

A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions and Experiences of Volunteers in the Field of Disability: The Case of Bandırma

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of individuals involved in volunteering for people with disabilities. This research seeks to contribute to the literature by addressing the intersection of volunteering and disability. The significance of the study lies in revealing the impact of volunteering on both volunteers and people with disabilities and in shedding light on social integration processes. Using a qualitative research method, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 volunteers involved in activities for people with disabilities in the Bandırma district of Balıkesir province. The findings reveal the diversity of motivations for volunteering, the transformative effect of the volunteering experience, the complex nature of perceptions of disability, and the ongoing change in societal attitudes. In addition, the emotional responses of people with disabilities and suggestions for improving social integration are presented. The results point to the potential of volunteering activities to transform the societal perceptions of people with disabilities and emphasise the need for a multidimensional approach in this field. This study offers practical insights for the design and implementation of volunteering programmes. In this context, this research contributes to efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: Disability, Volunteering, Volunteer Motivation, Volunteering Experience, Volunteer Perception

Introduction

Volunteering is defined as contributions made by individuals without expecting any financial return, with the aim of providing societal benefit. This concept brings individuals together based on values such as social solidarity and mutual assistance. Voluntary activities, particularly those carried out with individuals with disabilities, not only provide interpersonal support but also foster social sensitivity and awareness. Volunteering for individuals with disabilities offers support that enhances the quality of life for disabled people and contributes to the development of empathy skills among volunteers. These activities also can positively transform the societal perceptions of individuals with disabilities.

This study aims to gain a closer understanding of the experiences of individuals who volunteer with people with disabilities. The focus of the research is on volunteers' perceptions of disability, the motivations influencing their decision to volunteer, and the benefits they derive from these experiences. The study seeks to uncover how these voluntary interactions with individuals with disabilities resonate with the emotions and thoughts of the volunteers.

On the other hand, volunteering is discussed as a subtopic within civil society debates, and the literature in Turkey often concentrates on systemic, structural, and institutional issues. This intense focus appears to limit a comprehensive examination of the concept of volunteering. Topics such as what volunteering means in Turkish society, the values through which it is conceptualised, the types of volunteer networks that exist, how these networks are formed, what kind of volunteering culture exists in society and the place of volunteering in the societal mindset have not been adequately addressed from various perspectives (Kesgin, 2016).

In this context, the study was conducted to understand the perceptions and experiences of volunteers engaged in activities for individuals with disabilities in Bandırma. This research, conducted with participants of various ages, professions, and levels of experience, provides a more comprehensive examination of the interaction processes between volunteers and individuals with disabilities. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the societal awareness of volunteering activities for individuals

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Submitted: 12.08.2024 • **Revision Requested:** 04.10.2024 • **Last Revision Received:** 25.11.2024 • **Accepted:** 28.11.2024



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with disabilities. Accordingly, the research emphasises the significance of volunteering activities for individuals with disabilities in fostering a more inclusive society.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Volunteering

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon that occupies an important place in the social fabric of modern societies and is a tangible manifestation of social solidarity. In its most general definition, volunteering refers to activities in which individuals invest their time and effort for the benefit of society, without expectation of material reward and of their own free will (Haski-Leventhal, 2009).

According to another definition, volunteering can be described as the act of an individual providing support to a social initiative, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), or voluntary activities that they believe to be right, with the aim of enhancing people's quality of life and contributing to the public good, without expecting any financial gain or personal benefit. This support is carried out through legal and institutional frameworks. Volunteers undertake a variety of tasks in numerous areas of daily life, such as health, education, sports, environmental protection, social services, aid, libraries, park arrangements, traffic, cultural activities, and services for the elderly, women, children, individuals with disabilities, the poor, and the needy (Palabiyik, 2011).

Moreover, volunteers make significant contributions to NGOs in many ways, beginning with helping these organisations fulfil their missions. Notably, the number of qualified volunteers an NGO possesses is considered an indicator of the organisation's success. Additionally, the diverse knowledge and skills of volunteers, along with their ability to present creative and innovative approaches, constitute a substantial advantage for the organisation. Through this, NGOs gain the opportunity to evaluate issues from different perspectives and acquire fresh, innovative insights. Every new and professional contribution brings tangible benefits to the efficiency of the organisation (Güngör & Çölgeçen, 2013).

From a sociological perspective, the concept of volunteering can be linked to Emile Durkheim's (1984) theory of organic solidarity. This theory, which emphasises the interdependence and mutual responsibility of individuals with different functions within the complex structure of modern societies, helps to explain the role of volunteering practises in social integration.

Volunteering is seen not only as an aid activity but also as a form of active citizenship and civic participation. In this context, it is closely related to Robert Putnam's (1994) concept of social capital. Volunteering contributes to the strengthening of social capital by increasing social trust and cooperation.

The motivations for volunteering are multidimensional and can be explained by different theoretical approaches. For example, Clary and Snyder's (1999) Volunteer Functions Inventory examines these motivations under six main headings: values, understanding, social, career, protection and enhancement. This multifaceted approach allows us to consider the individual and social functions of volunteering together.

Volunteering is also closely related to identity formation and self-perception. In the context of the symbolic interactionism theory (Mead, 1934), the volunteering experience allows individuals to redefine themselves and their social roles. This process contributes to the enhancement of the individual's self-efficacy while facilitating the internalisation of social norms and values.

In summary, the concept of volunteering is a multidimensional phenomenon that needs to be addressed in a broad spectrum ranging from individual motivations to social structures. This practise, which strengthens social solidarity, promotes active citizenship and increases social capital, is crucial for the sustainability and social cohesion of modern societies. While developing individuals' sense of social responsibility, volunteering also allows for the production of creative and participatory solutions to social problems.

The Concept of Disability

Disability is a complex concept that has changed throughout history and is constantly being reshaped by social perceptions and scientific approaches. It is a multifaceted phenomenon with biological, psychological and social dimensions (Thomas, 2004).

From a historical perspective, the understanding and definition of disability has evolved significantly. While traditional approaches treated disability as an individual "defect" or "deficiency," modern approaches have radically changed this perspective.

Three basic models stand out in understanding the concept of disability: (Bampi, Guilhem, & Alves, 2010)

1. The medical model: This model sees disability as an individual health problem and a condition that needs to be "corrected" through medical interventions. This approach positions disability as an individual problem.

2. Social model: Developed in the 1970s, this model argues that disability is produced by social structures and attitudes. According to this approach, the real barrier is not physical or mental differences but society's inability to adapt to these differences.
3. Biopsychosocial model: This current approach, adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), sees disability as an interaction of biological, psychological and social factors. It is a synthesis of medical and social models.

Today, the concept of disability is also approached from a human rights perspective. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) defines disability as a human rights issue and emphasises the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in social life.

Within this framework, the concept of disability is a phenomenon with complex social, cultural and political dimensions that goes beyond a simple description of a medical condition. An understanding of this concept is essential to design social structures, institutions and policies in accordance with the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. Disability should be accepted as a natural part of diversity and difference, and social inclusion should be shaped on the basis of this understanding.

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations for Understanding Volunteering and the Perceptions of Disability

In this section of the study, some prominent concepts and theories are presented to provide an opportunity to interpret volunteers' perceptions and experiences of people with disabilities from a more complex and multifaceted perspective. This theoretical underpinning is intended to contribute to a more in-depth analysis of the thematic findings of the study and to highlight the underlying mechanisms of these findings.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), the symbolic interactionism theory argues that social reality and individuals' selves are constructed through interactions that occur through symbols and meanings. According to Mead, individuals develop their selves and social roles by taking the perspective of others (role taking). Language and symbols play a crucial role in this process. According to the theory, people respond to objects and events based on the meanings they attach to them, and these meanings are created and modified through social interaction. As a micro-sociological approach, symbolic interactionism focuses on face-to-face interactions in everyday life and examines how social structures are produced and maintained through these interactions (Stryker, 2008, p. 16; Mead, 1934). In this context, Mead's Symbolic Interactionism Theory can provide significant insights into how volunteers interact with symbols during their volunteering activities in the field of disability and other areas, and how these interactions shape their motivations and experiences.

Stigma Theory

Erving Goffman's (1963) theory explains that society stigmatises individuals by labelling certain characteristics or behaviours as 'abnormal', and that this stigmatisation profoundly affects individuals' identities and social interactions. Stigmatisation occurs when an individual has a characteristic that deviates from what is considered 'normal' and this situation damages the individual's social identity. Goffman suggests that stigmatised individuals develop different strategies to cope with this situation. The theory provides an important framework for understanding how social norms and expectations shape the lives of individuals and the mechanisms of social exclusion (Goffman, 1963). The motivations and experiences of individuals participating in volunteering activities can also be shaped depending on their perceptions within the society. Stigmatisation theory can provide a theoretical perspective to understand why volunteers volunteer, how they participate in volunteering activities and how they are affected by this process.

Social Constructionism Theory

Developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991), this theory argues that reality is socially constructed. According to Berger and Luckmann, social reality is created, maintained and transformed through the interactions and shared meanings of individuals. The theory emphasises the social origins of knowledge and reality and draws attention to the role of language and institutions in this process. Social constructionism explains how the reality of everyday life is objectified, legitimised and internalised. This approach emphasises that social phenomena are not natural or inevitable, but emerge as a result of human interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, pp. 183-193). However, the perceptions and experiences of individuals participating in

volunteering activities are also shaped by social relations and social structures. In this context, the theory can help to assess how volunteers construct meanings in social contexts and how these meanings affect their participation in volunteering activities.

Cultural Capital and Habitus

These terms, coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), express the cultural knowledge, skills and dispositions that shape the social positions and behaviours of individuals. Cultural capital includes the cultural resources (education, knowledge of the arts, language skills, etc.) that an individual possesses and that confer a social advantage. Habitus, on the other hand, is a product of social structures that individuals have internalised and that guide their actions. It expresses the tendencies of individuals to think, perceive and behave in ways that are specific to a particular social class or group. Through these concepts, Bourdieu explains how social inequalities are reproduced and examines the relationships between class, power and culture (Bourdieu, 1986). In this context, the perceptions, motivations and experiences of individuals participating in volunteering activities are closely related to this cultural capital. For example, an individual's level of education, cultural background and social environment may affect his/her decision to participate in volunteering activities. Similarly, whether volunteering activities are valued or not in an individual's social environment may affect this individual's approach to volunteering.

Transformative Learning Theory

Developed by Jack Mezirow (1991), this theory argues that adult learning occurs when individuals challenge and transform their assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives. According to Mezirow, transformative learning is a process that radically changes an individual's worldview and frames of meaning. This process usually begins with a "disorienting dilemma" and leads individuals to question their existing assumptions. The theory emphasises the importance of critical thinking, reflection and dialog and aims for individuals to become more autonomous and critical thinkers. Transformative learning is seen as a powerful tool for social change and personal development (Mezirow, 1991). Individuals who participate in volunteering activities often experience such transformations. Volunteering experiences can lead to transformations such as broadening individuals' perspectives, developing empathy and increasing awareness of social responsibility. Mezirow's theory can be useful to explain how such transformations occur and how individuals are affected by this process.

Social Capital Theory

From the perspective of Robert Putnam (1994), this theory emphasises the impact of social networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity on social cooperation and economic development. Social capital refers to the network of social relationships and connections that individuals and groups possess. Putnam argues that this capital increases social participation, improves the functioning of democratic institutions, and promotes economic development. The theory distinguishes between "bonding" (between similar groups) and "bridging" (between different groups) types of social capital. Putnam suggests that social capital is declining in modern societies and highlights the potential dangers to social cohesion and democracy (Putnam, 1994). Individuals who participate in volunteering activities often act as a part of social capital. Social capital emerges through strong relationships, mutual trust, and solidarity between individuals. Volunteers' motivations and experiences can also be shaped by this social capital.

Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory explains human motivation in terms of a hierarchy. This hierarchy extends from the most basic physiological needs (such as food and sleep) through security, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualisation needs at the top. According to the theory, higher-level needs cannot be addressed until lower-level needs are met. Maslow defines self-actualisation as the full realisation of human potential. This theory has been widely used to understand and motivate human behaviour, but it has also been criticised for not taking sufficient account of cultural differences (Maslow, 1943). This hierarchy can be an important tool for understanding why volunteers volunteer, what needs they aim to fulfil and what kind of satisfaction they derive from their volunteering experience.

Looking Glass Self

This concept, introduced by Charles Horton Cooley (1902), suggests that an individual's self-perception reflects the perception of others. According to Cooley, the self is formed in three stages: the individual imagines how they appear in the eyes of others, thinks about how others judge this appearance, and develops a sense of self (such as pride or shame) based on this judgement. This theory explains how the self is shaped by social interactions and emphasises the impact of social interaction on individual identity. The concept of the mirror self has an important place in social psychology and symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902; Swingewood, 1998). In this context, volunteers' motivations and experiences can also be shaped by the reflections of other people. For example, when a volunteer is appreciated or supported by others in his/her work, this can increase the volunteer's motivation and help him/her to have positive experiences.

Emotional Labour

Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour refers to the effort individuals make to display emotions that meet professional or social expectations. Emotional labour is particularly evident in situations where service workers should display or suppress certain emotions in their interactions with customers. Hochschild distinguishes between surface acting (displaying emotions without actually feeling them) and deep acting (trying to actually feel those emotions). The theory examines how emotions are commodified in the modern workplace and the potential negative effects on employees (Hochschild, 1983). In this context, volunteers' efforts to demonstrate emotional labour can influence their engagement and commitment. For example, a volunteer may feel more motivated and have more positive experiences by building an emotional connection and showing empathy with those in need.

Structuration Theory

Anthony Giddens' (1986) structuration theory emphasises the interaction between social structures and individual actions. According to Giddens, while structures (rules and resources) shape actions, actions also reproduce or transform structures. This is called the "duality of structure." The theory argues that individuals are not completely determined by structures, but rather can change structures. Giddens suggests that actors have "structural awareness" and can anticipate the consequences of their actions. Structuration theory aims to bridge micro- and macro-sociological approaches and provides an important framework for understanding the dynamics of social change (Giddens, 1986). Giddens' structuration theory can be used to explain how these social structures (e.g. norms, expectations, rules of society) influence volunteers' motivations and experiences.

Literature Review

Although there is no study specifically on volunteers in NGOs operating in the field of disability in the Turkish literature, there are many studies on volunteer perceptions, experiences and motivations. Some of these studies will be discussed under this heading.

In one of these studies, Çakı (2014) addressed the issue of volunteerism in the context of Turkish sociological literature. The aim of this article is to examine how the discourse on volunteering is constructed in Turkey and to question how compatible this discourse is with the reality of Turkey. This study analyzes books, articles, theses and reports on volunteerism in Turkey using a qualitative research method. In this context, Çakı argues that the literature on volunteerism in Turkish sociology is constructed within the framework of Western concepts and concerns and glorifies modern (institutional/organisational) volunteerism while belittling traditional volunteerism. In this literature, volunteerism is presented as one of the main characteristics of the modern individual and society, and it is argued that the low rates of volunteerism in Turkey are an obstacle to social development. However, this literature ignores the widespread phenomenon of 'informal volunteering' in Turkey. Unregistered volunteering refers to volunteering activities that are carried out especially in the networks of religious communities and sects and are not recorded in official records. Due to the prevalence of such activities, the actual volunteering rates in Turkey are likely to be much higher than those reflected in existing research. This situation also leads to misleading results in comparisons of volunteering research in Turkey with Western countries. Çakı argues that volunteering research in Turkey draws wrong conclusions based on incomplete data and that unregistered volunteering should be investigated and recorded. In this way, he argues, a more realistic picture of volunteering rates in Turkey can be presented and the activities of congregations and sects can be made more transparent.

Another study was conducted by Balaban and İnce (2015). In the study, young people's perceptions of volunteering activities were analysed using the example of the Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey (TEGV). The focus of the study is to reveal the perception of volunteering and the meaning they attribute to volunteering activities through interviews with educational park

supervisors and young volunteers at TEGV. According to the results of the research, volunteer supervisors and young volunteers agreed on the basic elements of the concept of volunteering. In particular, they attributed positive meanings to volunteering, emphasising unpaid responsibility and volunteering for love.

Another study was conducted by Ardahan (2016). The aim of the study was to examine volunteering as a serious leisure activity in the context of the AKUT (Search and Rescue Association) urban operations team and to determine the profile of volunteers. The study was conducted with data collected from 408 AKUT volunteers and analysed using demographic information and a motivation scale. The results show that volunteers are mostly interested in outdoor sports and prefer to spend time with family and friends. Volunteering is seen as a serious life practise rather than an ordinary leisure activity.

In their study, Çevik and Gürsel (2015) adapted the Voluntary Motivation Inventory (VMI) to Turkish society. The results showed that linguistic equivalence of the Turkish form with the original form was achieved, and 43 items of the inventory were appropriate in Turkish culture. These results indicated that the 10 sub-dimensions of the inventory, namely values, esteem, social interaction, reciprocity, responsiveness, self-esteem, social, career development, understanding and protective motivational themes, were also valid in Turkish culture.

Muştu (2019) provided an in-depth analysis of the motivations of young Red Crescent volunteers using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A survey of 293 volunteers and three focus group interviews with 23 volunteers shed light on young people's reasons for volunteering and their expectations from volunteering. According to the findings, the sources of motivation for young Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers can be categorised into five main dimensions. These are: developing self-worth, learning through the community, developing personal relationships, serving the community, and personal development.

Gülmez (2019) determines the volunteering behaviours and motivations of university students and to identify the volunteering profile of these students. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to 376 students studying at Çağ University in the 2017-2018 academic year. Because of the research, it was found that the participation rate of students in volunteering activities was 31.1%, and that this participation was mostly within unofficial individual initiatives or non-profit organisations. An analysis of students' motivations for volunteering showed that the altruistic dimension (awareness of helping others and the sense of well-being that comes from helping others) was the most important, followed by the utilitarian dimension (CV enhancement and professional contacts) and the sociability dimension (impact on the immediate environment). In addition, female students were found to be more motivated than male students in both the altruism and utilitarianism dimensions.

Bektaş (2021) investigated the volunteering motivation of 301 volunteers who participated in sports events in Turkey between 2018 and 2020. Some differences in volunteering motivations were observed according to the demographic characteristics of the participants. For example, it was found that volunteers who were licenced athletes had higher purposive motivation than volunteers who were not licenced athletes. It was also found that volunteers who had been licenced athletes for 6 years or more had higher levels of commitment motivation than volunteers who had been licenced athletes for 1-3 years. However, no statistically significant difference was found between the volunteers' levels of motivation according to other demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational status and occupation.

The results of the study indicate that volunteer coordinators at sports events should develop different strategies to increase volunteer motivation and prevent volunteer attrition.

In their study, Altun and Demirişler (2023) analysed the motivations of women volunteers in women's associations to participate in volunteering activities and their experiences in this process in a descriptive framework using qualitative methods. The results show that the participants' motivations for volunteering are shaped by factors such as spiritual/spiritual fulfilment, sensitivity to women's problems and a desire to help. In addition to the benefits of volunteering, such as spiritual contribution, broadening the environment, socialisation and personal development, disadvantages such as less time for family, witnessing difficulties and workload were also identified.

In another study, Sadıkoğlu (2024) aims to examine the elements and dynamics that create problems in the relationship between NGOs and volunteers in Turkey and to investigate the link between volunteers' expectations and volunteering experiences through the concept of a psychological contract. According to the findings of the qualitative study, there are problems in the relational dimension of the psychological contract of volunteers in Turkey related to the development of belonging to NGOs. In addition, the fact that the volunteer is not recognised as a stakeholder within the organisational structure of the NGOs and that the contribution of the volunteer is not sufficiently valued makes it difficult for the volunteer to belong to the NGO and causes a violation of the psychological contract in the relational dimension. On the transactional dimension, there are problems related to the volunteer management processes of NGOs. The lack of a professional approach from the first contact with the volunteer and the lack of a framework of rights and responsibilities of the volunteer lead to violations in the transactional dimension.

Aslan and Tuncay (2024) examined the perceptions of volunteerism of volunteers and managers involved in volunteer activities in the field of child welfare in Turkey, based on their volunteering experiences. The results of the qualitative study show that the

perception of volunteering has a multidimensional structure at the personal, family and social environment and community levels. At the personal level, volunteering was associated with positive concepts such as social welfare, active citizenship, responsibility, solidarity and helping, win-win, giving time, being sincere and unpaid, and contributing to change. At the family and social level, perceptions of volunteering include positive views such as appreciation, as well as negative views such as mistrust and fear, wasting time, and not seeing management in NGOs as a serious job. At the societal level, volunteering can be perceived as unpaid work, as an activity with no economic return and as an area to be feared, indicating a negative perspective.

Looking at the English literature, there are not many studies on healthy adults volunteering for people with disabilities. However, there are studies on volunteering by people with disabilities. For example, in a study conducted in Israel in 2019, Yanay-Ventura aimed to explore the experiences and insights of volunteers with disabilities in NGOs, focusing on their contributions and the impact of volunteering on their lives. Using a qualitative narrative case study approach, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the volunteers to collect comprehensive narratives about their motivations, experiences, and challenges. The findings revealed that volunteering not only empowers people with disabilities by giving them the opportunity to share their unique perspectives and advocate for their communities, but also highlights the importance of their role in promoting inclusion and social change. The study highlights the importance of recognising the voices of disabled people in volunteering and suggests that their experiences can inform effective practises and models for engaging disabled volunteers.

In another study, Markova (2018) aimed to explore the factors that influence the volunteering experiences of people with disabilities in the Czech Republic, focusing on the concept of inclusive volunteering. The research includes qualitative interviews with 25 participants with a range of disabilities to gather in-depth information about their motivations, experiences and challenges when volunteering. The findings reveal a low level of interdependence between volunteering and the lives of people with disabilities and highlight the need for greater inclusion and support to promote an inclusive society. The study highlights the importance of understanding the unique perspectives of volunteers with disabilities to increase their participation and the overall effectiveness of volunteering programmes.

In another study, Wicki and Meier (2016) developed a heuristic model to support volunteering among people with intellectual disabilities in Switzerland. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a study group of six volunteers with intellectual disabilities. The findings revealed that, with appropriate support, people with intellectual disabilities can volunteer under the same conditions as volunteers without disabilities.

In another study conducted in Israel, Kulik (2018) examined the differences in self-esteem between volunteers with and without physical disabilities. The research sample included 160 Israeli participants with various physical disabilities. Of these, 95 were volunteers and 65 were not. According to the results, participants who volunteered had higher self-esteem than those who did not volunteer. The results underline the compensatory role of volunteering for people with disabilities.

On the other hand, there are also articles in the literature about the motivations and experiences of volunteering. In this context, the results of a study conducted by Burns et al. among university students in 2006 show that altruism is involved in each of the different motivations that young adults have for volunteering. Similarly, in another study conducted on university students in Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Serbia, Bocs, Fényes and Markos (2017) concluded that there is no universal model or category of volunteering motivations. Students' reasons for volunteering and values differ between countries and ethnic groups. Another interesting finding is that there is a group of unmotivated volunteers, which means that not all young volunteers do it with enthusiasm and strong motivation.

Method

This section provides information about the research design, the validity and reliability of the research, the study population, and the data collection and analysis process.

Research Design

In this study, the “phenomenological design,” one of the qualitative research designs, was preferred. Phenomenological design is a research approach that explores in depth individuals' experiences, perceptions and the meanings they attach to a particular phenomenon or experience. The main reason for choosing this design is to understand the essence of the experiences of individuals involved in volunteering for people with disabilities and to discover the meanings they attach to these experiences. The phenomenological approach allows for a holistic examination of different dimensions of the volunteering experience, focusing on the lived experiences of participants and revealing the common themes underlying these experiences (Martinkova & Parry, 2012). This design can enrich theoretical knowledge in the field by allowing an in-depth analysis of volunteers' subjective perceptions of their interactions with people with disabilities. In this context, the phenomenological design was considered the most appropriate

research design to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of volunteering for people with disabilities from the perspective of the individuals involved in these activities and to capture the essence of this experience.

On the other hand, previous studies on volunteering and disability in the literature are mostly cross-sectional and survey-based. Survey-based studies offer the possibility of collecting large amounts of data and performing statistical analysis on volunteering and disability issues.

However, this method cannot provide in-depth information about the emotional, social, and personal transformations of the participants. This study, on the other hand, incorporated the volunteers' original statements through semi-structured interviews and was able to understand individuals' motivations and perceptions of disability from their own perspective. This allowed for the emergence of individual stories and unique experiences that are lacking in quantitative approaches.

In addition, previous studies have generally treated volunteering as an individual phenomenon and have not adequately assessed the social and cultural contexts of volunteering experiences. The phenomenological design of this study explored how participants experienced volunteering in light of their social environment, cultural norms and social expectations. In this way, the relationship between volunteering and disability phenomena with social structure and sociological theories was explored in detail.

On the other hand, previous research has generally focused on either volunteering or disability in one direction, ignoring the experiences at the intersection of these two fields. By looking at the phenomena of volunteering and disability together, this research has revealed the complexity and multi-layered structure of volunteers' experiences in this area.

Validity and Reliability of the Research

A number of strategies were employed in this study to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. First, the research questions were developed on the basis of an extensive literature review, which strengthened the content validity. The semi-structured interview questions were submitted to two independent experts for review, thereby enhancing the construct validity.

During the data collection process, audio recordings of the interviews were used and carefully transcribed. To increase reliability and ensure participant endorsement, the transcribed texts were shown to the participants for their approval. This practise ensured the accuracy and integrity of the data (Golafshani, 2003).

Study Group

The population of the study consists of individuals who are involved in voluntary activities for disabled people, and Bandırma district of Balıkesir province was selected as the region where the research was conducted. The reason for choosing Bandırma is that there are certain NGOs in this region where volunteers working with disabled people are active and it is possible to conduct a field study to understand the impact of the volunteer activities of these organisations on the local community. In addition, Bandırma is located in a place where researchers can easily reach volunteers and civil society organisations in the region. This situation both facilitates the data collection process and allows for in-depth interviews with individuals who are actively involved in volunteer activities. Ease of access was considered as a supporting factor for the effective conduct of the research.

In contrast to quantitative research, the selection of the population and sample in qualitative research is aimed at obtaining in-depth information rather than representing a large population. Therefore, in qualitative studies, the sample consists of individuals with relevant experience to understand a particular phenomenon in detail and strategies such as "purposive sampling" are used (Patton, 2002). This approach provides depth of meaning and contextual information by focusing on selecting individuals who can best answer the research questions. In this context, this study identified a study group consisting of individuals involved in voluntary activities for the disabled in Bandırma. In accordance with the objectives of the study, 12 participants who volunteer in different NGOs that regularly provide support to people with disabilities were selected using the purposive sampling method. The study group comprised volunteers in the field of physical, mental and developmental disabilities, and most of them perform their volunteer activities within the framework of non-governmental organisations operating at the local level.

On the other hand, when the data collected in the qualitative research reaches a level that provides sufficient answers to the research questions, the data collection process can be stopped. In other words, when data saturation is reached, the information obtained from the participants begins to repeat itself and the researcher finds that he/she cannot add any new insight or different perspective. Data saturation is important to increase reliability, particularly in research that focuses on in-depth exploration, such as phenomenological research, and supports the integrity of research findings (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In this context, data collection in this study was stopped as it was felt that data saturation was reached at the 12th participant. These participants were selected on the basis that they had experience of volunteering with people with disabilities and had the knowledge and awareness to share this experience in depth.

This study group also reflects the local context of the research. Understanding the dynamics, challenges and potentials of volunteering for people with disabilities in Bandırma can both contribute to the development of policies and practises at the local level and provide a point of comparison for studies conducted in similar contexts.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education Level	Volunteering Experience
K1	21	Female	Student	Bachelor's Student	6-12 Months
K2	20	Male	Student	Bachelor's Student	6-12 Months
K3	23	Male	Student	Bachelor's Student	1-2 Years
K4	21	Female	Student	Bachelor's Student	6-12 Months
K5	22	Female	Student	Bachelor's Student	6-12 Months
K6	23	Female	Student	Bachelor's Student	1-2 Years
K7	56	Male	Civil Servant	Postgraduate	Over 2 Years
K8	56	Male	Civil Servant	Postgraduate	Over 2 Years
K9	36	Male	Worker	High School	Over 2 Years
K10	49	Male	Unemployed	Primary School	Over 2 Years
K11	42	Male	Worker	High School	1-2 Years
K12	63	Male	Retired	High School	Over 2 Years

Limitations of the study

As this research was conducted with a limited number of participants involved in volunteering for people with disabilities in Bandırma, it is difficult to generalise the findings to other regions or a wider population. Although the use of qualitative methods in the study provided an in-depth insight into the volunteers' experiences, it limits the validation of the findings in a wider population. As the process of collecting data through interviews relied on the participants' ability to express themselves, some participants may not have been able to fully convey their feelings and thoughts. In addition, the fact that the research was conducted over a specific period may have ignored the time-varying dimensions of volunteering experiences. The limited diversity of the volunteer profile also limits the reliability of the findings. Finally, the involvement of the researcher in the data collection and analysis process is a factor that may influence the interpretations.

Data Collection Process

In phenomenological studies, various data collection techniques can be used to understand and reveal the phenomenon under study. These techniques include interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and document review (Kleiman, 2004). In this research, the interview technique was preferred to understand the phenomenon of volunteering for people with disabilities through the experiences and perceptions of the participants. In the semi-structured interview form, participants were asked 12 questions. These questions are as follows:

1. How did you decide to become a volunteer?
2. What does it mean to you to be a volunteer?
3. How do you feel when you volunteer?
4. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of volunteering?
5. How do the activities you do as a volunteer affect your daily life?
6. Why did you choose to volunteer in the field of disability?
7. What does disability mean to you?
8. What do you think about society's view of disabled people?
9. How do you think society should view disabled people?
10. How would you describe the bond between you and other volunteers in the organisation where you volunteer?
11. What do you think about the feelings of the disabled people you volunteer with?
12. What do you think should be done to solve the problems of disabled people? What are your suggestions?

The interviews were conducted with individuals who volunteer in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for people with disabilities in Bandırma district, Balıkesir province. The data collection process was completed between February 2024 and April 2024.

Research ethics and participants' rights were carefully considered, and each participant was provided with detailed information about the subject and purpose of the study before the interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to review the questions

before the interview began and were clearly informed of their right to stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. This approach was designed to ensure voluntary and informed participation in the interview process.

In order to avoid data loss and to be able to refer accurately to participants' statements during the analysis process, it was planned to audio record the interviews. Therefore, separate consent for audio recording was obtained from each participant. To ensure that participants felt comfortable with the audio recording and were able to express their thoughts freely, assurances were given that the recordings would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University with meeting number 2024-1 and letter dated 02/01/2024.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data obtained in this study was carried out according to the phenomenological research approach. The analysis process understood the essence of the participants' experiences of volunteering for people with disabilities and the meanings they attached to these experiences.

In the first stage, the audio recordings were carefully listened to, transcribed, and transcriptions made. The researcher became familiar with the data and gained a general impression by repeatedly reading these texts. During this process, the researcher tried to understand the participants' experiences as they were, bracketing her own prejudices and assumptions.

In the next stage, phenomenological reduction was used to identify significant statements and meanings in the texts. These statements were grouped into codes that reflected the essence of the volunteering experience. Broad themes were then created by examining the relationships between these codes (Kleiman, 2004).

During the process of creating the themes, the technique of imaginative variation was used to interpret the experiences from different perspectives. This contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The generated themes were organised to reflect the similarities and differences of the participants' volunteering experiences (Giorgi, 1997).

In the final stage, the identified themes and codes were brought together to create a holistic description of the phenomenon of volunteering for people with disabilities. This description serves as a synthesis that reflects the essence of the participants' experiences (Williams & Moser, 2019).

To increase the reliability of the analysis process, the codes and themes created were reviewed by another researcher and a consensus was reached (Golafshani, 2003).

This systematic and rigorous analysis process ensured an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of volunteering for people with disabilities and revealed the different dimensions of this experience. The findings were organised to answer the research questions and reflect the essence of the volunteering experience. The qualitative analysis programme MAXQDA 2020 was used in the analysis process.

Findings and Discussion

Because of the phenomenological and thematic analysis, seven main themes were identified. These themes and their associated sub-codes are presented in Table 2. The emerging themes and sub-codes reflect the multi-layered and complex nature of the volunteering experience and perceptions of disability, covering a wide range from the internal motivations of individuals to social structures.

Table 2. Theme and Sub-Code Frequency Table

Theme	Sub-Code	Frequency	Participants
1. Volunteering Motivation	Desire to help	8	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P11, P12
	Personal experiences	3	P6, P7, P10
	Sense of social responsibility	5	P2, P3, P7, P9, P12
2. Meaning and Effects of Volunteering	Unconditional help	7	P2, P4, P5, P9, P11, P12
	Personal happiness and peace	9	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12
	Professional and personal development	6	P1, P3, P4, P6, P7
3. Perception of Disability	Disability as a difference	4	P1, P7, P9, P11
	Disability as a difficulty	3	P6, P7, P10
	Potential disability situation	3	P2, P6, P9
4. Society's View on People with Disabilities	Negative attitudes and exclusion	5	P1, P6, P7, P8, P10
	Unconsciousness and lack of awareness	4	P3, P6, P7, P10
	Increasing awareness and positive change	5	P9, P10, P11, P12
5. Emotions and Reactions of People with Disabilities	Happiness and gratitude	6	P5, P6, P11, P12
	Emotional fluctuations	3	P1, P4, P6
	Wanting to participate in society	3	P2, P7, P9
6. Solution Suggestions	Social awareness	5	P1, P3, P6, P9, P10
	Physical infrastructure improvements	3	P1, P4, P7
	Legal regulations and policy changes	4	P1, P2, P7, P11

NOTE: Some participants may have provided answers that fit more than one code, so the sum of frequencies may exceed the number of participants.

The diversity of these themes and sub-codes, while attempting to capture the phenomenological essence of the volunteering experience, also reveals the social, cultural and political context of this experience. Each theme covers a spectrum from micro-level individual experiences to macro-level social structures, reflecting the multifaceted nature of volunteering and disability

phenomena. What emerges from these themes is that volunteering for people with disabilities has the potential for both individual transformation and social change, but realising this potential requires systemic and holistic approaches.

Volunteering Motivation Theme

The first theme to emerge from the research is the motivation to volunteer. This theme explores the reasons why individuals participate in volunteering for people with disabilities and lies at the intersection of altruism and individual experience. The sub-codes of the desire to help, personal experiences, and sense of social responsibility reveal the dynamic interaction between the individual's inner world and societal expectations.

In this context, some of the participants' statements regarding the subcode of the desire to help are as follows:

P4: "I decided because I feel good when I help people in need."

P5: "I decided to volunteer because I love and appreciate people, to reach children who need more help in the field of disability, to offer them a better life, to help them live in better conditions".

P9: "When I saw people in need in society, I decided to help as a healthy person."

P11: "I always helped people in need in my neighbourhood. I in the association by meeting other friends in the association."

P12: "I tried to help because I saw people with disabilities. Thanks to my friend who is active here, I started to take part in the activities of the association as a volunteer."

Another prominent code in the theme of motivations for volunteering is **personal experience**, and some of the participants' statements are as follows:

P7: "I have an autistic son. We discovered he was autistic in 1993. That is when our process with people with disabilities started and I have been involved in activities, both voluntary and involuntary, for about 31 years since the child was diagnosed with autism."

P10: "I was in constant contact with other people with disabilities. I had friends in this association. When other disabled friends told me about their needs, I told my friends in the association. That is how I joined the association."

Similarly, we see that a **sense of social responsibility** is also an important source of motivation.

P2: "For me, it expresses responsibility for individuals in society. I can call them non-compulsory duties."

P3: "When I decided to volunteer, I wanted to raise awareness. That is why I volunteered."

P7: "After this process, we saw that this was a need and it became clear that we also had to contribute in order to benefit from such services. So since then, we have tried to provide services that other people can benefit from as much as we can."

P9: "'Where there is service to people, there is no need for idolatry. This saying has influenced me a lot. In other words, I try to help these people because it is more valuable than even worship, because supererogatory worship is worship that people do in addition to what Allah commands."

When the theme of "motivation to volunteer" and the emerging sub-codes are evaluated in the context of the literature, they reflect the complex interaction between individual motivations and social structures. However, this theme overlaps significantly with the motivational factors specified in Clary and Snyder's Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary & Snyder, 1999). In particular, the "values" (desire to help), "understanding" (personal experience), and "social" (sense of social responsibility) functions were prominent in the participants' statements. The findings are consistent with those of Balaban and İnce (2015). In their study, participants attributed positive meanings to volunteering, particularly emphasising selfless responsibility and volunteering based on love. Similarly, Muştu (2019) identified five main dimensions of volunteers' motivational sources in his research: developing self-worth, learning through community, building personal relationships, serving society, and personal development. In this context, the codes derived from this study are consistent with these findings.

On the other hand, the participants' desire to help can also be linked to Durkheim's (1984) concept of organic solidarity. In the complex structure of modern societies, the interdependence and mutual responsibility of individuals form the basis of the motivation to volunteer. Furthermore, the influence of personal experiences on the decision to volunteer can be explained by Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus. Individuals' past experiences and social positions shape their volunteering tendencies.

The sub-code of the sense of social responsibility can also be linked to Robert Putnam's (1994) theory of social capital. Volunteering contributes to strengthening social capital by increasing social trust and cooperation.

The Meaning and Effects of Volunteering

The second theme focuses on the meaning and impact of volunteering. This theme is concerned with the transformation that volunteering brings to the lives of individuals and the social reflection of this transformation. The subcodes of unconditional help,

personal happiness and peace, and professional and personal development reveal the effects of volunteering at both the individual and collective levels.

Some views of the participants within the subcode of **unconditional help** are as follows:

P2: *“For me, it expresses responsibility for individuals in society. I can call it a non-compulsory duty.”*

P4: *“Being able to help people without expecting anything in return.”*

P5: *“Being a volunteer means touching someone’s life, being able to leave a mark on the life of someone.”*

P9: *“Being a volunteer means to win the heart of another person.”*

Some of the participants’ views within the **personal happiness and peace** sub-code are as follows:

P1: *“I feel very peaceful and happy. Sometimes there is tension and irritability, but in general I am happy and peaceful.”*

P5: *“I feel like I’m in heaven, isolated from the world. “As if I’m far away from all evil and there’s only good in life.”*

P6: *“I enjoy the activities I take part in as a volunteer. I become happy. “My day becomes beautiful.”*

P7: *“We are happy, pleased, and proud when we see that other people benefit from our efforts. In other words, when you do a job or make a contribution, when you see the result of that contribution on a child or a person with a disability, it gives us peace.”*

Some of the participants’ views under the sub-code of **professional and personal development** are as follows:

P1: *“Being a volunteer gives me knowledge in a professional sense. I get to know people with disabilities and act accordingly. I can now sense when they will do what. It also makes me feel good. I can add things to myself. It adds a lot in a professional sense. When I communicate with them, my communication skills improve.”*

P3: *“My motivation increases because I can develop professionally.”*

P4: *“As a benefit, it contributes to my professional life. I am already experiencing things that I will experience in the future.”*

P6: *“As an advantage, it develops my ability to empathise. In other words, I understand better how to deal with a negative event. Because people with disabilities can have crises. It teaches me how to approach them calmly, helps me stay calm and concentrate on solving the problem.”*

P7: *“As an advantage, it provides a lot of knowledge accumulation in a professional sense. It strengthens my empathic side. It is easier to understand people.”*

When the theme "The meaning and effects of volunteering" and its sub-codes are examined in the context of the literature, the interplay between individual experiences and social structures stands out. Consistent with the findings of Gülmez (2019), an examination of the meanings ascribed to volunteering reveals that the self-sacrifice dimension (awareness of helping others and positive feelings derived from helping others) takes precedence, followed by the utility (enhancing one’s resume and building professional connections) and sociability (influences from close social circles) dimensions. The findings are also consistent with Altun and Demirışler’s (2023) study, which shows that participants’ perceptions of volunteering are shaped by factors such as spiritual/sentimental satisfaction and the desire to help others. In addition, the benefits of volunteering, such as expanding networks, socialisation and personal development, are highlighted. Similarly, the study by Aslan and Tuncay (2024) shows that the perception of volunteering has a multidimensional structure across personal, family and social environment and societal levels. At the personal level, volunteering is associated with concepts such as social welfare, active citizenship, responsibility, solidarity and assistance, a win-win approach, time commitment, intrinsic motivation, selflessness and contributing to change.

From the perspective of sociological theories, this theme can be evaluated within the framework of Mead’s (1934) theory of symbolic interactionism. As evidenced by the sub-themes derived from the participants’ statements, the volunteers redefined their sense of self through their interactions with people with disabilities, reproducing societal meanings in the process.

The sub-theme of professional and personal development can be explained by Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital. The volunteering experience strengthens the cultural capital of individuals by increasing their knowledge, skills and competences. This process can also be evaluated in the context of Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning. Volunteers question their own assumptions and develop new perspectives because of their interactions with people with disabilities. This transformation can start at the micro level and contribute to changing social attitudes over time.

Perception of Disability

The third theme relates to perceptions of disability. This theme explores the meanings that volunteers attach to the concept of disability and how these meanings change over time. Sub-codes such as disability as difference, disability as difficulty and potential disability situation reveal the social construction of disability and how this construction is shaped by individual experiences.

Some of the participants’ views within the subcode of **disability as difference** are as follows:

P7: *"I think disability is just a difference, it doesn't mean much else. It's just one of the similar physical characteristics, like someone is tall, someone is short, someone is fat, someone is thin. "We don't think of disability as something different from others."*

P6: *"Physical disability is the absence of an existing organ, so it is a difference. But regarding mental disability, things change. They behave more childishly. They often do not behave according to their age."*

Some participants' views under the sub-code of **disability as a difficulty** are as follows:

P7: *"It means being limited. In other words, they cannot do some things that a normal person would do."*

P10: *"For me, disability means difficulty."*

Some of the participants' views within the sub-code of *the potential disability situation* are as follows:

P2: *"We are all candidates for disability. Today, I am not disabled, but I am a candidate. It expresses a process."*

P9: *"Society should not see them as disabled. We are also candidates to be like them at any moment. When I leave here, if a car hits me, I may not have a leg. "You should not see it as a defect, you should not despise it."*

When the theme of "Perceptions of Disability" is examined through the literature, it reveals the social construction of disability and how this construction is shaped by individual experience. This theme reflects the tension between the social and medical models, which have an important place in disability studies.

In this context, similarities can be observed with the findings of Diğ̈er's (2018) study. One of the focal points of the research findings is the challenges that people with disabilities face in social life. Particular emphasis is placed on difficulties such as lack of accessibility, discrimination in employment processes, misguided benevolence and social exclusion. The study highlights how different types of disability and individual variations influence societal perceptions and behaviours. For example, while some people with disabilities need constant support, others can live their lives with the help of adaptive equipment. These differences also shape the societal attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities. The research emphasises that everyone can experience a state of disability at some point in their lives. This shows that disability is not only a congenital condition but can also occur later in life. Therefore, societal attitudes towards and perceptions of disability are issues that potentially affect everyone.

From the perspective of sociological theories, the sub-code of disability as difference represents an understanding closely associated with the social model of disability. This approach can be associated with Goffman's (1963) labelling theory. Participants who perceive disability as merely a difference tend to reduce social stigma and promote normalisation. This view is also consistent with the social constructionist approach, which emphasises that "disability is a socially constructed category.

The sub-code of the potential disability situation reflects a significant paradigm shift in the perception of disability. This approach can be linked to Mead's (1934) concept of the 'generalised other'. By positioning themselves as potentially disabled, participants tended to adopt the perspective of people with disabilities. This perception can increase social empathy and change attitudes towards disability.

These quotes show that participants perceive disability in different ways. While some see disability simply as a difference, others see it as a difficulty and a limitation. In addition, some participants saw disability as a potential situation and emphasised that everyone was a candidate for disability. These different perspectives reflect the complex and multidimensional nature of the perceptions of disability.

Society's View on People with Disabilities

The fourth theme is society's view of people with disabilities. This theme examines social perceptions of disability and how these perceptions change over time. Sub-codes such as negative attitudes and exclusion, ignorance and lack of awareness, increasing awareness and positive change reveal the complex and contradictory nature of social attitudes.

Some of the participants' views within the **negative attitudes and exclusion** subcode are as follows:

P1: *"They smile at them on their special days and don't even look at their faces on other days. I even witnessed such an incident. They only stand by them during Disability Week. They take photos. They hug them. On other days, they forget."*

P6: *"I think that society is a bit distant towards people with disabilities because they often show anti-social behaviour. They have behaviours like hitting themselves for no reason, scratching their faces, hitting their friends all the time, and that makes them a bit ostracised in society."*

P7: *"In the cities they show different reactions, as if they've seen people with disabilities for the first time, some are afraid. Not just normal people, even when you go to the hospital, doctors and even the police don't know how to behave."*

P8: *"They think they cannot do anything."*

Some of the participants' views under the sub-code **unconsciousness and lack of awareness** are as follows:

P3: "Society is really very unconscious about this issue and everyone ignores people with disabilities."

P6: "They usually look at people with disabilities with an embarrassing eye. They look at them from a traumatising perspective. They don't give them the opportunity to achieve anything."

P7: "In other words, there is a problem in society regarding their definition and knowledge about them."

P10: "There are many people who help. But most of them also ignore. Even families of people with disabilities can say, "You cannot do it, what you are doing out in the cold."

Some of the participants' views under the sub-code **increasing awareness and positive change** are as follows:

P9: "In the last 10 years or so things have started to get a bit better. For example, my aunt had a daughter, she was disabled, she never went out, they locked her in the house. In the past, they disrespected them, so their parents, their families didn't want to take them out into society, but now society has started to accept them."

P10: "Older people always have these thoughts. But today's youth are more in control of events."

P11: "Society is divided into two sides. "One side tries to help too much, while the other side ignores it completely."

P12: "I think there's been a change for the better recently. More and more people have started to take an interest. People with disabilities have started to be noticed. In Turkey, many places such as pavements, mosques, schools, airports, and garages have now started to be adapted for people with disabilities."

When the theme of "society's view of people with disabilities" is examined in the context of the literature, it reflects the social construction of the perception of disability and its transformation over time.

The results obtained are consistent with the findings of Üngör (2019). According to the research, people with disabilities do not have access to equal opportunities and are hindered by negative perceptions of society. People with disabilities are often portrayed in the media with negative labels such as 'weak/dependent/needy/victimised', which is said to lead to their marginalisation in society. There is also a lack of understanding in society about the causes of disability. Viewing disability solely as a deficiency of the individual ignores the social dimension of the problem. The approach of the educational system, which excludes people with disabilities, hinders the development of awareness towards them. There is a lack of knowledge and sensitivity to tactile surfaces in society. However, raising the level of education contributes to a better understanding of people with disabilities and promotes positive change. Public service announcements, sign language, and awareness films have a positive impact on the perception of disability. In summary, according to Üngör's (2019) research, while increased awareness efforts and rising education levels lead to positive changes in perceptions of disability, negative attitudes and exclusion still persist. The complex and contradictory nature of societal attitudes towards people with disabilities suggests that addressing the issue requires a multidimensional approach.

The results of this study are also in line with the research of Diğ̈er and Yıldız (2021). Their findings also show that society's view of people with disabilities has a complex structure that includes negative attitudes that persist alongside positive changes. The research suggests that people with disabilities face social exclusion. In addition, there seems to be a lack of awareness of the importance and function of disability practises in society. For example, 44.7% of the participants said they were unaware of the function and importance of tactile surfaces on pavements and were indifferent to them. The study also shows that society is becoming more aware of people with disabilities, leading to positive changes. For example, 75.8% of participants believed that participating in an activity with people with disabilities helped them overcome negative perceptions. In addition, public service announcements, sign language, and awareness films have a positive impact on the perceptions of disability. In summary, the research findings show that society's view of people with disabilities is complex and contradictory. For example, while participants expressed a willingness to help people with disabilities, they also believed that such people were excluded from society. This situation shows that both positive and negative attitudes towards disability can co-exist.

In a sociological context, this issue can be evaluated within the framework of Berger and Luckmann's (1991) theory of social constructionism. Society's attitudes towards people with disabilities represent a reality that is collectively produced and constantly renegotiated.

The sub-themes of 'negative attitudes and exclusion' and 'unconsciousness and lack of awareness' are closely related to Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. Society's labelling of people with disabilities as "different" or "inadequate" limits their social interactions and leads to social exclusion.

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All these quotations and theoretical perspectives show that society's view of people with disabilities is complex and varied. While negative attitudes and exclusion persist, there is also ignorance and lack of awareness. However, some participants also noted that there has been increasing awareness and positive change in recent years. This situation shows that social perceptions are changing, but there is still a long way to go.

Emotions and Reactions of People with Disabilities

The fifth theme deals with the emotions and reactions of people with disabilities. This theme examines the experiences of individuals on the receiving end of volunteering from the perspective of the volunteers. Sub-codes such as happiness and gratitude, emotional fluctuations and the desire to participate in society provide deep insights into the inner worlds and social positions of people with disabilities.

Some of the participants' views within the subcode of *happiness and gratitude* are as follows:

P5: "When they see us, they are very happy at first. There was a child with autism in the place where we worked. A child who hadn't spoken for a long time. When we came, he interacted, clapped and then said things like 'I love you'. That touched me very deeply."

P6: "As far as I can see, they become more motivated by doing these activities. They start to get happier. As we continued, they started to adapt more."

P11: "They are happy when the aid reaches its destination and we are also happy when we see them."

P12: "Because they are in need, when we provide help, their needs are met and they are happy when their needs are met. Or, for example, we make a hobby garden here, everything is done by people with disabilities, then it brings them happiness, they plant everything there, they water it, they collect the products and it brings them happiness".

Some of the participants' views within the sub-code of *emotional fluctuations* are as follows:

P1: "They can suddenly go into crisis or embrace. Because we don't know what they're thinking at that moment, they might be reacting to something we've done. They might feel under pressure and have a crisis and hit someone."

P4: "I have met people with very different disabilities. Some are very hyperactive. Some are very calm. Their emotional state can be very different. When they see us, they might hug us one day and run away the next."

P6: "Their emotions are more introverted, they usually look very unhappy. I can see that they are happy in this environment. It's actually very easy to make them happy. The simplest thing is to bring a cake or celebrate a birthday, and they become very happy."

Some views of the participants within the sub-code *wanting to participate in society* are as follows:

P2: "They are very happy during the activity. They are very happy when they understand that we understand them. They feel good."

P7: "When we build a mosque or open a school, they are happy because they can be visible."

P9: "They are also very happy, but you must make them feel that you are helping them. If you do it with a feeling of pity, they get sad, if you help them humanely, they are happy."

Looking at the theme "Emotions and Reactions of People with Disabilities" from a literary perspective, it reflects the complex interaction between the subjective experiences of people with disabilities and social structures. This theme can be evaluated within the theory of symbolic interactionism. As Mead (1934) suggested, the emotions and reactions of people with disabilities emerge as a product of their interactions with others.

The sub-code of happiness and gratitude can be related to Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking glass self. People with disabilities shape their self-perceptions by internalising the positive approaches of volunteers. This process can mitigate the negative effects of Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. The positive attitudes of volunteers can help people with disabilities develop resistance to social stigmatisation.

The sub-code of emotional fluctuations can be explained by Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour. People with disabilities engage in emotional labour as they try to reconcile social expectations and their inner worlds.

The desire to participate in the society sub-code is closely related to the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion. This desire can be evaluated in the context of the active citizenship and social participation rights of people with disabilities. It can also be linked to Putnam's (1994) theory of social capital. The desire of people with disabilities to participate in society can strengthen social ties and increase social cohesion.

These evaluations show that the emotional responses of people with disabilities are varied and complex. In general, feelings of happiness and gratitude come to the fore in response to the help and activities of volunteers. However, some participants stated that people with disabilities can experience emotional fluctuations and sometimes give unexpected reactions. It is also emphasised that the desire of people with disabilities to participate in society and to be visible is also important. These observations suggest that approaches people with disabilities should be individualised and sensitive.

Solution Suggestions

Finally, the sixth theme focuses on solutions. This theme includes suggestions for improving the social inclusion of people with disabilities based on the experiences of volunteers. Sub-codes such as social awareness, physical infrastructure improvements, legal regulations and policy changes demonstrate the need for a multidimensional and holistic approach to increase the social participation of people with disabilities.

Some of the participants' views within the *social awareness* sub-code are as follows:

P1: "The public should be made aware. Because they don't know much about people with disabilities. Especially in schools, there are difficulties for inclusive pupils. Teachers or school administration or other students don't want the disabled person in the school. Awareness-raising efforts can be made in this direction."

P6: "In my opinion, more action-oriented things should be done about the groups we call disadvantaged groups in all areas. Certain NGOs can be set up or the number of volunteers can be increased. Places where volunteers can work in this field can be created in every province."

P9: "These problems should be identified first. We should fulfil our duties and what the state can do. We should do what we can without despising them or looking at them with pity. At the same time, we should teach this to the people around us and to future generations. Our children should not turn away when they see a disabled person in the street. Everyone in society should have the same attitude towards disabled people. We can do this by explaining and talking."

Some views of the participants under the sub-code of *physical infrastructure improvements* are as follows:

P1: "Roads can be arranged for them. Places for socialising can be arranged for them. If they don't have these places, they don't have much space to do activities. They are always at home. Therefore, meeting places can be arranged."

P4: "Work can be done to adapt to business life. It is necessary to increase accessibility for them to do their daily work."

P7: "For example, in a mosque, a disabled person can use the disabled toilet, perform ablution, go to the mosque and participate in life. This is of course a success that needs to be multiplied. In this way, accessibility studies need to be conducted so that people with disabilities can participate in life."

Some of the participants' views under the sub-code *legislation and policy changes* are as follows:

P1: "Families of disabled people and other family members should be informed about their disability rights. While a normal person gets 40 hours of education, no disabled person should get only 8 hours of education."

P2: "Higher authorities must make it mandatory to determine disability rates before a child is born, so that problems can be solved from the beginning."

P7: "As an NGO, we try to do our best. But we also need support from higher authorities."

P11: "They need a lot of support from the state and municipalities. They get a disability pension, but they cannot do housework. For example, I know two brothers and sisters. They can't cook their meals, they can't clean their houses. The municipality has a soup kitchen, but it is difficult for them to get there in winter. "Something must be done about the lives of people with disabilities."

The theme of solutions reflects a multidimensional approach to improving the social integration of people with disabilities. When evaluated in the context of the literature, this theme shows how micro- and macro-level changes are interrelated.

The social awareness suggestion can be evaluated within the framework of Berger and Luckmann's (1991) theory of social constructivism. Changing social perceptions of disability means constructing a new reality. This process can also be linked to Mead's (1934) theory of symbolic interactionism. Awareness-raising efforts have the potential to reshape society's symbols and meanings related to disability.

The proposal for legislative and policy change emphasises the importance of structural change at the macro level. This proposal can be evaluated within the framework of Giddens' (1986) structuration theory. While laws and policies shape social structures, they are also shaped by individual actions. This interplay can create a progressive cycle in disability rights.

These multidimensional proposals reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The proposals cover a wide range, from individual attitudinal changes at the micro level to structural changes at the macro level. This holistic approach emphasises the multi-faceted changes needed to ensure the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in society.

Conclusion and Evaluation

This study explored the motivations, experiences and perceptions of people involved in volunteering for people with disabilities. The research findings show that the process of volunteering has multiple effects on both volunteers and people with disabilities.

The first key finding of the research is the diversity and complexity of motivations for volunteering. Factors such as a desire to help, personal experience and a sense of social responsibility were found to be prominent in the participants' decision-making processes volunteer. This situation shows that volunteering motivations are influenced by both individual and social dynamics.

In terms of the meaning and impact of volunteering, participants perceived the experience as unconditional help, a source of personal happiness and peace, and an opportunity for professional and personal development. These findings suggest that volunteering can have a transformative effect on individuals' lives. It can be said that the volunteering experience can challenge and transform individuals' assumptions, beliefs and perspectives.

In terms of disability perceptions, the research also explored how volunteers made sense of their disability. It was found that participants perceived disability as a difference, a difficulty or a potential situation. These different perspectives reflect the complex and multidimensional nature of disability perceptions.

In this context, the complex and contradictory nature of social attitudes was revealed based on participants' observations about society's view of people with disabilities. While on the one hand, negative attitudes and exclusion persist, on the other hand, increasing awareness and positive changes were observed. This situation shows that the perception of disability is socially shaped and open to change over time.

In terms of the emotions and reactions of people with disabilities, the experiences of people on the receiving end of volunteering activities were examined through the eyes of the volunteers. Themes such as happiness and gratitude, emotional fluctuations and the desire to participate in society provided deep insights into the inner worlds and social positions of people with disabilities. These findings suggest that volunteering can positively influence the self-perception of people with disabilities.

The final section of the study discussed suggestions for improving the social integration of people with disabilities based on the participants' experiences. Suggestions such as social awareness, physical infrastructure improvements, legal regulations and policy changes demonstrated the need for a multidimensional and holistic approach to increase the social participation of people with disabilities.

Considering these findings, it can be said that volunteering can change the societal perceptions of people with disabilities. Through direct interaction with people with disabilities, volunteers challenge their own assumptions and develop new perspectives. This process contributes to the formation of a more empathetic and inclusive social understanding.

The study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on volunteering and disability. In particular, examining the relationship between motivations and volunteer and perceptions of disability opens up a new area of research at the intersection of these two fields. Furthermore, highlighting the transformative potential of the volunteering experience contributes to the understanding of social change and social inclusion processes.

From a practical perspective, this study provides important insights for the design and implementation of volunteering programmes for people with disabilities. Given the diversity of volunteers' motivations, it is important to design these programmes to appeal to different motivations. In addition, the transformative potential of the volunteering experience shows that these programmes should be designed to benefit not only people with disabilities but also volunteers.

In terms of social policy, the findings of this study emphasise the need for a multidimensional approach to increase the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Physical infrastructure improvements need to be accompanied by social awareness studies and legal regulations. Furthermore, given the potential of volunteering to change the social perceptions of people with disabilities, it is important to encourage and support such activities.

It should also be noted that the study has some limitations. The limited sample size and the fact that it was conducted in a single geographical region limit the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the study was conducted from the perspective of volunteers only, which prevented the direct examination of the experiences of people with disabilities.

We can also make some suggestions for future research. First, conducting a similar study with a larger and more diverse sample might increase the generalisability of the findings. Second, studies that directly examine the experiences of people with disabilities in relation to volunteering could provide a more holistic perspective on the issue. Third, longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of the volunteering experience could more clearly demonstrate the transformative potential of this experience. Finally, conducting similar studies in different cultural contexts could help understand the cultural dimensions of volunteering and the perceptions of disability.

In conclusion, this research has revealed the complex and multidimensional nature of volunteering for people with disabilities. The transformative effect of the volunteering experience for both volunteers and people with disabilities demonstrates the potential of these activities in terms of social inclusion and social change. Deepening and broadening research in this area can make a significant contribution to efforts to build a more inclusive and equal society.

Peer-review: : Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of study: F.A., M.O.; Data Acquisition: F.A., M.O.; Data Analysis/Interpretation: F.A., M.O.; Drafting Manuscript: F.A., M.O.; Final Approval and Accountability: F.A., M.O.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University with meeting number 2024-1 and letter dated 02/01/2024.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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How Cite This Article

Altun, F., & Ortatepe M. (2024). A qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of volunteers in the field of disability: the case of Bandırma. *Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi*, 87, 69-88. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jspc.2024.87.1532116>