

A cross-sectional phenomenological exploration of the experience of volunteers at a Durban-based NPO.

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours in Psychology degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Abstract

In South Africa (SA), Mental Health (MH) services are under-resourced and over-burdened, therefore much of the MH service provision is provided by voluntary Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) who are reliant on volunteers. However volunteer retention is a frequent problem. Little information has been gathered regarding the experience of MH NPO volunteers. Therefore, improvements are unable to be made and acquiring and retaining volunteers remains a weak point. Without an adequate number of volunteers, NPO's will be insufficient and unable to assist SA's MH sector. This research attempts to aid in this issue by qualitatively exploring the lived experience of volunteering for a MH NPO, providing more insight into volunteer's experiences. Such was explored using online semi-structured interviews with 5 volunteers from a particular Durban-based MH NPO. Descriptive phenomenological analysis, was used to analyse the data. Various themes were found pertaining to the volunteer experience including the benefits of supportive leadership, issues related to student centrism, and the learning experience that volunteering provides. The research findings will enlighten NPOs to some volunteer's experience, providing information that can be used to make adjustments and improvement to NPOs, and potentially benefit the retention of volunteers.

Keywords: volunteering, mental health, non-profit organization, South Africa

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A cross-sectional phenomenological exploration of the experience of volunteers at a Durban-based NPO.

This research was a cross-sectional phenomenological exploration into the experience of volunteers at a Durban-based non-profit organization (NPO) in the mental health (MH) sector.

The South African healthcare system is stretched to its limits (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). There is a lack of professional medical personnel in the context of overburdened publicly funded MH services (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018; Bradshaw, Mairs & Richards, 2006; Sundram, Corattur, Dong and Zhong, 2018). Due to this, NPOs contribute significantly to MH service provision in SA. According to the NPOs Act (No.71 of 1997) a NPO refers to a trust, company, or other association of people that is established for a public purpose and not for profit, whereby the income is not distributable to its members except as reasonable compensation for services rendered. Globally, funding for such organisations is low and thus volunteers are extremely valuable to this sector (Sundram, et al., 2018; Scherer, Allen, & Harp, 2016; Usadolo, 2016). Volunteering is a helping behaviour that is planned, long-term, characterized as non-obligatory support, in exchange for no monetary gain, and takes place within an organization (Omoto, & Snyder, 1995; Penner, 2004; Vecina, & Marzana, 2019; Erdurmazh, 2018). It is where individuals, referred to as ‘volunteers’, invest their free time to engage in activity that is of public interest, and intended to benefit others in society (Morros, Pushkar, & Reis, 1998; Simon, 2019; Klug, et al., 2018).

The issue facing these NPOs is that volunteer turnover (recruitment and retention) is a frequent problem, which has detrimental effects on the range and quality of services offered (Razzak, 2014; Guidi, Alfieri, Marta, & Saturni, 2015; Nencini, Romaiolo, & Meneghini, 2016). To curb this issue it is vital to understand the volunteering experience, including volunteer motivations, satisfaction, and reasons for staying in their role (Sundram, et al., 2018). Little information has been gathered regarding the experience of MH volunteers, especially within a South African context. Therefore improvements are unable to be made, and acquiring and retaining volunteers remains a weak point. This research attempts to address this problem by exploring the experience of volunteering for a MH NPO, thus providing more insight into volunteer’s experiences. The findings of this research are specific to a particular Durban-based MH NPO, however other NPOs could potentially use this knowledge to make necessary adjustments to their organization, making the volunteer experience more satisfactory, and thus resulting in longevity of volunteers.

Rationale

There is limited research regarding the experience of MH volunteers in SA, and none focusing on volunteers at this particular NPO in Durban. This research will add to the body of knowledge on volunteer experiences in SA, allowing for optimization of such. This NPO will be provided with insight into the lived experience of volunteers, showing what volunteers find favourable, or unfavourable, thus allowing for adjustments or improvements to be made. The findings could also potentially benefit other NPOs through providing insight into the volunteer experience. This information could potentially be used to both retain volunteers as well as motivate future volunteers to join, resulting in prosperous MH NPOs.

Problem Statement

In SA MH services are under-resourced and overburdened, and thus much of the service provision is provided by voluntary NPOs (Bradshaw, et al., 2006; Sundram, et al., 2018). NPOs are reliant on volunteers to carry out services, however volunteer retention is a frequent problem (Pozzi, Meneghini & Marta, 2015; Sundram, et al., 2018). Little information has been gathered regarding the experience of MH volunteers, therefore improvements are unable to be made, and acquiring and retaining volunteers remains a weak point (Cassidy, Thompson, El-Nagib, Hickling & Priebe, 2019). Without an adequate number of volunteers NPOs will be insufficient, and unable to assist SA's MH sector (Bradshaw, et al., 2006; Sundram, et al., 2018). This research attempted to aid in this issue by exploring the experience of volunteering for a MH NPO, thus providing more insight into volunteer's experiences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to qualitatively explore the lived experience of volunteers at a MH NPO, in Durban.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of this NPO's volunteers?

Research Objective

To explore the lived experiences of this NPO's volunteers.

Literature Review

This research attempts to address the lack of information of the volunteer experience within SA, in order to assist the larger problem of high volunteer turnover (Cassidy, et al., 2019). This will be done through a phenomenological analysis as such aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of individuals, working within the interpretivist paradigm.

This section will begin through explaining the theoretical foundation of this research, which is phenomenology, as well as expressing how this theory links to the research problem. The review of literature will then be conducted by thematically analysing what research thus far has found on the volunteering experience, with close examination for gaps in such research that the current research sets out to fill. It will start off by unpacking the reasons for volunteer drop out, followed by determining volunteer's initial motives to volunteering. The general experiences of volunteers, both positive and negative, will then be critically discussed. Lastly the ways to make volunteer experiences more positive will be analysed, including role identities, workplace relations, leadership and training. All of this information is essential to understand in order to make adjustments and improvements to the volunteer programmes, and to tailor retention and recruitment initiatives.

Theoretical Foundation

The chosen theoretical foundation for this research is phenomenology. Philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) established the discipline of phenomenology, now labelled descriptive phenomenology, in the first half of the 20th century (Rodriguez, & Smith, 2018). It is a philosophical movement that originated in response to the empirically bound ideas about the meaning of human experience and the world, whereby investigation was conducted on objective agreed-upon constructs (Barrow, 2017). Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl reduced the external world to the contents of personal consciousness, viewing realities of individuals as pure phenomena, from which study should take place (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology sought to emphasize lived experiences of individuals, showing its grounding in qualitative research methods (Vagle, 2014; Barrow, 2017), and it adheres to a social constructivist philosophy of human experience (Barrow, 2017).

Literally phenomenology is the study of phenomena, which focuses on studying conscious experience from the first-person point of view. Husserl saw phenomenology as a method that aimed to describe the way things appear in individuals conscious experience, the way individuals experience things, which may be different to the way things actually are in reality (Gallagher, 2012). It is a school of thought, philosophy, or research methodology that rejects all dogmatisms, and focuses on the subjective lived experiences of individuals in order to make sense of the world (Barrow, 2017). It requires researchers to set aside any personal bias or perceptions in order to enter the life of the participant free from supposition (Rodriguez, & Smith, 2018), and thus does not make use of *a priori* hypotheses in order to free the researcher from any prejudice (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Barrow, 2017; Gallagher, 2012). The researchers are to be focused on understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of participants, and describing such phenomena as accurately as possible in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of each participant (Barrow, 2017; Groenewald, 2004; Welman, & Kruger, 1999).

Shaw (2001, p.48) says phenomenology “is particularly suitable for research where the focus is on the uniqueness of a person’s experiences, how experiences are made meaningful, and how these meanings manifest themselves within the context of the person both as an individual and in their many roles”. Phenomenology as a theoretical framework is suitable for the objectives of this study as such seeks to understand the lived experience of mental health volunteers in their voluntary roles, in SA. Using phenomenological foundations the researcher will do so by aiming to set aside any personal bias or presuppositions, as well as remaining open minded, in order to understand and describe the conscious experience of volunteers from their perspective/ first person point of view. Phenomenology will thus enable the researcher to understand volunteer’s experiences in SA, thus addressing the research problem of the lack of such knowledge. It is necessary to understand the lived experience of volunteers in order to improve the experience of volunteers with the aim of retaining volunteers. Phenomenology also links to the chosen interpretivist paradigm as this theory offers an in-depth understanding and description of individual’s lived experiences, which is the aim of this paradigm (Barrow, 2017).

Turnover

Dropout rates of volunteers are consistently high across different countries, activities, and types of organizations (Benevene, Dal Corso, De Carlo, Falco, Carluccio, & Vecina, 2018). Volunteer dropout has detrimental effects on NPOs as such are reliant on volunteers to carry out organizational activities (Benevene, et al., 2018). It results in a loss of volunteers with

organizational memory, which will impact the organization's effectiveness and efficiency (Usadolo, 2016; Benevene, et al., 2018). It is thus important for management to understand volunteer's experiences and the factors that influence retention in order to make adequate and effective adjustments that will hopefully aid in future recruitment and retention of volunteers (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). Retention of volunteers is beneficial to the organization since it reduces the cost of recruitment and training (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). Volunteer retention or intention to stay (i.e. their deliberate plan to continue volunteering with an organization) is determined by multiple factors, perhaps most importantly by their satisfaction (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018).

Motives

It is important to consider what motivates people to start volunteering, as this can be used to tailor retention and recruitment initiatives, and for improving volunteer programmes (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Klug, Toner, Fabisch, & Priebe, 2018). The motivations of individuals shows their expectations for being a volunteer, which could be vital information for NPOs to tailor their volunteer programmes around, aiming to fulfil such expectations and thus resulting in more satisfied volunteers who will hopefully continue in their work for the organization (Alfes, Antunes, & Shantz, 2017).

In research done in the UK, motives reported by volunteers include personal, social and altruistic reasons (Cassidy, et al., 2019). The personal motives include career progression in the mental health field, thus seeking experience in the field, and the development of necessary skills (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Sundram, et al., 2018). The social motives include the desire to meet new people and have new experiences (Cassidy, et al., 2019).

The altruistic motives speak to volunteering being a selfless act and opportunity to "give back" to their community, and contribute to society in a positive way (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Sundram, et al., 2018). Some volunteers shared that they had a history of mental health issues, and so saw volunteering as a way to give back to their community who helped them in their time of need, or alternatively to provide support where there was none (Cassidy, et al., 2019). Klug, et al. (2018) similarly found altruistic and personal motives to volunteering, adding that motivations of volunteers include a feeling of responsibility to help others, and viewing helping others as part of their philosophy of life. Simon (2019) also found that people volunteer for a cause that they believe in.

The limitations of the above research are that they were conducted in areas outside of Africa, and thus the findings may not be applicable to South African volunteers. Understanding the motives of South African volunteers, whether personal, social, or altruistic will be beneficial knowledge for NPOs in order for them to tailor retention and recruitment initiatives around such.

Experience

The first six months of a volunteer's experience is highly influential towards whether they continue volunteering (Sundram, et al., 2018). It is crucial to understand volunteer's experiences in order to improve such, and thus retain volunteers. So far, research is minimal in this area, especially within a South African context. Research that has been conducted has found both positive and negative experiences in volunteering.

Positive Experiences. Generally volunteers seem to find their experience of volunteering as a meaningful one that gave them much happiness, peace and a feeling of being useful (Söderhamn, Flateland, Fensli, & Skaar, 2017). Research by Belfroid, Mollers, Smit, Hulscher, Koopmans, Reusken, and Timen (2018) found that the positive effects that volunteers reported reached far beyond their daily work, and included changes in life priorities and a greater appreciation of the value of their own lives (Belfroid, et al., 2018). Other positive experiences included discovering they were stronger than they thought (Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019).

Another positive aspect of the volunteer experience seems to be with regards to the relationships they formed. Research shows that volunteers experience a sense of closeness with others (Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019), make new friends and experience a feeling of belonging in their work (McGratten, 2014).

Volunteers also seem to find the knowledge they acquire from their volunteer work as positive (Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019). They report learning new skills, and feeling a sense of accomplishment (McGratten, 2014; Simon, 2019).

These positive experiences could compose a strong argument for inspiring and motivating people to start volunteering (Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019). However the research studies mentioned do have their limitations of being conducted on small samples and thus cannot be generalised to all volunteers.

Negative Experiences. Volunteering is said to be costly on volunteer's time and energy and results in much fatigue (Simon, 2019; Haski-Leventhal, & Bargal, 2008). Volunteer burnout is a prevalent issue; it has been found that poor volunteer-organization fit is a predictor of burnout and intentions to quit (Scherer, Allen, & Harp, 2016). Another major cost of volunteering is emotional strain (McGratten, 2014), like stress (Haski-Leventhal, & Bargal, 2008). Such stress could be due to numerous negative experiences volunteers have reported.

Negative experiences regarding management of the organization include lack of training and support, poor communication and lack of clarity regarding the volunteer's role and tasks (Söderhamn, et al., 2017; Sundram, et al., 2018; McGratten, 2014). Volunteers also point out a lack of appreciation from management (McGratten, 2014), and such was seen to have a negative effect on volunteer's sense of belonging with the organization (Sundram, et al., 2018). Other negative experiences, which could be seen as more personal, include the volunteering role not meeting the people's expectations, and the issues volunteers have reported to have with regards to their time management (McGratten, 2014).

Research shows a mixture of both positive and negative volunteer experiences. Having knowledge of the positive experiences would aid NPOs to compose an argument for why people should start volunteering, aiding in recruitment. Being aware of the negative experiences is equally important knowledge that could be used by NPOs in order to make improvements to their organization, possibly aiding in volunteer retention. The limitations of the above research is that it is not specific to the South African volunteer context, limiting its applicability to this context and showing the need to conduct the current research in order to determine the positive and negative experiences in the South African context.

Ways to Increase Satisfaction

Research shows that volunteer job satisfaction results from one's job being perceived as fulfilling (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). The more volunteers are satisfied with their work, the more positive feelings they will have towards the organization and thus the more likely they are to stay (Erdurmazh, 2018). Determining volunteer's levels of satisfaction, and what areas affect such satisfaction is essential in order to adjust volunteer programmes where necessary, and thus retain volunteers.

Role Identities. It has been found that a crucial predictor of volunteer satisfaction involves volunteer's role identities. Satisfaction with one's role is fostered by the perception of their relevance in the organization, congruence between personal and organizational values, whether they perceive their tasks as useful and impacting, and whether they feel recognized and valued by the organization (Corso, Carluccio, Buonomo, Benevene, Vecina, & West, 2019; Vecina, Chacón Fuertes, & Sueiro Abad, 2010). The lack of recognition and appreciation has been recorded as a reason for dropping out (Benevene, et al., 2018).

Role ambiguity is recorded as a reason for volunteer drop out (Benevene, et al., 2018), and it is noted that supportive supervisor communication minimizes the ambiguity of volunteer's role, thus minimizing dissatisfaction (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018).

Workplace Relations. Usadolo and Usadolo (2018) actually found that positive interaction between supervisors and volunteer's influences their intention to stay. A communication platform between management and volunteers is a vital tool in establishing volunteer satisfaction as it allows for volunteers to express challenges they may be facing (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). This will promote positive workplace outcomes like volunteer's intention to stay (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018).

This relational dimension is found to be of much importance to the voluntary context (Corso, et al., 2019), with a supportive social network among volunteers creating a sense of belonging for volunteers, which is said to result in satisfaction with their volunteer role (Sundram, et al., 2018). Research done in SA found that a positive relationship between volunteers and supervisors increased volunteer satisfaction (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). These relations, among volunteers or between volunteers and supervisors, could potentially be fostered by leadership of organizations through encouraging shared identity, cooperation and trust, which all have been found to be associated with volunteer satisfaction (Corso, et al., 2019).

Leadership. Benevene, et al. (2018) show that leadership is impactful on volunteer satisfaction, thus having effect on their commitment to the organization and intention to stay (Mayr, 2017), with a lack thereof being a reason for volunteer drop out (Benevene, et al., 2018). Schreiner, Trent, Prange, and Allen (2018) also show that the leadership of volunteers plays a central role to their wellbeing. However, previous studies show that there is a lack of effective management of volunteers in NPOs (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, & Washburn, 2009).

Research by Sundram, et al. (2018) found that volunteers appreciated supportive networks of the organization, like supervision from management, which provides the volunteers with learning opportunities and with the opportunity to express themselves in a supportive environment (Söderhamn, et al., 2017). Supportive leadership is also identified as a crucial factor affecting volunteer's motivation (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). It should be noted that volunteers perception's of management has a strong influence in shaping their attitude towards the organization, and when they have trust and respect towards their leadership they tend to have higher satisfaction with their job (Ogunfowora, 2014; Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016; De Carlo, Dal Corso, Falco, Girardi, & Piccirelli, 2016). General differences between expectations and reality (i.e. Does the organization fulfill the volunteer's expectations) play a major role in volunteer satisfaction and intention to stay (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). Furthermore if volunteers feel management is satisfying their needs they are more likely to continue volunteering (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018; Vecina, et al., 2010; Sundram, et al., 2018). Satisfaction can be enhanced if the needs of the volunteer's are addressed through policies and procedures within the organization (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018).

Training. Training programmes conducted by management have also shown a significant factor in volunteer retention, with the lack thereof contributing to volunteer drop out (Benevene, et al., 2018). High-quality training programmes for new volunteers, along with on going supervision, have been found to contribute to volunteers satisfaction and aided their development of skills of confidence for their role (Sundram, et al., 2018). Söderhamn, et al. (2017) also found that volunteers saw training in relational and communication skills as vital to a positive volunteer experience.

Conclusion

This research aims to understand the experience of volunteers at a MH NPO in SA. This is due to the important role of volunteers in our society, as well as the detrimental effects of the current high drop out rates, and the lack of information regarding the South African volunteer experience in particular. The theoretical framework of phenomenology will be suitable for this as it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the volunteers lived experience, from their first-person perspective, thus also directly linking to the aims of the Interpretivist paradigm. In order to understand volunteer's experiences it is essential to understand volunteer's initial motives, general experiences, satisfaction, and reasons for dropping out. This understanding will add to the body of knowledge of how to retain and recruit volunteers, and potentially aid in devising strategies to retain and recruit volunteers.

Knowing the initial motives to volunteer provides beneficial insight into individuals expectations for being a volunteer, which could be vital knowledge for NPOs in order to ensure those expectations are being met, resulting in satisfied volunteers that will more likely intend to stay. Similarly understanding the general volunteering experience is essential for the NPO management to be cognizant of in order to make improvements of such. Volunteer satisfaction is also an important aspect to consider as the more satisfied volunteers are, the more positive feelings they will have towards their work and the more likely they will be to stay, therefore with this information NPOs can make necessary organizational adjustments. Through past research on volunteer satisfaction it is found that role identities, workplace relations, leadership and training are important determinants of such, and thus need to be considered. As is shown, past research is limited due to either being out-dated, or not within a South African context, or not regarding a MH NPO in particular. Thus further research is needed of the volunteer experience within a MH NPO in a South African context.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

The Interpretivist approach was adopted for this research as it aims to understand and describe meaningful social experiences, providing insight into how a particular group of people make sense of their situation, and yields rich descriptions of such (Maree, 2020; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). This was suitable for this research that aims to explore the lived reality of volunteers, and to develop a depth of understanding and description of their experience. There are different dimensions of Interpretivism, which can be applied to this research, such as ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology.

Firstly, the ontological assumptions of Interpretivism are that reality is fluid, subjective and created by human interaction, in other words it is socially constructed (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Maree, 2020). Social reality is typified by a multiplicity, differing from person to person and resulting in multiple perspectives of a single phenomenon (Maree, 2020). In order to understand people's subjective realities, the researcher needs to enter their world and observe it through the direct experience of the people (Maree, 2020). This research acknowledged that each volunteer will have socially constructed their reality of volunteering, and thus will have different, subjective experiences in their volunteer work with this NPO.

Secondly, the epistemological assumption of Interpretivism is that knowledge is seen as the meaning that individuals or communities assign to their experiences, emphasizing humans ability to construct meaning (Maree, 2020). People construct their social world through sharing meanings and interacting or relating with others (Maree, 2020). Interpretivism proposes that there are multiple explanations of phenomena, and knowledge can change depending on time, place, context and people's interpretation of information (Du Plooy-Cillier, 2014; Maree, 2020). This points to the necessity of conducting research on the volunteer experience within SA in order for it to be relevant to such context, due to the probability that research conducted on volunteers elsewhere may not be relevant as these volunteers will have different realities to South Africans.

Thirdly, Interpretivism's axiology refers to the value of uniqueness of differing realities (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Researchers do not attempt to conduct value-free research, but instead acknowledge that values shape interpretations of both the researcher and participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The researcher valued each participant's perceptions of his or her volunteer experience, and valued that different participants had unique realities.

Lastly, Interpretivism is methodologically subjective and qualitative since the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of multiple realities (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). In order to study reality subjectively methods that are sensitive to the context and aid in gaining in-depth understanding are utilized (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). This research utilized such qualitative methods through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews. This methodological approach was the most efficient way to answer the research question, determining what the experience of volunteers was.

Research Design

This research made use of a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach. Qualitative research presents interpretive data and is used when the objective of the research is to explore or describe people's experiences (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Descriptive phenomenological research similarly focuses on understanding lived experiences in everyday situations and the meaning these experiences hold for participants, with the intention to describe such experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Maree, 2020). Therefore a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach was suitable for the current research that aimed to understand and describe volunteer's lived experience at this MH NPO.

A cross-sectional design was used in this research. This type of design focuses on creating an overall picture of a phenomenon at one point in time (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). This design is suitable for the current research, which aimed to create an overall picture of volunteer's experiences at a MH NPO in Durban, as it was only necessary to explore the volunteers experience at one point in time since a causal relationship was not being investigated (Du Plooy-Cilliers, & Cronje, 2014).

Deductive theorizing was used in this research, which is where the researcher moves from exploring the broad and general aspects of a theory to apply such to the specific topic under investigation (Bezuidenhout, 2014). In this case the researcher moved from the general factors of phenomenology to apply such to the volunteer experience.

This research utilised an interactive design, since direct contact with the participants was made through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Maree, 2020). This design was used as it is a qualitative data collection tool, in line with the Interpretivist paradigm, which allowed the

researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the volunteer's experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Population

The target population is all people or objects, in this case people, whom the researcher is interested in collecting data from, and who fit within the population parameters (Pascoe, 2018). The target population for this research encompassed volunteers of MH NPOs, since the purpose of this research was to understand the experience of volunteers at MH NPOs. The unit of analysis was the participant's responses gathered in the data collection since these included insight on their experience volunteering. The accessible population is only the section of the population that can actually be included in the research, the people within the target population who the researcher can access or make contact with (Pascoe, 2018). The accessible population of this research only included volunteers from a particular MH NPO in Durban, due to the accessibility of this group of people within the time constraints of this research project. Only volunteers who had been volunteering for at least one year at this particular NPO were included, as this allowed for sufficient experience with the organization in order for the volunteers to have gotten an accurate depiction of the organisation and evaluate their experience adequately (Sundram, et al., 2018). Furthermore only volunteer's who were open to participating, and only those who were able to participate, in other words they had the free time to participate in an interview as well as had Internet connection to connect to a video communications application for such interview, were included.

Sampling

A small sample size of 6 was intended to be used since the design of this research was qualitative, which only requires a small number of participants, and due to time constraints (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a). However, only a sample size of 5 was used as one participant was unable to participate due to scheduling issues, and due to time constraints it was too late to approach another participant. Whilst having a small number of participants can limit the representativeness of the sample and thus limiting the generalizability of the research results the researcher was not concerned with this since the aim of the qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach of this research was to explore, understand and describe the lived experiences of people, and not to produce generalizable results (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Pathak, et al., 2013; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). However this research's sample size was too small as data saturation was not achieved (Pascoe, 2014). Data saturation is the

point in data collection whereby participants are no longer providing new information as the previous participants have already covered everything.

These participants were gathered through non-probability sampling since the researcher wanted a sample that falls within the certain population parameters that they set out, and so instead of randomly selecting participants, a sample of MH NPO volunteers were selected from the accessible population, being the particular Durban-based NPO (Pascoe, 2014). Whilst this method limited the generalizability of the results since members of the population did not get an equal opportunity to be a part of the sample, it was not a concern of the researcher since their focus was rather on gaining an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Pascoe, 2014).

More specifically, the type of non-probability sampling used is purposive sampling. This is where participants are chosen purposefully because they represent a particular group that the research is concerned with based on the population parameters, ensuring that each participant fits within these population parameters and thus each participant assisted with the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Pascoe, 2014). In this case that group was MH volunteers of the particular Durban-based NPO who had been volunteering at the organization for at least a year. The advantage of this sampling method was that it was easy to access the participants, which was beneficial to this research due to time constraints.

These participants were accessed through a gatekeeper from the Durban-based NPO. The gatekeeper was a co-director of the NPO. A letter was emailed to the gatekeeper requesting to conduct the research at their NPO (see the Gatekeepers Letter/Request to Conduct Research in Appendix E on page 50-51). This included an explanation of the research along with an explanation of the nature of participation that is being asked of the NPO. A form for the gatekeeper to sign in approval of the NPO's participation was also emailed to the gatekeeper (see the gatekeeper approval form letter in Appendix F on page 52). The researcher additionally requested the gatekeeper to provide the contact details of six volunteers from their NPO who have been volunteering there for at least a year.

Data-collection Method

Preceding data-collection the researcher submitted their research proposal to the Independent Institute of Education (IIE) to obtain ethical clearance to conduct their research. Once ethical clearance was received (Appendix I on page 55-56), the gatekeeper of the NPO was contacted and

provided the researcher with the contact details of 6 of their volunteers. The researcher contacted the volunteers via WhatsApp, inviting them to take part in the research, sending them an explanatory information sheet (see Appendix D on page 47-49). This document was sent to the participants so that they were well informed of what they were agreeing to participate in, what was expected of them, the confidentiality and security measures that were being taken, and the contact details of both the researcher and supervisor for if they had any other questions.

The volunteers were also sent two consent forms, one regarding their participation in the research (Appendix G on page 53), and the other regarding the digital video/audio recording of the interview (Appendix H on page 54), which they were requested to sign and return to the researcher if they agreed to participate. Following this a forty-five minute meeting was arranged with each participant, in a time that was both convenient to the participant and the researcher. This meeting took place on the online platform Zoom in order to abide by the social distancing recommendations set out by the South African government due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This platform in particular was used due to its ease of use as one does not need to download any software but can merely click on the link that the researcher provides them with, and due to its newly updated privacy and security settings. It was advantageous to conduct the interview online as it could take place within the comfort of the participant's home or office possibly resulting in more relaxed participants, and it reduced the travel expense and time of attending a face-to-face meeting. However having the meeting online may have resulted in participants being distracted by occurrences in their homes during the interview. In order to account for this the interviewer suggested to the participant prior to their meeting that they should find a location within their premises that was secluded and perhaps schedule the meeting during a time when they had a moment of privacy.

Data of the volunteers' lived experience at the NPO was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, a qualitative data collection method. This is in line with the interactive design of this research that allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the volunteer's experiences. In-depth semi-structured interviews include a line of inquiry that has been developed by the researcher prior to the interview, which encompasses open questions that allow for further probing and clarification by the researcher, as well as allowing the interviewer or participant to take the conversation down different, yet necessary, paths (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a). The researcher is in the position to ask more in-depth questions about aspects that are of interest to their research (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This was most suitable to the design of this research, which is a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach, since it allowed the researcher to explore the

participant's experiences in great depth as there was not a rigid structure but rather a fluidity of conversation, and the researcher had the opportunity to probe and clarify points (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Pathak, et al., 2013; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The basic outline, however, allowed the researcher and participant to not lose focus of the purpose of the interview (Pascoe, 2014).

Furthermore the interview was only conducted at one point in time as the research followed a cross-sectional design, meaning it was only necessary to explore the volunteers experience at one point in time since a causal relationship was not being investigated (Du Plooy-Cilliers, & Cronje, 2014).

The interview meetings started with the researcher building rapport with the participants by having a brief, general conversation, followed by asking the participant several demographic questions including their age, employment status, and how many years they had been volunteering at the NPO. Following the gathering of this information the researcher started recording using the recording option on Zoom.

In the interviews the researcher asked questions along the lines of the volunteer's general experiences, satisfaction, and motivations, as well as their perception of NPO training, and where the NPO is flourishing or where improvements could be made (see Interview question schedule in Appendix B on page 45). These questions were intended to aid in answering the research question of what the volunteer experience is in order to understand how NPO's could make improvements in order to retain and recruit new volunteers. Throughout the researcher was attentive to the responses of the participant in order to identify emerging lines of inquiry that were related to the phenomenon being studied, and explored such through probing (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a).

The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Once the meeting was over the researcher immediately saved the recordings onto their computer and backed them up on a hard drive that remained in safekeeping.

Data analysis Method

Colaizzi's method of data analysis was used to analyse the data collected in the interviews. This is a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis, which aims to produce a detailed description of personal lived experience, free from pre-existing theoretical suppositions, or interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). Colaizzi's method of analysis allows the essence of an experience to be explored, and allows the researcher to reveal emergent themes and their interwoven relationships (Wirihana, Welch, Williamson, Christensen, Bakon, & Craft,

2016). Descriptive phenomenology is a valuable tool where there is little existing research, and thus was suitable for this research that aimed to explore the lived experience of volunteers at this NPO where no prior research exists (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015).

Colaizzi follows a seven-step process, involving rigorous analysis of the data collected (Morrow, et al., 2015). The researcher followed these steps in analysing the data produced from the semi-structured interviews. However, prior to engaging in such steps the researcher personally transcribed each interview verbatim. Due to the confidentiality agreement with the participants the researcher numerically labelled the participants, for example 'Participant 1'. All the transcriptions were saved to the researchers computer and backed up on a hard drive.

Following transcription the researcher began Colaizzi's seven-step process of analysing the data. The first step in this process is for the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data (Morrow, et al., 2015). In order to do this the researcher read through all the transcriptions of the interviews several times, until the researcher felt adequately familiar with all the data (Morrow, et al., 2015).

The second step of analysis is to identify significant statements said by the participants; this includes all statements in the participant's accounts that are of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation (Morrow, et al., 2015). For this step the researcher read through each interview transcription again, this time digitally highlighting statements that they felt were of direct relevance to each participant's experience volunteering.

The third step of analysis is to identify the meanings relevant to the volunteer experience through careful consideration of the significant statements (Morrow, et al., 2015). For this step the researcher placed each transcription into a table format in the left hand column, keeping the significant statements identified in the previous step highlighted. Then the researcher worked through each significant statement at a time, paying attention to non-verbal cues, and extrapolated the intended meaning behind the statement. This meaning was briefly documented in the right-hand column of the table, in line with the statement. In this step and in step two the researcher aimed to reflexively "bracket" their pre-suppositions as much as possible in order to remain close to how the phenomenon is experienced by the participants (Morrow, et al., 2015). The researcher did this by being aware of their pre-suppositions, and constantly questioning every interpretation they made to ensure it was true to what the participant was stating.

The fourth step of analysis is to cluster the identified meanings into themes that are common across all the participant accounts (Morrow, et al., 2015). The researcher did this by reading through all the identified meanings multiple times, and digitally highlighted meanings that were similar in the same colour highlighter. Various colours were used and a key was put together with the colour and identified theme it represented.

The fifth step of analysis is to develop an exhaustive description, which is where the researcher writes a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced at step four (Morrow, et al., 2015). The researcher did this step by creating a paper draft, whereby each theme was mind-mapped with the key points being identified. From this a digital draft was created in a word document in an academic essay format. In the introductory section all the identified themes were briefly introduced and then documented in more detail in the body, whereby subheadings were used for each theme.

The sixth and seventh steps, whereby a fundamental structure statement is formed and verified by participants was not conducted (Morrow, et al., 2015). This was due to time constraints, and will be addressed as a limitation to trustworthiness of the findings.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in this research. Guba proposes four criteria that will be considered in this research's pursuit of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b).

Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the data gathered from the participants (Koonin, 2014). In order to ensure credibility the researcher adopted well-established research methods, a research design that fitted the research question, and a theoretical foundation that was aligned with both the research question and the method (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). Credibility was also enhanced through well-defined, purposive sampling and detailed data collection methods (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). Credibility was also ensured through frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and their superior (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). Furthermore credibility was enhanced through an in-depth description of the participant's experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b).

Transferability is the ability of the findings to be transferred/ applied to similar situations (Koonin, 2014). This invites the reader to make connections between the study and their own experience

(Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). In order to increase transferability the researcher set out to use participants who were typical of the MH volunteering context, and the context within which the findings apply (MH NPO's in Durban, SA) was adequately described (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b).

Dependability refers to the quality of the process of integration between the data collection method, data analysis, and the resulting interpretation of the data (Koonin, 2014). This is closely tied to credibility and so ensuring credibility will somewhat ensure dependability (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). The researcher documented their decisions throughout the data collection and data analysis process in order for others to see the decisions that the researcher made, how the analysis was conducted, and how the researcher arrived at their resulting interpretations (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b).

Confirmability refers to the accuracy of the research findings, in other words how well they remain in line with the data collected (Koonin, 2014). The findings ought to be shaped by the participants, which requires the researcher to “bracket” their presuppositions, bias, motivations or interests (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). In order to reduce researcher bias, the researcher admitted their presuppositions so that the researcher was aware and cautious to not succumb to them (Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). In order for confirmability to be achieved the researcher described the research process in full so that its design can be scrutinized by others (Koonin, 2014).

Findings

Participants

The participants in this research ranged from the ages of 22-27, with four being female and one being male. Participant 1 was an Indian, female, who at the time of the study was studying her postgraduate in the MH field, and had been volunteering with the NPO for approximately two and a half years. Participant 2 was an Indian, female, who at the time of the study was working in the MH field whilst applying to study a postgraduate in the MH field, and had been volunteering with the NPO for approximately two and a half years to three years. Participant 3 was an Indian, female, who at the time of the study was working in the MH field whilst applying to study a postgraduate in the MH field, and had been volunteering with the NPO for approximately one year. Participant 4 was a black, male, who at the time of the study was studying his postgraduate in the MH field, and had been volunteering with the NPO for approximately two years. Participant 5 was a black, female, who at the time of the study was volunteering in the MH field, with the intention of applying for postgraduate study in the MH field, and had been volunteering with the NPO for approximately two years.

Positive Experience with NPO Leadership

Majority of the participants had positive experiences with the leadership of the NPO. The leadership included the managing director and co-directors of the NPO. It should be noted that questions related to leadership were not directly asked to participants as per the interview schedule (see Appendix B on page 45), yet all five participants spoke about their positive experiences with the leadership. This suggests that all found their experience with leadership to be an important aspect of their overall volunteering experience, as they did not have to be prompted to speak to such.

Welcoming and Inclusive. Participants expressed that they found the NPO leadership to be very welcoming and friendly. Participant 2 expressed that she was a bit overwhelmed and nervous, not knowing what to expect when entering the initial volunteer training at the NPO, however due to the staff's friendliness she was immediately put at ease.

Participant 2: "The staff are very friendly like they put you at ease right away... (the NPO coordinator) was so friendly and welcoming and I think that was also one of the reasons why I was drawn more and more to attend the monthly meetings."

Participant 2 further expressed that the leadership's friendliness and welcoming attitude was one of the reasons that she began to volunteer with the organization. This corroborates with research that found a positive interaction between leadership and volunteers influences the volunteer's intention of continuing volunteering for that NPO (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018; Mayr, 2017).

The leadership's welcoming nature also involved the leadership practicing inclusivity with the volunteers. The managing director of the NPO was said to be inclusive in terms of being willing to get volunteers involved in all sectors of the NPO. The volunteers appreciated this inclusivity as it made them feel like an important, integral member of the NPO, and not just another volunteer that was treated less than the leadership team.

Participant 2: "She always took your ideas into consideration, she always included you in things, she didn't just look at you as a volunteer, she just looked at you as an individual willing to contribute, and I think that was my first impression of the NPO, it's so inclusive, there was no hierarchy of professionals and students, it was just we all here to learn from each other."

Participant 1: "I found the managing director to be really keen on projects and willing to get people involved."

The participants displayed satisfaction with their ability to communicate with the leadership as equal, important members with the ability to express ideas and have them taken seriously. This links to research that shows a communication platform between management and volunteers is a vital tool in establishing volunteer satisfaction as this allowed for volunteers to freely express themselves (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018). Being valued by the NPO leadership seemed to be an important factor for these volunteers. This links to research that shows satisfaction with one's role, in particular, is fostered by the perception of their relevance in the organization and whether the volunteers feel recognized and valued by the organization (Corso, et al., 2019; Vecina, et al., 2010). The lack of recognition and appreciation has been recorded as a reason for dropping out (Benevene, et al., 2018).

Supportive. Multiple participants commented on the supportiveness of the NPO leadership stating how there was "A crazy amount of support from them", support that was referred to as being "more than enough". The general support that the leadership gave to their volunteers was a

contributor to their positive experience with the NPO. The participants also expressed that the leadership provide them with numerous supportive resources. These include MH talks where volunteers received psycho-education, and having access to a clinical psychologist for any personal issues they may be experiencing. Volunteers showed much appreciation for the support networks that the NPO provided them with.

Participant 5: “I don’t think there’s anything more that they could have done because I mean everything was at my disposal.”

Participant 4: “from then on my experience was just amazing...they offered every talk, every support group, like every support they could possibly offer me.”

A supportive resource that was highlighted as particularly beneficial to the participants was the support group forums for the support group volunteer leaders. Support group leaders are volunteers who facilitate a support group that meets on a regular basis. Participant 5 found these forums beneficial, noting the role of a support group leader was a difficult task. She expressed the support group forums provide the volunteers with the opportunity to “voice their concerns and just offload”. These forums would be an example of supportive networks of organisations that provide volunteers with the opportunity to express themselves in a supportive environment, and the opportunity to learn from other volunteers (Sundram, et al., 2018).

Through activities like the support group forums the leadership have cultivated and encouraged a relational dimension amongst their volunteers. The relational dimension is beneficial to the volunteer experience as it encourages shared identity, cooperation, trust, sense of community, and feeling of belonging, which all have been found to be associated with volunteer satisfaction, and a positive volunteering experience (Corso, et al., 2019; Sundram, et al., 2018; Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018).

The supportive nature of the NPO leadership is not only limited to the work context, but also exists in a personal context. Participant 4, in particular, pointed out in appreciation that the leadership showed concern for his personal wellbeing, and provided support in this context. This participant highlighted that they were dealing with many personal issues regarding their own MH during their time of volunteering and that the leadership supported them in a variety of ways.

Participant 4: “The amount of support I received from them, it sometimes felt like they were doing more than they had to, you know in terms of support, because they really were going all out... they consistently showed their support to me... they were so invested in my life.”

The leadership are seen to extend themselves beyond their work role, doing more than is expected, caring for their volunteers in a holistic manner- in both the work and personal context. This relates to the servant leadership theory, which encompasses a person-oriented attitude of leaders who have genuine concern with serving their followers and who go beyond their self-interest (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The emphasis of servant leadership is on the growth of the followers, who in this case are the volunteers, and the leadership create organizational opportunities to help their followers grow (Van Dierendonck, 2011). It is viewed as key to good leadership, resulting in strong relationships within the organization, and survival of the organization (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The leadership of the NPO seemed to be carrying out servant leadership, as they have shown personal care and support for their volunteers, which could be seen as outside the scope of what was required of them, therefore acting beyond their own self-interest. They also offered multiple opportunities for their volunteers to grow through all the supportive resources that were mentioned above.

The findings from this research show the volunteers to have had a positive experience with the NPO leadership, which increased their satisfaction with the NPO. This supports the research that found a positive relationship between volunteers and supervisors to increase volunteer satisfaction (Usadolo, & Usadolo, 2018; Benevene, Dal et al., 2018). Satisfaction is an important factor of the volunteer experience as research shows the more volunteers are satisfied with their work, the more positive feelings they will have towards the organization and thus the more likely they are to continue volunteering at the NPO (Erdurmazh, 2018).

Learning Experience

All the participants referred to their time volunteering with the NPO as a learning experience, one stating: “I have learnt so much, I’ve grown”. This learning occurred both in a professional capacity and in a personal capacity. Whilst some of these learning experiences involved challenging situations, they were always viewed by the volunteers in a positive light.

Professional Capacity. The participants made particular reference to their volunteering experience adding to their knowledge of MH, and developing skills in the MH field, thus providing

them with a learning experience in their professional capacity. There are particular areas that have been referred to as contributing to this learning experience, including the community forum talks that are provided by professionals in the MH field and various workshops that the NPO provides. For the support group leaders the NPO provides training, and support group leader meetings that have all been referred to as contributing to the volunteers experience of learning and growing.

Participant 4: “They really helped me in terms of understanding MH”

Participant 3: “support group training... it was good I actually learnt quite a bit”

The actual work that the volunteers engage in has also provided them with opportunities to learn and develop valuable skills. Participant 1 states: “I’ve learnt very valuable skills”. The skills learnt include the ability to develop intervention proposals and to develop trainings, as well as skills related to giving psycho-educational talks.

Participant 1 refers to working with other volunteers as a facet of their learning experience. She referred to it as a “large group project”, whereby one experiences many challenges in terms of interpersonal dynamics. These challenges include working with groups of people whereby some get along and others don’t, dealing with miscommunications, and mediating different opinions.

Participant 1: “I wouldn’t say that it’s a negative experience, ultimately it’s a learning experience, you learn from those interactions”

Whilst the participant acknowledges this experience as challenging she still viewed it in a positive light as she saw it as an opportunity to learn and grow, particularly developing interpersonal skills, and refers to volunteering as beneficial. It is commonly found in research that volunteers learn new skills and gain knowledge from their volunteering experience, which was seen as a positive aspect of their experience (McGratten, 2014; Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019). A sense of accomplishment often comes with gaining such knowledge and skills (McGratten, 2014; Simon, 2019).

The opportunity for learning that volunteering provides seems to be important to the participants in this research and this could be since all of them are starting out their careers in the MH field. Participants acknowledged that students in the MH field are searching for opportunities to gain more knowledge and get any experience they can in the field.

Participant 1: “And I think when you’re in the psychology field, you’re just trying to lap up any knowledge you can get and any experience”

Most participants were motivated to start volunteering in order to learn, due to their interest and desire to progress in the MH field. This corroborates with research that found volunteer’s personal motives to volunteer include career progression in their field of interest (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Sundram, et al., 2018). These volunteers were seeking experience in the field, and the development of necessary skills (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Sundram, et al., 2018).

Research shows that the motivations of individuals show their expectations for their volunteer experience, and when these expectations were fulfilled volunteers were more satisfied with working for the organisation (Alfas, et al., 2017). This links to the current research whereby participants in this research were motivated by their desire to learn, showing their expectation to have learning opportunities in volunteering. These expectations were clearly met, and viewed in a positive sense, satisfying the volunteers. It can thus be assumed that this learning experience added to the volunteers experience being positive.

Personal Capacity. Participant 5 explained that her experience had been a personal learning curve. The participant explained that she had experienced numerous challenges in her role as a support group leader. It was reportedly the exposure to the real life challenges of her support group members that challenged her on an emotional and psychological level. Whilst the participant was greatly challenged, often to a point of feeling depressed, she still viewed the experience in a positive light, as an opportunity for self-introspection, and as a chance for personal growth.

Participant 5: “My overall experience has been a learning curve. It has really challenged me in a good way.”

Participant 5’s experience links to research that shows a major cost of volunteering is emotional strain (McGratten, 2014; Haski-Leventhal, & Bargal, 2008). However the findings of the current research differs, in that while the participant experienced this challenge they still considered such in a positive light, whereas previous research only showed emotional strain to result in a negative experience (McGratten, 2014; Haski-Leventhal, & Bargal, 2008). This difference could be due to the particular NPO providing much assistance and support to their volunteers, especially MH support.

Student Centricism

Participants expressed that there is an evident student focus within the NPO, which has been both positively and negatively experienced by participants.

Most participants expressed that a motive for becoming a volunteer at this NPO was due to their desired career path in the MH field. They wanted to gain knowledge, experience, and skills in the field. Since MH undergraduate degrees in SA usually do not include any practical work, volunteering is seen as a way for these students to gain such experience and skills, as well as start “helping” before they have completed their postgraduate studies, “(volunteering) was my way I could help people at that stage (in undergraduate MH studies)”.

Participant 1: “I just think sometimes psychology students are just like what is the next thing I can do? What is the next skill I can learn? How can I give back?”

Since the NPO provides them with the opportunity to gain such knowledge, experience, and skills the volunteers are recorded to be satisfied and fulfilled with their duties, and this could be due to their expectations being met. The motivations of volunteers have been found to show their expectations, and when such expectations are met it results in more satisfied volunteers who are more likely to continue volunteering (Alfas, et al., 2017).

It is important to recognize the motivations, and expectations of volunteers as it can be used to tailor retention and recruitment initiatives, thus potentially improving volunteer programmes (Cassidy, et al., 2019; Klug, et al., 2018). The NPO is aware that their volunteer database mainly encompasses students and so they seem to have tailored their volunteer programme to meet these expectations of students. For example, they do so by providing psycho-educational talks to equip the volunteers with knowledge and skills, and providing recommendation letters for volunteers who have completed a certain number of hours that will be beneficial to their CVs, both fulfilling the student’s expectation of career progression. However, by focusing their volunteer programme on students the NPO seems to neglect the expectations of volunteers who are not students.

It was recognized by one participant that non-student volunteers do not want to add something to their CV for example, but often want some form of appreciation. It was acknowledged that this is an area that the NPO could improve upon. Research has found that a lack of appreciation from management contributes to the negative experience of volunteers (McGratten, 2014), particularly

having a negative effect on volunteer's sense of belonging with the organization (Sundram, et al, 2018; Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019). This potential lack of belonging for non-student volunteers, along with the NPO failing to meet such volunteer's expectations can result in the NPO becoming exclusive to students.

Student's motivations are also sometimes simply to add something to their CVs. This brings a lot of instability to the NPO as the students are not necessarily committed, which results in high drop out rate. This results in an unstable environment for other volunteers who will have to pick up the workload of those who drop out, possibly adding to the negative experience of these volunteers.

Participant 1: "I think that's where the instability comes from because students are not the most reliable people and also their timetables change"

Participant 2: "(The student volunteer) will start a task and the volunteer will drop off and then we have to pick up the workload"

The lack of commitment from student volunteers can have negative ripple effects on the other volunteers. Since remaining volunteers will have to take over the task of those who have dropped out it can result in a demanding workload for those volunteers. Demanding workloads have been correlated with volunteer burnout and consequently drop out (Allen, & Meuller, 2013). The dropping out of volunteers can also negatively impact the remaining volunteers as it can disrupt the feeling of belonging and sense of community among volunteers, which is an important factor in the volunteer experience (McGratten, 2014, Belfroid, et al., 2018; Simon, 2019).

In order to address this issue it has been suggested by some participants that the volunteer database needs to be expanded to try recruit volunteers who are just "general members of the public".

Participant 2: "I also think we need to reach out to more than just psychology students"

However this may be a difficult task as it has been noted that the NPO does not entirely accommodate general members of the public. Some participants pointed out that training did not exist for all volunteer roles, and such was not always required since their background in MH studies prepared them for their volunteer duties. However, they also acknowledged that not everyone has this educational background, and so more training may be necessary.

Participant 1: “I feel like the activities that are left to the volunteers aren’t the most difficult things, but that perception is also, it comes from my background in psychology.”

Training programmes have been shown through literature to be a significant factor in volunteer retention, with the lack thereof contributing to volunteer drop out (Benevene, et al., 2018). The lack of training in this NPO could therefore result in non-student volunteers having a negative experience with the NPO and consequently dropping out.

Another area of the NPO that has been recorded as being exclusive to students is the meeting times. For example the “first Fridays” meeting, whereby the volunteers meet and are given a psycho-educational talk, were seen as very suitable for student volunteers, but not for those who worked due to the time of the event occurring during working hours.

Participant 1: “A lot of the older volunteers, the people with jobs, found that very excluding”

Participant 1 refers to the student focus of this NPO to be both the NPOs “draw card” and their “downfall”. Whilst it positively attracts numerous volunteers who are students, it also results in exclusivity towards non-student volunteers.

Conclusion

How the research question was answered

The research question for this study was: “What are the lived experiences of this NPO’s volunteers?” Based on the information gathered from 5 semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to answer this question. Overall the experience of volunteers at this NPO was for the most part positive, however a few negative aspects of their experiences were also revealed. Three major themes of their experience arose; this included their experience with leadership, their experience being a learning one, and the effect of student centrism on their experience.

All the volunteers of this research reported having a positive experience with the NPO leadership and this increased their general satisfaction with the NPO. The participants found the leadership to be very welcoming and inclusive, which was appreciated by the volunteers who expressed that this was as one of the reasons they began volunteering at the particular NPO. It made the volunteers feel like equal, important, valuable members of the NPO. The participants also felt well supported by the leadership, both in a professional and personal context, and the leadership were reported to provide numerous supportive structures for the volunteers. The positive experience with leadership contributed to the volunteer’s general volunteering experience being considered positive.

All the participants viewed their time volunteering as a learning experience, occurring in both a professional capacity and in a personal capacity. It included gaining knowledge of MH, developing skills in the MH field, and personal growth. Whilst some of these learning experiences involved challenging situations, they were consistently viewed by the volunteers in a positive light, as an opportunity for growth. This learning factor of volunteers experience contributed to their general volunteering experience being considered positive.

The student focus of the NPO was seen to contribute both positively and negatively to the volunteer experience. It was viewed as positive for students as the NPO was reported to accommodate their expectations of volunteering, fulfilling their personal, and career progression motives. However, for non-student volunteers the NPO could seem exclusive to students, not accommodating them and not fulfilling their expectations. Furthermore, the lack of commitment of student volunteers results in instability in the NPO causing all other volunteers to have potentially negative experiences.

Implications of Findings

This research was a success. It will contribute to the body of knowledge of volunteers and will contribute to the NPO field by providing insight into volunteer's experiences. This research will particularly contribute findings on the volunteer experience from a location, Durban SA, that has limited research on such, and with a population that has had limited research on, South African volunteers. The particular Durban-based MH NPO will be given insight as to the areas that volunteers find favourable, or unfavourable, allowing for adjustments or improvements to be made, with the aim to make the volunteer experience more satisfactory. The findings could also potentially benefit other NPO's through providing insight into the volunteer experience. This information could potentially be used to both retain volunteers as well as motivate future volunteers to join, resulting in prosperous MH NPO's.

Recommendations. Due to this research being on only 5 participants, who are all young adults, and since data saturation was not reached, it is recommended that a replication study occur with a larger sample size with a wider age range in order to gather more extensive results. It is also recommended that follow-up research is conducted on the affects of student centrism on volunteers within an NPO.

In terms of practical application this research recommends that the student centric focus of the NPO be adjusted, including and accommodating non-student volunteers. It is also suggested that the NPO capitalise on their strengths of supportive leadership and the beneficial learning experience that volunteering provides, and use such to recruit new volunteers.

Ethical Implications

Participants. There are various ethical issues that affect participants during research, these will be considered here. Participants were informed about what they were agreeing to partake in through an emailed research explanatory information sheet (see Appendix D on page 27-29). This included a thorough explanation of what was required of them during their participation, along with how their identity was protected, and how the results were going to be used (Louw, 2014). Participants were informed here that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research process (Maree, 2020). Participants were then asked to give their consent through signing a consent form (see Appendix G on page 53) that was emailed to them, which was then returned to the researcher.

During data collection the researcher prioritized the participants physical and psychological comfort (Louw, 2014). In order to do so the researcher informed them of how their identity will be protected (this was done in the explanatory information sheet mentioned above) (Louw, 2014). For this research confidentiality of the participants identity was guaranteed, this meant the participant's responses were only known by the researcher and were not available to any one else (Maree, 2020). This was important, as the volunteers may not have divulged honest experiences and criticisms of the NPO out of fear that the management may negatively target them. For the purpose of confidentiality, the participant's real names were not used, and instead pseudonyms were used (Maree, 2020). Another consideration concerning participant comfort included the researcher being well organized so as not to waste the participant's time (Louw, 2014).

The researcher made it their priority to avoid harming participants during the research process. In order to do so the researcher avoided interview questions that were sensitive in nature, as well as avoided causing the participants to recall emotionally painful memories (Louw, 2014). The researcher also avoided situations that may have caused the participant's future prospects at the NPO to be harmed (Louw, 2014). This was ensured through maintaining anonymity of participants. The researcher meticulously followed standardized procedures and protocols with participants; aiming at all times to display respect and consideration for them, and at no stage did the researcher deceive the participants (Maree, 2020).

Researcher. There are numerous areas within research where the researcher can act unethically, namely in data analysis and data reporting, and these will be considered here (Louw, 2014). The researcher refrained from falsifying information (i.e. deliberately fabricating or changing data), and took care to not distort results in any way (Louw, 2014). The researcher strived to "bracket" their bias when analysing, interpreting, and reporting data (Louw, 2014). The researcher took caution to not misuse data, in other words not using any participant information (contact details or interview responses) for anything other than the research (Louw, 2014). The data collected was also kept safe on the researchers password protected computer (Maree, 2020). This data will be kept for 15 years, after which it will be destroyed (Maree, 2020). It was also ensured that research methods were appropriate, and not harmful to participants or unsuited for the researcher's stated purpose (Louw, 2020).

Limitations

This research was conducted within a year and so due to this time constraint the sample size was small. The limitation of this is that data saturation was not achieved, and so the research does not encompass a full description of the volunteer experience. Furthermore, the only accessible participants were in Durban since there was no budget and limited time to gain information on the volunteer experience from elsewhere. The researcher was aware of such and clearly stipulated that the research is focused on Durban-based volunteers.

The Covid-19 pandemic also posed limitations to this research. Due to the lockdown of the country since the 26th of March 2020, volunteers were not able to continue their duties at the NPO, which posed various issues. The absence of their duties for a few months may have distorted their perception of their experience volunteering. They may either not have remembered their experience correctly, or the pandemic could have disturbed their general view of their experience. The researcher was aware that their perceived experience is in the context of the pandemic.

Research shows that six months of volunteering for an NPO is an adequate amount of time to have sufficient knowledge and experience with the organization (Sundram, et al., 2018). Since lockdown resulted in a large portion of that time not actually conducting volunteering duties, the researcher made allowance for this and extended this time period to one year.

The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted data-collection as face-to-face interviews could no longer be conducted due to social distancing. Therefore, the interviews took place in an online platform. This could have possibly affected the comfort levels of participants since they may not be used to meeting online, and could have been in close proximity of other people in their living environment. Therefore they may not have spoken as freely as they would have in a face-to-face private setting. In order to account for their comfort levels the interviewer made general conversation with the participants prior to the interview and eased them into the interviewing process through asking basic, general questions. The researcher also suggested before hand that the participants should find a location within their premises that is secluded and to schedule the meeting during a time when they had a moment of privacy. There also may have been a possibility that they were distracted by occurrences in their home environments, however suggesting taking the meeting in a secluded private location accounted for this in the most part.

The last two steps of the data analysis were not completed due to time constraints of the research. This possibly affected the trustworthiness of the results since such was not clarified with the participants as the steps required, which did not ensure that the results accurately reflected the participant's experiences.

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Appendix A

Concept Document Table

Research Purpose	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
The purpose of this research was to qualitatively explore the experience of volunteers at a MH NPO, in Durban	What are the lived experiences of this NPO's volunteers?	There is limited research regarding the experience of mental health volunteers in SA, and none particularly focusing on the particular MH NPO volunteers in Durban	Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, & Washburn The new volunteer workforce	Theme 1 Volunteer turnover Theme 2 Motivations of volunteering Theme 3 Experiences of volunteers Theme 4 Ways to increase volunteer satisfaction	Paradigm Interpretivism Epistemology Knowledge is the meaning people assign to their experiences Ontology Reality is fluid, subjective and created by human interaction Axiology Uniqueness is valued	Qualitative	Semi-structured interview	Participants: Informed consent, psychological comfort prioritized, harm avoided, confidentiality ensured Researcher: Information was not falsified or misused, results were not distorted, inappropriate methods were not used, researcher bias was "bracketed"	Overall the volunteer experience was mostly positive, specifically supportive leadership and the learning experience volunteering provides contributes to this positive experience. A few negative aspects also arose, for example the focus on student centrism	Replication study with larger sample size, and wider age range Follow-up research on the affects of student centrism Student centric focus of the NPO should be adjusted Use NPO strengths of supportive leadership and learning experiences to recruit volunteers
						Population Volunteers of a Durban-based MH NPO who have been volunteering for more than 1 year				
In South Africa MH services are under-resourced and overburdened, and thus much of the service provision is provided by voluntary NPO's who are reliant on volunteers, however volunteer retention is a frequent problem. Little information has been gathered regarding the experience of MH volunteers, therefore improvements are unable to be made, and acquiring and retaining volunteers remains a weak point. Without a sufficient number of volunteers NPO's will be insufficient, and unable to assist SA's MH sector. This research attempted to aid in this issue by exploring the experience of volunteering for a MH NPO, thus providing more insight into volunteer's experiences	Objective	Key Concepts	Key Theories	Phenomenology		Sampling	Data Analysis Method Unit of Analysis Participant's responses Data Analysis Method Descriptive phenomenological analysis- Colaizzi	Limitations Time constraints resulted in a small sample size, which means data saturation was not achieved The Covid-19 pandemic posed numerous limitations, as due to social distancing the accuracy of participants' perceptions of their experience may have been distorted, data collection was impacted, and the population parameters needed adjustment	Key Contribution This research will add to the body of knowledge on volunteer experiences, particularly within Durban South Africa. This could aid NPO's in making necessary adjustments, optimizing their volunteer's experiences and thus retaining volunteers. This could result in prosperous MH NPO's	
						Method Purposive sampling Size 5				

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

1. How would you describe your overall experience with the NPO?
2. What was your initial motivation to start volunteering at this NPO?
3. How was the initial training from the NPO?
4. Are there any specific recommendations you have for the NPO?

Appendix C



Honours Ethics Checklist

Student name: Jenna Barnes

Title of the research: What's your experience: A cross-sectional phenomenological exploration of the experience of volunteers at a Durban-based NPO.

	YES	NO	COMMENT
I am not using human subjects		x	
I intend to use human subjects - I understand that I will not conduct research with human subjects under the age of 18 and other vulnerable groups. - I understand I can only proceed once I receive an <u>ethical clearance letter</u>, and my supervisor has approved my interview or focus group questions, questionnaire or coding categories etc.			
Interviews/Focus groups: An example of the written consent form I intend to use is attached.	x		
I will record the interview /focus group and the sample of the letter where I ask for permission to do so is attached.	x		
I plan to use an interview or focus group schedule: The example of my research instrument is attached.	x		
I plan to use a gate-keepers letter: The example of my letter is attached.	x		
I plan to do research on an IIE site/ with IIE students/ staff/ artefacts and I filled in the application for permission to do so. The application is attached. I understand I can only proceed once I receive IIE Approval for this.		x	
Signature			

Appendix D



Explanatory Information Sheet

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jenna Barnes and I am a student at Varsity College. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Samantha Thomas about the volunteer experience at a mental health non-profit organization in Durban. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the volunteer experience in order to enlighten non-profit organisations as to the areas that volunteers find favourable, or unfavourable, allowing for adjustments and improvements to be made. The aim is to improve the volunteer experience and thus retain volunteers.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are a current volunteer of a mental health non-profit organisation. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to have a 45 minute interview with you on the online platform Zoom, within which I will ask you questions regarding your experience volunteering.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you.

There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experience volunteering. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Varsity College, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my BA Honours in Psychology. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Jenna Barnes

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix E



Gatekeepers Letter/ Request to Conduct Research

Dear NPO Gatekeeper

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research at your NPO.

My name is Jenna Barnes, a BA Honours in Psychology student at Varsity College a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my Honours project is titled What's your experience: A cross-sectional phenomenological exploration of the experience of volunteers at a Durban-based NPO.

The aim of this study is to qualitatively explore the experience of volunteers at your NPO, in Durban. The nature of your firm's participation will be giving the researcher the contact details of ten volunteers from your NPO who have been volunteering with you for at least a year. The researcher will contact six of these volunteers, with whom the researcher will request to engage in a 45 minute interview over the online platform Zoom. Within this interview the volunteers will be questioned on various aspects of their experience with your NPO. The confidentiality of both the volunteers and your NPO will be ensured; the volunteers will be referred to as numbers (eg. Participant 1), and your NPO will be referred to as "the particular Durban-based NPO". The final research report will be made available in the IIE library and IIE repository.

Yours sincerely

Student: Jenna Barnes (signature)

Supervisor: Samantha Thomas (signature)

My contact details are as follows:

Jenna Barnes



The contact details of my supervisor/navigator/lecturer are as follows:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix F



Gatekeepers Approval

Consent form to conduct research at my company	
I,	
Representative of	
My capacity:	
Give my permission that may conduct research at my company.	
This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are available in the library and IIE Repository unless I indicate below that I would not.	
Select below: • I request that my company's identity be kept confidential. • My company can be identified in the study • The study may never be available on the repository. • The study may be made available on the repository. • The study may be made available on the repository after months.	
Signature	Date

Appendix G



Consent Form

Consent Form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Jenna Barnes about the experience of volunteers at a mental health non-profit organisation.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews will be conducted using the online platform of Zoom. Please note that confidentiality of using online platforms such as Zoom is limited. This is due to the use of international servers by the owners of the company, as well as inherent security flaws in the systems. However, the following precautions will be taken to ensure as much confidentiality as possible:

- Meeting IDs and passwords will be used, and the researcher will use the waiting room feature to ensure that no unauthorised person gains access to the interview.
- Recordings of the interview will be downloaded onto a flash-drive for storage, and this flash-drive will be kept in a locked place for a duration of at least 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to this recording.
- After the 5 year period has elapsed, the recording will be wiped from the storage device.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Appendix H



Consent Form for Audio Recording

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to allow Jenna Barnes to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the experience of volunteers at a mental health non-profit organisation.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.
- Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

Signature

Date

Appendix I

Ethical Clearance Letter



29 July 2020

Student name: Jenna Barnes
Student number: 17046070
Campus: Varsity College, Westville



Re: Approval of Psychology Honours Proposal and Ethics Clearance



HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.



Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.



In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.

ADvTECH HOUSE

Inanda Greens
 54 Wierda Rd West
 Wierda Valley 2196
 P.O. Box 2369
 Randburg 2125



Directors: RJ Douglas (UK), JDR Oesch*, MD Aitken*, FJ Coughlan* (*Non-executive)

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2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.



Supervisor and Campus Postgraduate Coordinator
Dr Samantha Thomas

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