

A Case Study in Volunteer Management:  
Volunteer Stress at a Northern California Rape Crisis Center

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This research project is a case study of a rape crisis center's volunteer program. Because the volunteers respond to recent victims of sexual assault in hospital emergency rooms, the study was designed to examine the stressors arising from their confrontation of such emotionally volatile situations. The study focused on the stressors volunteers experienced, how they coped, how the rape crisis center's training program prepared volunteers for job stress, what rape crisis center employees did to mitigate volunteers' job-related stress, and how effective volunteers perceived by rape crisis volunteers and the ways in which they coped with it to the stress and coping mechanisms of paid counselors in similar situations, as identified by two related studies.

The study found many similarities between the stress and coping behaviors of the volunteers interviewed and those of paid counselors in the other studies. All faced emotional stress and stress related to interactions and operational factors in their work, and all dealt with stress through personal relaxation and social support. The differences between the two groups lay in factors related to the volunteer nature of the interviewees' job, which led to dread of the unknown and isolation, and in the political leaning of the rape crisis center which was both a source of conflict and an inspiration for volunteers.