# "It's About Care as Much as It's About Feminism": Women's Personal and Political Motivations for Volunteering in Refuges and Rape Crisis Centres

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the motivations of women doing unpaid work in refuges and rape crisis centres at the international level. The limitations of existing literature are discussed and new data presented, concluding that women's motivations are multiple and complex with feminist political motivations and personal experience being significant factors in the decision to become involved.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article discute des motifs des femmes qui font du travail bénévole dans des centres de réfugiés et dans des centres pour victimes de viol au niveau international. Les limites de la littérature existante sont discutées et les nouvelles données sont présentées en concluant que les motifs des femmes sont multiples et complexes, avec la motivation féministe politique et l'expérience personnelle étant des facteurs important dans leur prise de décision.

## INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, human service agencies rely on significant numbers of volunteers (Gidron 1984). Few human service agencies depend on volunteers as much as those known as "female enclaves," for example rape crisis centres and women's refuges (Black and Dinitto 1994). These organisations have dual functions as part service provider and part campaigner for political change. We still know relatively little about why individuals volunteer, or why they volunteer for particular causes and in particular settings. Literature from social movement theory fails to adequately explain women's involvement in the feminist movement and its organisations, and literature on volunteering suggests relatively simple altruistic motivations for involvement. This paper discusses research which examined the motivations of women who volunteer in these organisations, their experience of volunteering, and the extent to which the dual function of these organisations plays a role in these two areas.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF DEFINING, MEASURING AND RESEARCHING UNPAID AND VOLUNTARY WORK

Social science disciplines, encouraged by feminist scholarship, are increasingly recognising women's unpaid work and paying attention to "society's undervaluation of women and of their contribution to social well-being" (Beneria 1999, 287). Unpaid work of all forms, be it domestic labour, subsistence work, or volunteering, are underestimated in statistics on the labour force, national income and Gross National Product (GNP). These measures were designed to look at remunerated activity and as such concentrated on the market as the core focus of economic activity. As a result, the concept of being "at work" became seen as a subset of paid employment (Beneria 1999, 288). Furthermore, unpaid work remains largely "hidden" because a great deal of it is done in the private sphere of the home in the form of domestic labour. In the case of volunteering, this form of unpaid work remains largely "hidden" and difficult to measure because information is not collected, neither for the purpose of measuring in itself, nor for

the purposes of taxation of wages, nor for union membership, for example.

Researching voluntary work is also difficult because of definitional problems. There is no single definition of "a volunteer," nor is there a single definition or understanding of what it means "to volunteer." Wardell et al. (2000) indicate that the public perception of the label "volunteer" as "do-gooder" means many volunteers often prefer labels such as "helper," so as to avoid being viewed as a stereotype. Furthermore the stereotypical profile of a volunteer was of middle-aged, educated women with a secure income, who attend church regularly and are altruistically motivated (Davis Smith 1993). Halfpenny and Reid (2002) document the variety of attempts made to define the voluntary sector, what organisations it comprises, and who it involves. The traditional assumption that voluntary work involved philanthropic or altruistic motives (Wardell et al. 2000), and provided services to those "less fortunate than ourselves" has meant organisations that developed from political movements, such as refuges and rape crisis centres, have, with the exception of a few studies (Black and Dinitto 1994), been neglected in research on volunteers' motivations. In fact, in general there have been few studies of volunteers and we still lack knowledge about motivations for volunteering, who volunteers, and their experience of volunteering (Wardell et al. 2000).

## THE FEMINIST ANTI-VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

The second wave feminist movement redefined violence against women as an issue of power and control and sought to challenge traditional ideas about domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. The distinction between the public and the private was challenged as well as the conduct of state agencies in relation to sexual assault survivors, and the reluctance to intervene in "domestic" situations. The feminist response took two forms: political campaigning; and the provision of alternative welfare services for women in the form of refuges and crisis centres aimed at empowering women and challenging male domination (Charles 2000; Lovenduski and Randall 1993). As such, the organisation and the movement

that developed had a dual function; part service provider and part campaigner for political change.

Refuges and rape crisis centres that emerged during this period were autonomous organisations, although in the United States (US) many became affiliated to other institutions in the 1980s (Byington et al. 1991). Strategies were communicated through the wider women's liberation movement and as a result centres embodied assumptions about ideology and goals, and were therefore relatively uniform in character (Gornick et al. 1985). Centres received little or no government support, so they were free to explore new ways of working and organising that challenged, at least internally, the bureaucratic structures of power that dominate in our society (Reinelt 1994). Centres were small, provided services that were low-cost, non-medical, and short term, delivered by trained volunteer women who were not social service professionals, and who were often survivors of violence themselves. Centres relied on women's voluntary labour in order to exist; a situation that was indicative of a lack of financial support and the alternative approach and politics that characterised the movement. The use of women's unpaid labour in feminist organisations is a controversial one (Riger 1984). Feminists see women's unpaid labour as a form of oppression; however, refuges and rape crisis centres, as with other branches of the women's movement, made the exception for women helping women.

There have been considerable changes in refuges and crisis centres since their inception in the 1970s, one of which has been the influx of state monies for violence-related services (Matthews 1994; Schechter 1982), which has meant an increasing number of paid workers provide labour in these organisations. In addition, many refuges and rape crisis centres have explored closer relationships with the state, whilst at the same time trying to retain their autonomy and feminist political analysis of violence. Despite state funding, organisations still rely heavily on volunteers. Statutory funding provision is inadequate, and the dearth of statutory services for survivors of violence means refuges and rape crisis centres still rely on significant numbers of volunteers. Lifetime prevalence rates that suggest 1 in 4 of the adult female population will experience domestic violence by a partner or ex-partner at some point in their lifetime (Dominy and Radford 1996;

Henderson 1997; McGibbon 1989), and between 1 in 5 and 1 in 7 women will experience rape or sexual assault in their lifetime (UNICEF 1997), do not indicate that the need for refuges and rape crisis centres and their volunteers worldwide is likely to diminish.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING

There have been attempts in both social movement literature and literature on volunteering to explain the motivations of those who become involved. Neither body of literature explains adequately the motivations of women to volunteer or do unpaid work in women's refuges and rape crisis centres. Social movement literature, from both the New Social Movement Theory (NSMT) approach which has European origins, and the Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) approach which has origins in the United States, fails to adequately explain motivations for social movement participation. Literature on social movements from the NSMT perspective fails to acknowledge that the women's movement directs action towards the state and as such is a political movement as well as a social and cultural one (Charles 2000), which in turn means it neglects the political dimension of social movement participation. In addition, social movement theory from both the NSMT and RMT perspective has limitations for understanding participation in women's and feminist movement organisations because when considering the motivations of social movement participants, they do not have the scope to incorporate the dual role of anti-violence organisations - part service provider and part campaigner for political change - and how this may impact upon an individual's motivation to volunteer, or become involved.

Evidence of the importance of the political dimension in social movement participation is provided by (Black and Dinitto 1994), who studied a sample of movement participants in rape crisis centres and battered women's shelters in Texas. They hypothesised that the greater the influence of political motivations for social movement involvement, the greater the perceived acceptance of participants would be. In other words, the greater would be their sense of collective identity. The study found that psychic (for example, feeling good about one's self as a consequence of helping others) and altruistic (wanting to help others for its own sake) motivations were the strongest, but that political motivations such as "helping to stop the problem of rape and battering" were also significant. The findings of the study suggest that the movement participants studied have altruistic or psychic motivations for becoming involved but that feminist political biases compel them to do so in women's movement organisations such as rape crisis centres and refuges for battered women. Blanton also indicates the importance of collective identity for movement participants, indicating that for women "the level of commitment to a Feminist Movement Organisation (FMO) can be quite deep, since members may be seeking not only a work setting or vehicle for social change, but also an experience of 'sisterhood' and personal acceptance" (Blanton 1981 cited in Riger 1984, 104).

The United States (US) approach of the RMT is also problematic when used to analyse the women's movement, and as Charles (2000) indicates, this is largely to do with its focus on rational choice theory and organisation. She cites Ferree, who argues that the centrality of rational choice theory to the RMT perspective creates a fundamental gender bias. This is because from an RMT perspective participants in social movements are seen as being devoid of social characteristics and therefore seen as rational actors encompassing "universal attributes of human nature" (Ferree 1992, 41 cited in Charles 2000, 49). As Charles points out, feminists have long argued that these apparently "universal attributes of human nature" are in fact attributes of white western middle class males.

The centrality of rational choice theory to the RMT perspective is also problematic because it assumes the only motivation for those involved in a movement is self-interest. Not only is this problematic in that people may be motivated by a variety of things other than and including self-interest, as Charles (2000) notes as one of Ferree's main criticisms, but she also notes that many movements have developed a critique of instrumental rationality. The majority of resource mobilisation theorists have failed to incorporate this and have thus asserted a particular point of view as objective and universal, thereby neglecting to acknowledge that people's motivation for action is likely to be broader than self interest.

For example, literature indicates that there are likely to be a number of motivations for people's involvement in a movement (Black and Dinitto 1994; Cnaan et al. 1991; Gluck 1979; Rubin and Thorelli 1984; Smith 1982; Wiche and Isenhour 1977). Indeed, Social Exchange Theory (SET) has frequently been used to address this question. This refers to the actions of an individual being motivated by the returns those actions are expected to bring, although these may not be tangible or stipulated in advance (Blau 1964). Altruism, the direct opposite of self-interest, is also often cited as a motivating factor, with Sills (1957) making the distinction between "altruism" (other-oriented), and "egoism" (self-oriented) motives. Kidd (1977) has also distinguished between "intrinsic" motives and "extrinsic" motives. Some scholars, for example Pittman et al. (1984), feel SET is particularly well equipped for the study of women who participate in the women-specific organisations of the women's movement, stating that "attracting and retaining workers, paid or volunteer, revolves around the worker's estimation of the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of the job" (Pittman et al. 1984, 33). Obershall (1973) also used social exchange theory by developing a risk/reward ratio for estimating the likelihood of joining a social movement.

Melucci (1989) is critical of social exchange theory and claims it is inadequate for studying volunteers participating in social movements because it fails to encompass the complexities, given that volunteering in a social movement involves multiple processes. McAdam (1992) also states that social movement participants, particularly in the women's movement, are a diverse rather than a homogeneous group, and that social movements are characterised by unstable memberships. In addition, women's movement organisations rely, more than most human service agencies, on volunteers in order to provide alternative welfare provision in the form of refuges and crisis centres, known as "female enclaves" (Black and Dinitto 1994). This means that conventional approaches to social movement participation fail to address the complexities of being involved in a movement that is both a campaigner for social change and a provider of welfare services. The motivations for volunteering in a social movement and being a member of a particular social movement organisation that

delivers services may be distinct. The women involved may not necessarily see it as a social service or social movement, or both (Pahl, 1979). Either way, it would appear that neither rational choice theory nor social exchange theory adequately addresses the complexities and multiple motives of women involved in the women's and anti-violence movements. There is a lack of fit between the theory and what happens on the ground in anti-violence organisations. The nature of "doing" is not addressed.

## AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Given the dearth of literature and empirical work on motivations for volunteering in its various contexts, and the inability of social movement literature to explain women's participation in the feminist anti-violence movement, one of the aims of the research from which the data described in this paper comes was to address the issue of volunteers' motivations and experience of volunteer work.

The following key research questions were identified:

‣ Who volunteers in women's refuges and rape crisis centres?

‣ What motivates women to volunteer in these organisations?

‣ How do the dual roles of refuges and crisis centres as social service and social movement relate to women's motivations to volunteer?

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research was a comparative study of women's anti-violence organisations, in the form of refuges and rape crisis centres, in the United Kingdom (UK) and Sweden. As well as investigating the issue of voluntary and unpaid work, more generally the research project examined the relationship of these organisations with the state, their trajectories, and the strategies adopted. Fieldwork took place during 2000 and 2001 and responses were received from 74 organisations and 549 workers. The research involved a triangulation approach,[1] and used questionnaires completed by the 549 workers for quantitative analysis, and 25 in-depth interviews with women working in refuges and crisis centres for qualitative analysis. Of the 549

respondents, 359 (65%) were unpaid workers and the remainder paid. The sample for this paper only includes those 359 workers who gave their labour on an unpaid basis, and the 15 interviewees who were unpaid workers.

## WHO VOLUNTEERS IN REFUGES AND CRISIS CENTRES?

My research found that it was entirely women who volunteered in refuges and rape crisis centres in both countries. This is not a surprising finding given the politics and history of the organisations. Despite US literature (Black and Dinitto 1994) detailing the slow but increasing use of men in such services and centres, my research shows that this is not the case in the UK and Sweden.

Women working in refuges and crisis centres are, in the most part, involved in some form of paid work over and above their voluntary activities. Seventy six percent (273) of women were involved in paid work elsewhere, of whom 74% (202) worked full time. This finding challenges recent literature that suggests people engage in voluntary work as training for work and in order to gain skills and experience relevant to the labour market (Charities Aid Foundation 1990; Dean and Morton 1995; Lynn and Davis Smith 1991; Matheson 1990; Thomas and Finch 1990). More evidence that challenges this is discussed below. It also indicates that women volunteering in refuges and crisis centres have a "triple burden," in that they have paid work and domestic responsibilities as well as voluntary activities. This was reiterated by the fact that approximately two thirds (233 or 65%) of respondents had one or more dependent children.

## WHY DO WOMEN VOLUNTEER IN REFUGES AND CRISIS CENTRES?

The research found that both altruistic and psychic benefits were significant in women's decision to volunteer in refuges and crisis centres, and that they were strongly influenced to do so by their feminist political beliefs. It is also clear that these motivations were not mutually exclusive but complex and interconnected, in that women might feel good about themselves as a result of fulfilling their desire to help other women, in line with their

feminist politics. For the women involved, providing "care" was as important as feminism and politics.

### Altruistic Motivations and Psychic Benefits

Consistent with literature on working and volunteering in women's anti-violence organisations (Black and Dinitto 1994), women indicated that altruistic motivations and psychic benefits were significant in their decision to do refuge or crisis work. Altruistic motivations, for example the desire to help other people, were cited by respondents in both the questionnaire-based and interview-based elements of the research. A total of 88% (316) of respondents cited altruistic motivations as significant in their decision to pursue refuge or crisis work.

For many women these altruistic motivations were also underpinned by the psychic benefits of pursing anti-violence work. The majority (94% or 337) of those who cited altruistic motivations indicated that the psychic and emotional benefits that resulted also motivated them to do refuge and crisis work. On the whole, women indicated that their work, and in particular helping other women and children, gave them a tremendous sense of satisfaction. The following comments indicate the views that women expressed in questionnaire responses: "Satisfaction in helping others seeing women and children move on from violence to living a safe life." and "When I see women change their lives around completely I just grin with pride, pride in myself and pride in them."

### Political Motivations

The majority (97% or 348) of women identified as feminists, having a feminist political outlook in general and in relation to their work with survivors of violence.

Feminist political motivations were evident in the responses women from the United Kingdom and Sweden provided about their motives for doing refuge and crisis work. This was also particularly noticeable in responses to what women liked most about working in their particular organisation. In more than 90% (323) of questionnaire responses women cited feminist politics as a motivating factor.

Examples of responses to specific questions about motivations are provided below.

> To be able to work with women and children and use mine and their skills and experience to enable survivors to continue surviving. It's about being a feminist.

> Working on a topic that I'm passionate about. I'm standing up for what I believe in and trying to make a difference to women's lives. Not just some women but all women.

It was clear from questionnaire and interview responses that women derived a lot of satisfaction from engaging in work that was related to their feminist politics and beliefs. Often women cited this as what they liked most about their work. The following comments are taken from questionnaire responses about what women liked most.

> Women helping women helping women.

> It's women-only, it's political, it's caring and honourable.

> Knowing I'm doing something to change women's lives, to empower them and allow them to make their own destiny. We work together and together we're stronger.

During interviews women were asked whether they saw their refuge or crisis work as directly related to their feminism. The response from all 15 women interviewed was that it was undoubtedly related. Engaging in anti-violence work, often on an unpaid basis, was done not simply for helping in itself, but because it was specifically helping women. The following interview comments indicate the importance of helping women specifically, and helping them with something that is in the most part perpetrated by men.

> I do this because I want to help women. I want to change their lives and see them move onto a life that doesn't involve getting beaten by men on a regular basis. It's very much related to my feminism and

> I can't understand why all women aren't feminists. How can you not be?
> (Bronwyn, Rape Crisis Worker, Wales)

> I'm here because I want to see a world where rape and beating doesn't happen. A world where power isn't exerted over women in that way, where men can't use it to stay in control and keep women scared.
> (Rhona, Women's Aid Worker, Scotland)

Feminist values and politics clearly informed the work of all 15 women, some of whom stated this explicitly, some of whom made statements with more implicit feminist content. Respondents rarely identified with a particular branch of feminism when asked what "type" of feminist they regarded themselves as. In order to gain further insight into what feminism meant to the women working in these organisations I asked what being a feminist meant in terms of their own life and work. The responses indicated that feminism has no one distinct meaning for these women. One feature that connected all responses was the desire to change women's lives; what differed was the ways in which this could be achieved. For example, Birgit, an SKR Worker in Sweden responded: "For me feminism means being committed to helping women and helping them through a difficult time. It's about making a difference and encouraging women to turn their back on violence."

In contrast, Ingrid's and Margo's responses indicate a more explicitly stated feminist perspective.

> It's about having a feminist(ic) understanding and knowing that we all experience the same things and that it's because we share the world with men!
> (Ingrid, ROKS Worker, Sweden)

> What does being a feminist mean to me?... I think being a feminist isn't just about "pie in the sky" kind of politics, it's about practical politics, actually being a feminist in how I live everyday. Well, that means working here for a start, and it means challenging things I see that contribute to the oppression of women. The small things that no one notices are almost the worst

ones, I mean, right? Violence is in your face, isn't it? And I know there's all the rape myths and all, and horribly people believe them, but most people, when it's out in public would find it hard to make a decent case for violence against women, wouldn't they? It's the wee things that are important on a day-to-day basis, like the ways women are made to feel bad about their bodies, made to feel they're "sexual" only when a man says it's OK to be, told they have to be thinner, prettier etc., etc., etc. I think it's also about being part of something bigger 'cause you have to do it on different levels because it's ingrained about being part of a collective. Who'll stand together and say we won't take it anymore. It's the way we do it, and the support and the fact I, well all of us, won't just take it, you know?
(Margo, Rape Crisis Worker, Scotland)

Women also indicated that their motivations for involvement were related not only to the service provided and helping women in itself, but the way in which the service was provided had motivated them to become and stay involved. Mary, a Women's Aid Worker in England, explained that helping women was important but it was equally important that she felt empowered and able to help herself.

Helping isn't enough. It's not just about helping a woman, it's about helping her to help herself. The police could help a woman by taking her husband away, neighbours could help a woman by 'phoning the police when they hear him hitting her. It's not just about that she's had someone making decisions for her, making her live in fear. It's more important that she's allowed to decide what happens to her. Living with violence like that destroys your sense of self, you can't see how to make decisions anymore because your life

isn't yours. To really help women you have to help them take their lives back.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Rape Crisis workers:

Rape has such a devastating impact on a woman and as a society we don't see that because we don't want to. All the time women are made to think it's their fault, the old "she asked for it" thing. Counselling doesn't stop that, I've seen women here who've had counselling from Victim Support, from doctors and private therapists and they make it about the woman, about what she did or didn't do and they try to make her feel better. So many decisions are taken out of women's hands by these people and it's like being raped all over again. We're different because it's not just about stopping them suffering, it's about seeing that it's not about them, it's about power and control and that's what they've lost more than anything. That's what we have to help women find again, to see that it's not about them.
(Nessa, Rape Crisis Worker, Northern Ireland)

We're good at what we do because we do it our way. We don't tell women to report it to the police if they don't want to, we don't make them see doctors, we don't force them to talk about it if they don't want to, we work very hard not to reinforce the idea that she's responsible and bad. Just because she's been raped doesn't mean she's impotent for the rest of her life. Men want women to be impotent. We encourage women to take responsibility for their health and happiness but not for the violence. We support women to make their own decisions about their lives.
(Cara, Rape Crisis Worker, Scotland)

## MOTIVATIONS AS COMPLEX AND INTERCONNECTED

In analysing the research material it became clear that women's motivations for engaging in refuge and crisis work were not mutually exclusive, and they were influenced by the dual roles and functions of the organisation. Therefore, just as anti-violence organisations have more than one function, women working in the organisations have several motivating factors for their engagement. It was not necessarily possible to separate altruistic motivations from political ones, nor psychic benefits from feminist political beliefs. For example, feeling good about one's self as a result of helping others was often related to helping other women in a particular way; a way that was compatible with feminist politics: "I'm standing up for what I believe in and trying to make a difference to women's lives. Not just some women but all women."

Furthermore, not only did the desire to help others often stem from feminist politics, women also indicated they felt good about themselves for pursuing and standing up for their political beliefs. For example, Mia's comments show that in pursuing her political beliefs and acting upon her political motivations, in turn she felt good about herself: "It's satisfying to do something that I believe in and to know I'm not just accepting the way things are. I'm challenging something and it feels good to know I am" (Mia, SKR Worker, Sweden).

In addition, it was clear from the analysis that women saw the service and the care that it provided for women as being of equal importance to the political aspects of their work, and as the title of this paper indicates, "It's as much about care as it is about feminism."

Therefore, previous literature on motivations for volunteering and social movement literature that concentrates largely on issues of self interest, or social exchange theory, fails to encompass the complexities and interconnectedness of women's motivations for volunteering in these organisations, and certainly neglects the importance of the political dimension and how it intersects with other motivating factors.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

The statement made by one respondent that "It's as much about care as it is about feminism" widened still in terms of its significance and meaning as the research progressed. It became clear that women also saw their voluntary work as providing a form of "care" and support for themselves in dealing with their own experiences of violence and emotional reaction to that experience, as well as providing care and support for others. Women viewed it as encompassing mutually supportive relationships.

Women often indicated that their own personal experience of violence had motivated them to become involved in anti-violence work. Often this was direct personal experience and for some women it was the experience of a close relative or friend. The significance of this personal experience fell into four categories: the desire to "give back" after receiving help themselves; an awareness of the impact of violence on women's lives and knowing how vital services are; a commitment to campaigning for change in procedures of the police, courts and other professionals dealing with survivors of violence; and exorcising the anger and sharing the pain they felt about their own experience of violence.

Of those that responded to the questionnaire, 62% (170) of women had personal experience of either rape, sexual assault or domestic violence. The questionnaire did not address the continuum of violence against women (Kelly 1988) but asked only about rape, sexual assault and domestic violence specifically. Of those women interviewed, 10 had personal experience of either rape, sexual assault, domestic violence or child abuse. If violence is viewed as a continuum, as Kelly (1988) suggests, therefore including acts such as coercion, flashing, inappropriate comments and emotional abuse, then all 15 women interviewed had personal experience of sexual violence. All 15 women knew someone, not in connection with their work, who had experienced rape, sexual assault, domestic violence or child abuse. These included: mothers; daughters; sisters; nieces; friends; neighbours; and colleagues. Four respondents had experienced domestic violence (which often included rape and sexual assault but occurring specifically within a domestic relationship), 5 women had been raped, and one woman had experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse that had also been accompanied by the domestic abuse of her mother.

Women also indicated that working in an anti-violence organisation allowed them a channel for the pain they felt about their own experience of violence and helped them transform that experience into something positive. Working with like-minded women helped some individuals come to terms with their own experience of violence and allowed for a more open exchange about their feelings. Women indicated that the support of their female colleagues was invaluable when their work caused them to re-experience pain and emotions they felt about their own experience of violence. The very nature of anti-violence work means there are constant reminders for women with personal experience of such events and coping with these reactions was facilitated by supportive colleagues and an "open" approach to the sharing of feelings and emotions. Some interview respondents also indicated that they felt this was not only due to the nature of anti-violence work and its connection to feminism, but also a result of the women-only working environment.

> It's easy to share it with the other women even if hard to feel. Sometimes you can literally see their pain and it's hard to listen to. There's much emotion in the room and it took me practice to be able to stay with it. I think my emotion was still too near the surface and it hurt to hear it. Other women understand that so I could talk with them on it.
> (Ingrid, ROKS Worker, Sweden)

Furthermore, in relation to personal experience of violence, women indicated the support they felt from colleagues simply because they shared the same experience, and regardless if experiences were openly discussed on a regular basis. Women's comments about the importance of their own experience of violence in contributing to their decision to volunteer, and to continue to volunteer, in refuge or crisis work, in terms of the connection they felt to the other members of the group, offers support for Judith Lewis Herman's (1992) claim that "commonality" is a vital part of the longer term process of coming to terms with traumatic events involving human cruelty. Her book *Trauma and Recovery* is one of the few texts on the impact of trauma to be written from a feminist perspective and to make the link between sexual violence and abuse and political power. She states that:

> Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatises; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanises the victim; the group restores her sense of humanity.
> (Lewis Herman 1992, 214)

The research findings indicate that the secondary trauma experienced by workers in anti-violence organisations can also be helped by "commonality" of the group. Women's heavy reliance on mutual support indicates commonality may not just be supportive in the case of individual experience of trauma, but is also related to an experience of "sisterhood" and a shared understanding of the subordinate position of women, and as such offers commonality in addressing the oppression, violation, and loss of power that women may experience in the course of their "everyday" lives.

On a similar note, the role of interpersonal relationships and friendships amongst those working in refuges and crisis centres was a significant motivating factor for women to both become involved, and to sustain their involvement. As such, doing unpaid work provided opportunities for women to develop close friendships that existed both inside and outside the unpaid work environment, which were significant factors given by women as to why they found their work satisfying, despite the obvious difficulty of the work. This mirrors the findings of Black and Dinitto (1994) that the possibility of friendship with likeminded women was an important recruitment and retention factor.

## CONCLUSION

My research findings have shown that there is no one motivating factor for women working in refuges and crisis centres and that personal and political motivations are not mutually exclusive. Consistent with the Black and Dinitto (1994) findings, altruistic and psychic benefits were significant in women's decisions to engage in crisis work, but political motivations and their feminist understanding of women's oppression and gendered violence were significant in their decisions to work in a refuge or crisis centre in particular. It suggests that new social movement theory's failure to acknowledge the political element of the women's movement, as Charles (2000) suggests, means it fails to engage with the specifics of involvement in the movement, and the RMT perspective's concentration on rational choice, seeing movement participation as motivated only by self-interest, means it does not capture the complexities of social movement participation when the movement has more than one function, and therefore a helping aspect and a wider social and political aspect. It also suggests that literature on volunteering that attempts to explain voluntary action in terms of altruism or training for work fails to adequately incorporate the experience of women volunteering in refuges and crisis centres. Both bodies of literature fail to recognise that "It's about care as much as it's about feminism."

Existing literature, with the exception of Black and Dinitto (1994), also neglects the role of women's personal experience of violence as significant motivating factors for their involvement in anti-violence work. It was clear that this was in part related to the desire to "give back," partly a response to their awareness of the dearth of services and therefore the need for alternative feminist welfare provision, and for some the desire to work with likeminded women with similar experiences and understanding of violence. For some women, voluntary work is about "care" as much as about feminism and also is about care for the self, and the desire to seek commonality and mutual support.

As a concluding note, the data used in this paper is from unpaid workers because of the nature of the paper's focus; however the research as a whole sampled both paid and voluntary staff. The research found that paid workers' motivations were not significantly different from those of unpaid workers, nor was the level of commitment to their work any more or less, but of course individual financial security cannot be ruled out as a motivating factor to continue their work for those who are paid. The majority of women working on a paid basis in refuges and crisis centres initially became involved with the centres as voluntary workers, and when funding allowed, became paid employees. Only a small number of women were involved with centres as paid workers from the outset, and these women usually held specialist qualifications in, for example, play therapy. As a result, few significant differences in motivations for working in feminist anti-violence organisations are found.

## ENDNOTE

1. Methodological triangulation refers to the use of more than one method to gather and analyse data in order to corroborate and enhance the findings of each individual method. The use of in-depth interviews provides richer and more descriptive data that elaborates the findings of a questionnaire based study, the findings of which reveal wider patterns and relationships that can be further explored and understood using qualitative techniques.

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