

## II.

Special Types of Volunteering

### Chapter 9

## Informal, Unorganized Volunteering

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### A. Introduction

Informal volunteering, or helping individuals in a way not coordinated by an organization, is the most common type of human helping behavior but one of the least studied. The psychological motives for informal volunteering are similar to those for formal volunteering, but income and socioeconomic status do not affect informal volunteering. Informal volunteering is common in both wealthy and poor countries, and welfare state service provision does not crowd out informal volunteering. Little is known about the individual and social benefits of informal volunteering, and the state of knowledge is not yet complete enough to inform policy. However, using existing informal helping networks can make development and other projects more effective. Future research should collect better data on informal volunteering, particularly longitudinal and comparative data.

### B. Definitions

This chapter accepts the set of definitions in the *Handbook* Appendix. Informal volunteering is defined as unpaid, voluntary work not coordinated by an organization or institution. It is evident in helping individuals living outside one's household, political participation, religious activity, and membership in informal mutual assistance groups is relevant. Surveys have measured person-to-person helping activities, including providing child care, cooking meals, doing household repairs, giving directions, listening to a friend's problems, and offering advice.

Much informal volunteering is reciprocal, with people taking turns helping one another through time, or with members of informal groups helping each other. Most informal volunteerism is directed at people one knows and only rarely at strangers (Amato 1990). Informal volunteering is often not completely voluntary, since it occurs in social groups with strong norms of reciprocity and mutual assistance. When members of these groups refuse to help others, they risk losing status and friendships. They may even be ostracized from the group.

No consensus exists on typology or classification of informal helping behaviors. Some even refuse to regard these behaviors as volunteering (Musick and Wilson 2008). One paper used factor analysis to classify informal volunteerism into two types, person-oriented and task-oriented helping. Person-oriented informal volunteering includes helping homeless or hungry person, child or teen, disabled person, or immigrant. It includes helping one's neighborhood, bringing together people of one's ethnic background, advancing the rights of a minority group, babysitting without pay, and helping someone move. Task-oriented informal volunteering includes taking care of animals or pets, housework, yard work, shopping or driving to appointments, helping with a business, making food, and doing home renovations (Finkelstein and Brannick 2007). Another factor analytic article reported a distinction between helping strangers and helping people known personally (Einolf 2008).

## **C. Historical Background and Theoretical Perspectives**

Three perspectives -- social capital, social networks, and evolutionary theory -- help explain why people participate in informal volunteering. Informal volunteering may be seen as a type of social capital, since it helps establish the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation among individuals (Putnam 2000). Social networks theory examines how individuals help others, expecting that they will later receive help in return (direct reciprocity). Or how they help members of a group, expecting that other group members, not necessarily the person receiving help, will later reciprocate (indirect reciprocity; Ekeh 1974). Evolutionary biology explains the existence of informal volunteering by the survival value it provided for our hominid ancestors. It also helps explain some features of informal volunteering, such as the tendency to help family more than friends, acquaintances, or strangers.

Informal volunteering predates the earliest formal voluntary associations, being present in all human societies (Gouldner 1960; Haidt and Joseph 2004; Komter 2005; Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990; Smith 1997). This suggests that informal volunteering is partially instinctive (as aspect of behavior genetics) among human beings, not learned behavior present only in some cultures (Haidt 2001; 2003; see also *Handbook* Chapter 25). Informal helping even predates the evolution of modern humans, with evolutionary biologists considering it an important aspect of humans' evolution as social animals (De Waal 1996; Sober and Wilson 1998).

Informal volunteering, compared with formal volunteering or state assistance, has historically been the most important way that people received assistance when they needed it. In preindustrial Europe individuals in local communities provided for each other's needs through traditional forms of mutual assistance. With industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century, these traditional networks broke down being progressively and partially replaced by formal voluntary and mutual aid associations (Egerton and Mullan 2008; Finlayson 1994; Owen 1965). These formal voluntary networks did not provide perfectly for human needs. So by the turn of the twentieth century, most European societies began developing welfare states. The nonprofit sector lived on, identifying gaps in service and new needs (Finlayson 1994) and partnering with the state to provide services more effectively (Lewis 1995; Kendall and Knapp 1996; Kendall 2003). Informal volunteerism seems to have become less important as societies industrialized, continuing to exist in the form of small favors, but no longer essential for survival.

## **D. Key Issues**

The key issues in understanding informal volunteering include measuring it accurately, discerning its causes, determining its relationship to formal volunteering and governmentally provided services, and measuring whether it benefits volunteers themselves and society in general. The key practical questions about informal volunteering are whether and how governments and nonprofits should encourage informal volunteering, and whether and how institutions can use existing networks of informal volunteering to build participation in formal programs.

## ***1. Measuring Informal Volunteering***

Whereas many surveys measure participation in formal volunteering, only a few ask about informal volunteering, and these exist almost exclusively in industrialized countries. Only three cross-national surveys produce informal volunteering information: the 2004 wave of the Eurobarometer, the 2001 wave of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), and the 2010 Gallup World Giving Index (WGI). The 2004 Eurobarometer surveyed 29 countries in Europe, and the ISSP surveyed 27 countries, most being highly industrialized countries in Europe or former British colonies. The Gallup World Giving Index (WGI) included only one question on informal volunteering, and detailed information on its methodology is unavailable. Still, it does have a broad coverage (153 countries).

Surveys tend to underestimate the prevalence of informal volunteering, since the commonplace nature of informal volunteering leads people to fail to recall it. A study in the United States found that people reported almost three times as much informal volunteering in time diaries as they did in surveys (Havens and Schervish 2001). Whereas time diary studies have the most accurate measures of informal volunteering, these exist in only a few countries. Moreover, methodological differences make cross-country comparisons difficult.

Informal volunteering is more common than formal volunteering. Time diary studies in the U.S. (Havens and Schervish 2001), the United Kingdom (Windebank 2008), and France (Windebank 2008) show that people spend more time on informal volunteering than formal volunteering. The World Giving Index found that more people reported having helped a stranger in the last month (an average of 45% across countries) than having done formal volunteering (20%). In the 2004 Eurobarometer study, participation in informal volunteering ranged from 56 to 92 percent, while participation in formal volunteering ranged from 10 to 51 percent. In the 2001 International Social Survey Program, 65.7 percent of respondents had helped someone with housework during the past year, 78.9 percent had consoled a depressed person, and 35.6 percent had helped someone find a job. A study of informal volunteering in southern Africa (Wilkinson-Maposa and Fowler 2009) shows that such volunteering is the most common type among poor people in that region.

The gap between informal and formal volunteering seems even higher in non-industrialized countries. These countries lack the high rates of formal volunteering found in industrialized countries, but have similar rates of informal volunteering. In the WGI formal volunteering correlated positively and significantly with Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but informal volunteering had no significant correlation. The top 10 for formal volunteering in the WGI were all industrialized nations, but for informal volunteering both industrialized and developing countries composed the top 10. These countries, in order, were Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Canada, Kuwait, Guyana, the United States, Kenya, and Australia, with Colombia and New Zealand tied for tenth place. Interestingly these 11 countries include 4 highly developed, stable democracies (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand), and 5 countries that have had experience with violent conflict (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Kuwait, and Colombia). This suggests two conditions that may encourage assistance to strangers: generosity stemming from peace and prosperity and mutual assistance given in reaction to violence and hardship.

Country-specific studies of informal volunteering are rare outside the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, but some do exist for Mexico, the Philippines, Russia, Kazakhstan, and southern Africa. In Mexico, a nationally representative study found two-thirds of adults engaging in some form of volunteering. It was about evenly split between formal and informal volunteering (Butcher 2012). A focus-group study of volunteering in the Philippines (Fernan 2002) revealed that respondents spent an average of five hours per week in formal volunteering and 8.2 hours per week in informal volunteering. Respondents defined informal volunteering to include some activities familiar to respondents in industrialized countries, such as participating in community clean-ups (37%), helping someone in non-emergency situations (33%), counseling (33%), and helping someone in an emergency situation (30%). Respondents also defined informal volunteering to include praying for someone, which 41 percent did in a typical week, and lending money (33%).

A nationally representative survey in Russia (Mersianova and Yakobson 2009) found that 50 percent of respondents received assistance from individuals they knew personally, including family (85%), friends and acquaintances (65%), neighbors (30%), co-workers (28%), members of ethnic groups (3%), people in similar circumstances (14%), and their parish (9%). The most common type of volunteering was informal, reported by 13 percent of respondents, followed by

volunteering through work (4%), for a housing committee (3%), with social movements (2%), and for a religious organization (1%) (Mersianova and Korneeva 2011). Common types of informal volunteering are helping with household chores, received by 24 percent of respondents, occasional help with shopping, cleaning, and child care (19%), regular child care (10%), providing special information (10%), resolving family conflicts (7%), help finding medical assistance (7%), and helping someone find employment (6%). As in the Philippines, a common form of helping was short-term loans of small amounts of money (28%) or longer loans of large amounts (12%).

A large scale survey (1200 respondents) in Kazakhstan found fifty five percent of the respondents provided assistance to the individuals they knew personally. The most common type of volunteering (82%) was financial, emotional, and resource assistance to the family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. 95% of the respondents do not consider the assistance to social network members as a volunteering (BRIF Centralnaya Asiya 2002).

In southern Africa, formal and informal volunteering exist in a situation of some conflict, with informal volunteering representing traditional society and formal volunteering operating as a less popular and largely state-sanctioned activity. Before the colonial period, “traditional cultural beliefs and practices encouraged collective responsibility, solidarity, and reciprocity.” Here people relied extensively upon traditional networks for support (Patel et al. 2007:13). Colonialism redirected, interfered with, and broke up these traditional practices. After independence many countries established formal volunteering programs through youth service movements. But by the 1980s these had declined, victims of poor administration, corruption, and nepotism. Despite negative interference from colonial rulers and post-colonial governments, informal volunteering remains powerful in southern Africa. In Botswana, for example, informal volunteering includes organizing weddings and burials, cooperating on farming and home construction, providing emotional support, and participating in community clean-ups. These are usually organized by a community leader or village headman, and involves informal roles and flexible time commitment (Patel et al. 2007:22).

Little survey data exists on informal helping in Africa, and in any of the waves of the Afrobarometer study no questions are asked about informal helping. Nonetheless, Pelsler, Burton

and Gondwe (2004) conducted a nationally representative survey in Malawi. It revealed that helping neighbors was common not only in rural areas, where traditional structures still existed, but also in urban neighborhoods, where one might expect traditional social arrangements to be disrupted. They found that 98.4 percent of survey respondents knew the name of their next door neighbors, 91.5 percent would let their neighbors look after their house while away, and 87.6 percent would let their neighbors watch their children for an evening.

To sum up, informal volunteering is more common than formal volunteering, but its prevalence is often underestimated on surveys (see *Handbook* Chapter 52). Its commonplace nature makes people fail to recall it. Informal volunteering does not vary as much by country as formal volunteering. Nor does it correlate with the country's level of economic development the way formal volunteering does. More time diary studies and more studies in developing nations are needed to enhance understanding of the prevalence and nature of informal volunteering outside the industrialized world.

## ***2. Correlates of Informal Volunteering***

Turning to empirical work on informal volunteering, researchers have examined the relationship between informal volunteering and demographic variables (gender, age, race, and ethnicity), childhood experiences, socioeconomic status, resources, motivation and values, and social capital and family structure.

Concerning demographics, studies in Great Britain (Egerton and Mullan 2008), Australia (Hook 2004), Sweden (Gundelach, Freitag, and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010), and Europe (Einolf 2011; Hank and Stuck 2008) find that women do more informal volunteering than men. Qualitative studies have argued that informal helping are more common among marginalized racial and ethnic groups, such as African-Americans in the United States (Chatters et al. 2002; Lee, Campbell, and Millar 1991; Rozario 2006) and indigenous people and non-English speaking immigrants in Australia (Kerr et al. 2001). There has been, however, little survey research on race, ethnicity, and informal volunteering. One U.S. survey found that African-Americans were no more likely than whites to engage in informal volunteering, but that blacks did volunteer more hours. Asian-Americans' and Latinos' informal volunteering behavior resembled whites' (Einolf

2011). Another U.S. study found that 41 percent of African-Americans 45 and older engaged in informal volunteering, as opposed to only 36 percent of whites (Rozario 2006).

Only two studies have examined the role of childhood experiences. A Canadian study found that people active in religious organizations in their youth were more likely to be informal volunteers as adults (Jones 2000). A U.S. study found children who were active in a religious organization, went door-to-door to raise money, did volunteer work, belonged to a youth group, participated in organized sports, and participated in student government, were more inclined toward informal volunteer work as adults. The association between these childhood experiences and adult informal volunteering was strong even among people 50 and older, indicating that childhood experiences may have effects that persist over the life course (Perks and Haan 2011).

Whereas many studies show that people of high socioeconomic status are more likely to engage in formal volunteering, the literature is divided on the relationship between socioeconomic status and informal volunteering. Some studies find that people with low income and education are more likely to engage in informal volunteering, including studies in the United Kingdom (Egerton and Mullan 2008; Li, Pickles, and Savage 2005; Williams 2004) and Sweden (Henning and Lieberg 1996). But an analysis of Swiss data found no correlation between education and informal volunteering, and a positive relationship between occupational prestige and informal volunteering (Gundelach et al. 2010).

Informal volunteering requires good health and free time. In the United States and Europe, informal volunteering correlates positively with health (Einolf 2011), and Swiss data show that as health problems develop informal volunteering declines in old age (Gundelach et al. 2010). People working part time or not at all do more informal volunteering than those working full-time (Gundelach et al. 2010).

The same psychological traits that motivate formal volunteering also motivate informal volunteering. These include empathic concern (Einolf 2008; Finkelstein and Brannick 2007), the six motivations of Clary and colleagues' (1998) "Volunteer Functions Inventory" (Finkelstein and Brannick 2007); scope of one's moral obligations (Einolf 2010); and role identity, moral obligation, and generative concern, which has to do with helping younger people (Finkelstein and Brannick 2007).

Turning to social capital, people reporting more frequent social contact with others and higher levels of trust also engage in more informal volunteering (Einolf 2011). Children can bring people into networks of mutual assistance, where one study found that people with school-aged children engage in more informal volunteering (Gundelach et al. 2010).

In summary, informal volunteering resembles formal volunteering in its positive relationship with childhood experiences, health, free time, prosocial personality traits, trust, social networks, and the presence of children in the household. Unlike formal volunteering, for which gender composition varies across countries, informal volunteering is more common among women. It may also be more common among racial and ethnic minorities. Unlike formal volunteering, informal volunteering does not correlate positively with income and education, and in some studies is actually more common among people of lower socioeconomic status.

### ***3. Informal volunteering and the welfare state***

Informal volunteering might have either a complementary or a competing relationship with formal volunteering and governmentally-provided social services. At the individual level, people only have a limited amount of time, so time spent in formal volunteering might preclude spending time in informal helping. On the other hand, many individual traits and characteristics predict both formal and informal volunteering. Thus the two behaviors may have a positive relationship. Governmental provision of services through welfare-state policies might “crowd out” informal helping, making it unnecessary. On the other hand, governmental provision for basic human needs might create prosperity and security, conditions that foster individual relationships and the “crowding in” of informal volunteering.

At the individual level, empirical studies from a number of countries show that the same people who do formal volunteer work tend also to do informal volunteer work. Much of this research is cross-sectional, including studies in Canada (Rajulton, Ravenera, and Beaujot 2007), Denmark (Henriksen, Koch-Neilsen, and Rosdahl 2008), the United States (Burr et al. 2005; Hinterlong 2008; Einolf 2011), and Europe (Einolf 2011; Hank and Stuck 2008). Using path analysis on panel data from the U.S., Wilson and Musick (1997) found that formal volunteering encouraged informal volunteering, but not the reverse. Informal volunteering also correlates with

charitable giving, voluntary association participation, and political activity (Einolf 2011), and with civic participation, socializing with friends and family, and participation in sports and recreation with friends (Rajulton et al. 2007). These findings support Smith's Leisure General Activity Pattern (see Chapter 6).

At the level of society, several have examined whether governmental assistance crowds in or crowds out informal volunteering. Studies of service provision to the elderly in France and Israel (Litwin and Attias-Donfut 2009) found no evidence for the crowding-out hypothesis: as elderly people age and develop health problems, government agencies provide more support while family, friends, and neighbors maintain their assistance. Two European studies, using cross-sectional, national-level data, also found no evidence for the crowding out hypothesis (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006; Van der Meer, Scheepers, and te Grotenhuis 2009). An analysis of the 26 Swiss cantons -- they are culturally similar but have widely varying welfare policies -- found no relationship between type of welfare services and informal volunteering (Gundelach et al. 2010). Finally, an analysis of data from the Eurobarometer, WGI, and International Social Survey Programme surveys showed a positive relationship at the country level between informal volunteering and both formal volunteering and state spending on social-welfare programs (Einolf 2012).

Studies of informal volunteering in the former Soviet Union reveal that personal networks play an important role, because of failures in the formerly powerful state sector and an emerging, weak, and poorly understood nonprofit sector. Under the Soviet regime people received comprehensive social and economic assistance from the government. Though citizens still expect such service today, governments have cut budgets for essential public services, among them health care, transportation, and free public housing, due in part to pressure from international development institutions such as World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Without a developed nonprofit sector to fill gaps, citizens have turned to traditional networks of family, neighbors, clan members, and coworkers (Nezhina and Ibrayeva 2012). These informal networks root in pre-Soviet peasant village gatherings, clan affiliations, and neighborhood councils (Kara-Murza 2011; Abylkhozhin 2007). During the Soviet period people formed informal networks to trade favors and exchange scarce commodities, a practice viewed then and now as corrupt, illegal, and repulsive (Ledeneva 2009). But people also formed, and continue to

form, positive social-support networks, based not on narrow self-interest but on loyalty, friendship, and trust.

A recent survey (Nezhina and Ibrayeva 2012) found that most people considered government the best place to seek help in both Russia (66%) and Kazhazkstan (44%), followed by family and friends (49%/42%), with nongovernmental associations a distant third (23%/13%). In Kazhakhstan, the senior members of the group dictate the norms and control charitable behavior of group members, who are expected to provide financial, emotional, and resource assistance to those who are in need. If a member refuses to provide a support it usually causes ostracism and social isolation and sometimes “moral terror”. In Uzbekistan, community councils (‘mahalla’) govern informal volunteering to help families gather the harvest, build a house, or prepare for wedding or funeral (Powell, 2009).

#### ***4. Benefits of Informal Volunteering***

As non-market productive activity, informal volunteering should be considered in the generation of aggregate income measures, as recommended by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009). Attempts to assign monetary value to informal volunteering labor are very rare, though Egerton and Mullan (2008) compute a monetary value for informal volunteering in the United Kingdom, and Ironmonger (2000) conducts the same exercise in Australia. Both studies found that informal volunteering contributes more value to the economy than formal volunteering, and that women contribute much more value than men.

As a type of social capital, informal volunteering would seem to have positive effects on society, though no research has tested this hypothesis. At the individual level, studies seeking evidence of benefits of informal volunteerism for volunteers have shown mixed results. On the positive side two studies show positive correlations between informal volunteering and good health. One used a sample of elderly people in Sweden (Jegermalm 2009), the other used a sample of members of religious congregations in the United States (Krause 2009). A French study found that informal volunteering correlated negatively with depression, but not as much as formal volunteering (Wahrendorf et al. 2008). Nevertheless, a study of American teenage members of the Presbyterian Church found no relationship between informal volunteering and

mental and physical health, while formal volunteering and helping out within the family did correlate with good health (Schwartz et al. 2009). Similarly, research on American retirees revealed that good health correlated with formal volunteering, but not with informal volunteering (Moen and Fields 2002).

These inconsistent results may indicate that some other factors mediate the relationship between informal volunteering and positive outcomes. In a study of the psychological benefits of informal volunteering, Windsor, Antsey, and Rodgers (2008) found that moderate amounts of both formal and informal volunteering correlated positively with good emotional affect and life satisfaction among the elderly, but that spending over 800 hours per year helping others had a negative correlation. One study of American elderly populations found that informal volunteering improved life satisfaction for women, but not for men (Antonucci et al. 1991). Another study of elderly people in the United States found that informal volunteering benefited white women and black men, but not white men or black women (McIntosh and Danigelis 1995).

All of these studies are cross-sectional, making causality difficult to determine. Informal volunteering might cause one to be healthy and happy, or healthy, happy people might be more inclined to become informal volunteers, or both. Reciprocal causality may also have a suppressive effect, as unhappy or unhealthy people might seek out volunteer opportunities as a way of coping. A U.S. study used a three wave, eight-year longitudinal data set and sophisticated statistical methods to better establish causal relationships (Li and Ferraro 2005). The authors found that formal volunteering helped prevent depression, but informal volunteering had no effect. They also found that formal volunteering encouraged informal helping, but not vice versa. They concluded that depressed people sought out formal volunteering as a coping mechanism, but depression did not lead individuals to seek out informal volunteering.

Five other longitudinal studies found that a mix of productive activities in old age predicted positive health and emotional outcomes. However, three of these studies included informal volunteering in a composite variable that included other productive activities, making it impossible to isolate the effect of informal volunteering from other actions (Ayalon 2008; Baker et al. 2005; Hinterlong 2008). Two other studies focused on widows, finding that informal

volunteering helped protect them from depression and helped with the grieving process (Brown et al. 2008; Li 2007).

## ***5. Informal Volunteering and Public Policy***

Governments and non-profit organizations are increasingly realizing the importance of social capital in development, and making use of existing informal support networks in establishing development projects. Most research on social capital and development has looked at formal voluntary associations, finding strong evidence that voluntary participation correlates with the success of particular projects and economic development in general (Khan, Rifaqat, and Kazmi 2007). Only a few studies have examined the role of informal local helping networks in implementing their own interventions. These include a Heifer Project International program in rural Tanzania (De Hann 2001), agricultural extension projects in rural Mali (Reid and Salmen 2000), a project encouraging the adoption of new fertilizer technology in rural Tanzania (Isham 2002), World Bank programs for indigenous people in Latin America (Uquillas and Nieuwkoop 2003), and rural development in Bangladesh (Mondal 2000) and Pakistan (Khan et al. 2007). Nearly all these studies found that making use of existing helping networks assisted the project in being successful and had good outcomes for participants. Microcredit programs such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh have also used informal helping networks as a basis for recruiting participants. While some authors criticize these programs for having negative outcomes for women (Goetz and Gupta 1996; Parmar 2003), they have been successful in alleviating poverty.

Several other studies have found that using informal volunteering networks may contribute to the success of public programs in industrialized countries. Biglan and Hinds (2009) found that community psychology programs in the United States have successfully used existing non-kin support networks to help implement programs designed to reduce negative youth behaviors, such as alcohol, drug, and tobacco use. Budde and Schene (2004) analyzed the use of informal social support networks in the U.S. to prevent violence and help victims of violence. Jupp (2008) found that informal volunteerism networks contributed to the success of community groups in public housing projects in England.

The above programs used existing informal volunteering networks to start formal programs, but did not try to increase informal volunteering itself. Williams (2004) argues that groups that want to reach poor people should encourage informal volunteering, not formal volunteering, as informal volunteering is the one type of volunteering poor and marginalized people are likely to engage in. Nonetheless, there has been so little research on initiatives to encourage informal volunteering that it is not yet possible to make recommendations as to whether governments or nonprofits should encourage it or how they could most effectively do so.

## **E. Usable Knowledge**

Given how little is known about informal volunteering, including a lack of consensus on how to define and measure informal volunteering, practitioners and policy makers should be careful in applying scientific knowledge to the subject. With this warning in mind, the current research demonstrates that informal volunteering seems to be more common than formal volunteering. At the country level, informal volunteering does not vary as much as formal volunteering, and does not correlate with the country's level of economic development the way that formal volunteering does. Informal volunteering does correlate positively both with formal volunteering and with government provision of social welfare services, indicating that these institutionalized forms of helping may create environments conducive to more informal, person to person helping.

Like formal volunteering, informal volunteering is a type of prosocial behavior, and correlates with prosocial activity in childhood, resources of health and free time, trust and social networks, and prosocial personality traits and motives. Unlike formal volunteering, informal volunteering does not correlate with status position, so that whites, males, highly educated people, and high income people are not more likely to engage in informal volunteering. Some research shows negative correlations with these status markers, while other research shows no correlation.

The most useful finding for policy makers in government and nonprofit organizations has to do with the role of informal volunteering networks as a source of recruitment for more formal projects. In rural development projects, microcredit banks, and social service projects among

poor populations living in industrialized nations, informal volunteering networks have proven to be an efficient way to recruit and motivate participants in formal projects. Few poor people in industrialized countries already do formal volunteering, but many do informal volunteering, so projects that look for informal volunteers play to the existing strengths of poor people.

## **F. Future Trends and Research Needed**

Given the scarcity of published studies on informal volunteering, virtually every topic covered in this chapter requires more research. Existing studies focus on the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe; there is very little research on the rest of the world, and almost no cross-national comparative survey research. Before such cross-national research can occur, researchers would need to agree upon a definition of informal volunteering, a typology to classify informal volunteering behaviors, and effective ways to measure them. Also needed is more research on the causes and correlates of informal volunteering, and more longitudinal research on the effects of informal volunteering on volunteers.

Perhaps the most striking gap in the literature on informal volunteerism is our lack of knowledge on the role it plays in society. There has been, during the last two decades, an immense amount of research on social capital, but almost all of it focuses on formal volunteering, political activity, and membership in formal voluntary associations. Social networks researchers study informal volunteering, but their studies often do not distinguish actual helping behaviors from potential sources of help, or helping behaviors from purely social interactions.

Finally, theorists of informal volunteering, social networks, and social capital should move beyond simplistic rational choice models that assume people cooperate only out of self-interest. Recent research in psychology, comparative primatology, and evolutionary biology suggests that helping others is an instinctive act, the legacy of hundreds of millions of years of primate evolution in social groups. People are more likely to help family members or people from whom they can expect direct or indirect reciprocity, but people also help total strangers in situations where they do not expect a return of the favor, out of empathy, moral duty, or because it feels good to help others. An evolutionary perspective provides tools that can help researchers

generate hypotheses about how the motives for helping and the amount of help offered vary among persons and situations.

## **G. Cross-references**

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