

Social Capital and Non-familial Adult Volunteers: Connections with Youth and Community

This study explores the critical intersection of volunteerism, social capital, and youth development within urban youth-serving organizations. Recognizing the significant disparities in social capital among marginalized and low-income youth, particularly Black youth, the research investigates how non-familial adult volunteers contribute to youth development and community engagement. Grounded in the Community Capitals Framework and social capital theory, the study employs a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to understand adult volunteers' connections with youth and community. Nine participants from diverse backgrounds were interviewed, representing a range of ages (21-55), genders, and racial identities. The research highlights several key findings:

- Volunteerism serves as a crucial mechanism for building social capital
- Adult volunteers play a pivotal role in youth development, especially for youth from underrepresented communities
- Motivations for volunteering are multifaceted, including altruism, personal development, and community concern

Significant contextual factors emerged from the study, including:

- Racial and economic disparities in household wealth and family structures
- Barriers to volunteerism, such as time constraints and limited resources
- The importance of trust and relationship-building in social capital development

Theoretical contributions include:

- Expanding understanding of social capital theory in youth contexts
- Demonstrating how volunteerism creates opportunities for positive youth development
- Illustrating the complex interactions between resources, connections, functions, and outcomes in social capital formation

The study underscores the critical need for youth-serving organizations to foster meaningful adult-youth connections, particularly for marginalized youth. By creating spaces for trust, skill development, and mutual engagement, these organizations can help address systemic inequalities and support youth potential. Future research should continue exploring the nuanced dynamics of social capital development, volunteer motivations, and youth empowerment strategies.