

MOTIVES FOR ENTERING AND STAYING IN YOUTH WORK: A SWISS STUDY

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ABSTRACT: Swiss workers' personal, altruistic, status, political, and religious motives for entering the field are examined and the results of a study to determine if those motives remained constant over time are presented.

Introduction

Switzerland has many residential institutions and programs for children and youth, with various purposes and different clientele. The majority of the institutions were founded in the nineteenth century by Reformed Church associations, the Catholic Church, and philanthropic organizations and still exist today with governmental subsidies. In the last twenty years more specialized programs such as residential treatment centers, therapeutic foster families, group homes, and teaching families were also started. The backbone for all institutions and programs is Child and Youth Care workers. Workers are trained in special technical schools, which are generally supported by the government (cities, cantons). Before their entrance into the training schools, graduates have either had nine years of secondary education and vocational training (as a mechanic, commercial worker, craftsman, etc.), or have completed intermediate school. Each year, in more than fourteen such training schools, about 200 residential care workers complete a three-year program, often along with social workers, who are trained at the same sites. Workers trained in this way comprise about 55% of the work force. Other workers, who have certificates in another vocation, are trained on the job while attending approximately one day a week in the classroom. These workers comprise the remainder of the work force.

Questions and Hypotheses

This survey research was designed to examine workers' motives for entering the field and to determine whether or not these motives remained constant over time. Questions originated from theories regarding selection of profession by Ginzberg, Super, and Tiedmann/O'Hara as well as from a review of relevant empirical research in the German-

speaking world (Fink & Schoch, 1987). This review found disunity in the statements and in the empirical work. For example, it was difficult to find two pieces of research that used similar categories for motivations for selection of a profession. However, we were able to conclude that there were five categories that were most relevant.

1. **Personal Motives:** Motives that deal with personal issues such as wishes for further growth and development, a satisfactory professional life, pleasure in working with children, etc.
2. **Altruistic Reasons:** Motives for helping others.
3. **Professional Status:** Motives related to professional advancement, improved social standing, etc. (e.g., "I saw for myself no better chances for advancement in my first profession.")
4. **Political Motives:** Motives related to improvement of society through social commitment.
5. **Religious Motives:** Motives related to feeling of inner call, which clearly arises from spiritual motives rather than ideal, inner motives, and is declared as such (Fink and Schoch, 1987, p. 381).

To test these motives, the following research questions and hypotheses were developed.

Question #1: What reasons do institutional child care workers give a few years after their training as their original reason for entering the profession?

Hypothesis 1.1: Political, religious, or status-oriented motives play almost no role in the selection of this profession.

Hypothesis 1.2: Altruistic motives constitute the majority of motives, followed by personal motives.

Hypothesis 1.3: Twenty-five to thirty years ago the altruistic motives would have been even stronger than in more recent years; this can be attributed to a trend toward personal motives.

Question #2: Would trained child care workers still select this profession for the same reasons after they had experienced the work for several years?

Hypothesis 2.1: One-quarter to one-half of the residential care workers today would select this profession for other reasons.

Hypothesis 2.2: Above all, personal reasons would be more important today than previously.

Question #3: Which motives are classified as preeminently important in the course of practical, professional child care work?

Hypothesis 3.1: Altruistic motives will be named most frequently.

Hypothesis 3.2: Aspects of personal (but nonmaterialistic) success will likewise be important.

Hypothesis 3.3: All other materialistic and nonmaterialistic aspects and incentives are not deserving of notice.

Methods

Two survey questionnaires were prepared and mailed. In 1984, a questionnaire was sent to all institutional child care workers in German-speaking Switzerland, who graduated between 1978 and 1983 from the ten most important schools of child care work. The return rate was 72.4% (686 valid questionnaires). Males accounted for 77.2% of the respondents (Lanz & Schoch, 1985). One year later a research team from Geneva surveyed 576 trained child care workers in French-speaking Switzerland, who graduated between 1957 and 1984. The return rate was 54%. The responses to the questionnaires were processed separately on mainframe computers at the University of Zurich and in Geneva, using SPSSX. A secondary analysis using a simple additive compilation and separate test of significance was concluded with all the 1,262 additional responses.

Instrument

The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. "For you, which motives stood out when you decided to complete training as an institutional child care worker? Write these down on the following lines." This open-ended question was then divided by a coding process into the five categories previously described, and the responses were weighed on a five-point scale.
2. "If you had to make the decision to enter the training for institutional care worker again today, would the decision be made for the same reasons?" Possible answers: "Essentially yes" or "Essentially no." "If NO, which reasons would not be so important today which could be added?" The answers were divided into the same five categories which were used in the first question.

3. Finally, all of the respondents who had, over time, been employed as institutional child care workers between graduation and promotion were required to select from a column of responses the three that had the greatest importance:

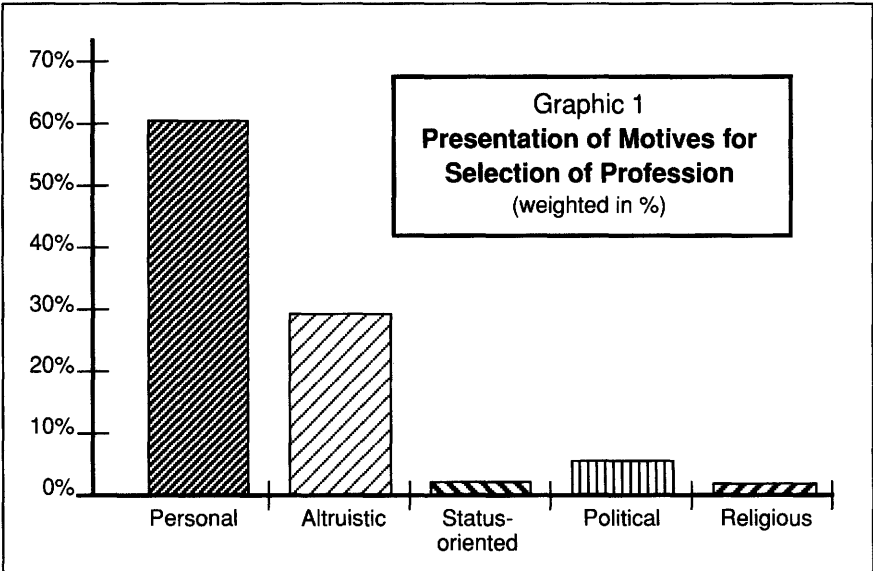
“I work as an institutional care worker, above all:

- a. because I can, through my work, achieve a social status.
- b. because I meet a social norm by doing it.
- c. to perform a duty to humanity.
- d. to comply with my inner call.
- e. because through my work I can live out my beliefs.
- f. because in my work I have the possibility to improve myself personally.
- g. because it is the best possibility for me to earn money.
- h. to enrich my life through contact with other persons and situations.
- i. because I know that other persons may need my help.”

Next, the matching responses from all of the questionnaires were added together.

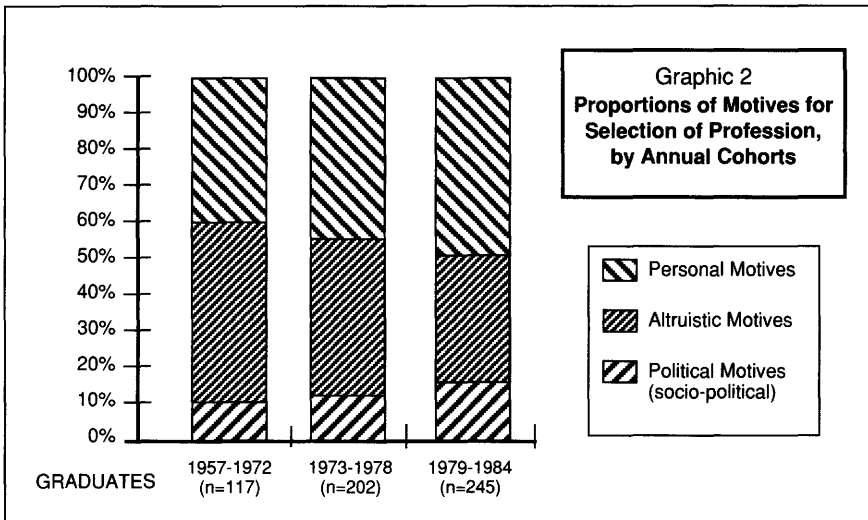
Outcomes

1. The distribution of the weights of the individual motivations for selection of the profession yielded the following patterns:



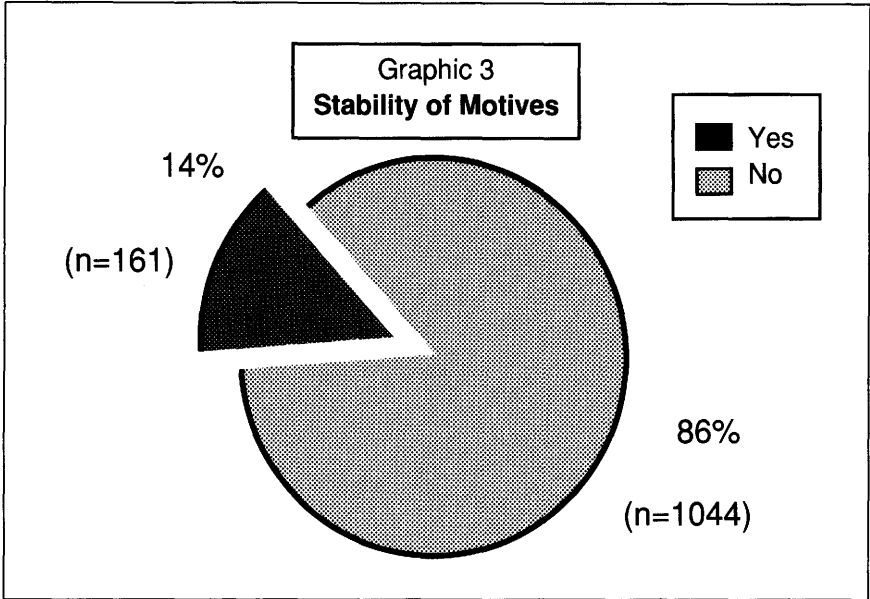
Swiss child care workers select the profession of institutional child care work principally out of personal motives: 60% of the weight points fell within this category, while altruistic reasons were in second place with 30%. Political motives, with 6%, as well as orientation to status and inner call (2% each) hardly made a showing in weight next to these two dominant categories.

The French-speaking population, whose first child care workers graduated in 1957, was tested to see if altruistic motives would diminish among beginning child care workers over the years (Hypothesis 1.3). When the workers were divided into two and three cohorts, according to the time they graduated, the following results were found.

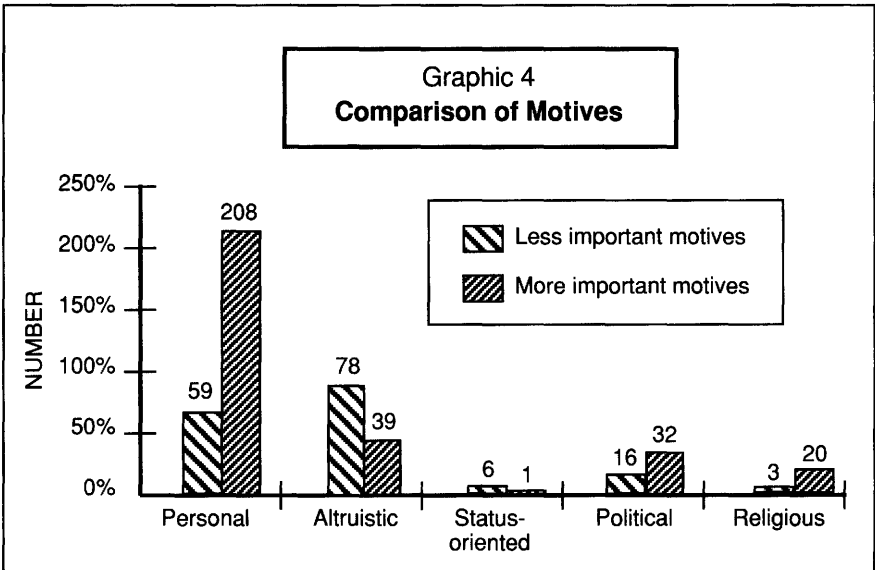


Personal motives decreased continually at the cost of the altruistic motives. In the oldest cohort (those who graduated between 1957 and 1972) more than half of the weight points fell within the altruistic reasons, while among the most recent graduates (1979-1984), over half of the points fell in the personal category.

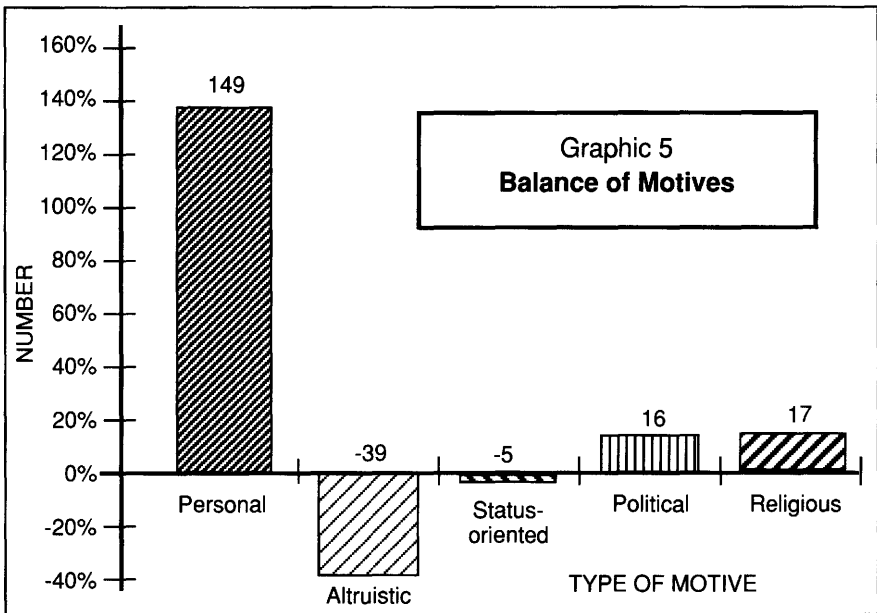
2. The workers had surprisingly consistent motivations. From 1,205 respondents, only 161 responded that their present motives for choosing the profession would have been different. All of the others would have selected the profession of child care worker again for the same reasons. When asked if they would again select the profession of child care work today, 79% responded "Yes," 16% "No," and 5% did not respond.



Therefore, only 14% indicated a shift in their motivational structure. Graphic #4 illustrates how often each motivational category today among these 161 persons is considered less important or more important. More than one response was possible:



The "movements" in the three categories considered less relevant are slight. Personal aspects today carried much more weight (208 responses of "more important" as compared with 59 "less important") and the relationships among the altruistic motives are correspondingly inverse. If the statements of this minority group (14%) are gathered together in a purely additive fashion, the result is almost a "Balance of Motivation":



The high positive valence of the now "more important" personal reasons is quite obvious. In the category of altruistic motives there is a negative valence: the weighted points for today "less important" are in a positive direction. On the other hand, the categories "Status orientation" (-5), "political" (+16), and "religious" are negligible.

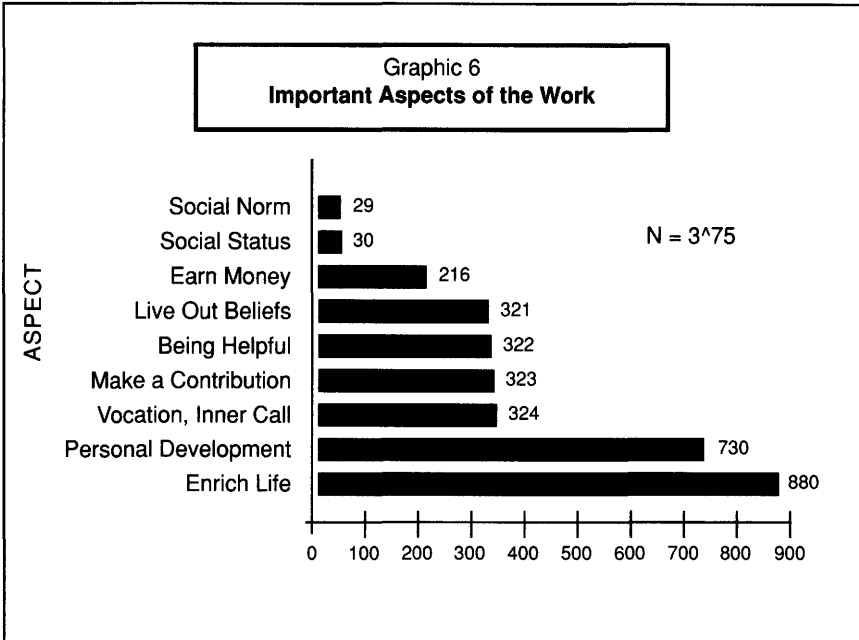
3. What the motivational aspects have to do with the practical activity of the child care worker is illustrated by two of the most frequently given responses:

Response "h" was indicated as important 880 times: "I work as a child care worker to enrich my life through contact with other persons and situations."

Response "f" was given 730 times: "I work as a child care worker because it gives me the possibility of developing personally."

The responses “d” (vocation, 324 times); “c” (make a contribution to humanity, 323 times); and “d” (can live out an inner call or conviction, 321 times) were chosen practically the same number of times. External aspects such as earning money or social status received little weight.

Graphic #6 illustrates the findings in an overview.



Discussion

Hypothesis 1.1, which states that political, religious, and status-oriented motives play an insignificant role in the selection of the profession, is clearly corroborated by the results. Young persons apparently do not enter professional training because they see an opportunity to change society or to live out their religious convictions or even to achieve higher status or prestige than in some other profession. The latter is not surprising; most of those surveyed were not certain how good the public image of the child care worker is.

On the other hand, Hypothesis 1.2 is rejected: Altruistic motives are clearly less important than personal. Therefore, for the most part, child care workers choose their profession because they see possibilities for personal development and greater job satisfaction, fulfillment in associ-

ating with children and youth, and for other similar reasons. Contrary to expectation, the altruistic component "desire to help" is not so important; this aspect distinctly trailed behind the other. And so, on this basis, it cannot be concluded that child care workers are simply content with their profession only because they are in it for others and can be engaged with others. The members of this professional group are just as enthusiastic as the majority of today's employees to practice their profession for themselves and for the satisfaction of their needs – a fact which training schools, in the admission of students, as well as administrators and employers, in the hiring process, ought to keep in view because, otherwise, discrepancies in expectations arise very rapidly.

These statements become underscored by the verification of Hypothesis 1.3. The motives for selection of the profession by trainees who graduated at the end of the 1970s clearly changed from altruistic back to personal. The comparison of the three cohorts leads us to assume that this is a case of continuous change that has quite possibly not yet come to an end. Whether this has to do with a stronger egocentrism or is an expression of the fact that the current generation feels more free to express how it feels, cannot be distinguished on the basis of this research. Possibly, a number of such factors work together in the same direction.

Hypothesis 2.1 must be rejected: only 14% of respondents cannot stand today on the same bases of choice that were relevant previously. All others maintain the same bases of choice even after an average of 4 to 5 years distance from graduation. Although this stability is surprising, it can be suggested that the profession of child care work is taken up as a second profession at an age at which personalities are already fairly fixed. Moreover, two thirds of these respondents have already had training in another profession prior to this training, which can account for their fairly clear conceptualizations of their wishes and motivations regarding a profession. It must, therefore, be concluded that residential child care workers seem to have consistent motives for selecting their profession.

Hypothesis 2.2 was proven correct in its entirety: personal bases would today be clearly more important among those who had changed their positions in the meanwhile, and altruistic motives would clearly recede into the background.

Surprisingly, an even more highly significant connection between both of the quantities holds true (chi square 25.99, $df = 1$): The person who today would have had fewer altruistic motives emphasizes all the more the importance of personal factors in the selection of profession.

This same development also seems to hold true among the age cohorts. However, this appears to be not only a question of the time period in which training took place (the 50s and 60s vs. the 70s) as the examination of Hypothesis 1.3 can demonstrate, but also of variations among individuals. Whether or not this is an indicator that the self-understanding of the helping professions has changed in the last few years is a matter for further investigation. More interesting is the highly significant connection between the changes of motives and the answer to the question whether or not the profession of residential care worker would still be selected today ($p = 0.0001$). Persons who would reach this same decision again at the time of questioning show significantly less shifting of motives for selection of profession, which permits the interpretation that those who leave a profession, in retrospect, consider their motives for selection of their profession to be false – and possibly have also left because of this.

The results of Hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2 point in a similar direction. Whereas 3.1 is rejected (“Altruistic motives will be mentioned most often”), 3.2 holds true on a surprisingly large scale: the aspects of personal but also nonmaterialistic gain are absolutely preponderant.

Residential child care workers obviously can be active in their profession because there it is possible for them “to enrich [their] lives in discussions with other persons and in other situations,” and because they have been given the possibility “also to progress personally.” Both of these items together comprise 51.7% of the factors mentioned, which is equivalent to a verification of the trend already discovered in Hypotheses 1.3 and 2.2. Nevertheless, the four responses which were mentioned about 320 times are not negligible. All of them can be subsumed under the concept “altruistic.” This fact leads to the following interpretation. On the one hand, the total of 1,209 responses (40.6%) are not negligible, which means that the altruistic motives are certainly not dominant but are still quite clearly present. On the other hand, the proportionate distribution of the four motives over the four categories shows that the altruism of the respondents is clearly divided into very different ideal and religious value systems. In regard to their attitude toward and their motivation for the profession, residential child care workers, therefore, seem to portray a true replica of our pluralistic, Western society.

Hypothesis 3.3 is clearly confirmed: Factors associated with money or prestige do not hold residential child care workers in their profession; at least they might show, with their statements to the interviewers, and perhaps also to themselves, that they are independent of such external considerations.

Summary

With the help of written responses from more than 1,000 trained residential child care workers, this study examines motives for entering the profession and the factors which they themselves consider most important in their work. It appears that personal and altruistic motives comprise the most important groups of motives. However, it also becomes clear that the personal motives ("to develop oneself," "to enrich one's life," etc.) have, in the last few years, clearly gained in strength, at the cost of the altruistic ("Helper") motives. This shift is evident not only between the cohorts of graduates of the 50s and 60s and the last few years but also within individual respondents, in the course of their careers, independent of the time when they graduated. Nevertheless, while altruistic motives certainly do not have their roots in one unitary view of the world and one set of basic attitudes but in very diverse sets of world views and of basic attitudes, they still contribute to the professional motives of practicing residential child care workers.

About the author:

Juerg Schoch, PhD, was appointed Director of the Protestant Teachers' College in Zurich, Switzerland, in March, 1990. His father has been the director of a group home for many years, and so Juerg has a long familiarity with residential care. He has been a secondary school teacher. At the University of Zurich he completed studies in social pedagogy, applied psychology, and theology, and served as a lecturer there. In 1989, he completed his doctorate at the university; his dissertation is entitled "Determinants of Turnover in Residential Child and Youth Care Work."

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