

S.S.Y. Chan. *Volunteering: impacts on the psychological well-being of Chinese older persons*. *Gerontechnology* 2008; 7(2):90. Technological and medical advancements predict longevity and better health in general for the older population in the 21st century. Improved health and independence of older persons allow them to increase their continuous contributions to their family, community and society. Older retired persons provide an invaluable pool of formal voluntary workers amidst the growing need for social services and fewer resources for social welfare expenditure. This study looks at volunteering, an activity in which time is freely given as a gift to benefit other people, groups and society, and the experiences of social engagement in older and associations between volunteering and psychological well-being (PWB) of older persons, including improved self-esteem and life satisfaction. **Methods** Rooted on activity theory, resilience of aging and role theory, this qualitative study aims to identify motivations for volunteering, the role(s) of volunteering, related effects on PWB of older persons, and perceptions of benefits and impacts of volunteering on older persons' PWB. PWB was measured on two foci, subjective well-being, including depression, anxiety, social impairment and hypochondriasis, and the four identifiable elements of distress covered in the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Data were gathered from two groups of 60-to-75-year-old retired respondents (volunteers and non-volunteers), through the use of focus group interview, in-depth case interview, and questionnaire. The responses were processed using mainly qualitative data and descriptive analysis, followed by a comparison of GHQ-12 score difference between volunteers and non-volunteers. **Results and discussion** Volunteering in old age can be inspired by self-motivation, can be encouraged by others and can be seen as a way to show gratitude to society. Volunteers were found to have significantly higher level of self-rated health, life satisfaction, self-image and PWB. Volunteering seems to alleviate volunteers' negative emotions. Interestingly, although older volunteers perceive volunteering mainly as a leisure activity, they are aware of some type optimal level of social participation, implying that adverse effects of excess participation in volunteering on PWB may be being recognized among older persons.

**References**

1. Kahn RL, Thomas JF. *Journal of Social Issues* 2002;58:627-644
2. Ryff CD, Keyes LM, Shmotkin, D. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2002;82:1007-1022
3. Wilson J, Musick, M. *American Sociological Review* 1997;62:694-713

**Keywords:** older persons, volunteering, psychological well-being, resilience of aging  
**Address:** Lingnan University, Hong Kong; E: sharon@ln.edu.hk

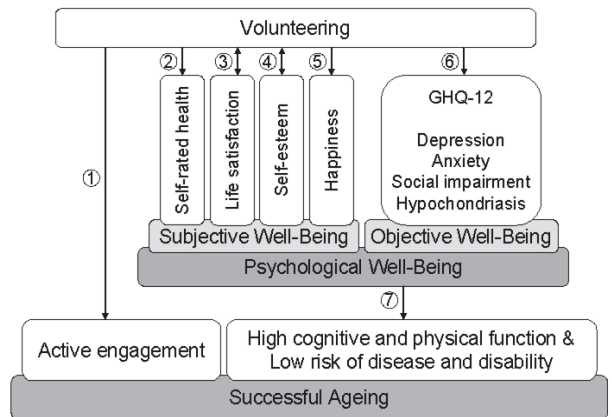


Figure 1 The Micro-framework of Findings; how volunteering affects psychological well-being of older persons and helps older persons achieve successful ageing