

Volunteering and civic engagement of people suffering from mental illness –
An investigation based on narrative interviews

It is practically unknown which fraction of people who are suffering from mental illness are volunteering in civic engagement. This is somewhat surprising since 36%¹ of the German population older than 14 years is actively engaged, and, at the same time, about 20%² of the European population is suffering from mental diseases. These facts rise three important questions. Is only a small amount of those people able to engage as volunteers? Are they hindered to engage by any social or legal conditions? How is it possible that a fraction of them is actively engaged despite of their restricted circumstances? In order to investigate these questions, I chose the biographical theory to obtain a new understanding of processes, factors, and structures of reasons which lead to volunteering. For this purpose, I carry out narrative interviews with volunteers from the former East Germany. These interviews will be analysed using the hermeneutic method of Gabriele Rosenthal which allows me to reconstruct the actions and experiences of their life as well as interactions between the individuals and the society. My study aims especially on social conditions triggering their diseases and the experience of individual or social (radical) changes. Moreover, I want to reveal strategies of coping with these processes and the role of the volunteering from the point of view of the interviewee. Eventually, the results of this work can help to build frameworks for volunteering and civic engagement for the target group of this study.

1 Gensicke/Picot/Geiß 2006, p. 15

2 Gesundheitsbericht 2006, S. 29