

Animal Welfare Volunteers: Who Are They and Why Do They Do What They Do?

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Abstract:

Although the volunteerism literature has grown in recent years, our understanding of those who volunteer to help non-human animals rather than humans is lacking. In light of the continuing difficulty animal shelters face in recruiting and retaining volunteers, a better understanding is long overdue. The purposes of the current investigation were to develop a demographic portrait of animal welfare volunteers, to assess the functions served by volunteering with animal welfare organizations (e.g., animal shelters), and to determine whether the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI; Clary et al. 1998) is a valid instrument to use with those who volunteer to help animals. The VFI measures volunteer motivations along six dimensions and has been used extensively in human-to-human volunteer contexts. A national sample of 426 animal welfare volunteers was given modified versions of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007) annual "Volunteering in the United States" survey and of the VFI. Results suggest that the typical animal welfare volunteer is female, White, pet-owning, heterosexual, employed, childless, married or partnered, Democrat-leaning, between the ages of 40 and 59, has an income between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and is Protestant. Additionally, it was found that the modified VFI is indeed a valid instrument to use with this population and reveals that animal welfare volunteers are primarily motivated by a need to act on important values relating to animals. Implications for successful recruitment and retention of volunteers are also discussed.

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