

More about the good Samaritans: Characteristics of volunteers in South Africa

by

Ferdinand Niymbanira¹ and Waldo Krugell²

Paper submitted for the Biennial Conference of the Economic Society of Southern Africa,
University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
25-27 September 2013

Abstract:

Volunteers are people who supply labour for the production of goods and services, for the benefit of others. Volunteer work is of significance in a time when social safety nets are weak and there are ever increasing demands on welfare organisations. If volunteers are understood better, it may be possible to harness their power for the greater good. The question is, who are these good Samaritans? This paper examines the characteristics of volunteers in South Africa using data from the Volunteers Activity Survey. We describe the characteristics of the volunteers and estimate a cross-section model of the predictors of volunteerism, testing the consumption model of volunteer work.

¹ Department of Logistics, Vaal University of Technology.

² School of Economics, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

More about the good Samaritans: Characteristics of volunteers in South Africa

1. Introduction

Economists usually assume that the amount of work that offer people increase as wages and salaries increase. However, there are individuals who present their work voluntarily and without payment for the production of goods and services from which others benefit. The goods and services produced in this way, are usually not part of the official measures of production, but volunteers make significant contributions to the economy and society. One in four Americans formally worked as volunteers between 2001 and 2005 (Pho, 2008:220). The rate at which volunteers offer their labor in European countries is highest in Sweden, where 59 percent of people who are employed also work as volunteers. In Slovakia, the participation rate is 55 percent, followed by Denmark, Greece, the UK and the Netherlands with participation rates of between 41 and 49 percent (Hackl et al., 2007:78).

Volunteering is defined as productive work that requires human capital, collective behavior that requires social capital and ethically oriented action that requires cultural capital (Wilson & Musick, 1997). This is not leisure, but is influenced by what other people think and do, and that is value-driven. Freeman (1997: S141) describes volunteer work as a "conscience good" to which people contribute time or money because they support the moral case for it. Voluntary work is particularly important in a time where social safety nets are thin and there are increasing demands on welfare organisations (Carlin, 2001). The role of volunteers in the community necessitates an investigation into the properties of these good Samaritans.

Research on volunteering in South Africa is limited. This paper examines the characteristics of volunteers in South Africa using data from the Volunteers Activity Survey. The focus is on formal volunteering. The volunteers do work for organizations in the fields of health and social services, education, the environment, politics and religion. As volunteers better understood, it may be possible to better mobilize their strength.

Section 2 gives a brief overview of the theory of volunteer work. Section 3 is a summary of the characteristics of volunteers who have been identified in the international literature. In section 4, the characteristics of South African volunteers are presented. Section 5 contains the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Why do people volunteer?

Volunteers give their time to the benefit of others. Why homo economicus would do this, can be explained on the basis of Menchik and Weisbrod (1987) consumption and investment approaches.

In the consumption model the individual selects to time spent on paid work, leisure and volunteer work. An utility maximising consumer will decide how much volunteer work she would do for her tastes and income restrictions. If the wage rate changes, there is an income

effect and substitution effect on the number of hours the individual volunteer works. According to the substitution effect will be that an increase in the wage rate leads to a decline in volunteer work, because the opportunity cost of an hour's volunteering becomes more when wages for paid work increases. According to the income effect, the higher wage rate means that the individual can work fewer hours and earn the same income as before. The result is that the supply of volunteer work will increase as the wage rate increases (Hackl et al., 2007). It is an empirical question which effect is the strongest. Income level and hours of paid work may therefore be important predictors of why some people are volunteers.

According to the investment model individuals work as volunteers to build human capital. A volunteer's future earning capacity can be increased through learning job skills and making contacts that may be useful later in her paid work. Hackl et al. (2007) identify a few investment motives of volunteers: (i) Volunteer work provides job training, (ii) Volunteer work provides access to networks, (iii) Volunteer work can be a way by which prospective employees can signal their skills and performance, (iv) Volunteer work can be a way to develop markets that later can be profitable, and (v) Volunteer work can be a way to counter decreases in the value of human capital (eg people who are temporarily unemployed). People can work as volunteers to build curricula vitae. Human capital variables such as gender, age, employment status and level of education is important predictors of why some people are volunteers.

The following section provides a brief overview of international empirical studies of the characteristics of volunteers.

3. Other studies of the characteristics of volunteers

Other studies have been largely confined to volunteers in the U.S., Canada and Europe. The literature includes descriptions of the characteristics of volunteers through to econometric modeling of predictors of how many hours people work as volunteers.

Hayghe (1991) defines the characteristics of volunteers in the U.S. according to data from the 1989 Population Survey. He found specific demographic and economic characteristics of volunteers. Women have a greater tendency to work as volunteers than men, married couples and people with children in the household are more likely to be volunteers. There is also a positive relationship between training and voluntary work, and seven out of ten volunteers also have a paid job. Hayghe (1991:20) found that people with higher incomes are more likely to work as volunteers.

More than ten years later Boraas (2003) offers a similar analysis of the 2002 U.S. Population Survey. The results are in many ways similar to those of Hayghe (1991), for example, that more women volunteer, or that there is a positive relationship between voluntary work and employment, education and income. Boraas (2003) found that people in the age group 35 to 54 years are more likely to volunteer than younger or older people. Older people who have recently retired, are more likely to volunteer than younger people. High school pupils do more volunteer work to strengthen their applications for university.

The characteristics of volunteers have also been investigated in a number of econometric studies. Vaillancourt (1994) estimated the characteristics that determine whether an individual works as a volunteer work or not, and found that Canadian volunteers are older, married, have children, live in smaller cities, are better educated and earn higher incomes than those who do not do voluntary work. Freeman (1997) find similar results for the U.S.

Carlin (2001) focuses specifically on women volunteers in the U.S. and the hours they work as volunteers. He finds that married women's supply of voluntary work is positive and inelastic. An increase in the net wage has a small negative impact on their participation in volunteer work. To have more children increases the probability to work as a volunteer, but married women with children work fewer hours as volunteers. Donations of time and donations of money seem to be substitutes (Carlin, 2001: 802).

Hackl et al. (2007) used Austrian census data from 2001 and examined the relationship between income and the supply of voluntary work in the European Union. They find that to work as a volunteer has a significant positive impact on wages – volunteers earn up to 17 percent higher wages compared to people who do not work as volunteers. Hackl et al. (2007: 92) found that volunteer participation rates decrease with age up to 44 years and then increases again. Retired people are more motivated by altruism to work as volunteers. They also found that women, individuals in urban areas and those living together offer less voluntary labour. Unlike other studies Hackl et al. (2007: 94) found that education does not have a statistically significant impact on the supply of voluntary work.

Pho (2008) estimated a Probit model of the characteristics of volunteers in the U.S. and get results very similar to those of Vaillancourt (1994) and Freeman (1997). She finds that fewer men volunteer compared to women. To be married and to have children is positively related to voluntary work. Pho (2008: 233) found that white-collar workers are more likely to volunteer compared to work blue collar workers and people who work in the service industry are more likely to volunteer than those in the manufacturing industry. More workers who work full time also work as volunteers. Female workers with temporary appointments are also more likely to work as volunteers than women who are not part of the labor force.

From this brief review of the literature, it is clear that volunteers have very specific characteristics. These studies are limited to the developed economies of the U.S., Canada and Europe. The following section examines the characteristics of volunteers in South Africa on the basis of data from Statistics South Africa's Volunteer Activities Survey.

4. Characteristics of volunteers in South Africa

We have completed a description of the data and estimated a first-round model of the predictors of hours volunteered. It seems that the income effect matters and there is some evidence of "investment" motive amongst SA volunteers.

For those details you will have to come and listen to the paper in Bloemfontein.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Blah, Blah and Yada, Yada for now.....

List of references

- BORAAS, S. 2003. Volunteerism in the United States. *Monthly Labour Review*, Aug.
- CARLIN, P.S. 2001. Evidence on the volunteer labour supply of married women. *Southern Economic Journal*, 67(4): 901-824.
- FREEMAN, R.B. 1997. Working for nothing: The supply of volunteer labour. *Journal of Labour Economics*, 15(1): S140-S166.
- HACKL, F., HALL, M. & PRUCKNER, G.J. 2007. Volunteering and income – The fallacy of the good samaritan? *Kyklos*, 60(1): 77-104.
- HAYGHE, H.V. 1991. Volunteers in the U.S.: Who donates the time? *Monthly Labour Review*, Feb.
- MENCHIK, P.L. & WEISBROD, B.A. 1987. Volunteer labour supply. *Journal of Public Economics*, 32: 159-183.
- PHO, Y.H. 2008. The value of volunteer labour and the factors influencing participation: Evidence for the United States from 2002 through 2005. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 54(2): 220-236.
- STATSSA. 2007. Labour force survey 16. September 2007. <http://interactive.statssa.gov.za:8282/webview/> Datum van gebruik: 26 Aug. 2008.
- VAILLANCOURT, F. 1994. To volunteer or not: Canada, 1987. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, XXVI (4):813-826.
- WILSON, J. & MUSICK, M. 1997. Who cares? Towards an intergrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review*, 62(5): 694-713.