# Why Do They Do It? A Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis of Crisis Volunteers' Motivations

*Regina T. P. Aguirre and Kristin M. W. Bolton*

The literature on volunteers' motivations is extensive; however, a comprehensive theoretical and empirical knowledge base pertaining to their motivations in crisis settings is lacking. This article furthers the knowledge base related to volunteers' motivations and demonstrates a unique method of qualitative data analysis rarely used in the field of social work—qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS). The authors conducted a QIMS of five qualitative studies. The method was developed specifically for the field of social work. It is grounded in traditional qualitative methodology, and it draws from other disciplines that have embraced qualitative meta-synthesis as common practice. QIMS involves synthesizing the results of multiple qualitative studies on a topic into a new, synergistic understanding of the topic under study. The QIMS generated six themes: (1) internal motivation to make an external difference, (2) volunteer existentialism, (3) lived experience, (4) internal/personal fulfillment, (5) lack of direction, and (6) lack of support. Findings demonstrate implications for three areas that relate to the functioning of agencies with volunteers who provide crisis services through hotlines: (1) recruitment, (2) screening, and (3) management (for example, training and supervision). Furthermore, two major strengths in using QIMS were identified: (1) broadening of extrapolation possibilities and (2) extensive triangulation.

KEY WORDS:  *crisis counseling; hotline; meta-synthesis; telephone counseling; volunteer motivation*

Crisis volunteers provide important services in the event of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, disaster response, and suicide. Perhaps the most common delivery vehicle of crisis services is the crisis hotline. In the United States, there are more than 150 permanent, volunteer-staffed, crisis hotlines, responding to more than 2,200 calls per day (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011). Typically, these hotlines serve people in the aftermath of violent victimization (that is, sexual assault or intimate partner violence) or who are considering suicide. In the aftermath of a community traumatic event (CTE) (Praetorius, 2006), such as a hurricane or earthquake, temporary hotlines assist with recovery and provide outreach to victims.

Crisis hotlines first appeared in the 1960s and 1970s (Seeley, 1992) and were accompanied by a flood of research on the best methods for training volunteers and on the effectiveness of volunteers as professional counselors. Very few studies focused on the motivations of volunteers in choosing this particular type of work over other options. Since then, research has waned, especially related to volunteers' motivations (Barz, 2001). An understanding of volunteers' motivations specific to this crisis-oriented work is key for managers in recruiting and retaining volunteers, especially given the growing trend of episodic (short-term) volunteering (for example, Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, & Handy, 2008).

Recruitment and retention of volunteers on crisis hotlines and other crisis-related services are complicated by the time commitment for crisis hotlines, which is longer than most volunteer placements, and the emotionally draining content of the work (Hector & Aguirre, 2009). The meager research on the motivations of crisis volunteers has found that these volunteers have altruistic (for example, Barz, 2001; Stegall, 1998) and egoistic motivations (Barz, 2001); these motivations are common among volunteers regardless of their roles and settings (Safrit & Merrill, 2000).

Although the body of literature on crisis volunteer motivation is sparse, there is a vast body of literature on motivations for volunteering in general. The literature indicates three categories of motivation: altruism, personal fulfillment, and personal growth (for example, career enhancement, skill building, broadening social networks) (Proteau & Wolff, 2008; Schiff, 1990). This mixture of altruism

and egoism is supported by the literature (for example, Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Yoshioka, Brown, & Ashcraft, 2007) on volunteer motivations and is grounded in the literature on individual motivations.

Initial theories of motivation were premised on the notion of humans reacting to both internal and external forces such as instincts (Freud, 1915/1957a,b), drives (Miller, 1951), and needs (Alderfer, 1969). To explain motivation at the individual level, three theories with varying vantage points emerged: (1) the ideation of self-evaluation within the context of self-worth (for example, Harter, 1990; Tesser, 1986); (2) personal agency beliefs (self-determination theory) (Deci & Ryan, 1985); and (3) cognitive factors within theories (for example, action control) (Kuhl, 1984, 1985, 1986) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986).

For our purposes, we chose Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs as a theoretical framework for understanding individual motivations. This hierarchy has been widely used in the social sciences to describe individual motivations. In the visualization of his model, Maslow developed a pyramid with five levels. For an individual to advance through the five levels of the pyramid, each level must be achieved. The first level (or base of the pyramid) is the physiological level (for example, basic needs such as water, shelter, and food). Unless the basic needs are met, the individual is unable to continue to the higher level needs. If basic needs are met, the individual advances to the second level, which is the need for safety and freedom from stress. An individual must achieve a feeling of safety and free themselves from high stress levels prior to advancing to the third level. The third level is the social level and is premised on the individual's needs for belongingness and love. The fourth level relates to self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are related to the personal growth motivations observed in the volunteer literature. Once the four lower levels are achieved, individuals are able to pursue self-actualization where they fulfill their true potential for performing acts of an altruistic and generative nature; this relates to the volunteer motivations for personal fulfillment and altruism.

Considering the interconnection among the three categories of motivation found in the volunteer literature (that is, altruism, personal fulfillment, and personal growth) and the highest two levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the purpose of this study is to focus on the levels that are most prominent for volunteers in crisis services. In other words, considering the vast array of opportunities for volunteer work, what motivates people to volunteer in emotionally taxing work such as answering a crisis hotline as compared to other, less emotionally taxing, volunteer opportunities? Are their motivations more closely aligned with one of the three broad categories of volunteer motivations identified in the literature? There have been a few qualitative studies on the motivations of crisis volunteers. The purpose of this study was to use qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) to develop a synergy of the essences of the motivations to volunteer in crisis settings that are identified in these individual qualitative studies. We questioned whether it is a truly balanced mix of altruistic and egoistic motivations for these crisis volunteers or whether their motivations are more closely aligned with one of the three broad categories of volunteer motivations identified in the literature.

## METHOD

Synthesis of qualitative research, although novel for social work as evidenced by only four published syntheses to date (Forte, 2009; Hodge, Horvath, Larkin, & Curl, 2011; McCalman et al., 2010; Watkins, Walker, & Griffith, 2010), has been used extensively in the field of nursing. Researchers in nursing developed methods or theories for conducting qualitative meta-synthesis (Estabrooks, Field, & Morse, 1994; Finfgeld-Connett, 2010; Jensen & Allen, 1996; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997) and applied them (Barroso & Powell-Cope, 2000; Beck, 2001, 2002; Britten, Cambell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan, & Pill, 2002; Campbell et al., 2003; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Finfgeld, 1999, 2000; Jensen & Allen, 1994; Kearney, 2001; McCormick, Rodney, & Varcoe, 2003; Nelson, 2002; Paterson, 2001; Paterson, Thorne, & Dewis, 1998; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003; Thorne & Paterson, 1998). Each of the methods and subsequent applications in the nursing field has generated a wealth of understanding of the strengths and limitations of various aspects of meta-synthesis. Thus, having noted the lack of a synthesis method oriented to social work, we developed QIMS, a method grounded in social work values for practice and

research and formulated from the rich and extensive applications in nursing. (For an extensive detailing of the method and its development, see Aguirre & Bolton, 2013.
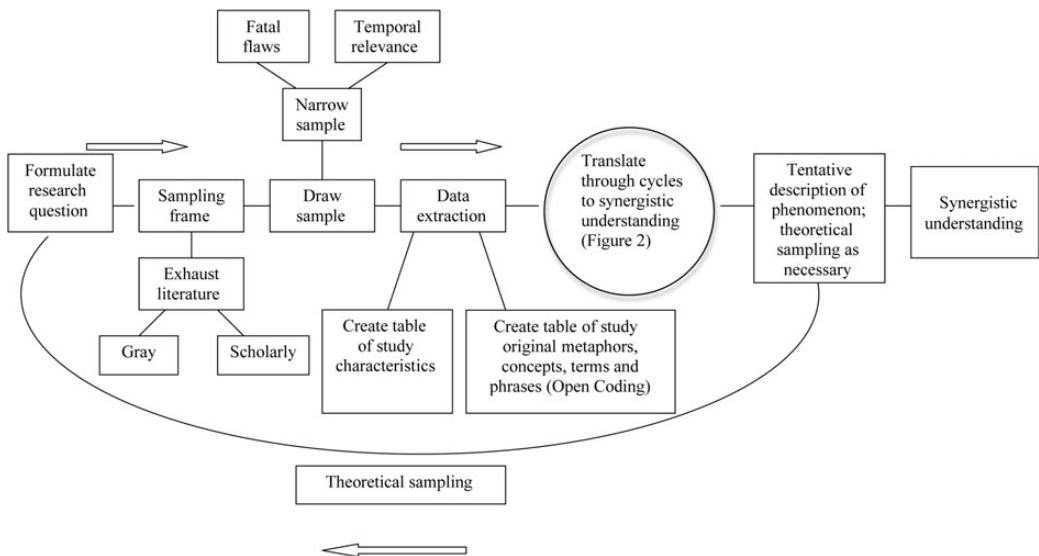
We used QIMS for this study. To define this method, we point to the meanings of three words in *interpretive meta-synthesis*: "interpretive" meaning that we eschew aggregating findings quantitatively; "meta" "denoting a change of position or condition," and "synthesis" being "the combination of ideas to form a theory or system" ("Meta," 2011; "Synthesis," 2011). We conceptualize QIMS as a means to synthesize a group of studies on a related topic into an enhanced understanding of the topic of study. In this process, the position of each individual study is changed from an individual pocket of knowledge of a phenomenon into part of a web of knowledge about the topic. This web of knowledge produces a synergy among the studies creating a new, deeper, and broader understanding (Aguirre & Bolton, 2013). (See Figures 1 and 2 for a detailed representation of the steps in QIMS that are presented in subsequent sections.)

### Sampling
We used purposive sampling to select studies relevant to our topic of interest for inclusion in the QIMS (depicted in Figure 3) and consulted with each other at every decision point to ensure agreement. When we disagreed with each other regarding whether to include a study, we discussed the inclusion criteria until we reached a decision. Although it is considered wise to limit qualitative synthesis literature searches in relation to temporal relevance to increase transferability (Barroso, Sandelowski, & Voils, 2006), we did not limit our search by publication year (that is, any study relevant to the topic prior to January of 2011 was considered for inclusion). Temporal relevance relates to ensuring that the treatment of the topic is not so dated that it is no longer relevant. We did not think that there was a need for this limit with our study, because motivations to volunteer in crisis settings are not likely to become outdated. Although events over the years may have added newer motivations, we could not conceptualize a motivation identified in earlier studies that might not be relevant in today. We conducted a title search using a large number of databases (that is, Academic Search Complete CINAHL Plus with Full Text, E-Journals, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycINFO, Social Work Abstracts, JSTOR, ISI Web of Knowledge, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses). Search terms included volunteers, volunteer motivation, crisis volunteer, crisis volunteer motivations, rape crisis



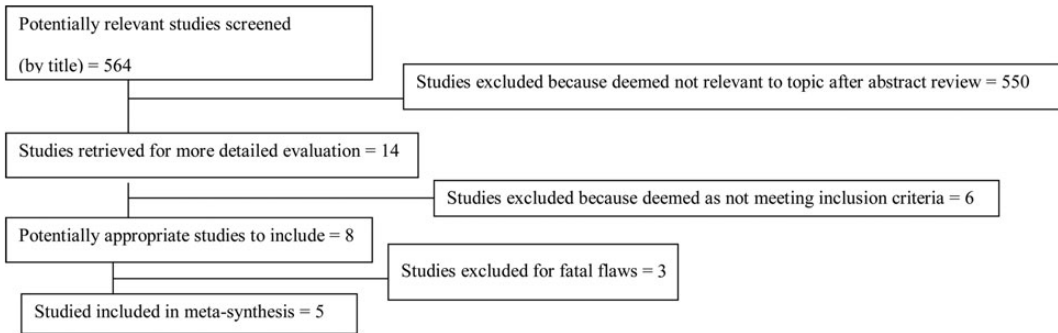**Figure 1: Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis Method**

## Figure 2: Cycles to Synergy
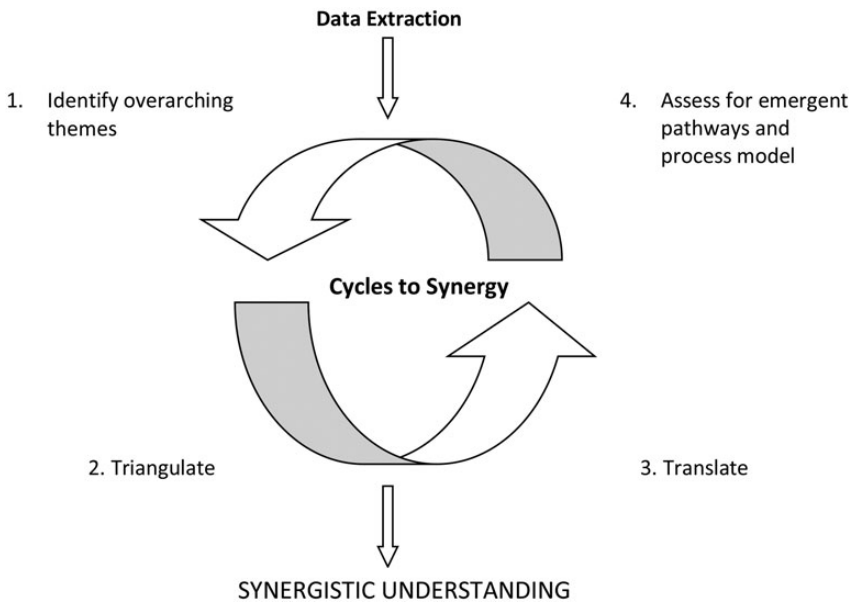
## Figure 3: Quorum Chart



volunteer, telephone counseling, hotline, crisis counseling, phone counseling, and suicide hotline volunteer. Once we identified the initial relevant studies, we scanned the abstracts to further judge topic relevance. We then scanned the remaining studies for relevant references. Studies in these references deemed relevant were obtained and reviewed for inclusion.

*Inclusion Criteria.* To be included, studies had to be a peer-reviewed journal article, book, thesis, or dissertation; published in English; published prior to January 2011; and conducted using an interpretive paradigm. The main topic-related criteria were the following: The primary volunteer role had to be responding to a crisis, and the study focus had to relate to the motivation for volunteering.

*Narrowing the Sample.* After exhausting all resources and compiling studies related to the research topic, we narrowed the list of studies in terms of topic relevance and fatal flaws. Studies

that exhibited fatal flaws (for example, researcher bias, lack of triangulation, questionable trustworthiness, or lack of theoretical tradition in data collection and analysis) were eliminated from the sample (Dixon-Woods, et al., 2006) at our discretion. It is important here to note that negative cases were not eliminated or perceived as a fatal flaw. Patton (2002) emphasizes the importance of the negative case because "our understanding of those patterns and trends is increased by considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the pattern" (p. 554). The negative case in our sample was a study that, rather than focusing on why people volunteer on crisis hotlines, focused on why people stopped volunteering. This approach to the topic was considered relevant, and thus the study was included. Furthermore, researchers must differentiate between fatal flaws and poor data presentation. Although the text in at least two of the studies was difficult to understand due to poor organization, these studies were included because the data remained vital to the sample itself and were rich and pertinent to the topic of inquiry.

Following the identification of the sample, we created a table to list and identify characteristics of the participants and studies (Table 1). The studies included in this meta-synthesis yield the perspectives of 96 crisis volunteers with the experiences of answering rape, suicide, and crisis hotlines and hotlines responding to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

## Triangulation

Triangulation, a method used to regulate the trustworthiness of qualitative research, is a major component of QIMS and should be used at every step in the study. In addition to the triangulation efforts in the original studies, QIMS adds another layer in the actual synthesis process. There are four types of triangulation, three of which were present in this study (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of data collection methods was not present in this meta-synthesis as all the studies collected data through interviews.

Triangulation of sources and traditions was inherent in the process, with various studies providing diversity in these areas. One issue that is often raised in the current literature on synthesizing qualitative research is whether to synthesize findings from different qualitative traditions. In the past, researchers were cautious of synthesizing findings from qualitative studies that were generated using different qualitative traditions out of concern that there would be a misrepresentation of the original research (for example, Jensen & Allen, 1996). However, this objection seems unwarranted; some researchers (ourselves included) favor the synthesis of qualitative studies utilizing differing traditions, arguing that it enhances value (Finfgeld, 2003; Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). For example, this QIMS included the lived experience—phenomenology—of volunteering in crisis settings (that is, Hector & Aguirre, 2009; Praetorius & Machtmes,

| Table 1: Studies Included in the Sample | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Study** | **Tradition/Data Collection Method** | **N** | **Age, Years Race/Ethnicity Gender** | **Volunteer Setting** |
| Hector & Aguirre (2009) | Phenomenology/Interviews | 15 | 24–66+ Not reported Not reported | Crisis hotline |
| Praetorius & Machtmes (2005) | Phenomenology/Interviews | 19 | 18–66+ Not reported 2 male, 17 female | Crisis hotline |
| Rath (2008) | Grounded theory/Interviews | 8 | 22–58 White Female | Rape crisis center |
| Steffen & Fothergill (2009) | Did not specify/Interviews | 34 | Not reported Majority white; other races/ethnicities represented: Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, African American, and Latino 17 male, 17 female | Multiple locations |
| Yanay & Yanay (2008) | Did not specify/Interviews and observations | 20 | 20–50 Not reported Female | Rape crisis hotline |

2005) along with theory of the transformative nature of training (that is, Rath, 2008).

Triangulation of analysts is key in any type of qualitative analysis, and QIMS is no exception. In fact, it is common for syntheses of qualitative studies to include studies that were conducted by the same authors conducting the synthesis (for example, Forte, 2009; McCalman et al., 2010; Watkins et al., 2010), thus creating an additional need for triangulation of analysts to address bias. This was certainly the case for our QIMS, because the first author had conducted two of the original studies included in the synthesis. To balance her bias and extensive knowledge of these studies, we divided the sample so that the first author conducted the steps of data extraction for the three studies she did not conduct and the second author completed the same for the first author's two studies. Once this initial process of data extraction was complete, we met several times to translate our understanding of these subsets of studies into the synergistic understanding presented.

## Theme Extraction

The first step in our analysis was to extract the themes identified in the original studies. These are presented in Table 2. We used the language presented in the studies to represent the themes extracted to maintain the integrity of each individual study. This ensured that the original researchers' interpretations were maintained and were used as the data for our QIMS.

## Synthesis of Themes

The next step in the analysis process was translation, which serves as a means to identify themes across the studies. Translation, as Noblit and Hare (1988) stated,

> maintains the central metaphors and/or concept of each account *in their relation to other key metaphors or concepts* in that account. It also compares both the metaphors and concepts and their interactions in one account with the metaphors or concepts and their interactions in other accounts. (p. 28)

Each of us spent time with the data individually, reviewing the extracted themes along with the supporting quotes of participants for our respective

| Table 2: Theme Extraction | |
|---|---|
| **Study** | **Themes** |
| Hector & Aguirre (2009) | 1. Giving back to the community<br>2. Altruism<br>3. Finding work challenging<br>4. Lived experience<br>5. Free time |
| Praetorius & Machtmes (2005) | 1. Altruism<br>2. Experience with suicide<br>3. Personal blessings<br>4. Realizations<br>5. Deeper understanding of the human condition<br>6. Interconnectedness<br>7. Community |
| Rath (2008) | 1. Motivation to train<br>2. Complexity of change<br>3. Changes in personal relationships<br>4. Personal change<br>5. Feminism |
| Steffen & Fothergill (2009) | 1. Personal healing<br>2. Self-concept<br>3. Community sentiment and involvement |
| Yanay & Yanay (2008) | 1. Motivation saturation<br>2. Completion<br>3. Lack of support<br>4. Lack of direction |

subsets of studies. We individually arrived at overarching themes and then convened to translate the subsets of studies into each other as the first step in the cycle to synergy (see Figure 2). This generated a collage of comparable themes that were key to the emergence of a synergistic picture of the phenomenon. Two of these themes emerged from the negative case in the sample.

The identification of the themes was followed by the actual data synthesis, which is what we consider to be the path to synergistic understanding of the phenomenon. This is a multiphase process. We met for multiple sessions of triangulation during which we reviewed our individual translations and worked toward verification and saturation across these to produce a combined translation. A synthesis of the studies emerged as a new, synergistic understanding of crisis volunteers' motivations, including a conceptual model of the motivation process.

## Findings

This QIMS yielded six themes: (1) internal motivation to make an external difference, (2) volunteer existentialism, (3) lived experience, (4) internal/personal fulfillment, (5) lack of support, and (6)

lack of direction. Jensen and Allen (1996) state that a meta-synthesis "is credible when it re-presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (p. 556). Thus, we illustrate each theme with quotes from the participants in the original studies. We also illustrate, in Table 3, how each of the originally extracted themes translated into the overarching themes of this QIMS.

***Internal Motivation to Make an External Difference.*** This theme seemed to resonate with the volunteers on the suicide and crisis hotlines. Altruism and giving back to the community were prominent. As illustrated by a participant in Praetorius & Machtmes's (2005) study:

> . . . years ago in the late 80s . . . I ended up calling the crisis line in New Orleans, and there was a voice on the other end that talked me out of thinking about suicide. It was about an hour call . . . an hour and half call, I guess. So, I had suicidal ideation at that time. So I've always remembered that and . . . it was just natural to say that I would really go through this and give back in this particular way. (p. 122)

***Volunteer Existentialism.*** Volunteer existentialism is a theme represented in all of the studies in this meta-synthesis. As we interpret it, the meaning of volunteer existentialism stems from Frankl's (1962) definition of existentialism and its active manifestation through logotherapy: "According to logotherapy, we can discover the meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed, (2) by experiencing value, (3) by suffering" (p. 113). Volunteer existentialism as demonstrated across these studies encompasses "doing a deed" and "experiencing value." Across these studies, the extreme crises that these volunteers respond to help them gain a perspective on their lives and what they perceive to be the most burdensome, become aware of their interconnectedness to the broader society (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005; Steffen & Fothergill, 2009), and provide a "deeper understanding of the human condition" (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005, p. 121). As one volunteer who responded to 9/11 noted,

> I think [it provided] maybe a sense of purpose or a sense of community, a sense of being one with everyone; a sense that maybe there was good in the world and I think that really the togetherness and the sense of being one with the community; one with, kind of, the human race. (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009, p. 39)

| New, Overarching Theme | Extracted, Original Themes with Authors and Publication Year |
|---|---|
| Internal motivation to make an external difference | • Altruism—way to give back (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Community (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Giving back to the community (Hector & Aguirre, 2009) |
| Volunteer existentialism | • Realizations (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Deeper understanding of the human condition (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Interconnectedness (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Community sentiment and involvement (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009) |
| Lived experience | • Experience with suicide (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Lived experience (Hector & Aguirre, 2009)<br>• Personal healing (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009)<br>• Self-concept (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009)<br>• Motivation to train—experience with sexual violence (Rath, 2008)<br>• Changed personal experiences (Rath, 2008)<br>• Personal change (for example, self-awareness) (Rath, 2008) |
| Internal/Personal fulfillment | • Altruism—way to show gratitude (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Personal blessings (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005)<br>• Finding work challenging (Hector & Aguirre, 2009)<br>• Free time (Hector & Aguirre, 2009)<br>• Motivation to train (Rath, 2008)<br>• Major life changes (Rath, 2008)<br>• Changed personal experiences (Rath, 2008)<br>• Motivational saturation (Yanay & Yanay, 2008) |
| Lack of support | • (Yanay & Yanay, 2008) |
| Lack of direction | • (Yanay & Yanay, 2008) |

**Table 3: Translation of Themes**

*Lived Experience.* The third way one discovers meaning in life, according to Frankl (1962), is through suffering. Overwhelmingly, this theme of having experienced the suffering that one is volunteering to alleviate resounds in the data. One person related the following regarding working on a crisis hotline: "I had a drug problem and without some people that very much cared about me and helped me through that time in my life, I wouldn't be here today." Another shared, "It just happens that I have a family member with a history of suicide attempts." Perhaps most clearly, another volunteer stated, "My volunteering for the suicide crisis center is because of the loss of my partner, to death by suicide" (Hector & Aguirre, 2009, p. 45). One person demonstrated this theme in the description of feelings after 9/11:

> You really felt that you had to do something in response to that besides sitting around and thinking about it, especially if you witnessed it [9/11 terrorist attacks in New York] . . . I think seeing it was a different thing. I think seeing it made you more likely to want to do something . . . I think that [volunteering] was also for me part of a healing process. . . . (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009, p. 35)

In addition, Rath's (2008) work included two participants who had lived the experience (being a victim of sexual violence) as well.

> I felt like I'd more or less dealt with my personal stuff to do with being abused and being raped . . . But I wanted to put something back in. (p. 24)

> Rape Crisis came towards the end of the piecing it together. It [being a survivor] just becomes a part of your life you've accepted. It's there and you feel like you might work on it occasionally. You can even see it as now turned in to a positive thing when you are able to use it as a positive thing. (p. 24)

In Rath's work, although only two of the participants had lived the experience of sexual victimization, the remainder of participants became aware through the volunteer training that they had experienced some form of victimization.

*Internal/Personal Fulfillment.* Internal or personal fulfillment emerged as another motivator for choosing crisis volunteer work over other possibilities. This motivation encompassed the volunteers finding the work rewarding and the work helping the volunteers move through already occurring life changes. For example, related to the work being rewarding, one respondent noted,

> It's very rewarding whenever you do get on the phone and you'd notice that change from when the person calls you they are all frantic, but by the end of the call, they are calmer and you can, you can hear it in their voice. (Hector & Aguirre, 2009, p. 45)

Another respondent noted,

> Personally, I find it to be gratifying to help people discover that they do have healthier options in facing whatever crisis they have. And, often when you are caught up in something you don't see very clearly and being able to talk to someone outside very honestly and start getting feedback, helps you to see that you don't have to walk into that tree . . . Again, the more I share and learn to share with others, the more enriched I am . . . I enjoy the work. I see it as something that is constructive, not only for others, but also for myself, and that is gratifying. (Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005, pp. 125–126)

For moving through life changes, several participants' quotes provide clear illustrations: "Lots of other things were going on in my life at that time. I was just moving towards a position of more confidence, being a more confident strong woman" (Rath, 2008, p. 24). "I think it was it was a confidence thing of freeing and unblocking a lot of stuff" (Rath, 2008, p. 25).

*Lack of Direction and Lack of Support.* The study by Yanay and Yanay (2008), identified as a negative case in this QIMS, looked at why people choose to leave after volunteering for a period of time in a crisis-related role. They found that lack of direction from the agency and lack of support in fulfilling the roles assigned to

volunteers were demotivators for volunteers. One participant described the issue of lack of direction in this way:

> The main topic which caused me long hours of distress is the matter of what my role and degree of responsibility is as a volunteer. How much am I allowed, and to what extent I have to take responsibility for somebody when she calls. To what extent are we really in a balanced array of power and, if not, to what extent am I allowed to intervene? To what extent am I supposed to intervene? If someone tells me that she's going to hurt herself, then they tell me at the center that I must intervene. But if she does something that in my view is mistaken, am I permitted to act? (Yanay & Yanay, 2008, p. 73)

Lack of support, which seems to be related to lack of direction is explained in the following quote:

> After repeated complaints on the part of volunteers, the staff decided to renew the discussion on the role of the volunteers . . . The volunteers requested stricter guidelines . . . However, the organization's administrators refused to define such clear guidelines. "Whoever can't take it can go," the staff insistently claimed, sticking to their belief that fixed boundaries cannot be set, and that a work "recipe" would only hurt the flexibility of both the organization and the volunteers. (Yanay & Yanay, 2008, p. 73)

## DISCUSSION

As an introduction to the discussion of this QIMS, we want to emphasize that there may be more, fewer, or different conclusions, recommendations, and implications depending on the situation to which this research is being extrapolated. As is true with all qualitative research, the findings may not apply to all situations, although transferability of meta-synthesis findings is enhanced by systematic sampling, multiple layers of triangulation, and extensive documentation of the synthesis process (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). The purpose of this QIMS was to develop a synergy of the essences of the motivations to volunteer in crisis settings

identified in these individual qualitative studies. In the existing literature on volunteer motivation, little focus is placed on why people choose to volunteer in crisis settings when there are many other, less emotionally taxing and time-consuming options (Barz, 2001). This is evidenced in the small number of studies that met our inclusion criteria for this QIMS. More research is needed on the motivations of crisis volunteers to assist organizations in recruiting and maintaining a strong volunteer staff to support these important services.

The sparse literature specific to the motivations of crisis volunteers indicates that motivation is a mix of altruistic and egoistic drives. This is partially reflective of the three categories of motivations that emerge in the broader body of literature on volunteer motivations in any setting: altruism, personal fulfillment, and personal growth (Proteau & Wolff, 2008; Schiff, 1990). With this QIMS, we questioned whether it was a truly balanced mix of altruistic and egoistic motivations for these crisis volunteers or whether their motivations were more closely aligned with one of the three broad categories of volunteer motivations identified in the literature.

The major contribution of this QIMS to the literature about crisis volunteers is the finding that volunteers' motivations do not completely align across the three categories of volunteer motivation. Personal growth did not emerge as a motivation in the QIMS. However, personal fulfillment and altruism did. The overarching theme of personal fulfillment in our QIMS supports the finding that crisis volunteers, like volunteers across other settings, seek to fulfill the egoistic need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

Concerning our question of whether crisis volunteer motivations were more aligned to one of the three broad categories of volunteer motivation, we found that three of our four overarching themes (that is, internal motivation to make an external difference, volunteer existentialism, and lived experience) are all altruistic motivations. Therefore, we conclude that altruism, fulfilling the basic need for self-transcendence (Maslow, 1954), is the primary motivator for crisis volunteers. This conclusion yields important implications and recommendations for organizations in recruiting and retaining their volunteers. The themes of internal motivation to make an external difference and volunteer existentialism yield the

implication that organizations should continually emphasize in their recruitment and retention efforts the impact that volunteers have on those they are assisting. We recommend that organizations develop formal ways to communicate this. Crisis services clients often provide unsolicited testimonies; these could be communicated to volunteers through newsletters and other formal methods of communication. In addition, there are many ways organizations can solicit testimonials from clients once they are out of crisis to assist in these important approaches to motivation. By maintaining an emphasis on the impact volunteers have on those they are assisting, organizations can also support the motivation of those volunteers seeking personal fulfillment. Personal fulfillment is aimed at meeting the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). As an organization places emphasis on impact of the volunteers' work, they provide an indirect emphasis on the fact that that this impact would not be possible without the growing abilities and expertise of the volunteers in fulfilling their roles.

The third theme related to altruism was that the lived experience of crisis created a desire in the volunteers to help others in similar crisis. One implication of this finding for organizations is that it is important for them to assess whether the potential volunteers are "ready" to help after their own crisis. We recommend that potential volunteers be asked questions about what they have done to heal; for example, for organizations recruiting for a suicide hotline, a key strategy would be to recruit from people who have successfully completed the affiliated suicide support group for people who have lost someone to suicide.

Even given this strong demonstration of altruistic motivations across these three themes, volunteers in crisis settings are still vulnerable to losing motivation when agencies fail to maintain and nurture their motivation through providing support and direction as evidenced in the two of the themes from the negative case of this QIMS. Volunteers are partners with the organizations in fulfilling a need to which both parties have a strong commitment. A key recommendation is that organizations support volunteers through debriefing opportunities and meetings and provide direction through trainings to update, expand, and enhance their skills and through ongoing evaluation to help them improve.

## POSTSCRIPT

In the process of conducting this study, we found that major strengths and related limitations emerged in using QIMS—broadening of extrapolation possibilities and extensive triangulation. *Extrapolation* is defined as "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (Patton, 2002, p. 584). With this particular QIMS, the definition of crisis–related volunteering was expanded to cover a variety of volunteer settings including rape crisis, suicide hotline counseling, and responding to terrorist attacks. In addition, the inclusion of multiple studies allowed us to examine the perspectives of volunteers from a broad age range, thus enriching our understanding. Finally, diversity was enhanced with the inclusion of multiple studies. Although extrapolation possibilities were broadened with this QIMS, these possibilities could have been increased had more studies been available for inclusion. More studies would have increased the number of perspectives (sample size) synthesized across studies. Although, like ours, syntheses of qualitative research have been conducted with as few as five studies (for example, McCalman et al., 2010), the general recommendations are for a sample size between 10 and 12 (Bondas & Hall, 2007).

Extensive triangulation is woven throughout the steps of a QIMS and, in this case, addressed a major limitation of the study. This limitation was the possibility of bias from the first author because she conducted two of the five synthesized studies. This limitation is balanced by our efforts to control bias through triangulation. As explained in the section on triangulation, a major strength of the QIMS method is the central role triangulation plays throughout the QIMS process, especially in terms of triangulation of analysts. Our triangulation efforts resulted in a rich and lively discussion of our different interpretations of how the studies translate into each other. This discussion continued until agreement was reached, the outcome of which is reflected in the resulting synergistic understanding.

Another often noted limitation of the qualitative syntheses of studies is the possibility of losing the essence of the qualitative traditions of the individual studies synthesized if the synthesis includes studies from different qualitative traditions. In the past, researchers have been cautious of synthesizing across different qualitative traditions (for example,

Jensen & Allen, 1996). We feel that our decision to synthesize across multiple qualitative traditions strengthened the study and is a strength of the QIMS method, which recommends synthesizing across traditions. For example, our QIMS included the lived experience through phenomenology (that is, Hector & Aguirre, 2009; Praetorius & Machtmes, 2005) along with the theory of the transformative nature of training (that is, Rath, 2008). In summary, triangulation affords QIMS a means of verifying that translation across studies, where variety in qualitative traditions and possible researcher bias are appropriately addressed, provides a synergistic understanding rather than a disordered and biased misunderstanding. **SWR**

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*Regina T. P. Aguirre, PhD, LMSW–AP,* is associate professor, University of Texas at Arlington, 211 South Cooper, Box 19129, Arlington, TX 76019; e-mail: rtpaguirre@uta.edu. *Kristin M. W. Bolton, PhD, MSW,* is assistant professor, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.