

## **Volunteerism and Social Capital: Observations from a preliminary study -**

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**Abstract:** Volunteers are a central element in most communities, playing an important role in delivering services across a diverse range of areas. Volunteerism has been described as a potent, dynamic and unifying force for the society at large (Cordingley, 2004), and volunteer energy has become an indispensable resource for many third sector organisations. Furthermore, volunteers help satisfy various social and community needs, contribute to building social capital and improving peoples' quality of life.

This paper explores links between volunteerism and social capital in Hong Kong. A household survey was conducted targeting individuals aged between 15 and 79 years. Preliminary findings revealed that one quarter of respondents had participated in voluntary work, with over half of them contributing, on average, between 1 and 6 hours of voluntary work in the past month. The majority (>70%) of volunteers were female. Age was positively predictive of social trust; the older the respondent, the higher their level of social trust. However, age was negatively predictive of joining volunteer services, the younger the individual the more likely they were to join volunteer services.

Joining volunteer services was predictive of having favour for social organisations. Volunteers' desire for personal development was demonstrated in their belief that affiliation with social organisations could raise one's social status. Volunteers' concern for civic society was evident through their high levels of society-based motivation, taking an interest in societal affairs and caring for less fortunate individuals. Individuals from lower income households were most likely to be motivated to volunteer as a result of their concern for the community.

**Speaker:** T. Wing Lo is Professor of Social Work and Criminology at City University of Hong Kong and is the founding director of its Youth Studies Net. He received training in criminology in Hull and Cambridge, England, and worked as a social worker for 17 years, helping young triad gangsters on the street. After joining CityU, he has led several large-scale reviews of services for young people and juvenile offenders and drawn up blueprints for the development of those services in Hong Kong and Macau. He has also been an advisor to many social welfare organizations and government departments.