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Emergency Volunteer Retention: Can a Culture of Inclusiveness Help?



Facts about Volunteering

- The Australian workforce is one of the most diverse labour forces in the world with 50.6% women and nearly 30% foreign-born employees.
- Yet, the profile of emergency services volunteer is far less diverse (Batty & Burchielli, 2011).
- Given technology has made physically demanding tasks easier, the female population remains an untapped resource for emergency services.



Attracting Women to Emergency Services

Why is it a Challenge?

Stereotypes about women:

- Ability to engage in physically demanding tasks.
- Typically described in communal terms (nice, accommodating): deprived of tasks associated with agentic behaviours (e.g., risk-taking).

Stereotypes about emergency services:

- Culture often described by some female volunteers in our survey as being 'old boys' military,' making prospective female volunteers feel unwelcomed.

Knowledge of emergency services:

- Women not knowing how technology could make it possible for them to partake in physically demanding tasks (e.g., using drones for search-and-rescue in hazardous areas).
- Not knowing the breadth of roles they can perform in emergency services.



Are these Stereotypes True?

Experiences of Women in Emergency Services:

- ❖ *“I was positively surprised at how accepting the unit was of women, particularly ‘non-blokey’ women who had a more academic background.”*
- ❖ *“Old boys’ military attitudes and behaviours was confronting, sometimes inappropriate and difficult to deal with. Value and range of activities was however great and the overall culture and passion of volunteers absolutely wonderful.”*
- ❖ *“The team are really nice and make me feel welcome/comfortable to work and learn in that environment”*
- ❖ *“I personally think it is harder for females to move up in my unit and it is very male-dominated and a few have the attitude that females can’t do it. Even on call outs males are given the jobs to do first and females are an afterthought and given menial tasks.”*

Create a culture of inclusiveness:

“all volunteers, irrespective of their background, feel valued and respected”

Characteristics of an Inclusive Climate (Nishii, 2013):

- Fair treatment: recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, remuneration
- Integration of differences: Valued for who you are, comfortable being yourself, free to express yourself
- Inclusion in decision-making: inputs from everyone are actively sought and used

H1: Emergency services female volunteers will perceive lower levels of climate of inclusion.



How Inclusion Climate Influences Volunteer Retention

Self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017): People will have higher quality motivation (meaning and enjoyment) when they feel competent, autonomous, and related to others.

- **Competence:** volunteers perceive they can have an effect on the environment and attain valued outcomes.
- **Autonomy:** feelings volitional and authentic.
- **Relatedness:** having meaningful connections with others.

Previous research: Strong links between these needs and performance, retention, and wellbeing in the workplace (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016) and volunteer work (Gagné, 2003).

H2: Psychological needs for (a) relatedness, (b) competence, and (c) autonomy are positively related to retention.

Inclusion Climate and Need Satisfaction

- The integration of differences will influence the satisfaction of all three needs by making gender differences less salient or more embraced as valuable to the unit. This will make people feel safe to try things (competence), be authentic (autonomy), and feel valued and cared for (relatedness).
- Inclusion in decision-making will influence the needs by valuing what each volunteer can bring to the performance of the unit and by giving them voice.

H3: Psychological needs of (a) relatedness, (b) competence, and (c) autonomy mediate the relationship between inclusion climate and retention.

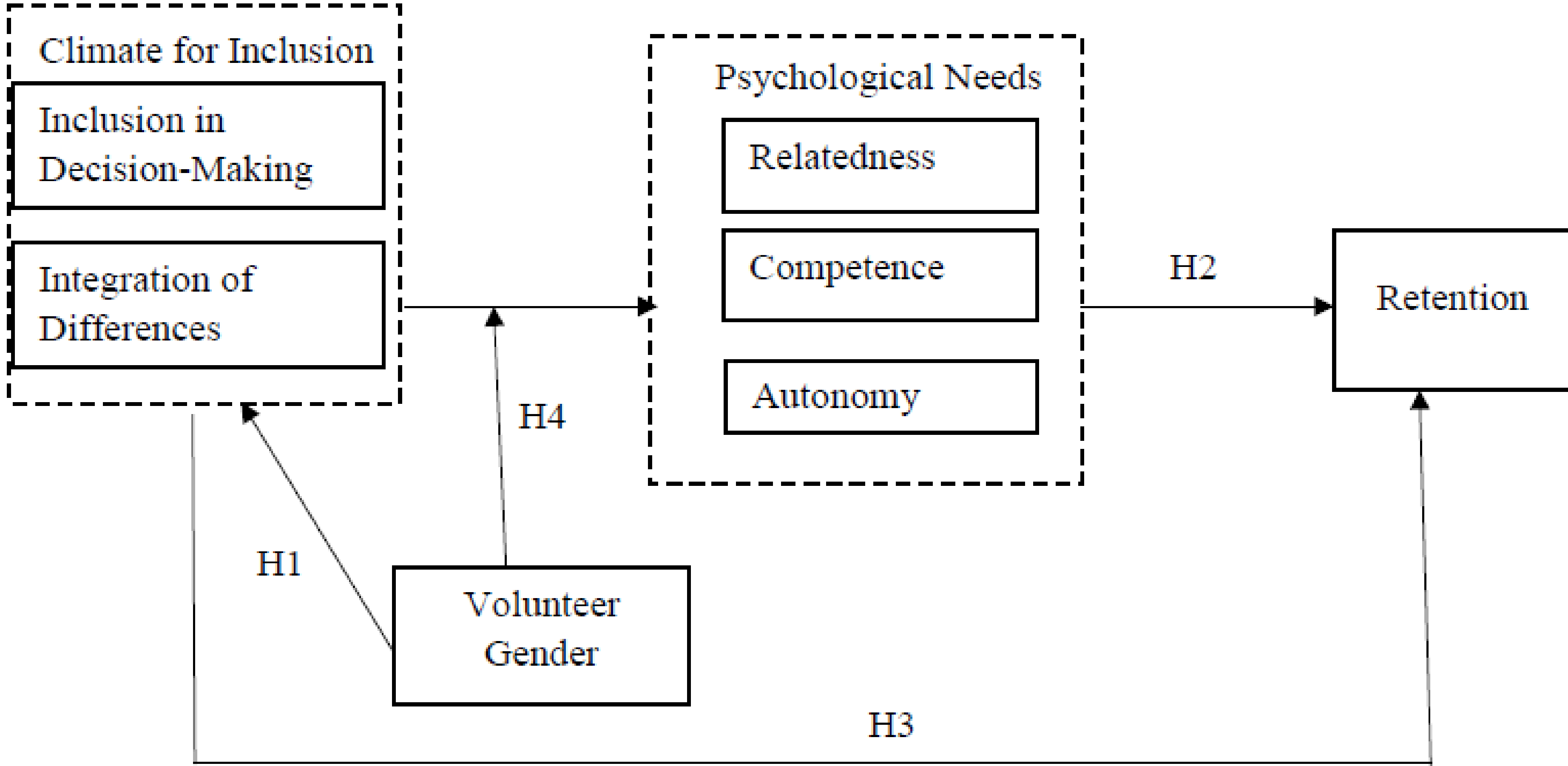


Invisible barriers for female volunteers in emergency services:

- Denied challenging tasks (e.g., cliff rescue, roof repair) due to benevolent sexism – wherein women receive less challenging tasks because they “deserve protection” or such decisions were made “in the women’s best interests” (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014).
- Not considered in decision due to wrongfully thinking they wouldn’t know.
- A climate for inclusion will minimise these barriers.

H4: Volunteer gender will moderate the positive relationship between inclusion climate and (a) relatedness, (b) competence, and (c) autonomy psychological needs such that these linkages are stronger for female than male volunteers.

Summary of Hypotheses



512 emergency services volunteers from rural and urban units in Western Australia completed an on-line survey.

- 50% men, 31% women, 19% did not indicate gender (excluded from analyses)
- Mean age 46 years (SD = 15.40)
- Metropolitan (59%), rural (29%) units (12% not reported)
- Volunteering for 9 years (SD = 9.72), 7 years with their current unit (SD = 8.27)

Culture of Inclusiveness (Nishii, 2013): 7 items each

- a) **integration of differences** (e.g., “Volunteers in this unit are valued for who they are as people, not just for the roles that they fill;” $\alpha = .93$)
- b) **inclusion in decision-making** (e.g., “Volunteers in this unit engage in productive debates in an effort to improve decision making;” $\alpha = .95$). 7 items each

Psychological Needs (Van den Broeck et al., 2010):

- a) **relatedness** (e.g., “At [organisation name] I feel part of the group;” $\alpha = .72$)
- b) **competence** (e.g., “I am good at the things I do in my volunteer role at [organisation name];” $\alpha = .82$)
- c) **autonomy** (e.g., “I feel free to do my volunteer work the way I think it could best be done;” $\alpha = .67$)

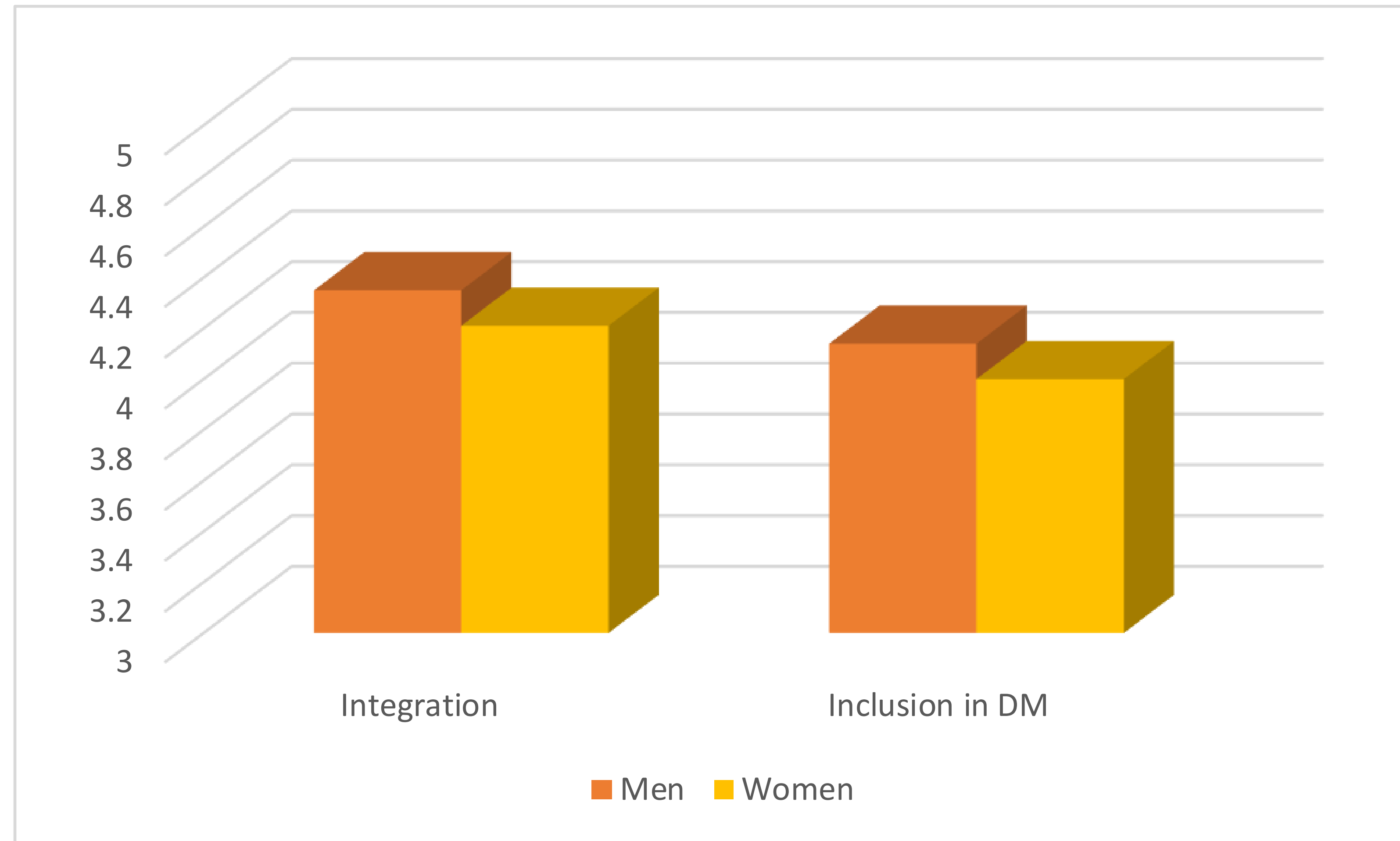
Retention (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993): 4 items (e.g., “How likely are you to be volunteering at your current unit in two years?”; $\alpha = .85$).

Volunteer **Gender**: men (coded as ‘0’) or women (coded as ‘1’)

Results: Gender Differences in Climate Perceptions

Not supported.

- Although women reported lower levels on both dimensions of inclusion climate, these differences were not significant.

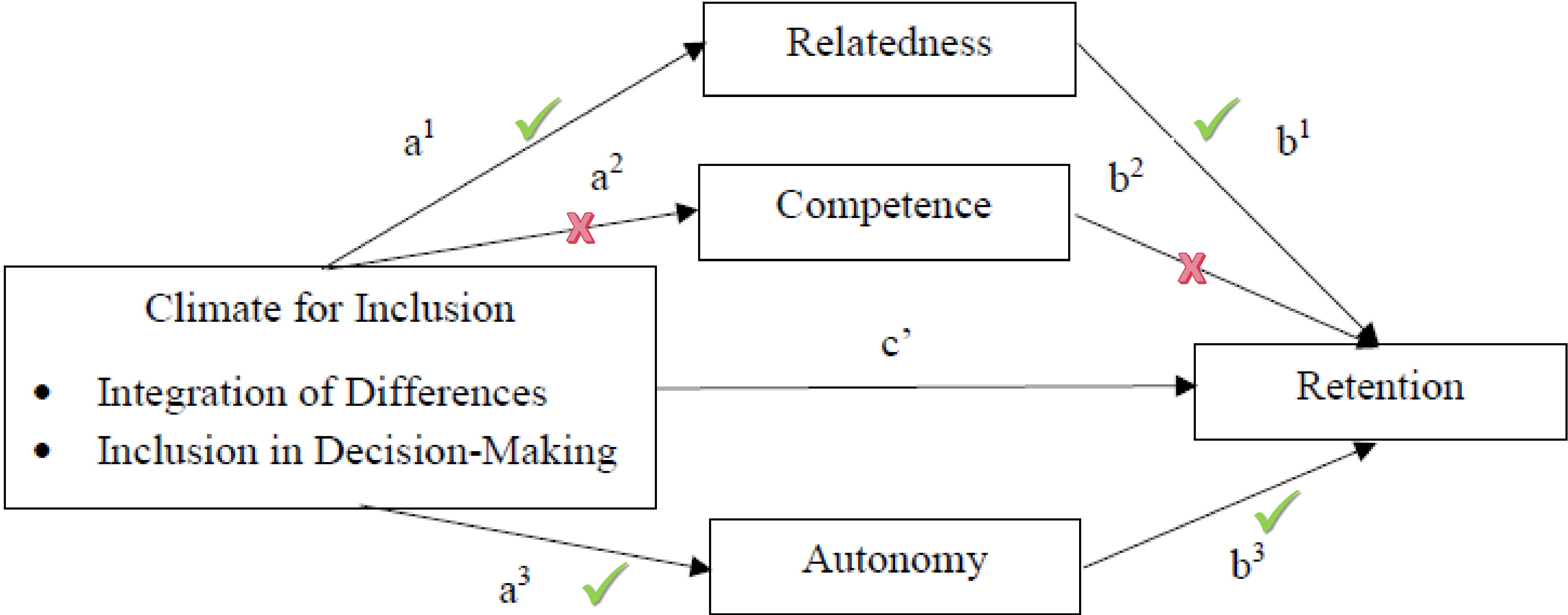


Standardised Results (using Multilevel Mediation Modeling)

Integration of differences and inclusion in decision-making were positively related to

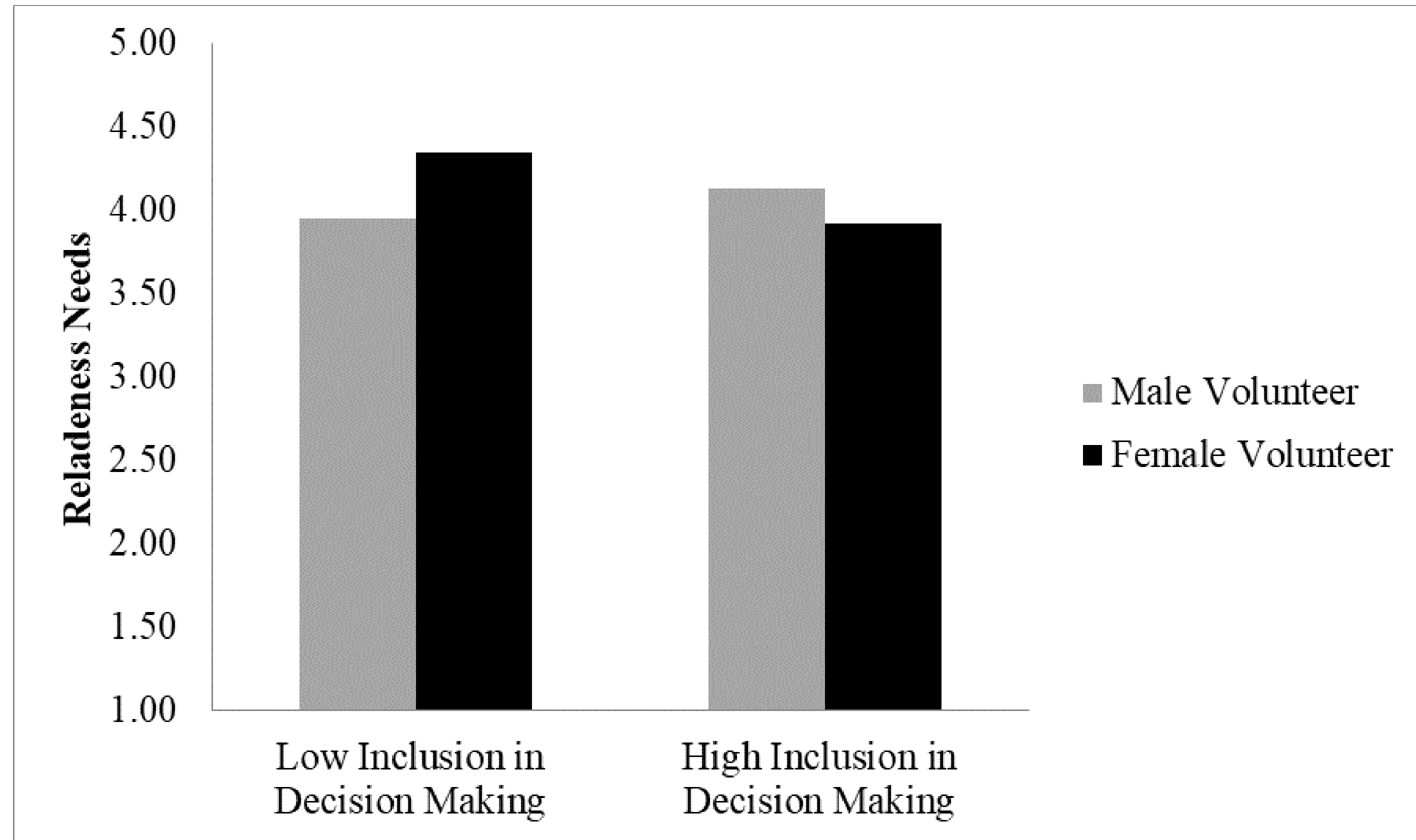
- Retention (B = .26, $p < .001$; B = .19, $p < .001$)
 - Relatedness (B = .46, $p < .001$; B = .37, $p < .001$)
 - Competence (B = .26, $p < .001$; B = .19, $p < .001$)
 - Autonomy (B = .58, $p < .001$; B = .58, $p < .001$)
-
- Relatedness related to retention intentions (B = .26, $p < .001$; B = .22, $p < .001$)
 - Autonomy related to intention intentions (B = .33, $p < .001$; B = .36, $p < .001$). Competence not related to retention intentions (B = .04, ns; B = .06, ns)
-
- Indirect effects were significant for both relatedness (.08, 95% CI [.04; .13]; .08, 95% CI [.04; .12]) and autonomy (.19, 95% CI [.13; .26]; .21, 95% CI [.14; .28]).

Summary of Mediation Results



Gender Differences in Reactions to Inclusion Climate

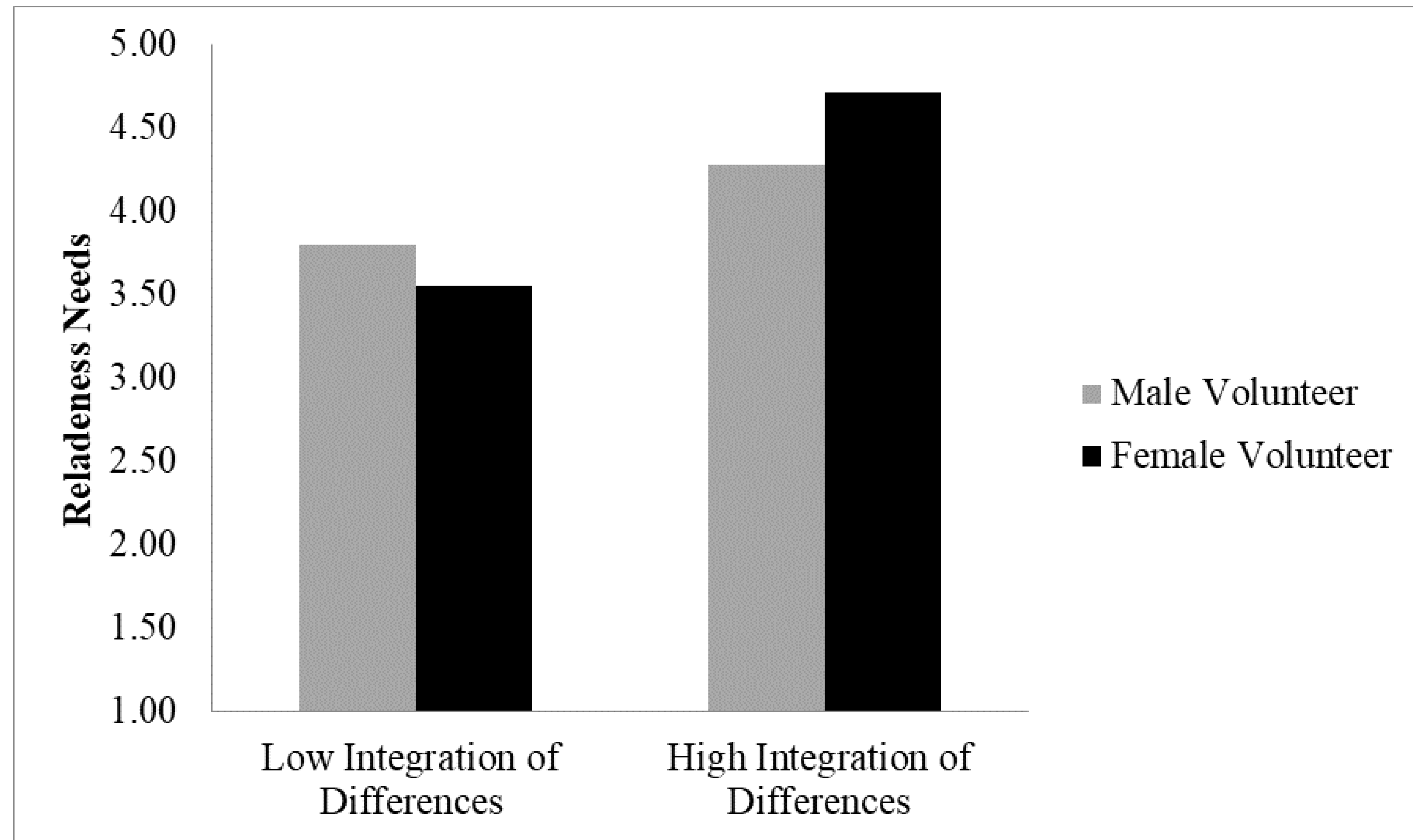
Inclusion in decision-making ($B = -.30, p = .01$)



- Inclusion led women to feel less related ($B = -.21, p < .05$) than for men ($B = .09, ns$)

Gender Differences in Reactions to Inclusion Climate

Integration of differences ($B = .41, p < .01$)



- Integration led to more relatedness for women ($B = .70, p < .001$) than for men ($B = .29, p < .001$)

Solutions that should be tested

- Cultural interventions in emergency units to break stereotypes about women.
- Marketing campaigns that break the culture stereotype about emergency services and that inform women about the range of roles and “physical strength” requirements or technological assistance.



- Selected volunteer quotes taken from interviews that speak about what they like about their work.
- Tested the quotes on realism and attractiveness with current volunteers.
- Tested the quote on attractiveness with community members.

Which quotes were more attractive to women?

You get a great sense of ownership of the unit and a sense of real contribution. It's nice to be there and we're a family!

It doesn't matter what you're involved with, where you've come from, you have experienced something different elsewhere. You can share all that knowledge and experience with the people that you're with now.

Volunteering here blew my expectations with all the courses. It just threw open this whole new world which I had not experienced before.

You know you're out there making a difference, and you're with people, that's terrific. You're part of a team. I just love it.



thank you 😊

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Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender ^a	.38	.49	--						
Volunteer age	46.08	15.40	-.15**	--					
Integration of differences	4.25	.85	-.09	.08	--				
Inclusion in decision-making	4.03	1.00	-.07	.09	.82**	--			
Relatedness needs	4.06	.80	.00	.06	.46**	.37**	--		
Competence needs	4.09	.69	-.15**	.08	.27**	.18**	.41**	--	
Autonomy needs	3.11	.84	-.00	.08	.57**	.58**	.41**	.26**	--
Retention	4.11	.94	-.04	.07	.55**	.49**	.46**	.28**	.57**