respondents who reported volunteering. Respondents were asked to describe how they first became volunteers for an organization. A list of options was given and respondents were asked to choose only one appropriate answer. The original 11-category responses were recategorized into (a) approaching the organization; (b) being asked; (c) family member's, friend's, or coworker's involvement in the organization; (d) one's own involvement in the organization, being referred by a volunteer organization, or responding to public appeal in newspaper/radio/Internet; and (e) others, including court-ordered community service. Some older adult respondents volunteered through the channel of informal social connections such as family members, friends, and coworkers, whose involvement in volunteer organizations made easily accessible volunteer roles in these organizations. Thus, category 3 represents this group of older adults, whereas category 4 refers to the group of older adults who relied on formal social connections such as involvement in or referral by organizations and response to public media. Other channels than the ones mentioned fell into category 5.

Among those who had been asked to volunteer, respondents were further asked: "Who asked you to become a volunteer for this organization?"

Only one response was allowed to be selected. The measure of *who asked you to volunteer* was categorized into (a) friend or relative, (b) someone in the organization, and (c) others, including coworker, boss–employer, or someone else. Based on the similar nature of organizations, the original 16-category *type of main organization* for which elders volunteered was recategorized into (a) religious; (b) civic, political, professional, or international; (c) educational or youth service; (d) hospital or other health related; (e) social or community service, environmental or animal care, public safety; and (f) sports, hobby, cultural or arts and other types of organizations. The variable *type of main organization* was used in bivariate analyses. Social structure variables including age, gender, race, education, and income were used as independent variables. Marital status, employment status, and number of household members were controlled in the analyses, because they are associated with role status and social networks needed for volunteering participation (Fisher & Schaffer, 1993; Wilson, 2000).

### ***Analytic Strategy***

Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine whether there is any difference in access to volunteer roles across types of organizations. Given the polynomial nature of the dependent variables (i.e., *how you first became a volunteer, who asked you to volunteer*), multinomial logistic regressions (executed through the PROC CATMOD procedure in *Statistical Analysis System*) were used to assess the likelihood of one way of being involved in organizational volunteering versus another way, after controlling for socio-demographic variables. For example, being asked by someone in the organization was the referent category against which being asked by friends or relatives and being asked by others were compared. The regression estimates represent the change in log odds of being in one category is associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable, as opposed to being in another category after controlling for related variables.

## **RESULTS**

In the sample of older adults over the age of 65 years, about 24% volunteered in organizations at some point from September 2001 to September 2002. Bivariate analyses show that older adult volunteers differed from their nonvolunteering counterparts in socio-demographic characteristics (see Table 1). In comparison, volunteers were likely to be

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic comparison between volunteers and nonvolunteers

	Volunteer ( <i>n</i> = 3,939)			Nonvolunteer ( <i>n</i> = 12,476)			$\chi^2$ (df)	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%		
Age (range 65–80 yrs)	72.9	5.1		73.9	5.2			10.8***
Race								
White			94.0			88.3	102.7 (1)***	
Non-White			6.0			11.7		
Gender								
Man			39.8			43.4	16.4 (1)***	
Woman			60.2			56.6		
Education (Highest level of school completed, 1–16)	10.3	2.8		8.5	3.1			34.1***
Income (Range 1 = \$5,000 to 14 = \$75,000+)	9.1	3.4		7.8	3.6			18.7***
Household members (Range 0–16)	1.8	0.8		2.0	1.1			9.6***
Marital status								
Married			62.5			54.1	85.6 (1)***	
Not married			37.5			45.9		
Work status								
Not working			83.8			88.8	75.7 (2)***	
Part-time work			10.1			6.3		
Full-time work			6.1			5.0		

Note. *N* = 18,109.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

younger, White, female, married, and have a higher level of education and family income. Proportionally, older adults in the labor force were more likely to volunteer than those who were not employed, and older volunteers had fewer members in the household than nonvolunteers. All of these findings are in line with the current literature about who are likely to be volunteers in later life (e.g., Caro & Bass, 1995; Fisher & Schaffer, 1993).

Of the main organizations<sup>2</sup> for which older adults volunteered, approximately 45% of older adult volunteers were engaged in religious organizations; 21% were affiliated with social and community service groups; about 11% did volunteer work in hospitals or other health-related organizations (see Table 2). The rest of older volunteers were disseminated across other types, including cultural or arts organizations, sports or

TABLE 2. How older adults first became volunteers across types of organizations

Organization Type	How One First Became a Volunteer					
	Volunteer	Self-approaching Organization	Being Asked	Formal Social Connection	Informal Social Connection	Other Ways
Religious	44.8	43.2	43.1	7.9	2.2	3.6
Social service	20.7	42.7	41.7	7.4	3.2	5.1
Health	10.8	44.6	42.1	3.9	3.4	6.1
Civic, political, professional	9.0	42.3	44.0	7.0	2.9	3.8
Others	8.5	40.9	41.2	4.9	4.9	8.0
Educational	6.2	41.3	46.8	3.8	5.1	3.0
Total	100.0	42.9	42.9	6.8	3.0	4.5

Note.  $N = 3,939$ . Percentage is reported.

hobby groups (9%); civic, political, professional, or international organizations (8.5%); and educational or youth service groups (6%). The findings are consistent with previous studies, indicating that older volunteers are most likely to provide voluntary services in churches or religious-related organizations, followed by social service, health, and educational institutions (e.g., Van Willigen, 2000).

Approaching the organization (43%) and being asked (43%) were the most frequently reported ways that older adults accessed volunteer activity across various organizations. Older adult volunteers in educational organizations and civic, political, professional, and international groups were more often asked to volunteer, whereas volunteers in hospital or health-related and religious organizations were more likely to approach the organizations about volunteering. Fourteen percent of the older adults in this sample first became organizational volunteers through their own, friends', or relatives' involvement in the organization; responding to public appeals; or in other ways. Proportionally, more older adults took volunteer roles in religious and social service organizations because they had already been involved in the organization, whereas those volunteering in educational and other types of organizations tended to be influenced by their friends' or relatives' involvement in these organizations. The findings indicate that access to volunteer roles varied across types of organizations,  $\chi^2(20, N = 3,811) = 43.9, p = .005$ .

TABLE 3. Who asked older adults to volunteer

Organization Type	Who Asked You to Volunteer (%)			
	Volunteer (%)	Asked by Organization	Friends or Relatives	Others
Religious	45.1	75.2	20.9	3.8
Social service	20.1	48.5	41.2	10.4
Health	10.7	52.3	38.5	9.2
Civic, political, professional	9.2	58.7	34	7.3
Others	8.2	52.2	40.3	7.5
Educational	6.7	59.1	35.5	5.5
Total	100.0	62.9	30.7	6.4

Note.  $N = 1,646$ .

Table 3 shows that, among those volunteers, who had been asked to volunteer ( $n = 1,646$ ), about 63% were asked by someone in the organization; 31% were asked by their friends and relatives; and the rest were asked by other people, including coworkers, bosses, or others. Proportionally, religious organizations (75%) tended to directly ask older adults to volunteer, whereas volunteers in the rest of types of organizations were likely to be asked through their informal social networks. Older adults volunteering for social service and health related organizations were more likely to be asked by coworkers, employers, or others. These findings demonstrate that there are significant difference in terms of who asked older adults to volunteer across organizational types,  $\chi^2(10, N = 1,631) = 95.8, p < .0001$ .

Table 4 contains estimates, standard errors, and Wald Chi-square statistics from the multinomial logistic regression. Approaching organizations was the referent way to first become volunteers. Education affected the likelihood of being asked versus approaching organizations themselves. Highly educated elders were less likely to be asked to volunteer when controlling for other socio-structural variables. Age affected the likelihood of older adults accessing volunteer roles through formal social connection(s). The older-old individuals were more likely than the younger-old individuals to volunteer because of their own involvement in the organization, being referred by organizations, or responding to public appeals. White older adults were more apt to be influenced by their friends' or relatives' involvement in the organization. Male and/or

TABLE 4. Multinomial logistic regression of how older adults first became volunteers: estimates, standard errors, and wald chi-square values

	Being Asked			Formal Social Connections			Informal Social Connections			Other Ways		
	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square
Age	-0.00	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.02	3.93*	-0.03	0.02	1.39	0.01	0.02	0.21
Gender	0.01	0.08	0.03	0.18	0.16	1.25	0.09	0.23	0.15	0.41	0.20	4.31*
Race	0.15	0.16	0.89	0.02	0.31	0.00	1.98	1.02	3.81*	-0.01	0.37	0.00
Income	0.00	0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.03	0.12	-0.01	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.14
Education	-0.03	0.02	3.53*	0.00	0.03	0.00	-0.03	0.04	0.45	0.07	0.04	3.57*
Married	0.17	0.12	2.02	0.04	0.25	2.19	0.01	0.37	0.00	-0.11	0.30	0.13
Part-time work	0.01	0.08	0.02	-0.00	0.17	0.00	-0.23	0.19	1.39	-0.16	0.17	0.92
Full-time work	-0.07	0.06	1.20	-0.14	0.12	1.43	-0.04	0.18	0.04	-0.03	0.15	0.04
Household	-0.07	0.34	0.04	-0.72	0.74	0.94	-1.12	1.11	1.01	-0.67	0.87	0.59

Note. Approaching organization is the referent group.  $N = 3,939$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

TABLE 5. Multinomial logistic regression of who asked older adult to volunteer: estimates, standard errors, and wald chi-square values

	Asked By Friends/Relatives			Asked By Coworkers/Bosses		
	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square	Estimate	SE	Chi-Square
Age	-0.00	0.01	0.05	-0.01	0.02	0.22
Gender	-0.12	0.13	0.87	0.06	0.24	0.06
Race	0.36	0.29	1.52	-0.59	0.40	2.19
Income	0.06	0.02	6.65**	0.08	0.04	3.86*
Education	-0.08	0.02	9.84**	-0.03	0.05	0.34
Married	-0.67	0.19	12.35***	-0.76	0.34	4.97*
Part-time work	-0.61	0.31	3.84*	0.34	0.40	0.75
Full-time work	0.21	0.19	1.19	0.07	0.36	0.04
Household	1.38	0.55	6.38*	0.21	0.97	0.05

Note. Being asked by someone in the organization is the referent group.  $N = 1,646$ .

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

high-educated elders tended to access volunteer roles through other means versus approaching organizations themselves.

Socio-structural factors had stronger associations with the likelihood of being asked to volunteer (see Table 5). Being asked by someone in the organization was the referent category. Income, education, marital status, employment, and household members affected the likelihood of being asked by friends or relatives versus being asked by organizations. Older adults with higher income and/or more members in the household were likely to be asked by friends or relatives. However, education and marital status reduced the likelihood of older adults being asked by friends or relatives to volunteer. Similarly, income and marital status affected the likelihood of being asked by coworkers versus by organizations. High-income elders were more likely to be asked by coworkers or bosses, whereas married elders were less likely to be asked by their coworkers or bosses versus by someone in the organization.

## DISCUSSION

The older population may be this nation's only growing natural resource that can be brought into productive activity (Freedman, 1996). The fact that about one out of four in the older population, aged 65 and over, volunteered suggests that older people have made significant

contributions as organizational volunteers. They have great potential to be further engaged in volunteering because prolonged life expectancy and improved health status make possible involvement in structured volunteering on a long-term basis. The key question is how to recruit older people effectively and what strategies are most useful in activating this potential resource to address social needs. Volunteer organizations need draw upon various recruitment methods to expand volunteerism in the older population according to the nature of volunteer roles.

The evidence that about 43% of older volunteers approached the organization indicates that they may be personally motivated or that volunteer roles may be appealing to certain groups of older adults. People are often drawn to a particular organization because of its mission or cause; for example, volunteers for AIDS service organizations and hospices were motivated by a dedication to caring for patients infected by the virus or to the gay community (Kovacs & Black, 1999). Therefore, social workers charged with developing volunteer programs need to specify the goals of the volunteer program and connect them with social issues that are easily identified, such as improving school children's academic performance, preserving families, or helping kids in need (Kovacs & Black, 1999). Older people are often motivated by altruism or the values of helping others and contributing to the society (e.g., Kim & Hong, 1998). Clearly articulated organizational goals or missions may easily connect older adults with volunteer roles and their desire for altruism. Another 43% of the older volunteers in this sample were asked to engage in organizational volunteering, suggesting that directly asking elders plays an important role in recruiting older volunteers. Because most elders in the sample were not at work at the time of interview (86%), they were less likely to be asked by their coworkers or employers than the organization, friends, or relatives. For those who were living alone without family members in the household, they may have few social networks to provide them with information about volunteer opportunities. Thus, social workers in health, mental health, and personal social service settings serving older adults need reach out to those elders with fewer social connections and ask them directly if they would like to be involved in organizational volunteering and community service.

This study found an organizational difference in access to volunteer roles among older adults. They were more likely to approach hospitals and other health related organizations, whereas those volunteering in educational institutions and civic, political, professional, and international groups tended to be asked. One reason could be that older adults may be

familiar with health-related organizations through their own, their friends', or their relatives' experience in these organizations; however, they may not have chances to learn about volunteering activities in schools, youth organizations, or civic, political, professional, and international groups if nobody around them has introduced such opportunities. Thus, it is very important for these organizations to reach out to potential older volunteers through directly asking and disseminating information about volunteer roles in the older population. Such information dissemination is a wonderful networking opportunity for social workers in different fields of practice. It is also a way that schools of social work and field practice agencies can collaborate. In terms of the likelihood of direct asking, social service agencies were least likely to ask older adults to volunteer compared with all other types of organizations (see Table 3). However, social service agencies are struggling between the need for expanded social services and the shortfall of federal funding for service provision (Caro & Bass, 1995; Jirovec, 2005). It is very likely that social service organizations will engage more and more older adults in voluntary service provision and delivery. Therefore, it is important for social workers in social service agencies to take the lead in "making the ask" in efforts to expand volunteering in the older population.

The lack of significance in the relationship between socio-structural factors and access to volunteer roles is noted. One possible reason could be that socio-structural factors such as age, gender, race, education, and income are not equal to the social resources and individual capacity that are needed for volunteering. Being young, male, White, and upper-class indicates the possession of more social resources and skills necessary for volunteering, but they are definitely not equivalents. The measures of socio-structural factors may not be sensitive enough to predict the relationship with access to organizational volunteer roles. In addition, other determinants of volunteering participation, including personal values, attitudes, motivations, and interaction with institutional factors, may account for the variances in access to volunteer roles. Further research is needed to examine how these factors are related to older adults' access to volunteer roles.

The marginal effects of education and income found in this study, however, have implications for social work practice. Social workers need to consider older adults' education and income levels when working in or with organizations who are recruiting older adult volunteers. The findings indicate that highly-educated elders are more likely to approach organizations versus being asked. Among those being asked to volunteer, they are

more likely to be asked by someone in the organization than by their informal and formal social connections. This is probably because some volunteer programs—such as Senior Companions, Forster Grandparents, and Experience Corps, all of which provide stipend and financial reimbursement for older volunteers—have already targeted low-income elders. Older adults who are members of labor unions, a source of both volunteer recruitment and activity, are also less apt to be highly educated or in high-income households. Although education and income are correlated ( $r = 0.43$ ) in this study, they have dissimilar effects on access to volunteer roles. Less-educated elders face obstacles to volunteering engagement due to the lack of skills and capability needed for volunteering, such as leadership skills, verbal and written communication skills, and self confidence (Jirovec & Hyduk, 1998). Therefore, they have fewer opportunities for institutional involvement in schools, workplaces, and voluntary associations (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995). If volunteer programs are able to provide skill training, on-going support, and sufficient supervision necessary for volunteer role performance, less-educated elders may be attracted to volunteering involvement and then benefit from volunteering in terms of developing civic skills. They may improve self-efficacy or confidence through acquisition of skills and abilities crucial to organizational volunteering (Jirovec & Hyduk, 1998). Also, matching older volunteers' capacity with volunteer role requirements may make them comfortable and confident in volunteering performance.

There are limitations to this study. Due to the contingency design in survey questions that addressed the access to volunteer roles in the CPS data, that is, the questions were only asked to volunteers, the research question regarding socio-structural differentials in access to volunteer roles cannot be fully examined. The sample is restricted to older volunteers only, who have already demonstrated socio-structural differences to the nonvolunteer population. Older adults who were young-old, highly-educated, married, and had more family income were likely to participate in volunteering activities. These differences have already been reflected in the likelihood of volunteering engagement; thus, they eliminate the extent to which socio-structural factors make a difference in how older adults access organizational roles. Further studies are needed to ask all respondents about their preferences regarding access to volunteer roles, the most likely way that they would become volunteers from a list of available items, what barriers are perceived their access to volunteering, and what kind of organizational facilitation or support is needed in assisting them with volunteer role taking. Also, it

would be useful to ask organizations about how they recruit older adults as volunteers and whether recruitment methods vary across organizations or types of volunteer activity.

Socio-structural characteristics as exogenous factors may affect individual resources and the capacity needed for volunteering. However, both resource and capacity can be developed or improved by organizational initiatives. Voluntary organizations that use older volunteers can take the lead by actively recruiting older adults who are willing and able to volunteer. It is the organizational responsibility to break down the lines across social classes and facilitate elders who need skill training, transportation, and any other support in assuming volunteer roles. The information provided here on the ways that older adults become involved in volunteering can be used by organizations to recruit, train, place, and make good use of older volunteers. In the 21st century, with the emerging patterns of productive engagement of older adults, social workers involved in voluntary organizations are in a position to help older adults move into an era of productive old age. The challenge to the profession is to be creative in ways that older adult volunteers can contribute to individual, organizational, and societal well-being.

## ***CONCLUSIONS***

This study has identified the differences in access to volunteer roles across various types of organizations and examined the effect of socio-structural factors on the ways to become an organizational volunteer. There is much still to learn about how volunteer organizations facilitate older adults to engage in volunteer roles and remove institutional barriers to volunteering, as well as how individual motivation and capacity affect the access to volunteer roles. However, it is clear that variations exist in the access to volunteer roles across different types of organizations and that education and income are associated with how older adults first become volunteers. Social workers across all fields of practice need to be aware of how their work can positively impact the development of volunteering among their older clients. This study demonstrates the important place that socio-demographic characteristics may play in how older people get involved in volunteering. It establishes the need for social workers in all practice settings to solicit less-educated and lower-income elderly into volunteering through advocacy, outreach, and facilitation.

## NOTES

1. Formal volunteering means an unpaid productive activity to benefit another person, group, or organization, involving structured commitment to a voluntary organization. Informal volunteering is an episodic and occasional help to neighbors, friends, or relatives (Wilson & Musick, 1997).

2. Respondents were asked about the number and type of organizations for which they volunteered. *The type of main organization* in this study was measured through the response to the first mentioned or main organization for which respondents volunteered; types of other organizations rather than the main organization were not taken into account.

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