

Volunteering participation among retired Finns

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Author: Tithy Saha

Supervisor(s):

University Teacher | University of Turku, Finland

Hans Hämäläinen

Associate Professor, INVEST Research Flagship Centre
Mirikka Danielsbacka

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Abstract

This paper examines the significance of various factors associated with volunteerism among retired Finns. A logistic regression model was employed, utilizing data from the 3rd wave of Generational Transmissions in Finland (Gentrans), carried out between autumn 2018 and 2019. The study sought to explore the relationship between different sociodemographic factors and volunteering in Finnish baby boomers born between 1945 and 1950. The findings reveal that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in volunteering work compared to those respondents with lower level of education. Moreover, respondents who place importance on religion show a higher likelihood of volunteering, while those in poor health exhibit a lower likelihood of engagement compared to those in good or very good health. Females are also found to be more likely to be involved in volunteering than males. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that retired Finnish baby boomers are motivated to participate in volunteer work. Socio-demographic factors including education, economic situation, health, religion, and gender are positively associated with this involvement.

Keywords: Active aging, healthy aging, volunteering.

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Introduction

One of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century is the phenomenon of population aging (United Nations, 2015). Life expectancies are increasing gradually in Western nations, yet a considerable number of paid workers choose to retire "early." (Kohli, 1991). Consequently, today's senior population spends significantly more time in retirement compared to previous cohorts. The social and economic impacts of population aging, often termed the "burden of aging," will be borne by a shrinking young adult population due to significant declines in birth rates. (Börsch-Supan, 2004; National Research Council, 2001). Population aging is evident through various indicators. For instance, the global proportion of individuals aged over 60 increased from 8% in 1950 to 12% in 2014, with projections indicating it will reach 21% by 2050. (United Nations, 2014). In European countries, approximately 21% of the population comprises older adults. Specifically, As of 2020, In Finland the elderly population comprises around 23% of the total population. (<https://data.oecd.org/chart/7bxI>).

Hence, amid the growing concern about aging populations, one of the most pressing issues is healthy aging. Healthy aging is defined as "the process of acquiring and maintaining functional capacity to ensure well-being in old age. " (WHO, 2015). In this context, retired older adults possess significant potential for productivity, and voluntary work has reached its peak. The term "Voluntary work" refers to unpaid activities individuals undertake either through an organization or directly for others, without personal ties, where no financial compensation is involved. (i.e., support is aimed at strangers) (Hämäinen et. al. 2023).

The cultural and political environment of any nation influences the role of volunteering. In Finland, as in other Nordic welfare states, volunteering serves as a complement to government services. (Grönlund, 2012). While Finland's public sector primarily ensures the welfare of its citizens, volunteerism is also widespread. National surveys indicate that more than 30% of Finns participate in volunteer work. (Hanifi, 2011). Research indicates that various factors affect volunteering. Older individuals who volunteer are more inclined to have a higher socioeconomic status, be married, affiliate with a specific religion, be employed, report good

health, have broad social networks, and possess previous volunteering experience compared to non-volunteers. (Warburton et. al. 2001; Choi, 2003).

Nevertheless, participating in voluntary work during old age is linked to numerous benefits, including positive self-rated health (Fiorillo & Nappo, 2017), reduced mortality rates, increased physical activity levels, elevated psychological well-being (Sneed & Cohen 2013), improved quality of life, and greater life satisfaction (Krägeloh & Shepherd 2015). In a study conducted by Wilson John (2012), it was found that the characteristics included gender, ethnicity, immigrant status, religion, level of education, employment position, and income strongly influence people's willingness to volunteer (Einolf, 2011; Kazemipur, 2012; Taniguchi, 2012).

Despite knowledge of various factors associated with volunteerism, this objective of this study to examine the relationship between sociodemographic factors and volunteering among retired Individuals born in Finland between 1945 and 1950 who are part of the baby boomer generation.

Literature Review

Volunteering among older people varies across countries due to differences in cultural perceptions, governmental policies, and social norms. It is both an economic and social phenomenon influenced by how the organization of societies and how social responsibilities are distributed (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). As welfare countries, European nations are increasingly recognizing retired individuals as a valuable source of volunteers, although regional differences persist. Volunteerism is particularly prominent in Sweden and Finland. (Gil-Lacruz et. al. 2017; García et. al. 2022).

Retired individuals may choose to participate in social welfare activities directly or through organizations that they find meaningful. To uncover the motivations behind engaging in volunteerism, several previous studies have explored the association between volunteering and socio-demographic characteristics. For example, in a study focusing on older Europeans aged 50 years or older, Erlinghagen & Hank (2006) found that participation rates in voluntary work are significantly higher in Northern Europe compared to Mediterranean countries. Interestingly, age, education, and health were found to exert a significant influence on engagement in voluntary work.

In the association between demographic characteristics and volunteering, numerous studies identified education as one of the major characteristics that motivate more to be involved in societal involvement (Huang et. al. 2009; Gesthuizen et. al. 2008). In studies using cross-sectional datasets, there is a widely accepted consensus that voluntary work correlates positively with education and income (Curtis & Grabb, 2001; Prouteau & Wolff, 2006; Taniguchi, 2006). In a study conducted by Ajrouch et al. (2016) In a longitudinal study conducted over two waves, focusing on Social Relations and Health over the life course it was found that education is significantly and positively correlated with a greater propensity for volunteering. Particularly, individuals with higher education levels are associated with a larger social network, which motivates greater involvement in volunteering at an older age. Research indicates that higher income is associated with a greater likelihood of volunteer participation (Fischer et. al. 1991). This may be explained by their capability to cover additional expenses related to volunteering, such as transportation, meals, and lodging.. Additionally, Fischer et. al. (1991) suggest that higher income, when combined with retirement, results in heightened levels of dedication among volunteers.

Numerous studies have recorded the correlation between religiosity and volunteerism. (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Penner et. al. 2005). When elucidating volunteering in later stages of life, the significance of religion or the altruistic inclination to assist others emerges as a pivotal predictor (Perry et. al. 2008). Similarly, Religiosity has also been pinpointed as a pivotal variable influencing volunteering behavior. (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014). In a study spanning 40 European countries, religiosity was found to have a positive correlation with volunteering (Voicu & Voicu, 2009). Dury et al. (2015), in their study based on Belgian aging studies, also discovered that older religious respondents, aged 60 years and above, who considered praying and spirituality as important aspects of their lives, were more inclined towards volunteering.

In numerous previous studies, the relationship between gender and volunteering has produced conflicting results. In a cross-national survey spanning 41 countries, it was found that males exhibit a greater tendency to volunteer compared to females in traditionally male-driven organizations. Conversely, in countries with higher levels of gender equality, women are notably more likely to engage in volunteering (Wemlinger et. al. 2016). In a study focusing on three Scandinavian countries, Boje et al. (2016) discovered that Denmark, Sweden, and Norway exhibit high levels of volunteering among both men and women, surpassing even those in other post-industrial nations. They observed that women are particularly drawn to

volunteering in Scandinavian countries, attributing this trend not only to gender equality but also to societal development, equitable resource allocation, and the restructuring of the non-profit sector towards welfare services. Conversely, other research demonstrates that In countries such as Spain, men tend to exhibit a higher inclination towards volunteering (García-Mainar et al. 2010).

Previous research has explored the association between sociodemographic factors, physical health variables, and volunteering among fully retired older adults in Western Australia (Jongenelis et al., 2020). Employing a comprehensive multilevel model, the study revealed that perceived personal responsibility plays a crucial role in volunteering. Additionally, it was identified as a mediator for other variables, including self-rated health, religious attendance, and social connectedness, which influence volunteering among older adults. In addition, Jongenelis et al. (2020) identified significant associations between education level, gender, and volunteering. Their study revealed that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in volunteer activities compared to those with lower educational attainment. Furthermore, the findings indicated that females are more inclined to participate in volunteering than males.

Aim of the study

The objective of this study is to assess how socio-demographic characteristics are associated with volunteering among retirees from the Finnish baby boomer generation born between 1945 and 1950, drawing from insights from prior studies.

Data and Methods

Sample

For this study, I utilized the population-based survey data from the Generational Transmissions in Finland (gentrans) project which studies contact, support, and social ties between friends and kin. The intended population of this study is Finnish baby boomers who were born between 1945 and 1950 (<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/gentrans/>). I used data from the third wave of the Generational Transmissions in Finland survey which was conducted in the autumn of 2018-2019. This present study sample included 2663 participants (58.81% female and 41.19% male). Moreover, the dataset encompasses respondents who are retired, working, and unemployed. However, in alignment with the research objective, the analysis has been restricted exclusively to retired respondents, resulting in a total of 2444 observations.

Dependent Variable

In this study, the sole dependent variable of interest was volunteering. Participants in the Gentrans project survey were asked whether they had volunteered within the previous 12 months, with responses coded as either 0 for no or 1 for yes, representing a binary variable.

Independent variables

In this study, several potential independent variables were taken into account, such as demographic and social factors, which were chosen based on prior relevant research. These variables encompassed gender, marital status, education attainment, self-perceived health, the importance of religion, and economic situation (Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Komp et. al, 2012).

To carry out the analysis, multiple independent variables were recorded. The original marital status variable, initially with six categories, was consolidated into four groups: unmarried, with a spouse/partner, divorced, and widowed. Educational attainment levels were initially divided into ten stages but later reclassified into three categories: 0=low, 1=medium, and 3=high. Individuals completing education up to middle school were classified as having low education, while those completing education up to vocational college level were categorized as medium. Respondents with education beyond vocational college were labeled as highly educated.

In the database, participants were prompted to assess their health and initially categorized into five groups. These were subsequently condensed into three categories: very good or good, fair,

and very poor or poor. In the dataset, respondents were queried about their economic situation, initially sorted into four categories. However, for this study, these four categories were condensed into three: wealthy, middle-income, and low-income.

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name		Freq.	Percent.
Done Volunteering Work	Yes	568	23.32
	No	1876	76.68
Gender	Female	1556	58.81
	Male	1097	41.19
Marital Status	Unmarried	164	6.21
	Having spouse/partner	1886	71.47
	Divorced	321	12.16
	Widowed	268	10.16
Education Attainment	Low	783	30.28
	Middle	1244	48.11
	High	559	21.62
Self-rated Health	Very good or good	1253	47.64
	Fair	1211	46.05
	Very poor or poor	166	6.31
Importance of religion	Very important	408	15.51
	Somewhat important	954	36.26
	Not that important	838	31.85
	Not important	431	16.38
Economic Situation	Wealthy	500	19.05
	Middle income	992	37.80
	Low-income	1132	43.14

Analytical Strategy

In this study, I began with univariate analysis, focusing on descriptive statistics. These statistics depict the frequency and percentage of both dependent and independent variables utilized in the study. Next, I conducted a binary logistic regression analysis to investigate the associations between different factors and volunteering among retired individuals in Finland.

To strengthen the robustness of the main findings, three regression models were developed. Each model incorporates a set of variables associated with volunteering (Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Komp et al., 2012), including participants' gender, marital status, level of education, economic situation, self-rated health, and importance of religion. (descriptive statistics: Table 1).

In this study, a stepwise model was utilized to examine how the inclusion of additional factors may alter the association of previously included factors with volunteering. In Model 1, I included variables related to respondents' demography: gender and marital status. For Model 2, I expanded the analysis to include socioeconomic factors, specifically education level and economic situation. Finally, in Model 3, I further augmented the factors by incorporating the importance of religion and self-rated health status. The analysis was performed using statistical software version 17.

Results

Table 2 displays the outcomes of the logistic regression model, detailing the association between volunteering participation among retired Finns and various socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

In the initial model (Model 1), demographic variables — gender and marital status were included as independent variables. The findings revealed that retired male (OR=.68) Finns were less likely to engage in volunteering work compared to the reference group (female), with this association being statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

When considering marital status, none of the odds ratios for the categories ("Having spouse/Partner", "divorced", and "widowed") are statistically significant compared to the reference category (unmarried). All associated p-values are greater than 0.05. This implies that,

according to this model, marital status does not have a significant effect on the odds of the outcome when controlling for other variables.

In Model 2, I broadened the analysis beyond gender and marital status by incorporating education level and economic situation. Despite these additional variables, the impact of gender and marital status on volunteering participation among retired Finns remained consistent.

In this model, a significant correlation was found between the level of education and volunteering participation among retired Finns. Individuals possessing medium or higher levels of education exhibit a greater propensity for volunteering compared to those with lower levels of education (reference group). This association was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

The odds ratios for middle-income and low-income respondents are 0.90 and 0.91, respectively. None of these categories' odds ratios are statistically significant, as their p-values are greater than 0.05. This suggests that the economic situation does not have a significant influence on volunteering engagement among retired Finns.

In the third and final model (Model 3), I incorporated two additional sociodemographic factors—self-rated health and religious importance. After the inclusion of these two variables, the associations among the variables in Models 1 and 2 remained stable, except for a slight change observed in gender. In Model 3, it was still, however, observed that males are less likely to engage in volunteer work. This indicates that retired male Finns were less likely to be involved in volunteering compared to females (reference group).

Respondents who rate their health status as "poor or very poor" exhibit a lower likelihood of volunteering compared to the reference group (very good/good health status), and this association is statistically significant ($p < .05$). However, reporting "Fair" health status does not significantly affect the likelihood of volunteering, with an odds ratio of 0.84.

In the variable concerning the importance of religion, the odds ratios are .31, .24, and .27, respectively, for reporting religion as somewhat important, not that important, and not important at all. These odds ratios signify the decrease in the likelihood of volunteering associated with each level of self-rated importance of religiousness compared to the reference

category (religion reported as very important). All levels of self-rated importance of religiousness have statistically significant effects on the odds of volunteering ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2 Logistic Regression

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	OR	P	95% CI		OR	P	95% CI		OR	P	95% CI	
Gender												
Female	Ref.											
Male	.68***	0.000	.56	.84	.66***	0.000	.54	.82	.79*	.041	.64	.99
Marital Status												
Unmarried	Ref.											
Having Spouse/ Partner	1.09	0.667	.72	1.66	1.12	.59	.73	1.71	1.00	.987	.64	1.55
Divorced	1.02	0.928	.62	1.66	1.09	.72	.66	1.79	1.05	.841	.63	1.75
Widowed	1.14	0.592	.69	1.89	1.19	.48	.72	1.99	1.12	.649	.66	1.90
Education Level												
Low	Ref.											
Medium	1.64***											
High	2.43***											
Economic Situation												
Wealthy	Ref.											
Middle Income	.90											
Low Income	.91											
Self-Rated Health												
Very good or Good	Ref.											
Fair	.84											
Very Poor or Poor	.25***											
Religion Importance												
Very Important	Ref.											
Somewhat Important	.31***											
Not that important	.24***											
Not important at all	.27***											
Pseudo R-squared	0.00				0.02				0.07			
Number of observations	2335				2335				2335			

Notes: OR= odds ratio, CI= confidence interval

Discussion

As modern societies experience rapid population aging, the engagement of older adults in social activities, especially their pursuit of successful and active aging, has garnered significant attention from policymakers and social scientists globally. (Dury et. al. 2015). The goal of this study was to explore how sociodemographic factors influence individuals' participation in volunteering among among retirees from the Finnish baby boomer generation born between 1945 and 1950. The findings indicate distinct correlations with volunteering behavior. According to the study, males compared to females, individuals who reported their health status as very poor or poor (reference group: very good/good health status), and those who rated religion as somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all (reference group: religion as very important), demonstrate lower levels of involvement likelihood in volunteering activities. Conversely, females and respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in volunteer work.

This study highlights gender differences in volunteering participation, indicating that females in Finland are more likely to engage in volunteering compared to males. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that in Nordic countries, known for their emphasis on equality, women's involvement in various types of volunteering is notably higher (García et al., 2022). These factors particularly encourage women to participate in volunteering as a means of promoting social awareness and contributing actively to society as citizens. (Boje et. al. 2019).

The study indicates a relationship between education level and volunteerism. It suggests that individuals with medium or higher levels of education are more inclined to volunteer compared to those with lower education levels. This aligns with previous research showing that higher education correlates with increased participation in volunteer activities (Son & Wilson, 2017). Moreover, the study aligns with previous research indicates that older adults with higher education tend to have broader social networks and stronger social bonds, which may contribute to their greater involvement in volunteering. This indicates that education not only affects volunteer participation but also fosters social networks conducive to community involvement and shed light on the relationship between education and volunteering. (Ajrouch et al. 2016).

Ajrouch et al.(2016) clarified that individuals with higher education prioritize expanding social networks and human capital, driving their engagement in volunteerism. Essentially, the findings underscore education's significance in promoting volunteerism. They suggest that higher education levels could indirectly bolster community involvement and social capital by encouraging greater participation in volunteer activities.

In addition to higher education attainment, the perceived importance of religiousness is also associated with volunteering. However, religion is multifaceted, serving as an indicator of its connection to volunteerism. In the dataset, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of religion to them and it has been found that respondents who feel religion is very important for them were more involved in the volunteering. In accordance with previous research, the relationship between the significance of religion and volunteering suggests that both an individual's religious network and their level of involvement and importance contribute to volunteering. Furthermore, religious influences on volunteering are observed across multiple voluntary domains (Yeung, 2018). This study's findings align with previous research, indicating that the importance of religion at a contextual level influences the probability of volunteering. The rationale behind this is that religious traditions often inspire doctrines, norms of altruism, and stewardship, which in turn motivate individuals to volunteer (Bennett, 2015).

Healthy aging and volunteering are linked up correspondently. Finally, this study indicates a link between self-perceived health status and volunteering participation among retired Finns. The findings is that individuals who perceive their health as very poor or poor are less inclined to participate in volunteer activities. This aligns with previous research suggesting that deteriorating health, including increased depression and mobility constraints, serves as a barrier to initiating or participating in volunteering among older adults (Papa et al. 2019).

This study's results regarding the link between self-perceived health and volunteering among retired older individuals differ somewhat from previous research. Principi et.al. (2016) found that older adults who particularly have poor health status are more involved in volunteering work as a way to overcome negative consequences of poor health and avoid social exclusion.

The main objective of this study is to assess the probability of volunteering among retired adults, considering sociodemographic factors. The research utilizes cross-sectional data collected in Finland. However, future studies should delve into various aspects of volunteering,

including formal and informal types, frequency of participation, and the resulting benefits, while also accounting for social and environmental factors.

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