

# Student Motivation for Volunteering: Demographic Factors, Gender Differences, and Inclusion in Study Program Curricula



Julian Kraja<sup>1,\*</sup> , Ledian Xhakollari<sup>2</sup> , Maranaj Marku<sup>1</sup>  and Edra Fresku<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Preclinical Subjects, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkodër, Albania

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology and Social Work, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkodër, Albania

<sup>3</sup>Departments of Mathematics, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkodër, Albania

## Abstract:

**Introduction:** This study explores volunteerism among students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs in nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, and a professional master's program in health psychology, with particular emphasis on motivational factors and the role of volunteerism within academic curricula.

**Methods:** A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of student volunteering. Quantitative data revealed patterns of experience and motivation, while qualitative interviews explored personal perspectives and contextual influences. Data were collected during the 2023-2024 academic year using the “Volunteering of University Students” questionnaire administered to 507 participants, as well as through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 30 students.

**Results:** Findings showed that 56% of students had volunteering experience. Key motivations included gaining new experiences and skills, feeling useful, personal development, and contributing to the community. Male students were more motivated by social connections and career aspirations, while female students prioritized personal development and skill acquisition. Major barriers for non-volunteers were lack of information and time constraints. Most students (90%) supported integrating volunteering into their academic curricula.

**Discussion:** It is evident that students engage in voluntary professional practices as a means of fulfilling their training as future professionals, rather than as a genuine means of involvement in volunteering. However, although young people appreciate the importance and need for volunteering, most of them do not actively participate.

**Conclusion:** There is strong student support for incorporating structured volunteering into university programs. Improving access to information and integrating volunteer activities into the curriculum may enhance participation and foster skills essential for future careers in health-related fields.

**Keywords:** Volunteerism, Students, Motivation, Barriers, Curriculum, Gender differences.

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\*Address correspondence to this author at the Departments of Preclinical Subjects, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkodër, Albania; Tel: +355682007636; E-mail: [julian.kraja@unishk.edu.al](mailto:julian.kraja@unishk.edu.al)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although there is no universally accepted definition, volunteering can be defined as any activity performed for the benefit of others without any expectation of reward [1], but it is recognised that this relationship is mutually beneficial, with evidence indicating that it enhances the well-being and health of the volunteers [2-7]. The term “volunteer” is defined as an individual who donates their time altruistically, without expecting any direct personal benefits, but rather contributing to the betterment of a particular group or community [4]. Volunteers give their time to benefit another person, with or without compensation, and this is controversial, depending on the perpetrators [8, 9]. The act of volunteering is a means of achieving a more just and equal social context for all, thereby making the world a better place [4]. The practice of volunteering was significantly discredited in the latter half of the 20th century in communist countries (Eastern Europe). However, following the collapse of these regimes, there was a notable surge in interest in volunteering [1, 9]. Even Albania inherited the perception of voluntary work as an unfavourable activity during this era. However, recent years have witnessed a transformation in attitudes towards volunteering, particularly among younger generations [9]. Albania faces numerous challenges, including but not limited to low levels of participation and mobilization in genuine voluntary and social movements [9].

### 1.1. Background

The majority of health education institutions seek to produce high-quality health personnel for the clinical care environment to ensure that their graduates are marketable and employable upon graduation [10-12]. The curriculum of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing provides students with theoretical and practical skills that enable them to face the labour market, which is why this curriculum is carefully structured and activated, but extracurricular activities, such as volunteering are carried out only at the will of the students [13]. The existing literature on the factors that motivate nurses' involvement in humanitarian work is limited, with the exception of cases involving disasters, but the motivation in this context is derived from personal beliefs and values, ideals, altruism, and professional identity [6]. These values are acquired during the process of growth and development, shaped by cultural, educational, and environmental influences [14].

The growing interest of researchers in international volunteering within healthcare projects is noteworthy, especially given the increasing participation rates. Of particular interest is the involvement of immigrant nurses in voluntary humanitarian work, which may be linked to potential employment opportunities [6]. Two studies conducted among nursing and midwifery students revealed that many had chosen these programs primarily to obtain valid diplomas that facilitate employment abroad [15, 16]. Volunteering can serve as a tool for personal development and can create pathways to employment [17]. Additionally, volunteering enhances students' employability by providing opportunities to gain valuable experience that may lead to future job prospects [1, 7]. The objective of this paper is to elucidate the phenomenon of volunteerism among students enrolled

in bachelor's degree programs in nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, and a professional master's degree in health psychology, with particular emphasis on motivational factors and the role volunteerism should play in their academic curricula.

## 2. METHODS

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of student volunteering. Quantitative data revealed measurable patterns of experiences and motivations, while qualitative interviews, guided by a phenomenological approach, enriched these findings by exploring personal perspectives and contextual factors. The integration of both methods enhanced the depth and validity of the study results.

### 2.1. Participants and Data Collection

The sample size of 507 participants was determined based on the total population of students enrolled in relevant health-related programs at the Faculty of Natural Sciences during the 2023-2024 academic year. To achieve a high response rate, the questionnaire was distributed to the entire student population via institutional email. Consequently, the sample reflects a census approach rather than a probabilistic sampling method. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the lack of prior large-scale data on student volunteering in Albania, including as many respondents as possible was considered the most appropriate strategy to ensure broad representation and reliable descriptive insights. However, since participants were recruited from a single institution, the generalizability of the findings to other contexts may be limited.

Although no a priori power analysis was conducted to determine the minimum required sample size for statistical significance, the final sample of 507 respondents was deemed sufficient for robust statistical analyses. This sample size allowed the use of chi-square tests and non-parametric methods (e.g., Mann-Whitney U and Spearman's rho), which are appropriate for categorical and non-normally distributed data. These methods facilitated meaningful subgroup comparisons (e.g., by gender and age) and the detection of statistically significant associations, supporting the reliability and interpretability of the study's findings.

### 2.2. Instruments

The first part of the questionnaire collected demographic data such as gender, age, and year of study. This study employed the “**Volunteering of University Students**” questionnaire developed by Činčalová & Černá (2021) [1] to explore students' volunteering experiences and motivations. The questions included: Do you have volunteering experience? If yes, how often do you volunteer? When did you start volunteering? What motivates you to volunteer? If no, why not? And if no, are you considering getting involved in volunteer activities? The use of this questionnaire was approved by Dr. Simona Činčalová via email.

### 2.3. Interviews with Students

In addition to the online questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of students to gain deeper insights into their volunteering experiences and

motivations. The authors developed a semi-structured interview guide with predefined questions and prompts to explore key themes related to volunteering. This guide was pilot-tested with a small group of students to ensure clarity. A total of 30 students from the 2023–2024 academic year were selected for interviews, ensuring representation across all programs and years of study. Data saturation was reached, and no repeat interviews were conducted. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for comment or correction.

The 30 interview participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure maximum variation in study programs, years of study, and prior volunteering experience. This sample size was deemed appropriate, as it allowed for a broad range of perspectives while keeping the qualitative data manageable for thorough analysis. Half of the interviewees had experience with volunteering, while the other half did not. This approach aimed to capture a comprehensive perspective on volunteering from those who had participated and those who had not.

The interview protocol included questions about the nature of their volunteering activities, the impact of these activities on their personal and professional development, challenges faced during volunteering, and suggestions for improving volunteering opportunities within the university. For students with volunteering experience, additional questions focused on specific motivations for volunteering, the activities they were involved in, and how their experiences influenced their academic and career choices. For those without volunteering experience, questions explored the reasons for not engaging in volunteer activities, their perceptions of volunteering, and what might encourage them to start volunteering in the future. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by one of the authors of this study, a female PhD full-time psychology lecturer at the University of Shkodra 'Luigj Gurakuqi' with extensive research experience. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Through classroom meetings, the researcher explained the study's purpose and established a prior relationship with participants. She informed participants that all the researchers were full-time lecturers with an academic interest in student volunteering. The interviewer disclosed the research team's role and motivation for conducting the study, aiming to explore student engagement in volunteering without influencing responses. The interviewer had prior experience in qualitative research and adhered to ethical guidelines to minimize personal bias. The interviews were conducted in classroom settings, with only the participant and the researcher present. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were made during the interviews to complement the audio recording and capture non-verbal cues or contextual details. No participants refused to take part in the interviews.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

The study employed a range of statistical analyses to examine student volunteering patterns. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and volunteering experience. Chi-square tests assessed associ-

ations between categorical variables, such as gender and volunteering experience, age, and the timing of volunteering initiation. Cramér's V was calculated to determine the strength of associations, while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test evaluated the normality of volunteering frequency data. A Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare volunteering frequency between genders, and Spearman's rho correlation assessed the relationship between age and volunteering frequency. Additionally, qualitative data from student interviews were thematically analyzed to gain deeper insights into motivations and barriers to volunteering. One researcher coded the data to ensure consistency in interpretation. A preliminary coding tree, based on the interview questions, was developed and themes were refined iteratively during analysis. Coding and theme development were conducted manually, without qualitative data analysis software. Participants were not asked to provide feedback on the findings after analysis (no participant checking was performed).

#### 2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Department of Preclinical Subjects at "Luigj Gurakuqi" University of Shkodra, with document reference number 101/2. The approval was signed on 5th December 2023 in Shkodra, Albania. The study adhered to ethical guidelines and principles for research involving human participants. Students were informed about the study's purpose during face-to-face meetings held in classrooms, grouped by year and study program. These sessions provided detailed explanations of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. It was clarified that completing the questionnaire implied informed consent.

To protect confidentiality and anonymity, no identifying information was collected. Data were anonymized during collection, and all responses were stored securely in an electronic format accessible only to the research team. Participants were assured that their information would be used solely for research purposes and that individual responses would not be disclosed. Only aggregated data will be published, ensuring individual participants cannot be identified.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Demographic Characteristics

The sample consisted of 507 students, with 86.6% female ( $n = 439$ ) and 13.4% male ( $n = 68$ ). The largest age group was 20-year-olds, comprising 26.8% of the sample, while the smallest group was 22-year-olds, representing 6.5%. The distribution across study years showed a relatively balanced representation in the first three years, with fourth-year students, primarily master's students, making up a smaller proportion (13.0%) (Table 1).

#### 3.2. Volunteering Experience

##### 3.2.1. Overall Experience

About 56% ( $n=284$ ) of students reported having volunteering experience, while 44% ( $n=223$ ) reported no such experience.

**Table 1. Distribution of student's sociodemographic characteristics (N=507).**

Characteristics	Students (n)	Students (%)
<b>Gender</b>	-	-
Female	439	86.6
Male	68	13.4
<b>Year of university study</b>	-	-
First-year Bachelor students	157	31
Second-year Bachelor students	140	27.7
Third-year Bachelor students	143	28.3
First-year Professional Master students	66	13
<b>Age</b>	-	-
18 years old	72	14.2
19 years old	113	22.3
20 years old	136	26.8
21 years old	86	17
22 years old	33	6.5
Over 22 years old	67	13.2

### 3.2.2. Gender and Volunteering Experience

A significant difference was observed between genders. 69.1% of males reported having volunteering experience compared to 54.0% of females. A chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between gender and volunteering experience ( $\chi^2(1, N = 507) = 5.472$ ,  $p = .019$ ), indicating that males were more likely to have volunteering experience than females. However, the strength of the association was weak (Cramér's  $V = 0.104$ ).

### 3.2.3. Age and Volunteering Experience

Volunteering experience was reported by roughly half of the students aged 18 to 20 and by a higher proportion of 21-year-olds (74.2%) and those aged 22 and above (over 54%). A statistically significant relationship was also found between age group and volunteering experience ( $\chi^2(5, N = 507) = 14.928$ ,  $p = .011$ ), although the effect size was weak (Cramér's  $V = 0.172$ ).

### 3.3. Frequency of Volunteering

The results indicated that 44.2% of students did not engage in volunteering. The majority of volunteers participated infrequently, with only 15.7% volunteering every week, highlighting limited overall involvement in volunteer activities.

Among volunteers, a significant proportion participated weekly, with other participants spread across less frequent intervals.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated a statistically significant deviation from normality in the distribution of volunteering frequency ( $D = 0.178$ ,  $df = 281$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that the data were not normally distributed.

Most students volunteered weekly; however, female student participation was more consistent across all volunteer frequencies. Male students showed a slight preference for

monthly and weekly volunteering. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that although males had a higher mean rank (156.02) than females (138.06), the difference in volunteering frequency was not statistically significant ( $U = 4714.000$ ,  $Z = -1.417$ ,  $p = .156$ ). These results indicate that no significant difference was found in the frequency of volunteering between male and female students in this sample (students who have volunteering experience).

The analysis of the frequency of volunteering across different age groups revealed notable variations. Among 18-year-olds, the most common frequency was once a month (32.4%), whereas 24.3% volunteered weekly. For 19-year-olds, 30.9% volunteered once a year, and 27.3% volunteered weekly. In the 20-year-old group, 31.0% volunteered monthly, and 28.2% volunteered biannually. Among 21-year-olds, weekly volunteering was most common (32.8%). For 22-year-olds, 44.4% volunteered weekly. In the over 22 group, 41.7% volunteered weekly. These findings indicate that younger age groups (18-21) exhibited more varied volunteering frequencies, while older individuals (22 and above) tended to volunteer more frequently every week.

A Spearman's rho correlation revealed a very weak and statistically non-significant relationship between age and volunteering frequency ( $\rho = 0.097$ ,  $p = .105$ ), indicating that age does not significantly influence how often students volunteer (Table 2).

### 3.4. Start of Volunteering

The majority of students (57.7%) began volunteering before entering university. More male students (66%) started volunteering before university compared to females (56%). Conversely, female students were more likely to begin volunteering during university (44% vs. 34%), highlighting gender differences in the timing of volunteering initiation. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and the timing of volunteering initiation, which showed no statistically significant association ( $\chi^2(1, N = 507) = 1.595$ ,  $p = .207$ ) (Table 3).

### 3.5. Motivations for Volunteering among Active Volunteers

The motivations for volunteering reported by students were consistent across both quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitative results showed that the most common motivations were gaining new experiences and skills (49.3%) and feeling useful (42.3%). These were echoed in the interviews, where students also emphasized personal development (40%) and practical experience (30%) as key drivers. Additional qualitative insights included community contribution (20%) and professional networking (10%), supporting the statistical trends. Together, these data highlight that students view volunteering as beneficial for personal growth, skill-building, and professional advancement.

Male students were more motivated by social connections and career aspirations, whereas female students prioritized personal development and skill acquisition. Both genders showed similar influence from religious beliefs and skill utilization (Table 4).



**Table 2. Frequency of volunteering.**

-	No. Volunteering % (n)	Once a Year % (n)	Once a Half-year % (n)	Once a Month % (n)	Once a Week % (n)
All students (n=507)	44.2 (223)	14.7 (74)	12.1 (61)	13.3(67)	15.7 (79)
All volunteers (n=284)	-	26.3 (74)	21.7 (61)	23.8 (67)	28.1 (79)
Female volunteers	-	28.1 (6)	21.7 (51)	23.0 (54)	27.2 (64)
Male volunteers	-	17.4 (8)	21.7 (10)	28.3 (13)	32.6 (15)
Age of volunteers	-	-	-	-	-
18 years old	-	21.6 (8)	21.6 (8)	32.4 (12)	24.3 (9)
19 years old	-	30.9 (17)	25.5 (14)	16.4 (9)	27.3 (15)
20 years old	-	25.4 (18)	28.2 (20)	31.0 (22)	15.5 (11)
21 years old	-	29.7 (19)	21.9 (14)	15.6 (10)	32.8 (21)
22 years old	-	22.2 (4)	0 (0)	33.3 (6)	55.6 (8)
Over 22 years old	-	22.2 (8)	13.9 (5)	22.2 (8)	41.7 (15)

**Table 3. Timing of volunteering participation by gender.**

-	Volunteers % (n)	Female % (n)	Male % (n)
Before university studies	57.7 (162)	56 (131)	66 (31)
During university studies	42.3 (119)	44 (103)	34 (16)

**Table 4. Motivations for volunteering by gender.**

Motivations for Volunteering	Volunteers %	Female %	Male %
To gain new experiences and skills	49.3	51.1	40.4
To feel useful	42.3	40.9	48.9
To utilize the skills	34.2	34.2	34
Religious beliefs	26.4	26.6	25.5
Desire to work in their area of interest	18.7	17.7	23.4
To make new friends	15.8	13.5	27.7
To fill the free time	11.3	11.8	8.5
Other personal reasons	13.7	12.2	21.3

Comparing motivations across age groups revealed distinct trends. Younger students, particularly those aged 18 and 19, often cite personal fulfillment and gaining new experiences as key reasons for volunteering. For example, 33.9% of 19-year-olds and 45.8% of 20-year-olds were motivated by feeling useful. In contrast, older students, especially those aged 21 and above, showed a stronger focus on applying their skills and pursuing careers in their fields. Notably, 57.8% of 21-year-olds and 37.5% of 22-year-olds emphasized gaining new experiences, while 44.4% of 22-year-olds and 13.5% of those over 22 expressed a desire to work in their area of study. Overall, younger students tend to be motivated by personal growth and social factors, whereas older students prioritize practical application and career goals.

### 3.6. Barriers to Volunteering Experience

Analysis of both the survey and interviews identified similar barriers to volunteering. Over half of non-volunteers (51.6%) reported not knowing how to get involved, while 30% of interviewed students cited a lack of information. "I don't know who organizes volunteering activities or where to sign up" (P5). "I've heard about volunteering, but I have no idea where to find these opportunities (P10). "No one

ever explained how we can get involved in volunteering activities (P9). Time constraints were another frequently cited issue, with 50% of interviewees and many survey respondents highlighting academic workload as a key obstacle. As one participant stated, "I have a heavy academic load and no time left for volunteering" (P6). Another added, "Between lectures, assignments, and exams, it's impossible to think about anything else (P14). One student explained, "Even when I want to volunteer, my schedule is already packed with other duties. (P15). Another student emphasized, "I can't fit volunteering events into my routine (P16). Less commonly reported barriers included perceived irrelevance to career goals and lack of confidence. These overlapping findings reinforce that both informational and structural factors hinder student participation in volunteering activities.

While both genders face barriers to volunteering, females are primarily hindered by a lack of information (54%), whereas males are more affected by time constraints (33.3%), highlighting gender-related obstacles to participation (Table 5).

3.6.1. Age and the Barriers to Volunteering Experience

Results showed that students of all ages were unsure how to start volunteering, which was the main obstacle (Table 6).

Table 5. Barriers to volunteering by gender.

Barriers for Volunteering	Volunteers % (n)	Female	Male
Uncertainty about how to get involved	51.6 (115)	54 (109)	28.6 (6)
Time constraints	21.1 (47)	19.8 (40)	33.3 (7)
Other reasons	13.9 (31)	13.4 (27)	19 (4)
The unpaid nature of volunteering	2.2 (5)	2 (4)	4.8 (1)
Unappealing	0.4 (91)	-	4.8 (1)
Negative reputation associated with volunteering	0.9 (2)	1 (2)	-

Table 6. Age-related barriers to volunteering.

Age	Main Barrier: Uncertainty about getting Involved % (n)	Secondary Barrier: Lack of Time % (n)
-	-	-
18	42.9% (15)	28.6% (10)
19	56.1% (32)	19.3% (11)
20	54.7% (35)	21.9% (14)
21	59.1% (13)	13.6% (3)
22	40% (6)	33.3% (5)
Over 22	46.7% (14)	26.7% (8)

3.7. Future Volunteer Interest among Non-volunteers

Among the 223 students without volunteering experience, 38.4% (n = 78) were open to participating if invited, and 36.9% (n = 75) would have considered volunteering if they had more free time. Additionally, 14.8% (n = 30) said they would have volunteered only if someone close to them was involved, while 7.4% (n = 15) cited other reasons. A small minority, 2.5% (n = 5), were not interested in volunteering. These findings indicated significant potential to increase volunteer participation, with 75.3% expressing willingness if approached directly or given more free time, underscoring the importance of targeted outreach and support for time management.

3.8. Recommendation for Volunteering

A striking 99.2% (n=503) of students would recommend volunteering to others, with only 0.8% (n=4) not recommending it. This overwhelming support for volunteering highlights its perceived value among the student body.

From the qualitative analysis, both groups, those with and without volunteering experience, acknowledged the potential benefits of volunteering. Students highlighted the importance of integrating volunteering into the curriculum to encourage greater participation. They believed that structured volunteering opportunities organized by the university could mitigate some of the barriers they faced. Both groups, those with and without volunteering experience, acknowledged the potential benefits of volunteering. A substantial

majority (80%) of students noted a positive impact on their personal development, while 70% reported benefits to their professional development. Furthermore, 90% of all students believed that integrating volunteering more explicitly into the curriculum would be beneficial.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Volunteer Experience

Approximately 56% of the study's participants reported prior engagement in volunteer work, which, while slightly above half of the total sample, is a commendable figure, particularly within the context of students enrolled in medical technical sciences programs. This relatively low level of student participation in voluntary activities is attributable to the nascent stage of democracy in all post-socialist countries [18]. Notably, among volunteers dedicated to healthcare, contributing to this cause, which does not benefit the volunteers themselves, is regarded as an altruistic value [5]. Consequently, the results of the present study align with those of a study conducted by Kraja et al. (2024) [19] on altruistic behavior in these programs, where such behaviors were found to be above average. Furthermore, increased volunteerism is likely related to altruism and professional identity [6, 9], as nursing students see volunteerism as an opportunity to enhance values, such as altruism [20].

4.2. Participation in Voluntary Activities according to Gender Differences

In relation to the gender of students and their involvement in voluntary activities, it has been demonstrated that males are more engaged in these activities, comprising 69.1% of the sample (though this is a relatively small sample size). However, the fact that 86.6% of the study's participants are female may affect the accuracy of this result. In contrast to the study by Cívico-Ariza et al., 2020 [4], conducted in Spain, which found no differences between females and males in voluntary activity involvement, our study highlights the male gender by suggesting that males in our culture have more freedom than females and are able to make their own decisions regarding engagement in such activities. This assertion is further corroborated by a study conducted in the United Arab Emirates by Alsuwaidi et al., 2022 [21], which, despite finding no gender disparities in voluntary engagement, questions its own findings due to the notably high percentage of female participants, potentially obscuring any gender differences. Conversely, a study undertaken in Hungary by Pusztai et al., 2021 [18] revealed that female students exhibited higher levels of persistence in engaging in voluntary activities.

Wilson (2000) [8] underscored the absence of gender disparities in voluntary participation, citing studies indicating that women in North America are more inclined to volunteer, while in Europe, no such differences were observed. This observation aligns closely with Wilson's conclusions, suggesting that the results of the present study are consistent with his findings. Additionally, the involvement of male nursing students in volunteer activities could provide a valuable opportunity for their professional development, as highlighted in the study by Dolu et al., 2023 [22].

### 4.3. Participation in Voluntary Activities by Age

In terms of age demographics, the findings of the present study demonstrate congruence with those of the study conducted by Alsuwaidi *et al.*, 2022 [21], which was undertaken among pre-clinical medical students. In that study, first-year students expressed reluctance to volunteer, citing concerns that this might hinder the attainment of their academic goals [21]. In addition, Al Gharash *et al.*, 2021 [23] found that nursing students associated their volunteer work during pandemics with their knowledge, likely because knowledge increases with age and they feel more willing to volunteer. People of different ages have different attitudes towards volunteering, with volunteering increasing in middle age [8]. The present study also demonstrated an association between age and volunteering, although the strength of this relationship was found to be negligible due to the homogeneity of the participant age group.

With regard to the frequency of volunteering among participating students, the results indicated that 44.2% of students did not engage in volunteering, and the majority of volunteers participated infrequently, with only 15.7% volunteering weekly, highlighting the limited overall involvement in volunteer activities. Among volunteers, a significant proportion participated weekly, while others volunteered less frequently. Consequently, the distribution of responses to the question “How often do you volunteer?” did not appear to follow a normal distribution. There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency of volunteering between male and female students, and there was a very weak positive association between age and volunteering frequency, suggesting that age does not significantly affect volunteering frequency in this sample. Moreover, evidence on the frequency or type of volunteering among nursing students is scarce [2].

### 4.4. Beginning of Volunteering

The majority of students (57.7%) had participated in volunteering activities prior to entering university, with 66% of males and 56% of females engaging in such activities. A study conducted at a UK university by Dyson *et al.*, 2017 [2] found that 42% of participating nursing students had volunteered before commencing their university education, while only 12% were active during their university studies. Alsuwaidi *et al.*, 2022 [21] emphasized the necessity for further exploration to better determine whether students had volunteering experience before entering university.

### 4.5. Motivations for Volunteering among Active Volunteers

The motivations for volunteering are varied and multifaceted [24]. A study by Geng *et al.*, 2022, among Chinese students, revealed that 62.53% of participants engaged in volunteering for both personal gain and the public interest. Participation in university volunteering offers a valuable opportunity for the development of personal, social, and professional skills [12].

In the present study, which surveyed 284 active volunteers, the predominant motivating factors for participating in volunteer activities were:

#### 4.5.1. Personal Growth

In this study, 40% of participating students cited personal development as their primary motivator. This high percentage can be justified by the fact that students perceive voluntary work as a necessary addition to their qualifications, which they believe will give them an advantage in the labour market in the future [17, 4, 2]. Furthermore, students perceive that the experience acquired through volunteering will be highly regarded by prospective employers [1]. For students pursuing healthcare-related disciplines, who may have limited exposure to social realities, volunteering can offer substantial prospects for personal development [12].

#### 4.5.2. Practical Experience

A total of 30% of the study's participants reported that they were motivated by the prospect of acquiring practical experience that was related to their respective academic disciplines. The results of the study by Dyson *et al.*, 2017 [2] demonstrated a heightened level of dedication among students in pursuit of their objectives as prospective health professionals. However, this commitment does not translate into a similar engagement with voluntary activities. This observation suggests that achieving employment is more contingent on a combination of theoretical and practical preparation rather than on volunteering experiences. It is evident that students engage in voluntary professional practices as a means of fulfilling their training as future professionals, rather than as a genuine means of involvement in volunteering [7]. This observation raises concerns about the possibility that students may participate in voluntary activities solely to achieve personal objectives rather than to assist those in need [7]. However, the underlying ethical principle that underpins the clinical practice of all health professionals is the motivation to volunteer, whether driven by altruism or a desire to assist others [25]. Volunteering has been identified as an effective educational strategy, positively influencing the attitudes of nursing students [12]. This impact is evident in the development of practical skills, including direct patient contact, which contributes to the enhancement of professional competencies.

#### 4.5.3. Contribution to the Community

A voluntary contribution to their community was reported by 20% of the participants. Participation in volunteer activities by students is motivated by a desire to assist others [2]. Činčalová and Černá (2021) [1] found that the sense of contributing to society is a key factor in student engagement in volunteer activities. According to the study by Wondimu and Admas (2024) [7], the primary motivation for volunteering was helping people in need, a phenomenon that can be explained by social obligations and reciprocity [7]. Social motivation and cooperation with society are among the main reasons cited by university students for engaging in volunteer activities [4].

#### 4.5.4. Professional Networking

In this study, 10% of participating students indicated that they were motivated by the desire to establish a professional network and enhance their CVs. Volunteering is frequently regarded as a means to improve career pros-

pects [17]. Students often utilize volunteering as a way to enhance social outcomes [1]. A study by Wondimu and Admas (2024) [7] in the United Kingdom found that students engage in volunteering activities to boost their profiles, future opportunities, and employability. In addition, volunteering provides an opportunity for individuals to establish connections with others [7]. In accordance with the results obtained by Handy *et al.*, 2010 [24], the second most common motivation for engaging in volunteer activities was CV enrichment.

Our study also demonstrated that, in contrast to female students, male students exhibited stronger motivation to engage in volunteering activities for the purpose of enhancing their social connections and career aspirations. However, both genders showed comparable influence from religious beliefs and skill utilization.

#### 4.6. Barriers to Volunteer Experience

The study revealed that 223 students lacked volunteering experience, with the predominant obstacle being a lack of awareness regarding involvement opportunities, affecting 51.6% (n=115) of the sample. Factors such as remuneration, negative perceptions, and lack of interest were found to be less significant barriers. Among healthcare professionals, the most significant barriers to volunteering, in addition to time constraints, include poor information about opportunities to participate in volunteering activities [25].

A qualitative analysis of students lacking volunteering experience revealed the following common barriers:

##### 4.6.1. Lack of Time

About 50% reported that academic and personal commitments left them with little time to volunteer. Similar to the findings of Činčalová & Černá, 2021 [1], the main limitations to participating in volunteer activities were lack of time and information. Additionally, in the study by Alsuwaidi *et al.*, 2022 [21], students did not have time to participate in volunteer activities due to concerns about not achieving school objectives.

##### 4.6.2. Insufficient Information

About 30% of respondents expressed a lack of adequate information regarding available volunteer opportunities. This finding aligns with results reported by Činčalová & Černá, 2021 [1], where students indicated a deficiency in information and a lack of knowledge about how to engage in these activities. The paucity of information was also linked to students' uncertainty about how to get involved.

##### 4.6.3. Perceived Inadequacy

About 10% of respondents expressed the opinion that volunteering was not relevant to their career goals. Al Gharash *et al.*, 2021 [23] posit that one reason why students do not engage in community volunteering activities may be the nature of nursing curricula, which include knowledge and skills related to hospital settings and do not promote community volunteering.

##### 4.6.4. Insecurity about Involvement

A tenth of the participants expressed uncertainty about engaging in voluntary activities. Their limited confidence in their skills and competencies to provide assistance may affect their willingness to volunteer [23]. Similarly, in the study by Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2021 [26], students reported apprehension about volunteering during the pandemic due to similar uncertainties.

While both genders encounter barriers to volunteering, women are primarily hindered by a lack of information (54%), while men are more affected by time constraints (33.3%), thus highlighting gender-related barriers to participation.

In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of the apparent lack of societal inclination towards volunteerism in Albania in recent decades, it is essential to consider the period during the communist regime [9]. Moreover, the state of volunteerism in the Czech Republic is comparable to that observed in other post-communist countries, where volunteerism is often subject to devaluation [1]. Among the post-communist countries in Southeast Europe, Albania stands out for its unique status in not undergoing a de-Stalinization process, a phenomenon that distinguishes it from other regions and offers a distinctive case study [9]. However, the advent of communist states and their concomitant demands for the contribution of free time led to the obsolescence of volunteerism in Central and Eastern Europe [27]. This phenomenon is further substantiated by the fact that 44% of students have never engaged in volunteer work. However, it should be noted that there is a tendency among young people to establish novel models of volunteerism grounded in utilitarian motives and socialization in volunteerism [9].

#### 4.7. Future Volunteer Interest among Non-volunteers

Among the 223 students lacking volunteer experience, 38.4% (n = 78) expressed willingness to participate if prompted, while 36.9% (n = 75) indicated they would consider involvement if they had more available time. The study by Cívico-Ariza *et al.*, 2020 [4] demonstrates that, among students who do not volunteer, the percentage of those expressing a desire to participate is four times higher than those who do not wish to participate. The present study once again highlights the lack of information regarding voluntary activities, as well as the time demands for lesson preparation or simultaneous employment during school.

#### 4.8. Recommendation for Volunteering

The present study demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of students, constituting 99.2% of the sample (n=503), expressed a positive inclination to recommend volunteering to others, with a mere 0.8% (n=4) expressing a negative stance. This finding bears a striking resemblance to the findings of the study conducted by Berduc *et al.*, 2023 [12], which revealed that 95.4% of nursing students would advocate for volunteering. A similar finding was reported by Geng *et al.*, 2022 [28], who found that only 3.7% of the students had no intention of volunteering. This overwhelming support for volunteering highlights its perceived value by the student body. However, although young people



appreciate the importance and need for volunteering, most of them do not actively participate [4].

In this study, 90% of students expressed the opinion that integrating volunteering more explicitly into the curriculum would be beneficial. Students believed that volunteering allows them to make connections between theory and practice [29]. Students in the study by Coombs *et al.*, 2024 [29] also highly recommended the further use of volunteering within the nursing curriculum.

Coombs *et al.*, 2024 [29] also found that volunteering enables students to develop clinical and educational skills, build confidence in their ability to join the nursing profession, and strengthen both professional and personal values. Volunteering, when structured as part of the curriculum, contributes to the achievement of competencies and the acquisition of qualities essential to nursing [2].

Seah *et al.*, 2021 [20] posit that healthcare educational institutions should adopt strategies to promote and encourage volunteerism among students. In their study of Chinese students, Geng *et al.*, 2022 [28] proposed a range of strategies for policymakers to incentivise volunteerism within the student population. Over the past two decades, high schools and colleges in China have begun to incorporate volunteerism into their curricula [28].

## CONCLUSION

The present study explores the motivations behind volunteering among bachelor's students in Albania pursuing study programs in nursing, midwifery, and physiotherapy. Participation in voluntary activities by students is satisfactory to a certain extent, and is justified by the fact that the country is post-socialist. The results demonstrate that reasons for participating in volunteer activities vary, but the decision to pursue a career in health professions is a key factor influencing the propensity to engage in volunteering. The study found no significant differences in volunteering levels across years of study, indicating that it does not matter in which year lectures on volunteering are offered. This suggests that volunteer work, as a core value of these professions, is not adequately addressed in the bachelor's curricula of nursing, midwifery, and physiotherapy programs. This was also confirmed through a review of the course curricula. The absence of volunteering-related content in these programs was further noted by the study group.

Given the significant importance of volunteering for health workers, it is recommended that topics related to volunteering be incorporated into these programmes. The study revealed that a lack of information about volunteering led to students not being actively involved in such activities. Therefore, it is recommended that universities establish structures to promote, facilitate and organise the participation of medical science students in volunteer projects.

## LIMITATIONS

The study participants were recruited from only one university; therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalised to all of Albania and other European countries. In future studies, it would be very useful to examine the curricula of other teaching programmes, considering the pos-

sibility of where and how concepts and literature on volunteering can be introduced into curricular or extracurricular training subjects. Additionally, the female/male ratio was 86.6% female and 13.4% male. Although the ratio seems to have a big difference, statistics show that this ratio is the same in all countries [19, 30].

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors confirm their contributions to the paper as follows: J.K. and L.X.H.: Contributed to the study conception and design; J.K., E.F., and M.M.: Responsible for data extraction; L.X.H. and E.F.: Conducted the data analysis; L.X.H.: Led the drafting of the manuscript, with contributions from JK. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Department of Preclinical Subjects at "Luigj Gurakuqi" University of Shkodra, with document reference number 101/2. The approval was signed on 5th December 2023 in Shkodra, Albanian.

## HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of institutional and/or research committee and with the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as revised in 2013.

## CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Informed consent was obtained from all participants of this study.

## STANDARDS OF REPORTING

COREQ guidelines were followed.

## AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data and supportive information are available within the article.

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None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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