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Differences between paid and unpaid social services for beneficiaries

Toegevoegde waarde van door vrijwilligers uitgevoerde sociale dienstverlening voor clienten

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

In many Western welfare states, social work services that have traditionally been provided by paid employees are being replaced by family support, community support, informal networks, and volunteering. For the field of social work, it is relevant to know what it matters to beneficiaries whether services are provided by volunteers or by paid employees. The central question of this article is therefore as follows: What are the differences between unpaid and paid social services for beneficiaries? The article is based on literature review and focus groups. Our results suggest that beneficiaries do experience some differences regarding the advantages of volunteer services for beneficiaries that can be summarized in three propositions: (1) services provided by volunteers are more relational than are services provided by paid employees, and they are therefore perceived as more equal, flexible and sincere. (2) The effects of volunteer services for beneficiaries are not exclusively positive. (3) Although particular tasks may appear to be interchangeable to some extent, the relative advantages of a given task depend upon whether it is performed by a paid worker or by a volunteer. Additional research is needed in order to provide further validation.

\textbf{SAMENVATTING}

In veel westerse verzorgingsstaten wordt sociale dienstverlening die tot voor kort werd uitgevoerd door beroepskrachten, vervangen door mantelzorg en vrijwilligerswerk. Voor het brede werkveld van het sociaal werk is het relevant om te weten wat deze verschuiving uitmaakt voor de gebruikers van de dienstverlening, de cliënten. Centrale vraag voor dit artikel is daarom: Wat zijn voor cliënten, de verschillen tussen door vrijwilligers en door beroepskrachten uitgevoerde sociale dienstverlening? Het artikel is gebaseerd op literatuuronderzoek en focusgroepen met beleidsmedewerkers, vrijwilligers, sociale professionals en cliënten. De uitkomsten van dit onderzoek doet vermoeden dat cliënten inderdaad verschil ervaren. Diensten aangeboden door vrijwilligers lijken meer relationeel georiënteerd te zijn, dan een vergelijkbare taak uitgevoerd door beroepskrachten. Hierdoor lijkt de dienstverlening uitgevoerd door vrijwilligers gewaardeerd te worden als meer gelijk, meer flexibel en

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Social work; volunteering; beneficiaries; organizations/management

\textbf{TREFWOORDEN}

Sociaal werk; vrijwilligerswerk; informeel vs formeel; management; client-perspectief

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1. Introduction

In many Western welfare states, social work services that have traditionally been provided by paid employees are being replaced by family support, community support, informal networks, and volunteering. Examples include the ‘Big Society’ in the UK (Alcock, 2010) and the Social Support Act in the Netherlands (Metz, 2008) in which family members, neighbors, and informal networks are strongly expected to deliver social support while in France (Bassel & Lloyd, 2011) and Sweden (Hvinden & Johanson, 2007) the welfare systems move away from an universal rights system toward stronger reciprocity demands, which in Sweden is combined with the increase of volunteering within social services (Granholm & Held, 2007). The replacement of formal social work services provided by paid employees with informal and unpaid services by volunteers can be traced to three separate developments: reductions in public spending, the activation of passive citizens who are dependent on the government, and efforts to build social cohesion in response to the advancing trend of individualization (Newman & Tonkens, 2011).

Research on volunteering shows that one obvious and general rationale for using volunteers is that it is a cost-effective way to deliver services (Nesbit, Brudney, & Christensen, 2012). This does not mean that volunteering is for free. There are the transaction costs to the volunteer (e.g. time commuting to and from the organization, transportation costs) and to the organization (e.g. for recruiting, training, screening, managing volunteers) (Freeman, 1997). Three different methods are used to estimate the actual cost or economic value of a volunteer hour: replacement value (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004), investment value and market value (Mook, Handy, Ginieniewiz, & Quarter, 2007). Most studies demonstrated the cost-saving effects of volunteering (Brudney & Duncombe, 1992; Handy & Brudney, 2007; Handy, Mook, & Quarter, 2008).

The focus on the economic value bears the risk to overlook the possibility that volunteers might actually provide unique advantages (or difficulties) that would be harder to obtain with paid workers. What is known about volunteering is that it has positive effects for communities and for volunteers themselves. Volunteering has important social value for society. Through volunteering, resources that are present within a society are deployed to the benefit of that society. While social capital is being redeemed, it is also being strengthened (Putnam, 1993). Volunteering is involved in the provision of social support at the meso and micro levels. Support at the meso level involves organizations and networks that arrange the provision of social support by individuals. This type of support is important, as only a portion of all social support is provided spontaneously (Devilee, 2005; Metz, 2006; Scholten, 2000). Support at the micro level consists of assistance that individual citizens provide to people in their own surroundings. There is considerable variation in the range of support offered, as well as in the nature of the relationships underlying the support provided (Metz, 2008).

By volunteering, individuals learn civic skills, improve their individual social capital, and prevent social isolation (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Musick & Wilson, 2008). In the wake of individualization, the awareness has emerged that people do not volunteer solely to help others, but to help themselves as well. In addition to enhancing individual skills, volunteering contributes to the expansion of individual social capital. By volunteering, individuals come into contact with more people (as well as with more people from other backgrounds) than they would have if they had not volunteered.
This provides volunteers with larger social networks, as well as with access to resources present within these networks (Metz, 2014). Also, volunteering contributes to the prevention of social isolation. Volunteers learn basic social skills that make it easier for them to participate actively in society. By volunteering, individuals become part of a social network (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

For the field of social work, it is also relevant to know what it matters to beneficiaries, by whom we mean clients and service users, whether services are provided by volunteers or by paid employees. Beneficiaries are, indeed, the main target group of social work services. Since the introduction of New Public Management in the eighties of the former era, efficiency is one of the main parameters used to evaluate social services. With the more recent development of evidence based practice, also effectiveness comes to the fore. In contrast to the economic value and what is known about the value of volunteering to the communities and to volunteers, little is known about the value of volunteering to beneficiaries of the services (for exceptions, see Haski-Leventhal, Ronel, York, & Ben-David, 2008).

In this article, we examine differences between paid and unpaid social services for beneficiaries and suggest possible explanations for these differences. The central question of this article is therefore as follows: What are the differences between unpaid and paid social services for beneficiaries? This research contributes to knowledge regarding the interchangeability of paid work and volunteering within the field of social work from the perspective of beneficiaries. It adds the perspective of advantages perceived by beneficiaries to the three most prominent perspectives on the value of volunteering: (1) the cost perspective, (2) the volunteer perspective, and (3) the society perspective (social capital).

2. Toward a preliminary conceptual framework

Before discussing the potential unique value of social services for beneficiaries provided by volunteers as compared to social services provided by paid workers, it is important to discuss how volunteers actually differ from paid workers. This begins with the question: What is volunteering? Definitions of volunteering are based upon a ‘matter of degree’ (Smith, 1975) along four dimensions (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996): rate of pay, degree of obligation, distance from the beneficiary, and degree of organization. Interpretations of each of these dimensions and the activities that are perceived as volunteering vary according to context (Meijs et al., 2003). Volunteering in the area of social services can take various forms, ranging from spontaneous assistance between neighbors to mentoring programs and the delivery of services. In this article, we define volunteers as individuals who donate their time, skills, or services to an agency or organization without obligation and without receiving direct financial compensation for their work. Volunteering thus differs from paid work in that it is an act of free will that is not contingent upon expectations of monetary rewards (Bonjean, Markham, & Macken, 1994).

The fundamental differences between paid workers and volunteers might be associated with differences in their psychological approaches to the work that they perform (Allen, 1987; Pearce, 1993). The informal (and implicit) reciprocal agreement of a work environment (beyond the scope of formal employment contracts) is captured in the concept of the psychological contract between workers and their organizations (Rousseau, 1995). Volunteers are likely to have different reasons for joining organizations (Farmer & Fedor, 1999), including identification with the core values of an organization or a need for meaningful social interaction (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). The psychological contract between volunteers and their organizations is of a more relational nature, while such contracts are likely to be primarily transactional (e.g. pay contingent on performance) in the case of paid workers (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Pearce, 1993).

Little is known about potential differences between the tasks performed by paid workers and those performed by volunteers. Most studies on the interchangeability of paid work and volunteering are quite recent and relatively limited in scale. Research conducted in North America provides evidence of at least some extent of task exchange between paid workers and volunteers (Handy
The interchangeability described in these studies concerns the distribution of tasks between paid workers and volunteers in general. In many cases, budget cutbacks are forcing organizations to replace paid workers with volunteers (Handy & Brudney, 2007; Handy et al., 2008; Handy & Srinivasan, 2004; Liao-Troth, 1999). In other cases, volunteers are deployed when it appears that paid workers are not able to do their jobs because of the complexity (Brudney, 1990) or quantity (Netting, Huber, Borders, Kautz, & Nelson, 2000) of the tasks. Perceptions of volunteering and of professions play an important role in the assignment of tasks to paid workers and to volunteers (Handy et al., 2008; Karr, 2000).

Expertise is not acknowledged as a fundamental difference when paid staff is compared to volunteers. Considering the training and competency issue, a difference is that paid staff received more formal training and competencies to the task at hand than volunteers (Pearce, 1993). This is confirmed by the observation that organizations are often reluctant to invest much in training volunteers to enhance their performance (Hoge, Zech, McNamara, & Donahue, 1998) and that organizations have more strict requirements on the level of expertise of paid workers than of volunteers (Ploeg et al., 2011). Nevertheless, there are also findings that state the opposite. On population level volunteers are higher educated than non-volunteers (Choi, 2003; Mutchler, Burr, & Caro, 2003). These volunteers might be higher educated for a professional job that differs from what they do as a volunteer leading to staff having more formal training. According to Catts and Chamings (2006), volunteers bring expertise from other industries. This leads to the general conclusion that many volunteers might be higher educated than the staff they work with while paid staff might be higher qualified to the task at hand.

Aside from payment, type of contract and perception, there seems to be little difference between paid workers and volunteers. This means that preliminary literature on interchangeability suggests that paid workers and volunteers can do the same tasks. Question that is left is what it matters to beneficiaries whether social support is provided by volunteers rather than by paid workers. Our literature review points to six possible areas in which the relative advantages of social services provided by volunteers can differ from those of services provided by paid workers.

First, volunteers are generally perceived to be more capable than paid workers are of engaging in meaningful relationships with beneficiaries (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Other scholars note that volunteers are more likely to be attentive to the relational aspects of their contacts with clients (Nelson, 2000; in Netting et al., 2000). The superiority of volunteers with regard to establishing meaningful relationships with beneficiaries is indirectly supported by empirical evidence suggesting that the best predictor of job satisfaction for volunteers is the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. In contrast, the job satisfaction of paid workers derives primarily from the satisfaction of their need for autonomy (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2009).

Second, some studies report that social support provided by volunteers is perceived as more egalitarian than similar services provided by paid workers. Beneficiaries attach considerable value to relationships with volunteers with whom they perceive themselves as equal and with whom contact does not appear patronizing, moralizing, or judgmental (Asscher, Hermanns, & Dekovic, 2008; de Baat, 2009). In many cases, clients perceive volunteers as more accessible – and thus less threatening – than they perceive paid workers (Kelleher & Johnson, 2004).

Third, feedback received from volunteers seems to be considered more sincere, as compared to feedback provided by paid employees. This is because volunteers are not formally obligated to provide such advice (Gilligan, 1998). Beneficiaries consider volunteers more impartial than paid employees, and they attach more value to their dedication and effort (McGonigle, 2002).

Fourth, volunteers and paid workers appear to produce different kinds of trust. Trust can be based on either cognition or affect (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Cognitive trust involves a calculating and instrumental assessment of information (Chua, Ingram, & Morris, 2008). Beliefs regarding competence and responsibility (Butler, 1991; Cook & Wall, 1980), as well as about reliability and dependability have been identified as important elements in the development and maintenance of trusting relationships (Zucker, 1986). In contrast, affective trust involves empathy, rapport, and self-disclosure (Chua et al., 1998).
Given its special and relational nature, volunteers are likely to be better at creating affective trust. Given the formality of transactions taking place within the context of paid social support, paid workers are likely to be better at creating cognitive trust.

The inclusion of volunteers in interventions alongside paid workers can increase the **quality** of services for beneficiaries, partly by improving the care-taker/beneficiary ratio (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). Such combinations enable the fulfillment of specific needs that would otherwise have been impossible or unfeasible to address (McGonigle, 2002). Employees who work together with volunteers are perceived as warmer, more sensitive, and more supportive than employees who do not (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). According to a recent study conducted in Israel (Ronel, Haski-Leventhal, Ben-David, & York, 2008), the perceived quality of volunteer services is enhanced by the very fact that they are performed voluntarily.

**Continuity** is another aspect in which volunteering can offer advantages over paid work. The literature distinguishes between two types of continuity. In many cases, contacts established between volunteers and beneficiaries have grown into sustainable and enduring relationships (Beale et al., 2007; Flaxman, Schwartz, Weiler, & Lahey, 1998). In addition, relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries can support and strengthen ties between beneficiaries and their communities (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). The second type of continuity refers to the availability of services. According to Thompson, Kropenske, Heinicke, Gomby, and Halfon (2001), one important benefit of volunteering is that beneficiaries can always depend upon volunteers to be there. The perceived benefits of volunteers for beneficiaries thus also include a sense of constant availability.

### 3. Method

Given the lack of knowledge concerning the differences between volunteer and paid provision of social services from the perspective of beneficiaries our study consisted of two stages. In the first stage, we conducted a broad literature review within the fields of social work and volunteering focusing on possible differences between paid and unpaid social services to beneficiaries and supposed explanations for those differences. In the second stage, we proceeded with an inductive qualitative research design with focus groups (Neuman, 1994). Focus groups are ideally suited for exploring shared experiences and thoughts around a specific theme (Bryman, 2008; Mighelbrink, 2008; Morgan & Spanish, 1985). We discussed possible differences retrieved from the literature review in focus groups involving representatives from four relevant stakeholder groups: beneficiaries, paid service providers, volunteers, and government officials who are involved with the allocation of subsidies within the field of social services. Hereby we followed the principles of conventional qualitative data analysis, avoiding the use of preconceived categories and instead allowing the categories to flow from the data and allowing new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

For the literature review we conducted searches in databanks including Business Source Premier, Campbell library, ABI/Inform Complete, Jstor and Social Science Citation Index on combinations of key words such as ‘volunteer’, ‘paid staff’, ‘added value’, ‘difference’, ‘beneficiary’, ‘service user’, and ‘client’. The possible differences retrieved from the literature review were summarized into a topic list that was used during the focus groups.

In all, we conducted eight focus groups between November 2011 and June 2013. For selecting our sample we used a combination of snowballing and convenience. First, this research was part of a large national research grant in which there was intensive interaction with practitioners and non-profit organizations. We drew four focus groups from that network. Second, we contacted organizations within our network of which we knew that the organizations worked with both paid staff and volunteers. From this, we drew the focus groups with beneficiaries. Third, for the government officials, we sent letters to program coordinators and policy-makers on national and local level (two large cities, one in the southern part of the Netherlands and one in the Western part of the Netherlands). This resulted in two more focus groups. All participants of the focus groups were selected for
having own experiences with both paid workers and volunteers in the field of youth services. The focus groups consisted of 17 volunteers, 22 paid employees, 16 beneficiaries, and 17 government officials. All focus groups participants responded themselves to our call in both the larger research grant and our network. At the start of the focus group, participants were again asked whether they were willing to participate and offered to leave when they were not.

All participants, including the beneficiaries, were asked whether they perceived from their own experience that from the perspective of beneficiaries volunteers performed different and where they perceived that paid staff performed different from volunteers. This question was specifically stated in general terms to invite the participants of the focus groups to think of fundamental differences for beneficiaries instead of differences in the way in which specific tasks are performed.

Data analysis began with repeated readings of the full transcripts to generate familiarity with the content of the data (Tesch, 1990). We then highlighted words and phrases that appeared to represent key thoughts of the respondents. We subsequently grouped and recoded these initial codes into broader categories, which we used to create meaningful clusters (see Patton, 2002). During this whole process, we went back and forth to the literature and found that the six categories described by the respondents in the focus groups were linked to indications of differences between volunteers and paid staff in the sparse literature. As a result, we modified the last two focus groups with the beneficiaries to test the six categories, which we found by analyzing the data of the first focus groups. Here, we took a more deductive approach.

4. Results

In this section, we consider the ways in which the possible differences between paid and unpaid social services for beneficiaries are perceived in practice. Our discussion is structured according to the six areas of difference identified in the literature (as described above) and the perspectives of four relevant stakeholders (i.e. beneficiaries, paid service providers, volunteers, and government officials involved in the allocation of subsidies within the field of social services). The results are supported by quotes from the focus-group participants.

4.1. Meaningful relationships

| Meaningful relationships                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Volunteers Support provided by fellow human beings generates relationships with more meaning |
| Paid service providers Beneficiaries are more receptive to volunteers who act on own initiative |
| Government officials The closer identification between volunteers and beneficiaries generates meaningful relationships |
| Beneficiaries Volunteers are more open to personal interaction |

It was clear from all of the focus groups that beneficiaries are highly appreciative of meaningful relationships and that volunteers are better equipped than paid workers are to form and maintain such relationships. One reason is that paid workers tend to introduce an element of formality into their interactions with beneficiaries. As noted by several beneficiaries in the focus groups, volunteers are more open to personal interactions. ‘Because he’s here just for the fun of it, he can be more open to people than the staff members are.’ ‘These people will have a chat with you even outside of the intervention. They also get more involved in your personal situation and are more likely to stand up for you.’

As observed by some of the paid service providers who participated in the focus groups, beneficiaries seem to be more receptive to people who are there to support them on their own initiative. This further suggests that volunteers (who are there on their own initiative) might be better at establishing meaningful relationships than are paid workers (who are there because it is their job).
The greater ability of volunteers to engage in meaningful relationships can be the result of assigned characteristics of volunteers. In the focus groups, government officials noted that volunteers are often selected on personal characteristics with which beneficiaries are more likely to identify. It is the lack of expertise or formal education that prevents the volunteer from overproblematization. At the same time, some government officials considered the ability to maintain some degree of distance from beneficiaries as a valuable asset for volunteers. According to beneficiaries, however, volunteers are better able to engage in meaningful relationships simply because they are open to personal interactions and because they would also like to have a good time.

Meaningful relationships with beneficiaries are also accompanied by risk. When volunteers spend a large amount of time with beneficiaries, this can generate a high degree of attachment to the volunteer on the part of the beneficiary, and beneficiaries can become emotionally dependent of the volunteer. Beneficiaries are therefore at risk of disappointment and feelings of abandonment when the intervention is complete and the relationship (which was intended to be temporary) is ended. Children are particularly at risk because they are even more likely to become highly attached to volunteers. Emotional ties with adults are necessary for positive youth development so the letting go of these relationships might harm their developmental process. As observed by one of the volunteers, ‘This attachment is hard to cope with.’

4.2. Equality

|                        | Equal status, but not equivalent. Hierarchy is necessary and inevitable |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Volunteers             | Volunteers are less judgmental                                         |
| Paid service providers  | Volunteers are less threatening. Relationships between beneficiaries and paid workers are more hierarchical |
| Government officials    | Relationships with volunteers are characterized by greater equality than are relationships with paid workers |
| Beneficiaries          |                                                                         |

The volunteers, paid service providers, government officials, and beneficiaries who participated in the focus groups agreed that, as compared to paid workers, volunteers tend to relate to beneficiaries more as equals. Beneficiaries note that paid workers tend to be stricter than volunteers are. They attribute this difference to the fact that paid workers are obligated to perform within the context of their employment.

The extent to which the perceived equality of volunteers with beneficiaries is greater than that of paid workers also depends on the social distance between the volunteer and the beneficiary. Several volunteers noted that they intentionally maintain a certain distance from their beneficiaries, given the negative consequences that complete equality can have for the beneficiaries. Although they see their relationships with beneficiaries as based on equality, they do not consider themselves equal. One explanation is that volunteers perceive themselves as supporters and their beneficiaries as clients; such relationships are inherently unequal.

Paid workers tend to perceive volunteers as less judgmental. Relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries are therefore perceived to involve greater equality. According to several paid workers, this increases the likelihood that volunteers will be able to reach and support their beneficiaries. ‘For the beneficiaries, it is really important for them to feel supported by fellow human beings. If the same task were to be performed by paid workers, it would be considered as a bigger deal.’ Government officials add that volunteers problematize situations less than paid staff.

Equality-based relationships can also be disadvantageous. In the focus groups, the volunteers noted that inequality has its benefits as well, and that it is even necessary in some cases. ‘As a volunteer, it is important to be able to keep a distance towards the clients, just like in other jobs …. Otherwise there] confusion might arise.’ This standpoint was also supported by government officials, as they appreciate the distance volunteers often have toward the issue.
4.3. Sincerity

Volunteers are more open toward people who support them based on altruistic motivations. Volunteers are intrinsically motivated and therefore more sincere. A voluntary and informal character can increase the degree of perceived sincerity. Volunteers are intrinsically motivated and therefore more sincere, although sincerity is not always relevant to the situation.

According to all four groups of stakeholders, volunteers tend to be more sincere in their interactions with beneficiaries. As observed by the volunteers, beneficiaries are willing to share information when they perceive that supporters are acting on their own initiative. This observation was confirmed by paid service providers and beneficiaries as well, who noted that volunteers are perceived as more sincere, given that their actions are intrinsically motivated and given that they receive no remuneration. Volunteers are therefore perceived as more involved. ‘I think that you’re more likely to turn to a volunteer than to an employee if you have a problem. Someone who’s getting paid might listen with only one ear. They’re not doing it on their own initiative.’

Government officials add that beneficiaries appreciate the fact that volunteers are providing their support on a voluntary basis, thus corresponding to the views expressed by volunteers concerning their own initiative. The government officials also attribute the perception of informality and accessibility to the voluntary nature of the support provided.

Volunteers illustrated this sense of perceived sincerity on the part of beneficiaries when referring to the fact that volunteers are not always required to make formal reports (except when required by law). This is in contrast to paid staff members, who must usually report what they observe with their beneficiaries. ‘Parents often are very pleased when they notice that nothing is being reported about the conversations. This provides them with the freedom to speak openly.’ Another volunteer added, ‘... as a volunteer, you know more and different things about the beneficiary than employees do’. This implies that beneficiaries might perceive paid workers as threatening, due to their formal obligation to report to their organizations. Because volunteers are perceived as being less subject to such formal reporting obligations, beneficiaries tend to be more receptive and open toward volunteers.

Although beneficiaries acknowledge the sincerity of the volunteers, they note that sincerity is not always particularly important in all situations. Beneficiaries tend to prefer paid workers in situations calling for specific expertise. Moreover, beneficiaries expect that some paid workers have been trained to fulfill a confidential counseling role.

4.4. Trust

Volunteers have higher levels of affect-based trust. If qualified, they also need cognitive trust. Paid workers have higher levels of cognitive trust. Affective trust is generated by informal relationships (i.e. due to less threat of negative sanctions). Volunteers have higher levels of affective trust, and paid workers have higher levels of cognitive trust.

As discussed in the literature review, trust can be divided into trust based on cognition and trust based on affect. All of the stakeholder groups that participated in the focus groups agreed that the relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries tend to be more strongly characterized by affective trust, while the relationships between paid workers and beneficiaries rely more heavily on cognitive trust. As observed by the volunteers, however, a certain amount of cognitive trust is also needed in order for volunteers to be taken seriously.

Some of the volunteers indicated that volunteers are better at building affective trust with beneficiaries, as they tend to be less judgmental and more committed to the beneficiaries. In their turn, beneficiaries are more likely to perceive affective trust in volunteers who have been recruited...
according to peer characteristics. Government officials and beneficiaries supported this observation by stating that the commitment, accessibility, and less threatening image of volunteers tends to generate strong affective trust between beneficiaries and volunteers. In contrast, the government officials and beneficiaries noted that paid workers tend to maintain more distance and professionalism in their relationships with beneficiaries, thus reducing the development of affective trust. This type of trust is also diminished by the tendency of beneficiaries to perceive these relationships as more formal, and thus more threatening. For example, beneficiaries are more likely to confide to volunteers that they are having problems raising their children, because they would not expect volunteers to sanction them for such problems. In contrast, this fear tends to become quite evident when support is provided by paid workers.

Affective trust is not the only factor that beneficiaries consider important. As observed by some of the volunteers, beneficiaries often question the level of expertise and experience that volunteers possess with regard to the problems that they are facing. If the volunteers do possess such experience and expertise, beneficiaries are likely to perceive them as qualified, and this leads to cognitive trust. Beneficiaries primarily ‘... want to know whether I’m knowledgeable and experienced enough ... if so, it is less important whether I’m paid for what I do’. The paid service providers corroborated this observation by stating that the experience that volunteers have often leads to trust. Nevertheless, they also indicated that they have more cognitive trust because they work for pay. Such compensation is implicitly associated with greater professionalism. Several paid service providers, government officials, and beneficiaries also noted that most beneficiaries assume that paid workers possess more knowledge and expertise than volunteers do, thus cultivating cognitive trust.

According to the government officials, beneficiaries have relational reasons for trusting volunteers. Beneficiaries tend to perceive their relationships with volunteers as more informal. This generates affective trust and makes beneficiaries more receptive and open to volunteers than they are to paid workers.

### 4.5. Quality

| Volunteers | The quality of volunteers lies in their ability to provide more and better services |
| Paid service providers | The professionalism, education, and training of paid workers assure the quality of services |
| Government officials | The quality of volunteers has to do with empowerment |
| Beneficiaries | The quality of paid workers has to do with expertise (through professionalism, education, and training) and performance, while the quality of volunteers involves pleasant social interaction |

The stakeholders represented in the focus groups held differing views regarding the relative impact of volunteers (as compared to paid workers) on the quality of the social support that they provide. The differences could be directly attributed to differences in perceptions regarding the meaning of quality.

Volunteers referred to quality in terms of additional services, noting that beneficiaries tend to perceive the advantages of volunteers in terms of quality. More specifically, the perceptions of quality involved the fact that volunteers make it possible to provide additional services that would otherwise have been unfeasible. As noted by one volunteer, this is ‘because we enable certain activities, for which paid workers have no time’. Volunteers are also able to provide beneficiaries with support and personal attention that is more difficult to realize when the care-taker/beneficiary ratio is lower (as is the case when only paid workers are available). Beneficiaries also noted that volunteers ‘are able to impart some joy. They are not so focused on technical aspects, and they are less concerned when things do not go according to plan, although it should always be enjoyable’.

The government officials agreed with the volunteers that the use of volunteers does indeed enhance the quality of social services, although their perceptions differed with regard to the way in which the quality is enhanced. The government officials explained quality in terms of
empowerment rather than in terms of additional services. According to this group, the policies of local and other governments are designed in order to ensure that the projects they subsidize enable people to become empowered and less dependent on institutions. They perceive that volunteers are better able to empower others (e.g. because they lack formal education and are therefore more likely to ‘think out of the box’ rather than in terms of set formats).

The paid service providers, government officials, and beneficiaries nevertheless expressed concerns regarding the quality provided by volunteers. Some of the paid service providers asserted that beneficiaries who seek quality assurance are likely to request paid workers. These beneficiaries tend to equate quality with professionalism, education, and proper training, and they associate these qualities more with paid workers than they do with volunteers. The beneficiaries confirmed this observation. The paid service providers and government officials explained that, within institutions and organizations, volunteers are less subject to critical scrutiny than paid workers are, given that employees are more likely to be held accountable for quality while volunteers are not.

### 4.6. Continuity

| Stakeholder          | Continuity                                                                 |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Volunteers           | Volunteers offer more continuity in services; they are always available     |
| Paid service providers | Paid workers and volunteers secure continuity in services in distinct ways. Volunteers have the potential to create enduring relationships |
| Government officials | Paid workers and volunteers secure continuity in services in distinct ways. Volunteers have the potential to create enduring relationships |
| Beneficiaries        | Paid workers and volunteers secure continuity in services in distinct ways. Volunteers have the potential to create enduring relationships |

All of the stakeholders participating in the focus groups agreed that volunteers are better able to provide continuity in services than paid workers are (at least to some extent). Volunteers stated that they simply make more time for their beneficiaries, because they are personally committed to particular tasks and/or clients. As illustrated by one volunteer, ‘Ninety minutes can easily turn into four hours.’ The paid service providers agreed, adding that volunteers need only be present or do ‘something’; such involvement is not possible for paid workers, as it would be too costly. Another way in which volunteers contribute to the continuity of services has to do with the fact that paid workers usually have set schedules, while volunteers have more freedom to determine their own schedules. This allows the possibility of being present in the evenings and weekends. As illustrated by one policymaker, ‘[volunteers] seem as if they are always ready/present’. Beneficiaries added that paid workers often leave the organization as they progress in their careers, while volunteers tend to stay because of their commitment to particular organizations or beneficiaries.

Both the government officials and the paid service providers nevertheless commented that the availability of volunteers is also subject to limitations. The reason that many volunteers are available at night or in the weekend is because they also hold paid employment during regular working hours. Beneficiaries are thus likely to perceive volunteers as more flexible than they actually are, simply because they come at different times than paid workers do. Geographic distance is another factor in this regard. Volunteers tend to contribute their time within their direct surrounding, while paid workers often do not work in their own neighborhoods. The government officials, paid service providers, and beneficiaries agreed that beneficiaries are able to depend upon paid workers on a more regular basis, given that their constant availability within specific work schedules, as well as the fact that they are expected to cope with or react to any situation that might arise. In contrast, volunteers are not always obliged to comply with such expectations, as they are able to turn to their coordinators when facing situations with which they do not feel comfortable.

The various stakeholders had little to say about continuity in terms of enduring relationships. As noted by the paid service providers, however, volunteers often become involved within their own networks, thus having the potential to create enduring relationships. Government officials and
beneficiaries further indicated that, in some cases, volunteers maintain their relationships with beneficia-
riest alongside the official intervention, or even after the intervention has been completed.

5. Conclusion

In many Western welfare states, social work services that have traditionally been provided by paid employees are being replaced by family support, community support, informal networks, and volunteering. For the field of social work, it is relevant to know what it matters to beneficiaries whether services are provided by volunteers or by paid employees. The central question of this article is therefore as follows: What are the differences between unpaid and paid social services for beneficiaries?

This research based upon literature and focus groups has suggested six possible areas in which the relative advantages of paid and unpaid social services might differ for beneficiaries within the field of social work. First, volunteers are perceived as being better able to engage in meaningful relationships than paid workers are. Second, a greater element of equality appears to be perceived between volunteers and beneficiaries than between paid workers and beneficiaries. Nevertheless, volunteers and beneficiaries are not to be perceived completely equal, given that volunteers provide services to beneficiaries. Third, volunteer services appear to be perceived as more sincere than paid services are. The fourth area involves trust. Relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries appear to be characterized by a higher level of affective trust, while those between paid workers and beneficiaries seem to be based largely on cognitive trust. The fifth area has to do with the quality of the social support. Volunteers are perceived to increase the quality of social services by providing services that would otherwise have been unfeasible, as well as by combining the services with pleasant social interaction with beneficiaries. Government officials refer to this quality as empowering, as contrasted with the label paternalistic that some of the officials use to characterize some paid social services. The final area of possible differences has to do with continuity. Volunteers are perceived to provide continuity in terms of flexibility and enduring relationships, while paid workers are perceived to provide continuity in terms of consistent availability within specific work schedules, as well as in terms of their ability to cope with any situation that might arise.

Nevertheless, both beneficiaries and volunteers caution that, even if volunteers are perceived to be able to perform better in terms of these qualities, this does not necessarily mean that beneficiaries prefer their services to those provided by paid workers. Also this research points out that the professional quality of the services provided by volunteers can be called into question in some cases. Paid workers are perceived to be more likely to deliver better professional quality.

Explanations for the perceived differences in the performance of paid workers and volunteers in the social services can possibly be related to differences in the nature of their commitment to the services they provide. Because of their personal commitment and lack of a formal position, volunteers might be more likely to work from the heart, more independent and more flexible. In contrast, paid workers might be likely to engender higher levels of cognitive trust, professional quality, and predictable availability, as a consequence of their formal positions and compensation.

Further research is necessary in order to provide more in depth understanding and validation of the perceived differences and similarities in the value of social services performed by paid workers and volunteers to beneficiaries, particularly in the form of surveys and/or experiments with testable hypotheses. This research was highly explorative, due to the limited availability of literature on this subject. Although the use of an inductive qualitative research design was justified, the research itself was less systematic and more open for a broad variety of influences than when a deductive design had been used. Also only a small part of the broad field of social work in one European welfare state country was addressed, as all the participants of the focus groups were retrieved from youth services in the south of the Netherlands. That we were able to organize focus groups with four relevant stakeholders, including paid workers, volunteers and beneficiaries, and the different stakeholders all agreed on the appearance of the six possible differences sustain the outcomes of
the research. As a result, we can conclude that the outcomes of this explorative research are both promising and premature and therefore need further clarification and testing.

Based on the results of this study we suggest three propositions and two subpropositions for further research regarding the relative advantages of volunteering for beneficiaries: (1) one advantage of volunteering to beneficiaries is that services provided by volunteers are more relational. Moreover, they tend to be characterized by greater perceived equality, flexibility, and sincerity, given their relative informality, as compared to services provided by paid workers. (2) The effects of volunteer social services for beneficiaries are not exclusively positive. (2a) The quality, safety, and continuity of volunteer services cannot be guaranteed, due to their lack of formality. (2b) Beneficiaries ultimately risk harm of their development when meaningful relationships with volunteer service providers are ended. (3) Although particular tasks may appear to be interchangeable to some extent, the relative advantages of a given task depend upon whether it is performed by a paid worker or by a volunteer.

Note

1. For purposes of scientific substantiation, 8–14 focus groups are necessary (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999), with block sizes ranging from 6 to 10 participants (Morgan 1998).

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