



## Modification of the Volunteer Functions Inventory for application in youth sports

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to modify the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) to be specifically applicable to assess volunteer motivation in youth sport settings. Based on a comprehensive review of literature, the VFI items were first modified to reflect the context of youth sports. Testing of measurement properties was accomplished through two studies. In Study One, the modified VFI was administered to volunteers ( $N = 515$ ) of a nationwide youth soccer organization. Data were randomly split into two-halves: one for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal-axis extraction and oblique rotation, and the other for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation. In the EFA, six factors emerged which were consistent with the dimensions of the VFI; however, 12 items were eliminated due to double loading or misspecification, resulting in 18 items being retained. The CFA revealed that the data fit the 6-factor model well. In Study Two, the resolved scale was re-validated through a sample of 262 volunteers of local youth sport leagues. Overall, findings of these two studies suggest that the modified VFI for youth sports is a valid and reliable scale. This scale may be adopted to study various volunteer motivation issues associated with youth sport organizations and events.

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Volunteers are a crucial component of the work force needed to delivering high quality youth sport programs (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Numerous researchers have attempted to identify sociodemographic characteristics and psychological states of youth sport volunteers to formulate practices to effectively recruit and retain qualified volunteers for youth sport programs (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Taylor, Darcy, Hoye, & Cuskelly, 2006). Of particular importance, volunteer motivation has been identified as a key concept that affects individuals to accept and remain in volunteer positions (Caldwell & Andereck, 1994; Coleman, 2002; Farrell et al., 1998; Johnston, Twynam, & Farrell, 2000; MacLean & Hamm, 2007; Shibli, Taylor, Nichols, Gratton, & Kokolakis, 1999; Stergios & Carruthers, 2002/3; Strigas & Jackson, 2003; Williams, Dossa, & Tompkins, 1995). When studying the motivation of sport volunteers, various measurement scales have been adopted (Clary et al., 1998; Farmer & Fedor, 2001; Knobe & Prensky, 1984; Miller, 1985); however, most of these instruments were adopted directly from general organizational settings and were applied to sport volunteer contexts without carefully looking into their measurement properties in terms of validity, reliability, and applicability.

Due to the lack of a scale that specifically addresses the unique setting of youth sport programs, various general scales have been continuously adopted, modified, and even formulated by researchers to conduct related studies. It is unknown the

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extent to which research findings derived from these general studies are applicable to volunteers working in youth sport programs. Therefore, formulating a valid and reliable scale that has strong theoretical foundations and practical relevance appears necessary. When a sound instrument is available, it can be utilized by researchers and practitioners to accurately identify motivational factors of volunteers in different youth sport settings, and formulate effective management strategies to recruit, train, and retain volunteers.

## 1. Review of literature

### 1.1. Youth sports

Since the mid-1900s, sport participation has been a popular activity of American youth (Coakley, 2007; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997). Currently, more than 60 million participants play organized youth sports sponsored by schools, local and national sport organizations, communities, and/or churches in the United States (Coakley, 2007; National Council of Youth Sports, 2008; Pennington, 2003). Approximately 66% of the participants in organized youth sport programs are males and 34% are females (National Council of Youth Sports). Participation figures in youth sports has continuously increased, which may be attributed to three primary reasons: (a) a shift in participation from local recreational youth sport programs to national agency-sponsored youth sport programs, through which participants are more accurately counted; (b) increased participation of younger children; and (c) increased accessibility of youth sports at urban, suburban, and even more rural settings (Seefeldt & Ewing).

Youth sport researchers and policy makers have identified various benefits of regular participation in youth sport programs, including but not limited to: (a) physical and health, (b) social and psychological, and (c) moral and ethical benefits. An extremely important outcome attained from regular youth sport participation is the physical and health benefits. Youth learn basic motor skills such as running and jumping, and also develop sport-specific skills in youth sport programs (Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk, 1992). Regular participation in physical activity can improve cardiovascular health and endurance, increase bone density, build muscle strength and endurance, and control body weight (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Additionally, participation in youth sport has been found to be positively related to individual participation in physical activities later in life (Van Mechelen, Twisk, Post, Snel, & Kemper, 2000). It is widely believed that participation in sports can provide social and psychological benefits as well. Through learning and implementing game plans and strategies, sports provide opportunities for youth to improve prosocial behaviors including interpersonal skills, teamwork, and leadership skills (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003; Wells, Ellis, Paisley, & Arthur-Banning, 2005). Sport participation also provides youth with educational experiences which help to develop positive personal characteristics, and ethical and moral behaviors (Coakley, 2007; Weiss & Smith, 2002). Numerous studies have found that through learning positive values in sports (e.g., teamwork, effort, and sportsmanship), youth sport participants are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than non-youth sport participants (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hastad, Segrave, Pangrazi, & Peterson, 1984; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Melnick, Vanfossen, & Sabo, 1988).

### 1.2. Volunteering in youth sports

The many benefits of youth sport participation cannot be achieved without effective adult involvement. Youth education and youth sport scholars agree that the involvement of motivated and trained adults is a crucial factor in offering high-quality youth sport programs, achieving program objectives and benefits, ensuring safe environments, and enhancing children's overall experiences in youth sports (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Additionally, when children perceived that their parents had a high level of interest in their participation in sports, children showed high initial and sustaining involvement in those sports. Apparently, parents were a vital socialization influencer of children (Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 1996; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

The majority of coaches, officials, and administrators in youth sport programs are volunteers, mainly parents. A Report of the Department of Health and Human Service and Department Education (2000) indicated that in the U.S., approximately 2.5 million volunteers work as coaches of youth sport programs annually, and the National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS) reported more than 7 million adults participated in the work force of organized youth sports (2008). The National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) has trained more than 2 million coaches since 1981, most of whom were volunteers (NCYS, 2003). In the American Youth Sports Organization (AYSO), a youth soccer organization, there are nearly 250,000 adult volunteers who work with 630,000 boys and girls in its soccer programs (AYSO, 2002). These volunteers fulfill various positions within youth sport organizations, incorporating both sport-related and administrative duties. A majority of volunteers work on the playing field as coaches, referees, and/or team managers. Many volunteers, however, are responsible for off-field positions as well, including upper management/administrative positions (e.g., commissioners and board members), mid-management positions (e.g., program managers and various department directors), and lower-level officers (e.g., treasurer, secretary, and auditor; AYSO, 2004).

Despite the crucial functions of volunteers in youth sport organizations, most youth sport organizations face challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. As youth sport participation increases (NCYS, 2008; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997), the demand for sport volunteers also increases. Due to the constant need of volunteers, most youth sport organizations rely heavily on the parents of the children participating in the program (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Doherty (2005) found that Canadian sport

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