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The Same but Different: A Comparison Between Family Volunteers, Other Formal Volunteers and Non-Volunteers

Abstract

Extensive research has examined how family status, composition, and dynamics, affect volunteering but not on how family members volunteer as a group. This research note explores family volunteering - two or more members of a family volunteering together. Using the UK Time Use Survey diary data, it examines some essential facts about family volunteering - the extent and patterns of it, and how family volunteers differ from non-volunteers and the individuals who volunteer but not together with their family members. The results suggest that family volunteering constitutes a substantive proportion of formal volunteering and nearly half of family volunteers are two adult partners. The findings also indicate that while family volunteering shares some predictors with formal volunteering without one's family members, it is also a sufficiently different volunteering phenomenon that warrants further theoretical and empirical investigation.

Keywords: family volunteering, household context, formal volunteering, the UK

Introduction

Many studies indicate that household composition, marital and parental status can influence whether an individual volunteers or not (Wilson, 2012). Family volunteering – broadly defined as several members of the same family volunteering together – however, remains an under researched volunteering type. Very little is known about how and why individuals volunteer together with other family members, who is more or less likely to do it and what are their experiences. Yet, this knowledge is essential - potential volunteers in the USA, Canada and the UK think that there are insufficient volunteering opportunities for families, especially for those with children (Evergreen, 2006; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2016; Hegel & McKechnie, 2003; Jochum, 2019). This research note addresses this gap and advocates for developing the family volunteering research debate. It demonstrates that family volunteering constitutes a significant proportion of formal volunteering; that family volunteers are sufficiently different from other formal volunteers not involved in family volunteering; Therefore family volunteering, an empirically and theoretically underexplored and under-explained, yet interesting and important phenomenon of volunteering, deserves a further exploration.

The next section identifies the gap in current knowledge. It is followed by a description and justification of the methodology used in this study. The results section presents the findings discussed in the final section of this paper.

Family Volunteering Research So Far

Volunteering is not an exclusively individual activity - some family members might not only to volunteer on their own but also together with other family members. As Stuart (2019) in

her review of 232 academic and practice papers has pointed out, previous research has mostly explored how family status and composition influences individual volunteering rather than family members volunteering together. Family volunteering has been examined in some small-scale family volunteering program evaluations and surveys, and case studies (Bird, 2011; Germann Molz, 2016; Littlepage et al., 2003; Reilly & Vesic, 2002), conducted mostly in the US and Canada, and a multi-method and multi-case study by Ellis Paine et al. (2020) examining how families get involved with voluntary organisations and how these organisations involve families in the UK. Thus, very scarce statistical data are available on the extent, patterns, and correlates of family volunteering. It might be possible that the relative scarcity of research in family volunteering could be explained by the implicit assumption that family volunteering is relatively rare and/or is not significantly different from other formal volunteering and thus does not require a separate theoretical and empirical investigation. This research note tests this assumption and addresses the following research questions: 1) What is the extent of family volunteering in the UK? 2) How do family members engage in volunteering together? 3) How do family volunteers differ from non-volunteers and individuals who volunteer but not with their family members? It focuses particularly on the differences in household predictors, such as presence of children in different ages, of family and formal volunteering, as families can provide motivation, resources and barriers for family volunteering (Ellis Paine et al., 2020). It also explores the differences in well-established individual level predictors of volunteering such as gender, age, education, employment, marital and health status (Wilson, 2012).

Methods

Data

This study analyses the data from the United Kingdom Time Use Survey (UKTUS) 2014-2015 (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2017) - a large-scale nationally representative household survey of the time use of people aged 8 years and over¹; it measures who is present when an individual is engaged in an activity, e.g., in volunteering.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The UKTUS used a multi-stage stratified probability sampling strategy (see details in NatCen, 2016). The response rate was 40.4% for the households and 32.8% for the time diaries (NatCen, 2016). This study used a sample of 4,216 households and 8,274 individuals that had completed household and individual interviews and at least one completed diary day. The household and individual weights (Centre for Time Use Research, 2016) were used

Measurements

Dependent Variables

Volunteering Status: family, other formal and non-volunteers. Formal volunteering in the UKTUS was defined as '*Working as a volunteer free of charge or for a minor fee*' for or through an organisation (NatCen, 2016, p.128). For examples of specific activities see NatCen (2016, p.128-133).

Individuals who had at least one formal volunteering episode involving a co-presence of another household member, were classified as 'Family volunteers'². 'Other formal volunteers' were individuals who engaged only in formal volunteering that did not involve a co-presence of another household member. Individuals with no formal volunteering episodes were classified as 'Non-volunteers'.

All households where nobody had a volunteering episode were coded as ‘Non-volunteering households’; all households with only formal volunteering episodes were coded as ‘Other formal volunteering households’ but all households with at least one family volunteering episode as ‘*Family volunteering households*’.

Family Volunteering Patterns. Pre-set UKTUS co-presence categories were used to identify following patterns of family volunteering: 1) *family volunteering with a spouse/partner (i.e., two partners volunteering together;* 2) *with mother;* 3) *with father;* 4) *with a child 0-7 years old;* 5) *with other person from the same household (including a child aged 8 or over)*, each coded as 0=’No’, 1=’Yes’.

Predictor Variables

Household level variables

The *number of adults in the household*: 1- ‘One’; 2- ‘Two’; 3- ‘Three or more’. The *presence of children/young people in the household for each age group*: age under 4, 5-10, 11-15 and 16-19 (corresponding the key stages in the UK education system) - (0 - ‘no children of this age in the household’; 1- ‘at least one child /young person of this age in the household’). Three types of *household income*: income from wages and/or self-employment; benefits; investments -were coded as dummy variables (0- ‘no income from this source’; 1 – ‘income from this source’. The *total household monthly income before tax* - measured in hundreds of British Pounds (£).

Individual Level Variables.

All sample members. *Age*: 0 – ‘under 16’; 1- ‘16-25’; 2- ‘26-45’; 3 -‘46-59’; 4 – ‘60+’. All participants aged under 16 were coded as children. *Gender*: 0- ‘male’ 1 – ‘female’.

Adults: Education: 0- 'no university degree' and 1- 'university degree or higher'.
Self-reported general health status: 0 - 'Bad/Very bad' ; 1 – 'Fair'; 2-'Good/Very Good'.
Economic activity (the ILO classification): 0 – 'Economically inactive'; 1 – 'Unemployed';
2 – 'In employment'. *Marital status:* 1 – 'Single, never married'; 2 –
Married/cohabitating'; 3 –'Divorced/widowed'.

Multivariate Data Analysis Methods

For multivariate analyses on the adult sample this study used multilevel mixed-effects random intercept logistic regression models for dichotomous dependent variables (Robson & Pevalin, 2015), including abovementioned individual and household level predictor variables.

Results

The Extent of Family Volunteering In the UK

Family (Household) level

On a hypothetical average day, in 9% (n=387) of the UK households at least one household member engaged in formal volunteering. In around 3% ((n=132 or 810,000 households based on the estimates using the population statistics for 2015 (ONS, 2015)) of all households in the UK, two or more family members volunteered formally as a family – that equals to approximately one third of all formal volunteering at the household level.

Individual level

At the individual level approximately 5% (n=453) of individuals reported formal volunteering on an average day. Around 40% of them (2% of the sample, n=172) were involved in family volunteering.

Children (aged under of 16) were slightly less likely than adults to engage in other formal volunteering but more likely to volunteer as a family ((2% (n=30)//3% (n=248) and 2% (n=28)//2% (n=144), respectively)).

Family Volunteering Patterns

If we look at all possible combinations of family members, nearly half (49%) of family volunteering episodes involved two adult partners volunteering together. Nearly seven out of ten couples who volunteered together were older adults aged 60 or over. The second most common combination of family volunteering was a parent volunteering with at least one child under the age of 16. This was reported by nearly a quarter (23%) of adult family volunteers. Two parents volunteering with at least one child under the age of 16 was the third most common family volunteering type (19%).

A Comparison Between Family Volunteers, Other Formal Volunteers and Non-volunteers

As can be seen in Table 1, there were statistically significant bivariate relationships between nearly all predictor variables and volunteering status. Family volunteering was significantly more common among the individuals living in the two adult households and living with children aged between 0 and 15, and with the household income coming from wages/self-employment or investments. Family volunteers were significantly most likely to be children under the age of 16 and adults older than 60, economically inactive, employed and self-employed and married/cohabiting.

Formal volunteering other than family volunteering was significantly more common among the individuals living in single person households, with no children of any age, with the household income coming from a pension and/or investments but not from (self)

employment or benefits. Formal volunteers were also most likely to be female, over age of 60, unemployed or economically inactive, single, divorced, or widowed.

[Table 1 here]

Table 2 examines the differences between family and other formal volunteers, and non-volunteers, while controlling for their household and individual characteristics. As can be seen in Model 1, there were some significant differences between family volunteers and individuals engaged in other formal volunteering activities on their own. These differences were at the household, not the individual level. People who had children aged under four or children aged 11 to 15 were more likely to be family than other formal volunteers. Other differences between family and other formal volunteers were not statistically significant.

[Table 2 here]

Model 2 compares family volunteers to non-volunteers. The results suggest that again, people living in the households with children aged between 11 and 15 were significantly more likely to be family volunteers than to be non-volunteers. But there were also two individual level characteristics that distinguished family volunteers from non-volunteers: gender and age. Women were more likely to volunteer with their family than not volunteer. Individuals aged between 26 and 59 were less likely to volunteer with their families than people over age of 60.

Model 3 compares other formal volunteers to non-volunteers. Similar to family volunteers, women were more likely than men to be formal volunteers than non-volunteers. However, there were other characteristics too that distinguished formal volunteers from non-volunteers, but which were not significant for family volunteers in Model 2. People with a

degree were more likely than people without a degree to be formal volunteers than non-volunteers. Unemployed individuals were more likely but those in paid work- less likely, to volunteer formally than economically inactive individuals.

Finally, the interclass correlation coefficients (ICC) suggest that 56%, 53% and 13% of the variation in family versus formal, family vs. non-volunteering and formal vs. non-volunteering variables, respectively, could be attributed to the differences in households but the rest -to individuals or other groupings.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research note was to examine the extent and patterns of family volunteering in the UK and to compare family volunteers to other formal volunteers and non-volunteers. The results suggest that family volunteering constitutes a substantive proportion of formal volunteering - on an average day, every four out of ten formal volunteers engage in volunteering together with their family member(s). This study is likely to under-estimate the extent of family volunteering in general because these figures do not cover all types family volunteering identified by Ellis Paine et al. (2020), e.g. volunteering for the same organisation but not at the same time. They also family members living in different households (e.g., separated parents and a child; grandparents and grandchildren etc.).

Secondly, the findings also indicate that nearly half of family volunteering episodes involve two adult partners, most commonly- older adults, volunteering together, with no children present. This highlights the importance of further research on adult couples volunteering that could complement the large body of evidence on older adults volunteering (e.g. Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Tang et al., 2009).

Thirdly, results suggest that while family volunteers share some household and individuals' characteristics with individuals involved in other formal volunteering, there are some significant differences. Most importantly, it indicates that the household level characteristics explain a considerably larger proportion of the variation between whether somebody is a family volunteer or a (other) formal volunteer or a non-volunteer than they do for variation in between whether somebody is a formal volunteer or a non-volunteer. These findings imply that household context (and possibly changes in it), can differentiate whether somebody who does not volunteer engages in formal volunteering and whether they volunteer with their family. More specifically, adults who live in a household with children aged under four or children aged 11 to 15 are more likely to be family than other formal volunteers. The presence of children aged between 11 and 15 also significantly distinguishes family volunteers from non-volunteers but does not significantly differentiate between formal volunteers and non-volunteers. These findings align with findings from previous studies that adult with school-age children is more likely to volunteer, often through schools and sports (Caputo, 2009). Although some studies suggest that time spent looking after pre-school children can reduce formal volunteering (Gray et al., 2012), this study indicates that might not be the case for family volunteering, most likely because unlike other formal volunteering it can involve both parents and children.

Finally, this study found some significant differences in individuals characteristics of family volunteers, formal volunteers, and non-volunteers. For example, compared to 26-59 years old individuals, adults aged over 60 are also more likely to engage in family volunteering than to be non-volunteers. This indicate that family volunteering might be one of 'the pathways' for older adults to volunteer (Brodie et al., 2011).

Theoretical Implications

The findings suggest that family volunteering is not a niche volunteering type and it has a significant presence in the world of volunteering. It therefore warrants further theoretical and empirical exploration. We need to investigate and theorise the predictors of family volunteering – e.g. how does motivation for family volunteering differ from motivation for other formal volunteering? How do individual volunteering histories interact to predict engagement in family volunteering and how involvement in family volunteering changes over life time, e.g. who are constant, serial or trigger volunteers? (Hogg, 2016). Secondly, building on existing work (e.g. Ellis Paine et al., 2020), we need to examine family volunteering experiences and how organisations engage with family volunteers. Thirdly, family volunteering is unlikely to be exclusively formal volunteering and therefore further debates and research on other forms of family volunteering, such as informal family volunteering, are essential. Fourthly, we need to investigate family volunteering outside of the UK context, especially in countries with different social norms related to family relationships and volunteering. Finally, what are the outcomes of family volunteering, for example, for satisfaction with relationships, children’s involvement in civic activities, individual, and family well-being? How can volunteer engaging organisations ensure that some possible negative effects of family volunteering, such as conflicts and tensions, time and money related ‘costs’ of volunteering (Littlepage et al., 2003; Reilly & Vesic, 2002) do not deter families from volunteering together?

Implications for Policy and Practice

Families have been described as a ‘largely untapped demographic’ of volunteers (Volunteer Canada, 2010), and ‘rich vein only just beginning to be explored’ (Saxton et al., 2015) – an assertion confirmed by this study. There seems to be a desire for more family

volunteering opportunities – nearly one in five of adults who never volunteer said that they would be interested in volunteering together with their family (McGarvey et al., 2019) and many voluntary sector organisations who do not offer family volunteering schemes are interested in developing them (Jochum, 2019). The evidence from this study suggests that there are two likely target groups for volunteer involving organisations- families with children and (older) couples. Families with children under the age of four and children between 11-15 and older couples are already most likely to volunteer as a family and the key focus of volunteer management here might be how to retain them. In contrast, there is a need to examine why families with children between age of five and ten are less likely to engage in family or even formal volunteering and what are the barriers to their involvement.

To conclude, this research note identified a significant evidence gap and suggests that family volunteering is a substantive, sufficiently distinctive phenomenon of volunteering warranting further theoretical explanation and empirical investigation.

Notes

1. Although at the time of writing, the UKTUS dataset is around six years old, to our knowledge it is the only nationally representative dataset in the UK and internationally that measures with whom individuals are volunteering and thus enables to identify engagement in family volunteering.
2. According to the population statistics (ONS, 2015), only 0.9% of the households in the UK were the households of unrelated adults. Our preliminary analysis indicated that these households did not engage in family volunteering. Therefore, we have used the terms 'household' and 'family' interchangeably.

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Tables

Table 1. Bivariate relationships between household and individual level characteristics and volunteering status

Predictor variables	Volunteering status					p value
	n	Family volunteers (%)	Other formal volunteers (%)	Non-volunteers (%)		
<i>Household level characteristics</i>						
Numbers of adults in household						
1	1491	0.4	5	94	***a	
2	4560	3	3	94		
3+	2200	1	2	96		
Presence of children in household						
under age of 4	No	7081	2	3	95	**a
	Yes	1170	3	2	96	
5 to 10	No	6621	2	3	95	***a
	Yes	1630	3	2	95	
11 to 15	No	6536	2	3	94	***a
	Yes	1715	3	2	95	
Presence of young people aged 16-19 in household						
	No	6887	3	3	95	a

	Yes	1364	2	3	96	
<i>Sources of household income</i>						
Wages/Self-employment	No	2160	2	5	93	***a
	Yes	6087	3	3	97	
Pension	No	5492	2	2	96	***a
	Yes	2751	2	5	93	
Benefits	No	4663	2	4	94	*a
	Yes	3575	2	2	96	
Investments	No	6147	2	3	96	***a
	Yes	2088	3	6	91	

Monthly household gross income 3292 M=3339, SD=676 M=2674; SD=407 M=3904; b SD =678

Individual level characteristics

Age

under 16	909	3	2	95	***a
16-25	964	1	3	96	
26-45	2347	2	2	97	
46-59	1781	1	3	95	
60+	2250	3	5	92	

Gender

Male	3821	2	3	96	**
Female	4430	2	4	94	

Education						
	no degree	6224	2	3	95	a
	degree	1855	2	4	94	
Health status						
	Bad/very bad	486	1	2	96	a
	Fair	1366	2	3	95	
	Good/Very Good	6398	2	3	95	
Economic activity						
	Economically	2854				
	inactive		2	5	93	***a
	Unemployed	231	1	7	92	
	In	4232				
	self/employment		2	2	96	
Marital status						
	Single- never	1622				
	married		1	3	97	***a
	Married/cohabiting	4570	3	3	95	
	Divorced/widowed	1148	1	6	94	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, ^aChi-square test for independence, ^bOne-way

between groups ANOVA test

Table 2. Multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression estimates

	Volunteering status		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Family vs. other formal volunteers	Family vs. non-volunteers	Other formal volunteers vs. non-volunteers
	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)
Household characteristics			
Number of adults in HH (One)			
Two	1.35 (1.00)	0.93 (0.64)	-0.49 (0.30)
Three or more	0.79 (1.26)	0.54 (0.81)	-0.61 (0.38)
Children aged 0-4 (Yes)	2.11* (0.96)	0.53 (0.44)	-0.50 (0.37)
Children aged 5-10 (Yes)	0.92 (0.79)	0.62 (0.39)	-0.13 (0.34)
Children aged 11-15 (Yes)	2.95*** (0.86)	1.42*** (0.39)	-0.37 (0.31)
Young people (16-19) (Yes)	-0.32 (0.93)	0.25 (0.56)	0.27 (0.34)

Sources of HH income

Wages/Self-employment (Yes)	-1.48	-0.44	0.34
	(0.80)	(0.48)	(0.26)
Benefits (Yes)	-0.24	0.0074	0.012
	(0.59)	(0.36)	(0.22)
Pension (Yes)	0.25	-0.071	0.18
	(0.89)	(0.43)	(0.27)
Investments (Yes)	-0.96	0.37	0.68***
	(0.57)	(0.34)	(0.17)
Monthly HH income in £100s	0.003	-0.001	-0.0006
	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Individual characteristics			
Female (Male)	-0.12	0.45*	0.43**
	(0.39)	(0.22)	(0.16)
Age (60+)			
16-25	-0.14	-1.05	-0.14
	(1.35)	(0.71)	(0.47)
26-45	-1.10	-1.58**	-0.56
	(1.17)	(0.58)	(0.35)
46-59	-1.14	-1.65**	0.055
	(1.01)	(0.57)	(0.29)
Degree or higher (no degree)	-0.01	0.44	0.41*
	(0.49)	(0.29)	(0.18)
Marital status (Single, never			

married)

Married/cohabitating	1.09 (0.90)	0.95 (0.57)	0.22 (0.34)
Divorced/widowed	-1.44 (1.11)	-0.25 (0.74)	0.37 (0.29)
Health status (Bad/Very bad)			
Fair	-0.44 (1.02)	0.67 (0.67)	0.43 (0.39)
Good/Very Good	-1.15 (0.98)	0.40 (0.68)	0.61 (0.37)
Economic status (economically inactive)			
Unemployed	-2.82 (1.70)	-1.13 (1.11)	0.93* (0.39)
In employment	1.21 (0.64)	0.13 (0.41)	-0.71* (0.28)
Intercept	-0.94 (1.71)	-7.70*** (1.08)	-4.67*** (0.58)
<hr/>			
Var (_cons[householdl])	3.53 (2.35)	4.27*** (1.21)	0.48 (0.35)
<hr/>			
N	312	5327	5417

ICC	0.52	0.56	0.13
ICC (null model)	0.63	0.64	0.25

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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Conflicts of interest

The author of this paper is a co-editor of Voluntary Sector Review

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