

“Something that others do”: applying personal experience to established definitions of volunteering

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Introduction

- What is volunteering?
- Defining volunteering in research
- The 'universal attributes' of volunteering
- Applying definitions to lived experiences
- So what?
- Wider implications

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What is volunteering?

- No standard definition in use across the United Kingdom
- Therefore no clear line between what is volunteering and what is not
- Definitions tend to focus on the formal side of volunteering
- Some specifically exclude friends and relatives

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Defining volunteering in research

- Omitting the 'v' word is the standard approach in surveys
- This is not always desirable in qualitative research

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The 'universal attributes' of volunteering

"I think it's probably about someone offering their skills for free to an organisation, a company or a group of people"

"I understand that the concept of volunteering is really offering your time, without expecting a monetary gain, but probably because you have a cause that you want to promote"

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Applying definitions to lived experiences

“I don’t have any experience of volunteering I don’t think,. Maybe a group when I was twenty, but that probably doesn’t count”

“I wouldn’t have said I did any volunteering, but I’m on my kids schools parent council and I’ve just realised that’s volunteering. I wouldn’t have said it was volunteering, just something that I do”

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So what?

- What does it mean for how we ask people about their volunteering experience?
- To what extent are perceptions of volunteering acting as a barrier to participation?
- Does it mean that 'social desirability bias' is not as prevalent as we might think?

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Wider implications

- Recruiting research participants
- The categories of voluntary activity
- The word 'volunteering' is the key barrier
- Seeking to understand the views that people bring with them

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Potential courses of action

1. Spreading a greater understanding of volunteering and volunteers
2. Tackling the subject at an early age through the education system
3. Focussing on the activities and the benefit and letting the people decide

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