

## VOLUNTARY SERVICE OF HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS

DZIAŁALNOŚĆ WOLONTARYJNA STUDENTÓW KIERUNKÓW MEDYCZNYCH

Monika Szpringer, Edyta Dziewisz, Justyna Kosecka, Olga Pluta

Faculty of Health Sciences, The Jan Kochanowski University of Humanities and Sciences in Kielce

Dean: Prof. Stanisław Głuszek MD

### SUMMARY

The article presents a fragment of research concerning voluntary service of health sciences students and their knowledge in this area. The aim of the research was to assess voluntary service of Health Sciences students at the Health Science Faculty, the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce. The research was carried out in March 2009 among 19-24 year-old students of the following specialisations: Public Health, Physiotherapy, Nursing and Obstetrics. In total, 200 students, including 187 women and 13 men, were interviewed during the investigation. The basic method applied in the investigation was a diagnostic survey.

Only 2% of the surveyed students take part in voluntary service. This is a very small number. They provide assistance in orphanages, hospices and Caritas.

The best-known organisations of public benefit known by students are: The Polish Red Cross (22%), the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (20%), Caritas (17%), Polish Humanitarian Action (11%), the POLSAT Foundation (6%), TVN (5%), Monar, Markot (13%). 7% of students do not know any non governmental organisations. Students acquire knowledge about voluntary service mainly from the Internet (36.8%), from friends and families (22.2%), media (19.3%), and also from non governmental organisations (16.2%). The surveyed students contact call centres (5.5%) most seldom.

It results from the investigation that only a small number of students become engaged in voluntary service. The main cause of this small number of volunteers is the lack of time. More students of Pedagogy and Social Sciences are engaged in voluntary work.

**Key words:** activity, voluntary service, Health Sciences students.

### STRESZCZENIE

W artykule zaprezentowano fragment badań dotyczących aktywności wolontaryjnej studentów kierunków medycznych i ich wiedzy w tym zakresie.

Celem podjętych działań jest ocena zjawiska społecznego, jakim jest wolontariat wśród studentów kierunków medycznych na Wydziale Nauk o Zdrowiu Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach. Badania przeprowadzono w marcu 2009 roku wśród studentów z kierunków: zdrowie publiczne, fizjoterapia, pielęgniarstwo i położnictwo, w wieku 19–24 lat. Ogółem poddano badaniu 200 osób, w tym 187 kobiet i 13 mężczyzn. Podstawową metodą zastosowaną w badaniach był sondaż diagnostyczny, w ramach którego zastosowano technikę ankietowania.

Zaledwie 2% ankietowanych studentów włącza się w wolontariat. Jest to bardzo znikoma liczba. Swoją pomocą służą w domach dziecka, hospicjach i Caritasie.

Najbardziej znanymi przez studentów organizacjami pożytku publicznego są: Polski Czerwony Krzyż (22%), Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy (20%), Caritas (17%), Polska Akcja Humanitarna (11%), Fundacja POLSAT (6%), TVN (5%), Monar, Markot (13%), a 7% studentów nie zna żadnych organizacji pozarządowych. Wiedzę o wolontariacie studenci czerpią głównie z Internetu (36,8%), od przyjaciół i rodziny (22,2%), z innych mediów (19,3%), a także organizacji pozarządowych (16,2%). Najrzadziej ankietowani korzystają z infolinii (5,5%).

Z badań wynika, iż niewielu studentów zostaje wolontariuszami. Głównym tego powodem jest brak czasu studentów. Większe grono wolontariatu stanowią studenci kierunków pedagogicznych i społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** aktywność, wolontariat, studenci kierunków medycznych.

## INTRODUCTION

There are many people in the contemporary world who voluntarily and disinterestedly offer themselves and their assistance to other people. Volunteers offer their assistance everywhere where it is necessary. A. Gluziński points out that volunteers can also be engaged in public administration and in other public establishments (e.g. hospitals, nursery schools [1]. Volunteers act from the need of their hearts. Bringing joy to seriously sick children and adults and making them smile are the only rewards for their effort.

The period of studies is the time of the acquisition of knowledge and experience. Voluntary service is one of many possibilities of one's verification in direct activity in the interest of others. In Poland, voluntary service is based in a large measure on students. It is proper, therefore, to prepare suitable conditions for voluntary service [2].

The disadvantageous situation of voluntary service in Poland results from the absence of satisfactions of basic needs contained in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, i.e. physiological needs, safety, belonging, self-esteem and respect. Offering assistance to others and self-actualisation are on its highest level. If the individual is not in a position to satisfy his or her own basic needs, it is difficult to expect from them a commitment to act in the interest of others.

The labour market in Poland negatively bears on voluntary service. Students prefer to undertake a profitable employment rather than to devote their spare time to disinterested help to people in need. They do not perceive later advantages from the acquisition of such experiences. Voluntary service shapes character, teaches responsibility, sensitivity and patience, prepares for the commencement of professional work after graduation. If young people understand it, then voluntary service will become more popular [3].

All persons who want to become volunteers undergo a suitable training, recognise their competences and the range of activities. After the completion of training they receive a certificate which does not confirm their work as volunteers. Half of them resign from collaboration after the receipt of a certificate. They are persons who want to obtain such a certificate for their own private advantages. The majority of trainees want to verify their knowledge acquired during the period of studies. However, they often undertake something that outgrows their abilities. They have no practical, and what is most important, psychological preparation to execute such difficult tasks. It is also necessary to emphasise that not every person can work in all kinds of voluntary activity.

Many students confuse the notion of community service and voluntary service. Voluntary service is not

only assistance offered to the sick, disabled and children, but also all other activities undertaken by the need of the heart. It also includes help in animal shelters, museums, artistic activity or desk jobs.

In the opinion of students a volunteer is the person who:

- is disinterested
- is helpful
- works benevolently from the need of the heart
- is sensitive to human harm
- is tolerant and responsible
- is forbearing and friendly
- is competent and honest
- gives, but also gains precious experience
- wants to change the world for the better, thinks innovatively
- feels necessary.

A majority of students consider that volunteers are very necessary. However, only 54% of them want to do this service; 7% do not want to; and 39% do not know whether they would be prepared to do voluntary service. At present a great opportunity for young people is the European Voluntary Service – EVS. EVS has already undertaken the second action of the programme “Youth in Action”. EVS enables organisations to send young volunteers to provide help in various foreign (ecological, social, cultural) projects and to host volunteers from other European countries in the existing non-profit organisations and institutions [4]. Everyone aged 18–30 years can become a volunteer and they do not need to have any qualifications or experience, they do not have to know any foreign language on a determined level (unless stated otherwise by the hosting organisation – the host of the project and the sending organisation which carries out recruitment). The only criteria are a strong motivation, age and citizenship of one of countries of the programme (or – for volunteers from countries not included in the programme – possession of a temporary residency card). Voluntary work brings measurable advantages to young people, such as personal development, a better understanding of oneself and others, meeting the challenges, new relationships and friendships, assistance to people in need, new knowledge: acquisition or improvement of a foreign language, new ideas and interests, improvement of communication and practical skills, acquisition of new experiences. Serving other people is one of the most noble human attitudes and at the most lofty and priceless manifestation of the human spirit [5]. It acquires a special significance in relation to Health Sciences students. It is an opportunity for young people to learn how to help others, organise time without drinking alcohol, drugs, violence, and to develop the attitude of help and kindness for others, particularly those who are weak and need support.

**MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The survey was carried out in March 2009 at the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce. 19-24 year-old students included in the survey studied Public Health, Physiotherapy, Nursing and Obstetrics. The research was carried out in March 2009 among 19-24 year-old students of the following specialisations: Public Health, Physiotherapy, Nursing and Obstetrics. In total, 200 students, including 187 women and 13 men, were interviewed during the investigation. The basic method applied in the investigation was a diagnostic survey. Interviews were also made with the employees of the Kielce Centre of Voluntary Service.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There are far more of women (92%) than men (8%) among volunteers. In the majority of cases they are people with higher education, residing in towns. In recent years a 50% fall of the number of volunteers was observed. The major cause was emigration of young people. It is a very alarming phenomenon because people who have left the country were very creative and highly committed to working for the benefit of others.

Students provide many reasons why they infrequently undertake this activity. Above 36% of students do not have time for voluntary service; 26% do not want to be engaged disinterestedly in work for the benefit of others. Almost 21% of the investigated claim that health problems are a barrier for involvement in this type of work. It is disturbing that 15% of the investigated students do not believe in their competence and possibility of voluntary service for people in need (Fig. 1).

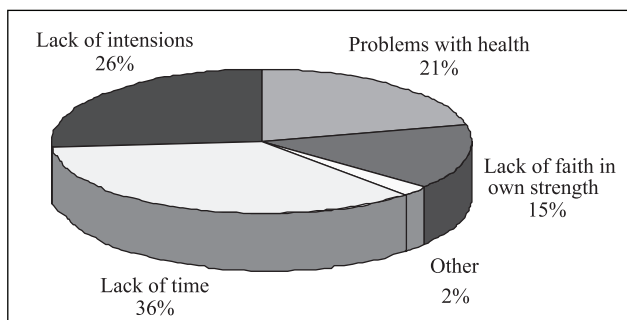


Fig. 1. Major causes of the lack of the commitment of students in voluntary service.

Many students are not engaged continuously in voluntary service, but in daily life they often offer assistance to other people. Most often they help dis-

eased and handicapped persons (24%), however only 14% of students declare assistance to elderly people. About 12% of the surveyed students devote their time to play with children and young people, and they also help shopping (12%). Above 11% of students offer assistance to their friends. Fund raising and gift collection are rarer forms of assistance (8.4% each) (Fig. 2).

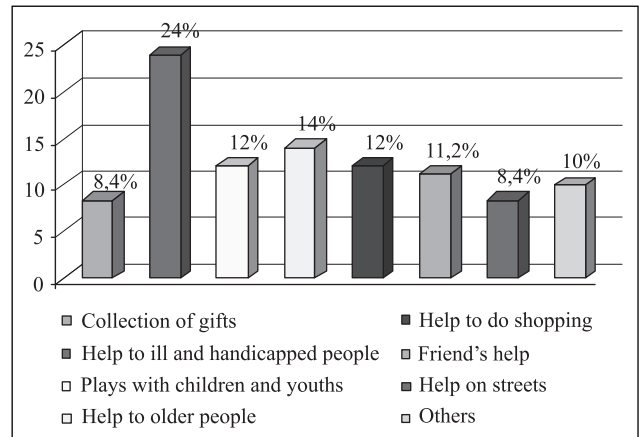


Fig. 2. Private help of students not involved in voluntary service.

The majority of the surveyed students:

- never received help from a volunteer;
- consider that they have not sufficient knowledge on the subject of voluntary service;
- consider that it is necessary to induce young men to voluntary service;
- do not know many volunteers.

The Polish Red Cross is one of the organisations of public benefit best known to students (22%). The second place is occupied by The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (20%). Such a great popularity is due to a strong publicity in media. Another well-known organisation is Caritas (17%). A considerable number of students also mention The Polish Humanitarian Action (11%). The POLSAT Foundation is indicated by 6% of the surveyed students, and The TVN Foundation by 5%. It is alarming that 7% of students do not know any non governmental organisations. Ac-

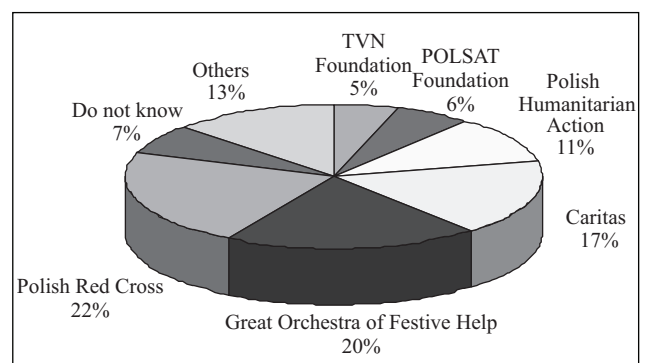


Fig. 3. Non governmental organisations engaged in voluntary service best known by students.

tivities of the remaining organisations are also important but less well-known, as e.g. those of Monar and Markot (13%).

It is necessary to emphasise that only 27.5% of the surveyed students donate 1% of their income tax for the organisations of public benefit.

Social activists most often mentioned by students:

- Jerzy Owskiak
- Janina Ochojska
- Jolanta Kwaśniewska
- Małgorzata Foremniak
- Marek Kotański
- Anna Dymna

Students acquire knowledge about voluntary service mainly from the Internet (36.8%) and from friends and families (22.2%). The subsequent sources of information are media (19.3%) and also non governmental organisations (16.2%). The surveyed students use the call centre (5.5%) most seldom.

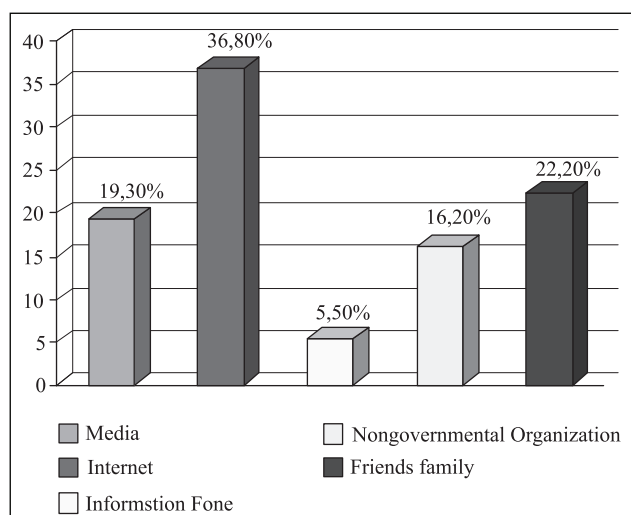


Fig. 4. Sources of information about voluntary service

Only a small percentage of Health Sciences students undertake work in voluntary service (2%). Those who do offer help in orphanages, hospices and Caritas. They were induced to this type of activity mainly by their acquaintances and friends. The major cause of insufficient commitment in voluntary service of Health Sciences students is the lack of time.

#### Address for correspondence:

prof. dr hab. Monika Szpringer  
Zakład Profilaktyki Społecznej  
Wydział Nauk o Zdrowiu UJK w Kielcach  
25-317 Kielce, Al. IX Wieków Kielc 19  
e-mail: mszprin@poczta.onet.pl  
tel. 048 41 349 69 31

Table 1. Commitment of Health Sciences students in voluntary service.

Commitment	n = 200	%
Yes	4	2
No	196	98

#### CONCLUSION

1. In the last two years the number of volunteers has been observed to drop by 50%.
2. What is most important for students is the satisfaction of their own needs, and next offering assistance to other people.
3. A serious problem is the stereotypical vision of voluntary service and confusing it with community service.
4. There is a need to include in the Syllabus basic information about voluntary service in Poland and in the world, about advantages and opportunities of participation in different forms of voluntary service.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [5] Gluziński A. Ustawa o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie. Wyd. Difin, 2005; 102–103.
- [6] Kanios A. Społeczne kompetencje studentów do pracy w wolontariacie. Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2008; 62–67.
- [7] Information obtained from employees of the Voluntary Service Centre, ul. Sienkiewicza 76, 25–501 Kielce.
- [8] ([http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolontariat\\_Europejski](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolontariat_Europejski))
- [9] A letter of Bishop Jan Chrapek Let's share – voluntary service, Radom 2001: 2.