

Women as Volunteers in Empowerment through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) Initiatives: Perspectives of Belief

ABSTRACT

Women volunteerism in Nigeria is very significant for effective designing, implementation and evaluation of all their empowerment programs. Self-help group (SHG) approach is one of the fundamental beliefs of women towards empowerment, that only when they join they can be able to become self-reliant. The objective of this paper is to determine how women's belief in volunteerism influences their level of empowerment as volunteers in SHGs. It has been established that belief has direct positive impact on the level of empowerment of women that actively participate in volunteering through SHGs. A total of 255 women volunteers in SHGs were selected randomly through multi-stage stratified sampling methods. The data was collected through the use of structured self-report questionnaire and the data was analyzed using IBM SPSS version 22 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation co-efficient technique. The highest relationship and positive linear relationship was found between empowerment and normative belief ($r = .72, p = 0.000$), while relationship between empowerment and self-belief ($r = 5.9, p = 0.000$) indicates moderate positive linear. The paper concludes that women belief in volunteerism will intensely encourage their participation in SHG volunteering activities for holistic community development. As such, women SHGs in Nigeria should be exposed to all available positive volunteering activities to enable them become aware of the global standards and also capacity building of volunteers should be given a priority with a clear mission of increasing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of women volunteers in SHGs.

Keywords: Women, volunteers, empowerment, self-help groups, belief

1. INTRODUCTION

Voluntary services by women in Nigeria are on the increase day by day. Available data from a recent study showed that more than 82.9% (6297) of a survey sample among Nigerian women are participating in one voluntary service or the other [1]. Volunteerism activities in Nigeria can be traced back to pre-colonial era about 100 years ago [2]. It was observed to manifest from religious teachings, cultural values and charitable altruism sometimes from the point of rendering support to less privilege, vulnerable and displaced persons as a result of economic crisis and political conflicts [3]. There is outcry and many efforts towards trying to incorporate volunteerism more as part of the main components of culture and engagement of women at the youth age to participate fully from initiation to evaluation stage. According to [3] there is high number of volunteers from the strata of retirees while young individuals and other professionals find it very difficult to actively participate because of time emanating from tight schedule. From the above this paper argues that, women may have high volunteering spirit than men counterpart among the academic staff of tertiary institutions because of the natural sympathetic traits they possessed.

The government of Nigeria is very much concern about general well-being of women and their participation in community development initiatives as such efforts through floating a Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development (MWAYD) and legislating laws to allow non-governmental organizations reach out to more people especially women to enlighten them more on volunteerism benefits and consequences. It has the advantage of considering all which in turn will promote mutual cohesion and women as child care givers, they can easily inculcate the idea of volunteerism to the younger ones. Generally, majority of Nigerian population are aware of the physical and mental benefits of volunteering

even from the religious point of view, such as helping the needy, conscious knowledge sharing, making new friends, self-esteem and self-efficacy attainment, promoting active learning and enhanced community services, many challenges are available that require the services of volunteers to reduce their menace in our societies today [4, 6].

Volunteers especially women can serve as store of knowledge that can be used for development of program and can also be utilized in ensuring empowerment paradigms directly associated with educating, enlightening and creating more awareness are appropriate, suitable, applicable and reasonable. Active participation in volunteering activities was found to empower women economically, socially and psychologically to effect the desired changes and improve their living standards [7, 8, 9, 10, and 11]. Previous studies indicated that persons who are willing to volunteer actively are motivated based on their beliefs which make such persons repeatedly sacrifice their resources for the sake of others, and also leads them to also withstand the resource mobilization and its utilization for other to benefit over a long period of time. Nigerian women are heterogeneous in nature in terms of culture, norms, values and geographical location. They comprise of major tribes Hausa/Fulani (North), Yoruba (West) and Igbo (East), but they have a common system of volunteering engagement especially in the area of child development and beliefs. Although, previous research was able to put forward some universal prepositions about women involvement in volunteerism and self-help, studies related women in general and specifically regarding beliefs in Nigeria is still lacking. Hence this article has studied the extent to which beliefs fortify women engagement in volunteerism, with specific focus on how women beliefs affect the rate of volunteerism.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Volunteerism in the context of this study refers to any type of activity carried out by individual without expecting reward in any form (cash or kind) for the benefit of other community members' benefit formal and informal. In general perspectives volunteering refer to process of giving out without direct or direct taking, accepting or collecting anything in return [11] identified four types of volunteering, namely philanthropy, self-help, civic involvement and advocacy or campaign. In volunteerism studies, it was found that people usually form groups or join groups if they believe that their needs, aspirations and interest can be met. However, individuals possess different needs, it could be economic (business, income generation, skills acquisition), social (making new friends, public speaking, networking) and psychological (self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, building more confidence) and many more. Invariably, many studies indicated that people are willing to help others based on their perceived importance of the need or because of sympathy and inert altruism.

Belief connotes the feeling of being certain that something exists or is true [12]. Belief is what we know or think we know about subject, object or phenomenon and is closely associated to human attitudes [13]. Belief is a sustaining factor in the constructs associated to attitudes and is subjective to norms and perceived behavioral control [14]. Theory of planned behavior of Ajzen is one of the recent theories that explained belief in different forms citing divergent reactions by different group of people. Although, the theory is universal, the women common factor that leads to high volunteering is not fully addressed, however, the theory takes care of gender issues indirectly. Moreover, this article measure belief using two sub-scales namely the normative beliefs and the self-beliefs. Adopting the instrument used by [13], this study modifies some of the items to suit the Nigerian area of study. To measure self-belief in women volunteerism, items such as I feel good in volunteering; I gain lot of experience during volunteering work; volunteering is very essential; I volunteer because of its usefulness; volunteering engaged my time; I participate in volunteering as it makes me understand what life is all about; volunteering increases my self-esteem, volunteering change me as a person, volunteering has provided me with the opportunity of appreciating individual differences among people.

Furthermore, empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept that suffered numerous attacks and challenges to the extent that it becomes a fashionable word without consensus meaning [35, 6]. According to [8] empowerment is an argued concept which has different meaning and interpretation based on the perspective one is looking at it. Moreover, having a static single definition of the concept may contradict the actual need of specific area of interest [34]. However, in general perspective

empowerment refers to the ability of individuals to acquire and understand how to control personal, social, economic, psychological and political forces that will enable them improve their living standards [8], and through social interactions, depending on what they wish and their interest about developing themselves and the community they live in (20, 7]. Moreover, empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change [35]. Specifically, empowerment can be referred to exposing women individually or as group into activities that will make them self-dependence and self-reliant in all day to day running of their life, which includes social, political, psychological and economic affairs. Similarly, empowerment of women in most cases is directly associated with power which simply means ability to make certain people do what we want, not minding their interests, wishes, needs or aspirations.

3. Review of related Literature

3.1 Women and Volunteerism in Nigeria

Volunteering is an act that was found to have helped many women in SHGs enhances their technical potentials, increase their knowledge and enhance their capacity towards becoming goods ambassadors in all strata of life they find themselves such as leaders or followers. Previous studies indicated that women both young and adult actively participate in volunteering activities to acquire requisite and acceptable social engagements that facilitate reduction of unwanted behaviors and dangerous threats [3, 15, 16, 17]. Moreover volunteering activities was found to be of help during preparatory stage of employment and transition of young women into adulthood [13]. Furthermore, altruism, making new friends, giving back to community and joining other friends includes some of the major factors motivating SHG members join volunteer agencies [18], however, the factors differ across the globe depending on peoples culture, norms, values and aspirations [19]. Some scholars are of the view that the volunteerism spirit development initiatives should be included in school curriculum to enable young ones grow with the zeal of making sacrifice of both time and space for the benefit of others, while another school of thought affirm that volunteerism spirit is an in born habit or being inherited from parents.

3.2 Why do Women Volunteer?

In all cases reported or being in session volunteerism is agreed to be an individual willingness to render support or devote time to the SHG which in the long-run the whole community benefit from the good/service or assisting the less privilege without expecting anything in return (cash or kind) and also the contribution by these individuals' is very important and highly considerable to the sustainable development of the society and the Nigeria' development as a nation. According to [19] helping behaviors exhibited by women that are specific in nature and has long-term assurance or commitment is called volunteering, which due to its effect towards societal development, behaviors in relation to helping others has become one of the goals that many researches are willing to achieve now and in the near future. Moreover, women volunteerism is one of the simple expressions or manifestations as human behavior which arises out of long established ancient cultures of involvement and mutual exchanges [9]. Women volunteers are explicitly required towards call for substantial preparation, arranging of priorities, identifying needs and matching of individual competences with attentiveness and type of mediation required. Volunteers through SHG in general are deliberately looking for openings to help others; they deliberate inter and intra SHG on the requisite time and space about to volunteer; the range of participation and the extent to which specific activity match their personal interest, need and aspirations and the investments of both resources required in the period of helping relationships [20].

Furthermore, women volunteers participate actively because they have passion and zeal to help others, they are enthusiastic and highly sympathetic and they were found to be engaged in exhibiting helping behavior within the community they live because their level of interaction through socialization within their surroundings' has shaped their beliefs, values, norms and world perspective [20]. [21] established that active involvement in volunteer activities by women leads to their empowerment through enhancing their capabilities that are directly associated to controlling their resources and making good decisions. Other reasons for volunteerism by women include just wanting to help others, to do something important and to some they feel they must do something to help others. Also, desire for exposure, opportunity to

practicalize theories, chance to translate perceptions or ideas into action, opportunity to overcome new challenges of life, to be acquainted with new civilizations and traditions. Moreover, in SHG women volunteer to expand their knowledge and skills, they also believed volunteering is an inherently worthwhile and provides a good life for both the family and society at large [22].

“The question here is why focusing on women?”

Research associated to women beliefs' in volunteerism in Nigerian context is absolutely very low, hence the study is initiated to provide a baseline foundation on investigating and understanding what drives women to engage in volunteering activities from the perspective of their beliefs. Moreover, educational and other structures both private and public found it very important to nurture volunteerism spirit among youth (men and women) [15], because in the long run it will translate into facilitating holistic societal cohesion. According [13] there are many reasons that encourage individuals to become volunteers, but most often is tied to the need of helping others, doing very important things and/or to render services to the needful free. Many women involved in volunteerism have a sensation that is a duty to do something that will assist others directly or indirectly, which they also agree is a reason for life from the perception of their religious or cultural beliefs. Other established reasons for volunteerism comprises of the need for experience towards some challenges, an opportunity to establish a real assurance and show interest for the underserved or marginalized, a chance to views and perceptions into action, a chance to make more friends and overcome social exclusion obstacles, to acquire more on interesting things about other or new values and civilizations. Volunteers also acquire have the chance of acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Hence, some individual's volunteer because such activities are naturally valuable, while others have a sensation that is a good life experience for them and their families at large [22].

3.3 Theoretical Perspective (Theory of Planned Behavior)

This study find it very imperative in discussing women volunteerism to focus more on the factors that have direct influence on the attitudes, intention to stay and other various social formations that allows sustainability of such behaviors in communities. Some scholars had made an attempt to identify and discuss diverse social and individual factors that affect their intentions and possible behaviors [23]. The most effective in this regard is the utilization of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) together with its expansion or modification, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) of [24], the expansion or modification was a result of the discovery that behavior appeared not to be 100% voluntary and under control, as such leads to inclusion of perceived behavioral control. The theory of planned behavior postulated that human behavior is directed in three (3) kinds of situations, thus: behavior beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs [25]. It went further describing beliefs as the foundation of attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control concepts [26]. The theory posits that individual's attitude is an outcome of the person's foremost behavioral beliefs [27, 24]. It also explains individual behavior is mainly inspired by the person's intention, and the behavioral intention manifest as outcome of the person's attitude towards the behavior and subjective norm is behind the act of the behavior [27, 14]. Moreover, individual behavior depends on the person's willingness to exhibit that behavioral attitude while the intention is the resulting effect towards a behavior and the individual subjective norm [13]. The most influential indicator of behavior is intention. Intention refers to intellectual depiction of individual's enthusiasm to exhibit assumed behavior [27, 14, and 25].

In addition, this article argues subjective norms to be anticipated as a task of normative beliefs and societal burdens among other essential loads [27, 24, 25, & 28]. Perceived behavioral control is anticipated to serve as outcome control beliefs, or beliefs indicating availability of resources or avenues that guarantee proper execution of the intended behavior. Proper clarification of all these beliefs provides a clear understanding of the distinctions between those performing the behavior and vice versa [29, 30]. Using the basis of the above theory, this article analyze women belief's to expand comprehending variances among women volunteers and those who deem it less important to join the volunteering activities. This article provided a logical and holistic structure that permits evaluation of individual, societal and spiritual properties of volunteering intention for women in Nigeria.

3.4 Beliefs and Volunteering among Nigerian Women

In volunteering studies, individual level of belief is perceived as a powerful pointer on the degree of his/her obligations. Individuals in a given society are mostly encouraged in joining volunteering activities based on their believe and have passion to help others grow, even though they cannot gain anything out of the sacrifice or as a result of giving freely their precious time or material. According to [13] volunteering is very essential manifestation of social conscience and central to social equality. It is the sacrifice of both resources to make the society become a better place for both the commoners and the poorest poor or those in need. Moreover, is a generosity freely done without expecting any gain in whatever form, in many Nigerian culture's the virtue of volunteerism is higher in women than men, it is also attributed to their sympathetic inherent behavior. Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behavior has postulated behavioral manifestation of human beings is directed by three reflections, viz. behavioral beliefs (expressed in the beliefs around possible results of the behavior), normative belief (belief around normative expectations of others), and control beliefs (belief deals with the existence of elements that enhances or retard the behavioral performance). They in most cases occur together in exhibiting a behavioral pattern and when the aggregates are summed up, attitude towards behavior, subjective norm and perception of behavioral control leads to the formation of a behavioral intention [27, 14 & 31]. Moreover, for clarity the aggregates of the three considerations can be clearly stated as behavioral beliefs creates positive or negative attitude towards expected behavior, normative belief yields supposed societal burden or subjective norm; and control beliefs lead to perceived behavioral control. However, this beliefs manifestation to attitudinal expectations towards that results to behavioral intention is not in conflict in anyway with the cultural provision of women in many Nigerian cultures, as such application of this theory to this study can further substantiate the claim that, volunteerism among women in Nigeria is a product of combined behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs.

In addition, beliefs can be seen in the facets of what individuals understand about subject or a phenomenon or what the individuals perceived to have knowledge about it (Raven & Rubin, 19832]. Practically, beliefs are thoroughly related with attitude and behavior. Beliefs in most cases are hardly evaluated just like attitudes, but the two were found to be contributing in the case of measuring a cause [13]. The quantum of association between beliefs and attitudes is very strong that this article can conclude an individual's attitude towards an object or a subject if we have knowledge on her beliefs. Moreover, within the context of volunteerism, functional approach is the one of the most widely studied approaches for clear understanding beliefs [20]. Although different people in a society perceived volunteerism differently, but there exist a common ground that the services rendered is freely and voluntarily undertaken without expecting any reward in cash or kind. Some are motivated to participate because they have hold the belief that by giving out freely they satisfy their conscience, while some believe that helping those in need is part of religion or cultural obligation, as such they engage themselves in volunteering activities.

According to Law [31] five forms of beliefs can be developed about volunteerism among persons of youth age and he categorized them in to two as "other-serving belief" and "self-serving belief". The five forms are as follows:

- (a) Pro-social value function (other-serving belief) which simply means helping other people that are in need.
- (b) Understanding function (self-serving belief) simply means likelihood of acquiring both knowledge and skills while serving others.
- (c) Socializing function (self-serving belief) meaning social component that relates the services rendered as a group or individual such as mingling with different people and making new friends.
- (d) Future plan function (self-serving belief) meaning possible concrete dividends to girls in general.
- (e) Well-being function (self-serving belief) meaning aspect that deals with the psychological stability of the person's involved.

This article focuses on beliefs in relation to women empowerment in volunteerism through self-help. It is however, hypothesized that belief as a factor (normative and self-beliefs) would have a strong relationship to empowerment of women in SHGs. In essence, the following two hypotheses are tested: Hypothesis 1: Empowerment has positive relationship to normative beliefs. Hypothesis 2: Empowerment is positively related to self-beliefs.

3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this article is to determine how women's belief in volunteerism influences level of their empowerment as volunteers in SHGs. It has been established that belief has direct positive impact on the level of empowerment of women that actively participate in volunteering through SHGs [33, 10, 31, 26, 34 & 35]. However, there exist a vacuum of understanding beliefs in relation to empowerment through volunteering in SHGs because of scanty studies in Nigeria. Hence, this study was undertaken to serve as a baseline for examining the belief factor's contribution in women empowerment through volunteerism in Nigerian SHGs.

Normative beliefs and self-beliefs were the detailed two sub-scales used in measuring belief factor while empowerment was measured using Rosenberg self-esteem scale. Data were collected from the women in SHGs as participants through self-administered questionnaire. The participants were informed that the study is voluntary in nature and all information they give will only be used for research purpose. The data collection exercise was conducted during the month of July-August quarterly consultative meeting between regulatory agencies and SHGs in North-eastern Nigeria and all the women that participated in the study were given a token of soap and jelly to show appreciation. Total number of 267 women participated, however 255 participants responses were found useful and is considered adequate population for and will give adequate level of confidence for the study. The study was carried out to quantify the belief of Nigerian women in empowerment through volunteerism in SHGs. Set of questions in a 10 point Likert-scale format was employed, ranging from 1 Strongly Disagree to 10 Strongly Agree. The levels of women belief were scored at categories of Low (1-4), Moderate (5-7) and High (8-10).

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- 1) There is significant relationship between empowerment and normative belief among women in volunteerism.
- 2) There is significant relationship between empowerment and self-beliefs among women in volunteerism.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the respondents analyzed were age, location, religion. Marital status and educational qualification as depicted in Table 1. There were 54 respondents (21.18%) with low age category, 130 (50.98%) respondents at moderate category, while 71 respondents constituting (27.84%) are within the high age category. From the demographic information, most of the respondents involved in volunteering are located in the urban centers (47.45%), followed by semi-urban 26.67 % and 25.88%. The religious belief of the respondents was categorized into three, namely Islam, Christian and others; the study shows that Muslim's has the majority with 136 respondents (53.34%). Those in Christian religion comprised 42.74%, and others 3.92%. From the study, it was found that, majority of the women were married constituting about 77.65%, while 41 respondents were single 16.08% and only 6.27% are divorced/widowed. Educational background of the respondents' shows that majority of them attended primary school (42.35%), followed by those who attended secondary school 34.11%, while only 41 respondents (16.08%) have post-secondary certificate only 7.46% were found to have traditional or religious education.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demography	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Low (18-30)	54	21.18
Moderate (32-43)	130	50.98
High (44-66)	71	27.84
Location		
Urban	121	47.45
Semi-Rural	68	26.67
Rural	66	25.88
Religion		

Islam	136	53.34
Christian	109	42.74
Others	10	3.92
Marital Status		
Single	41	16.08
Married	198	77.65
Divorced/widowed	16	6.27
Educational Level		
Religious/Traditional	19	7.46
Primary	108	42.35
Secondary	87	34.11
Tertiary	41	16.08

Volunteerism plays a vital role towards empowering of women in SHGs and it is also an essential process that promotes support to women in their diversity, while sacrificing the little they have to ensure sustainable development of their communities and other human development initiatives Table 2. Shows that, the level of women empowerment is high at 46.7% (M=2.6546, SD=.47820).

From the results obtained and examining the hypotheses, H1 was supported, because it revealed positive relationship between empowerment and normative belief. The normative belief among women engaged in volunteering activities through SHGs is also high. The results revealed 49.8% (M=2.6879, SD=.46447) of women decided that their belief in volunteerism is very helpful towards their encouragement in participating as volunteers. However, it worthy to note that, the belief factor differs considerably based on the needs of the individuals in the SHGs, for example the results indicated 12.1% of the women had low belief in volunteering even though they belong to active SHG members category as depicted in Table 2. Moreover, H2 was also supported; empowerment is positively related to self-beliefs. The level of volunteerism in self-belief factor was at high level among majority of women in the SHGs at (51.0%), (M=2.3486, SD=.57470).

Table 2: Level of Empowerment, Normative Belief and Self Belief among Women involved in Volunteerism through SHGs

Volunteering through Crisis				
Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
	Empowerment			
Low	24	9.4	2.6546	.47820
Moderate	112	43.9		
High	119	46.7		
	Normative Belief			
Low	31	12.1	2.6879	.46447
Moderate	97	38.1		
High	127	49.8		
	Self-Belief			
Low	14	5.5	2.3486	.57470
Moderate	111	43.5		
High	130	51.0		

5.1 Inter-correlation towards Empowerment in Volunteering for Women SHGs

The relationship between the Dependent variable (empowerment) and Independent variables (normative beliefs and self-beliefs) was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. To ensure non-violation of the assumptions of normality and linearity, preliminary analysis were performed, which provided confidence in further analysis. As shown in Table 3, the highest relationship and positive linear relationship was found between empowerment and normative belief ($r = .72$, $p = 0.000$). The relationship between empowerment and self-belief ($r = 5.9$, $p = 0.000$) indicates moderate positive linear.

Table3. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients of Empowerment and the Selected Variables

Variables		Y	X ₁	X ₂
Y	Empowerment	1.000		
X ₁	Normative Belief	.724	1.000	
X ₂	Self-Belief	.587	.643	1.000

5.2 Discussion

The functional approach of [20] is one of the most widely studied in relation to understanding beliefs related with volunteerism of women in SHGs. Utilizing this approach in this study, it can help towards understanding people's perception on beliefs specifically in volunteerism and in general perspective. Some women participate in volunteerism because of the indirect benefits associated with empowerment, while others as an opportunity to gain both knowledge and skills. However, when normative belief is coupled with self-belief directly leads to formation of a behavioral intention to join volunteering activities [27]. However, the findings from this study, indicates that active participation in volunteering activities empower women in SHGs, they become more economically stable, possess increased capacity to make rational decisions, they have more friends and their level of self-esteem and efficacy also is high [33, 10 & 36], it also raise their consciousness towards charitable or philanthropism in assisting the community to grow. Moreover, SHGs will find the results of this study very useful towards helping them to design appropriate intervention projects to suit the needs of the volunteers specifically and the society in general. Furthermore, the study is in consonance with many theories that deals with volunteering phenomena, beliefs and SHGs of women empowerment, precisely the Functional Approach theory of [20] and the Theory of Planned Behavior by [25] are more justified. The two theories postulated that individual behaviors are guided by their beliefs about expected results of the behavior, the belief around the normative anticipations of others and beliefs around the presence of factors that may expedite or retard performance of the behavior. The sum of these leads to the formation of behavioral intention.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall finding from the study shows that the level of women empowerment in volunteerism at normative belief between the women participating in SHGs volunteering activities is high. As such, it is safe to conclude that women belief in volunteerism will intensely encourage their participation in SHG volunteering activities for holistic community development.

Based on the above findings and discussions, the following recommendations are made:

- (a) Women SHGs in Nigeria should be exposed to all available positive volunteering activities to enable them become aware of the global standards.
- (b) Capacity building of volunteers should be given a priority with a clear mission of increasing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of women volunteers in SHGs.
- (c) The belief factor should be taken as a major enhancer of participation of women in volunteerism through their SHGs.
- (d) More guidance on interpreting volunteering experiences would be very useful towards satisfying other motives besides self-oriented beliefs. This will go a long way in boosting and sustaining commitment to remain active.

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