Employment Status and the Attitudes and Behavior of Higher Status Women Volunteers, 1975 and 1992: A Case Study

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This study examines the relationships between employment status and women's attitudes toward and participation in a higher status voluntary service organization. Data were gathered in 1975 and 1992 from a sample of chapters of the International Association of Women (a pseudonym). The 1992 sample included three percent who reported a racial or ethnic identification other than white. Drawing on several theoretical perspectives, we expected to find differences in the attitudes and level of participation of employed versus non-employed members that would have important effects on organizational functioning. However, few differences in the attitudes of members employed full time, part time, and not in the labor force were found in either 1975 or 1992. There were, however, differences in behavior. Employed members reported spending much less time on organizational activities and were less likely to assume leadership roles, but these differences diminished between 1975...
and 1992 as employed women became numerically dominant in the organization, suggesting that the growing presence of employed women in IAW led to the development of informal norms and new policies about the amount of time members should devote to the organization and a corresponding loss in the total number of volunteer hours devoted to it.

The movement of women into the labor force has been described as the "single most outstanding event of our century" (Ginzberg, 1976). Numerous studies have documented the effects of women's entry into the labor force on work organizations, the family, schools, the media, and other institutions. Yet we know almost nothing about how women's growing labor force participation affects another type of organization which has played an important part in the lives of women in the United States—voluntary associations.

Volunteerism emerged as a significant activity for women during the industrial revolution, when higher status women, largely excluded from paid work, were encouraged to make voluntary activity a key part of their lives (Harris, 1978). As volunteers, they developed and used talents for planning, leadership, and administration in ways that posed no threat to their husbands' dominance or traditional family roles, while socializing with peers and validating their status through community service (Ostrander, 1984). For some, participation in higher status organizations became an "invisible career" (Daniels, 1988). Higher status women continue to be greatly overrepresented among the numerous Americans who participate in voluntary activities and belong to volunteer organizations (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1994), but their increasing entry into the labor force (Fuchs, 1988) raises questions about the place of volunteerism in their lives and the future of organizations to which they belong (Statham and Rhoton, 1986). Employed women may have less time for volunteering, and their predispositions toward volunteer work may be different from those of women outside the labor force, producing conflict and strain in organizations that have traditionally been outlets for women's volunteer work.

Several national surveys (Edwards, Edwards, and Watt, 1984; Kingston and Nock, 1992) compare the time employed and non-employed women devote to voluntary associations and the types of organizations they join. However, no national survey examines women's attitudes toward voluntary association participation by employment status. Nor are there case studies of specific organizations that compare the attitudes and behavior of their members.

This research helps to fill these gaps through a case study of a large, higher status women's volunteer organization studied in 1975, when em-