

EFFECTS OF CAREER LENGTH OF ADULT AMATEUR VOLUNTEER LEADERS ON CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES IN A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Children evolve by engaging in activities in a natural environment. Therefore, change should also occur in adults. However, few research reports are available. In this study, we investigated the effects of the career length of adult amateur volunteer leaders (hereafter, "volunteer leaders") on children's activities in a natural environment. We administered a questionnaire to volunteer leaders who supported children's nature activities, and analyzed data descriptively statistically and qualitatively (the KJ method). According to career length, attachment to children increased and emphasis on children's development became more, and less on their own learning and development. However, the "long career" respondents were unaware of their increased sense of superiority to children. A change the respondents were aware of was encountering their new self. On the other hand, the "short career" respondents reported feeling annoyed when children did not listen to them—to develop an attachment to children and a desire for overseeing their development, more time and opportunities to interact with them are necessary. Furthermore, the long career respondents regarded children as companions with whom they experience mutual growth, rather than as targets of teaching; they possibly realized that prioritizing children's development led to their own—however, they tended to feel a subconscious sense of superiority to children with lesser knowledge and experience. If adult volunteer leaders grasped their skill, knowledge experiences such as sharing with children would lead to desirable changes and development rather than a sense of superiority. Consequently, they could do mutual development with children.

Keywords: Career Length, Volunteer Leader, Activities in Natural Environment.

1. Introduction

To keep their sense of wonder alive, children need adults who rediscover nature and share experiences along with them. At the same time, adults need to cultivate sensitivity by exploring nature with children (Carson, 1998). Moyer (2001) said that learning and development through nature activities is not only for children but also for adults. Adults could also experience several impression and awareness by nature activities.

Nowadays, opportunity of children's nature experience has been decreasing. Under the background of this phenomenon, decrease of playground, spread of internet and parents would not give children chance of nature activity proactively. It is, therefore, possible that when those lacking in such experience themselves become parents in the future, their children would be further disconnected from nature, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle (Laird et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study was to verify the changes in adult amateur volunteer leaders (hereafter, "volunteer leaders") through nature activities with children based on the 1) weight put on the development of children and the volunteer leaders, 2) relation between their sense of superiority (Isogai, 1962) to children and career length, and 3) changes anticipated pre-activity and those that actually occurred due to the activities. The aim was to not only recommend nature activities for children but also provide basic data that could contribute to prevent from diminishing activities in nature environment as generations pass.

2. Method

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 19 volunteer leaders—10 male and 9 female; the average age was 31.2 years. They joined the nature activities offered by Ocean Family (Approved Specified Nonprofit Corporation). The answer formats were free description (FD), multiple answers allowed (MA), and select one from the five given options (SO) (1=no, 2=maybe no, 3=neutral, 4=maybe yes, 5=yes). The respondents were asked to provide their career length in years and months.

Main Questions

- 1) For how long have you been a volunteer leader? (years / months)
- 2) Before joining the nature activities, what change(s) did you anticipate in yourself through these activities? (FD)
- 3) Please provide your impression of children. (FD)
- 4) Do you have a positive or negative image of engaging with children? Please provide reasons for the same. (FD)
- 5) What are you looking for when engaging with children? (MA)
<choices> befriending them, overseeing their growth, observing their enjoyment, your own growth, improving your ability to lead, acquiring useful skills, participating in joyful activities, new encounters, other
- 6) What makes you anxious when engaging with children? (MA)
<choices> whether or not they would be satisfied, trouble between them, communication with them, your ability to lead, relationship with other volunteer leaders, accidents, other
- 7) Through the nature activities, how did the following change: (1) your impression of children and (2) children's mentality and behavior.
- 8) What are the merits and demerits of participating in activities with volunteers of different generations? (FD)
- 9) Please provide your reason for participating in children's nature activities. (FD)
- 10) When do you feel supporting children's nature activities is rewarding? (FD)
- 11) You feel happy when you interact with children. (SO)
- 12) You think it is easy to read children's minds. (SO)
- 13) You sometimes interact with children reluctantly. (SO)
- 14) You are good at interacting with children. (SO)
- 15) You think it is important for children to interact with adults and engage in activities with them. (SO)
- 16) You have good memory of activities with children. (SO)
- 17) You sometimes feel a sense of superiority to children. (SO)
- 18) You feel frustrated when children are better at nature activities than you. (SO)
- 19) You have good impression to children playing outside. (SO)
- 20) Through nature activities with children, how have you changed? (FD)

The actual questionnaire comprised a similar or opposite question to each item for confirmation—for example, ‘You have good memory of activities with children’ and ‘You have bad memory of activities with children’. To avoid redundancy, only the main questions have been provided in this paper.

Of the 19 respondents, the 16 whose career length we could know correctly, we divided into 2 groups of 8 each: short career (less than 1 year) and long career (more than 1 year).

3. Results

3.1 Weight the respondents put on the development of children and their own

We calculated each volunteer leader’s mental ratio of ‘putting weight on children’s development’ (weight on children) and ‘putting weight on development of volunteer leader themselves’ (weight on themselves) from their answers. Secondly, we consider the relation between which the volunteer leaders put weight on and career length.

Figure 1 is the ratio (%) of ‘putting weight on children’s development and Figure 2 is that of putting weight on development of volunteer leader themselves. Figures show that as career length becomes longer, weight on children increases (the regression line: $y = 0.0077x + 0.4948$) and weight on themselves decreases (the regression line: $y = -0.008x + 0.5067$).

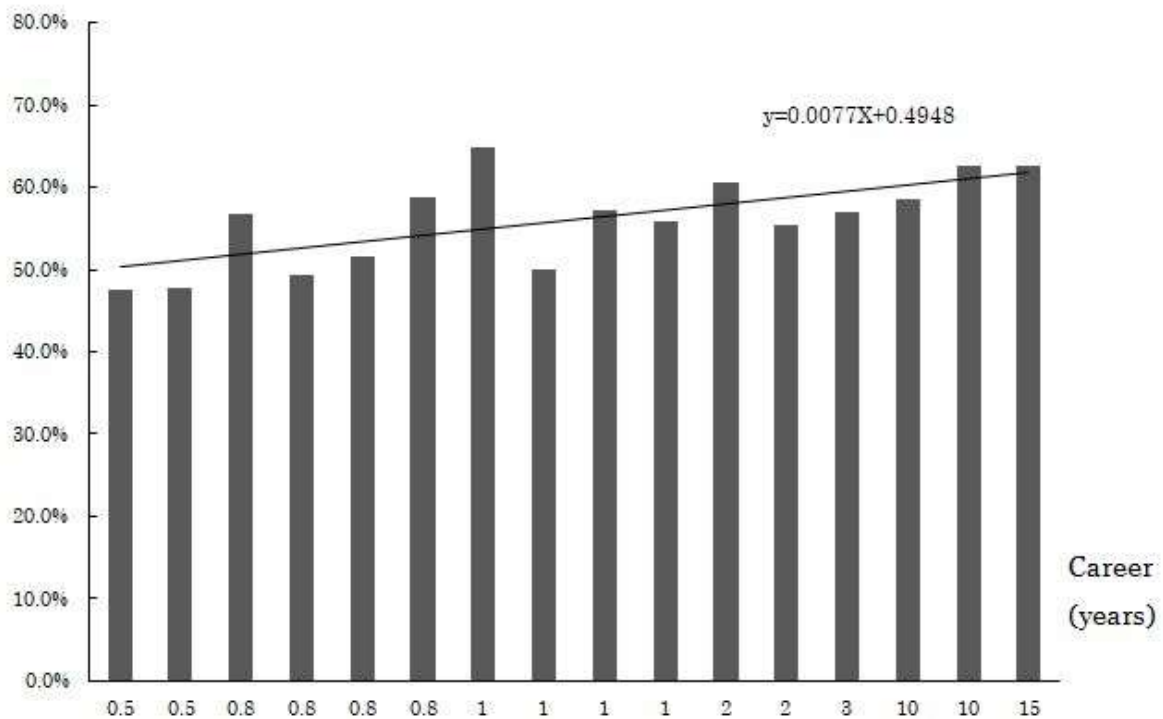


Figure 1: % of weight on children

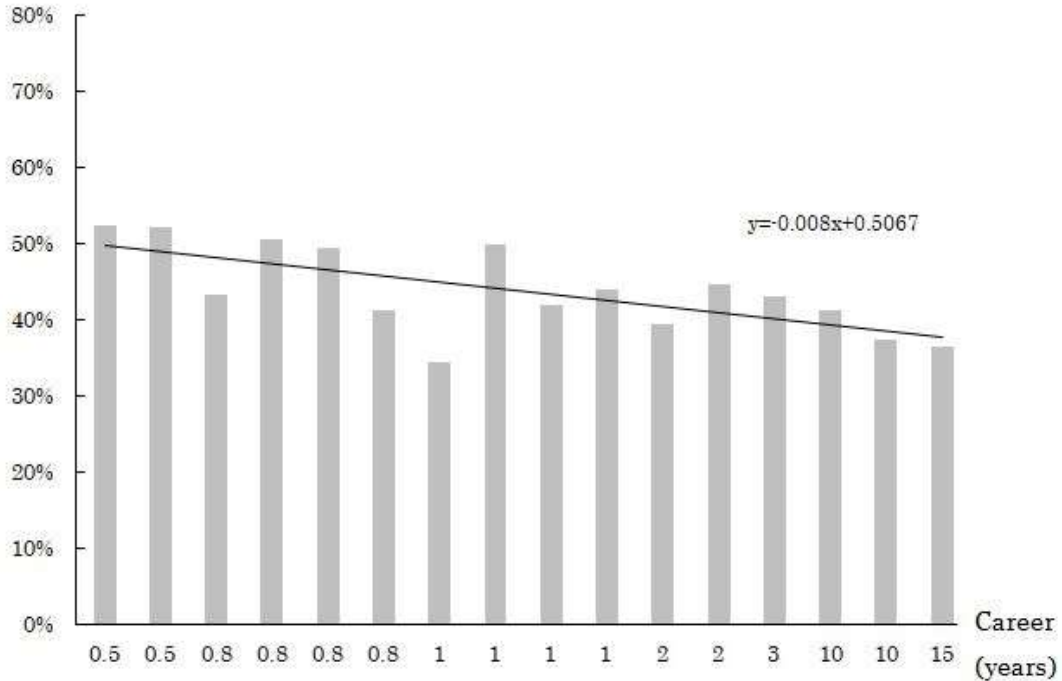


Figure 2: % of weight on volunteer leaders themselves

Not a few short career respondents wrote negative comments—for example, “Children do not listen to me.”

3.2 The sense of superiority to children

The ratio of the respondents’ sense of superiority to children and their career length was calculated.

Based on the regression line ($y = 0.005x - 0.3567$), it was concluded that their sense of superiority increased with their career length.

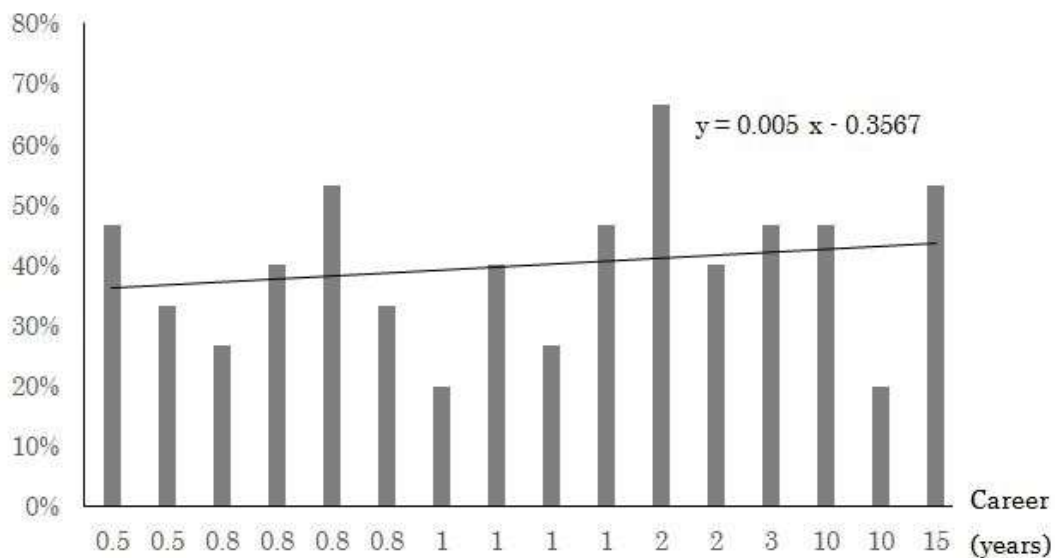


Figure 3: % of the sense of superiority to children

3.3 Changes that occurred in the respondents

The respondents' FD answers for changes anticipated pre-activity and those that actually occurred through the nature activities were categorized thus: 1) changes in sense of values and way of thinking, 2) changes in behavior, 3) changes in interpersonal relationships, 4) changes in impression of children, and 5) changes in consciousness toward nature.

1) Changes in sense of values and way of thinking

Representative answers that categorized these changes were: "I realized that it was not embarrassing to not know," "It is important to do my best, whether I can or cannot does not matter," "I get to do risk management and be cool," "My life values have changed," and "I get to determine what is most important and devote time to that."

2) Changes in behavior

Representative answers that categorized these changes were: "I look at the whole picture and act accordingly," "I get to never forget safety management," "I act according to the circumstances," "I get to try brief explanation," "I walk (instead of using traffics)," and "I am able to wait without getting irritated."

3) Changes in interpersonal relationships

Representative answers that categorized these changes were: "I got to not deny others," "I am able to accept diverse peoples," "I am able to put myself in the other person's shoes," and "I have become more cooperative."

4) Changes in the impression of children

Representatives answers that categorized these changes were: "I know that scolding and being angry are different, and while sometimes it is necessary to scold children, being angry at them is inappropriate," "I have learned to respect children who have unlimited potential," and "I have come to consider children as companions." The most common answer was "The number of things I learn from children has increased."

5) Changes in consciousness toward nature

Representative answers that categorized these changes were: "I have started to like being in nature," "My interest in natural environment, creatures, and natural disasters has increased," and "I have stopped using the air conditioner."

The change that the respondents had not anticipated pre-activity but became aware of after the activities was encountering their new self. Representative answers were: "I did not know I am good at blah blah blah" and "I did not realize I like blah blah blah very much." and some noticing were got from comparing children with childhood of volunteer leaders themselves.

4. Discussion

The results of this study showed that the short career volunteer leaders appeared to experience difficulties in interacting with children and tended to focus their attention on themselves; in other words, for developing an attachment to children and a desire to oversee their development, more time and opportunities to interact with them are necessary. On the other hand, their long career counterparts regarded children as companions with whom they experience mutual growth, and not as targets of teaching. Thus, they could realize from their experiences that prioritizing children's development would lead to their own (Figure 4).

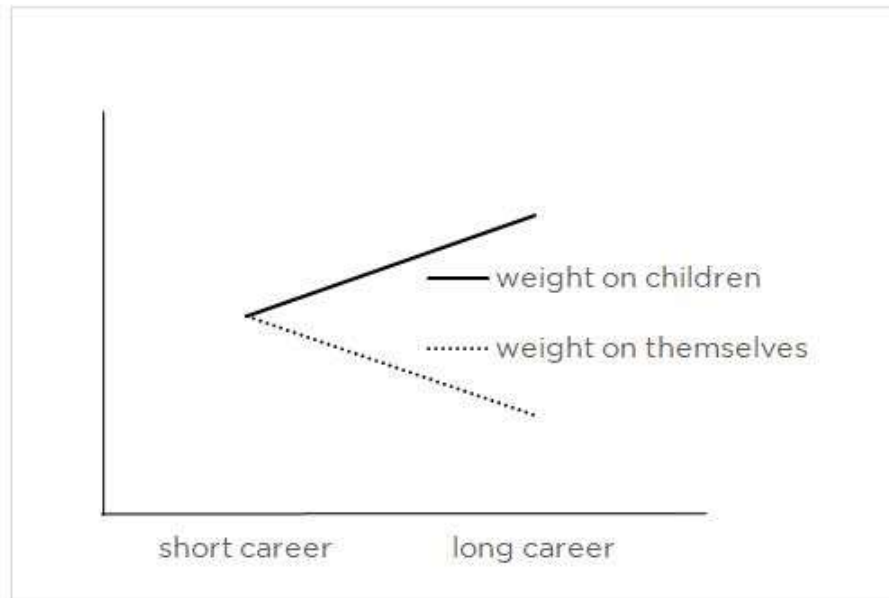


Figure 4: Respondents' career length and weight target

However, the long career volunteer leaders also tended to unconsciously feel a sense of superiority to children whose knowledge, skills, and experience were less than theirs. If adult volunteer leaders would grasp their skill, knowledge experiences as sharing with children not as causes of sense of superiority, the changes and development would be desirable and they could do mutual development with children. Of course, training courses have held for volunteer leaders. However even such training courses, long career volunteers play part of instructors, so they don't have chance to be pointed their unconscious sense of superiority. Carson (1998) wrote that "...for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel..." She commented that it is more important to share the sense of wonder and rediscover joy, excitement, and mystery in the world along with children than to have a lot of knowledge to impart. This study indicates that volunteer leaders having a lot of knowledge and skills might develop a sense of superiority and, thus, lose the chance to learn with children, sharing and sympathize the sense of wonder with them unconsciously.

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