

Voluntary Issues

Scottish Household Survey Analytical Topic Report: Volunteering

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This paper reports the findings of a project that investigated the prevalence, type and intensity of volunteering in Scotland based on data gathered through the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) between 1999 and 2006 and focus groups and interviews. This project also involved considering the methodological performance of the volunteering suite of questions in the SHS.

Main Findings

- Rates of volunteering reported through the SHS are lower than those reported by Volunteer Development Scotland's Annual Digest of Statistics and the Department for Communities and Local Government's Citizenship Survey.
- Our analysis confirms that the key groups identified in the Scottish Executive's Volunteering Strategy (2004) (people with disabilities, unemployed people, young people, those living in neighbourhoods of deprivation and those with no formal qualifications) are less likely to volunteer than others in the survey.
- Volunteers are more likely to volunteer with organisations that focus on children, young people or sports and physical recreation than any other type of organisation. Volunteers are more likely to take part in raising money, committee work or general help than any other type of activity.
- In 2005, volunteers spent on average 12.8 hours per month volunteering.
- Volunteers are often attracted to volunteering by a desire to help their community and/or to help people experiencing a similar situation, problem or condition which has been experienced by the volunteer him/herself or by a friend or family member.
- Volunteers are likely to stop volunteering due to a lack of time, often caused by a change in circumstances such as having children or starting a new job.
- People who have never volunteered feel that a lack of awareness of what volunteering involves can act as a barrier to taking part in volunteering. For example, there may be a fear that volunteering will make excessive demands on an individual's time and energy.
- The data shows few significant differences between urban/rural classifications for the types of volunteer, activity or frequency of activity, etc, despite the differences in prevalence of volunteers overall.

Methodology

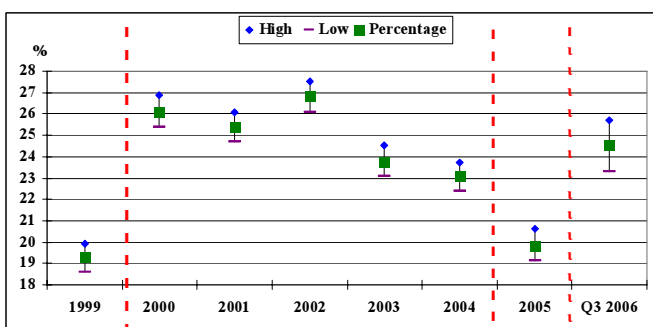
The project commenced in January 2007 and was completed in August 2007. The methodology for the project involved the following four stage programme of work: preliminary review of data; statistical analysis of data from the SHS from 1999 to quarter 3 2006; statistical analysis of data from the Citizenship Survey and Volunteer Development Scotland's Annual Digest of Statistics; and focus groups and telephone interviews with volunteers, former volunteers and non-volunteers.

Comparison of SHS with Other Surveys

The Citizenship Survey and Volunteer Development Scotland's Annual Digest both report higher rates of volunteering than the SHS. It is possible that the difference in rates reported can be explained, at least in part, by the content, structure and format of the survey questions used to identify volunteers. It may be that asking individuals to specify first the organisations they have volunteered with, rather than the more general activity they have taken part in has an impact on rates of volunteering reported.

Examination of Volunteering Questions in SHS 2005

Figure 1 Rates of volunteering 1999-2006



This project analysed the methodological performance of the volunteering suite of questions in the SHS, and the impact they have on reported rates of volunteering. Our analysis found that rates of volunteering in Scotland increased between 1999 and 2000 following a change to SHS questions and remained stable until 2003, when they appeared to fall. There was no significant change between 2003 and 2004, but the rate appeared to fall significantly in 2005 following a further change to SHS questions. Another

change in question took place in 2006, and rates of volunteering increased in that year's survey.

To improve the quality of volunteering-related information gathered through the SHS, it would be beneficial to make the following changes to the SHS.

- clarify the categories used on the SHS showcard of voluntary organisations used when asking respondents if they have volunteered with any of these organisations. This issue has been addressed with changes proposed for the 2007 SHS
- current and non-volunteers, as well as former volunteers, should be asked about attractions to volunteering to gain a full picture of these attractions and barriers. This change has been made to the SHS 2007 suite of questions
- all respondents, rather than only those aged from 16 and not retired, should be asked about the qualifications they hold, in order to gain an accurate picture of the qualifications held by the full range of volunteers in Scotland. This change has been made to the SHS 2007 suite of questions

Propensity to Volunteer by Socio-demographic Characteristics

Our research confirmed that key groups identified in the then Scottish Executive's Volunteering Strategy (2004), among whom it would be beneficial to encourage a higher level of volunteering, are less likely to volunteer than society in general. Specifically, we found that:

- people with disabilities are less likely to volunteer than those without a disability
- unemployed people are significantly less likely to volunteer than those who are self-employed, employed full or part time or retired
- young people aged between 16 and 24 are significantly less likely to volunteer than those aged between 35 and 74
- people living in the 15% most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland are significantly less likely to volunteer than those living in more affluent areas
- people with no formal qualifications are less likely to volunteer than those with qualifications.

However, when people in these groups do volunteer, they do

so to a similar intensity (in terms of frequency of volunteering and hours spent volunteering per month) as other groups in society.

We recommend that each of these groups (people with disabilities, unemployed, young, those living in neighbourhoods of deprivation and those with no formal qualifications) should be the target of a tailored marketing campaign designed to encourage individuals to take part in volunteering. Marketing must demonstrate to each of these groups the benefits they can gain from volunteering, and how accessible and flexible volunteering can be in terms of time commitment and matching activities to an individual's abilities.

Type of Volunteering Activities in Scotland

While there are some variations based on age and gender, in general volunteers are most likely to volunteer with organisations that focus on children and young people or sports and physical recreation.

When types of volunteering activity undertaken are analysed in general, volunteers are more likely to raise money, serve on a committee, or generally help out than undertake any other activities.

Intensity of Volunteering in Scotland

Our analysis found that the largest proportion of volunteers (42.3%) volunteer at least once a week and that in 2005 the average number of hours spent volunteering per month was 12.8 (or around 3.2 hours per week). This finding could be used to reassure those people who are currently reluctant to volunteer because they fear it will involve an excessive time commitment.

Attractions to Volunteering

Current and former volunteers who took part in our focus groups and telephone interviews reported personal experience as a strong attraction to volunteering. That is, volunteers are often motivated to volunteer through a desire to help individuals experiencing a situation, problem or condition that has been experienced by the volunteer him/herself or by a friend or family member. For example, one research participant who is dyslexic now tutors other dyslexic adults.

Another attraction to volunteering is a desire to help or 'give something back' to the community.

Data gathered through the SHS indicate that the largest proportion of former volunteers said that nothing would encourage them to volunteer again, a finding supported by our qualitative research with lapsed volunteers. Of the rest, the SHS data show that a substantial proportion of former volunteers would be encouraged to re-start volunteering if they could fit it round their other commitments, and this was also suggested by our qualitative work.

Barriers to Volunteering

Analysis of SHS data identified a lack of time as the most common reason associated with the decision to stop volunteering.

Our qualitative research found that a lack of awareness of what volunteering involves can act as a barrier to volunteering among people who have never volunteered. This lack of awareness can lead to a belief that the individual does not have the skills or abilities to make an effective contribution in a volunteering role, or a fear that volunteering will make excessive demands on an individual's time and energy. Raising awareness among these people of what volunteering involves may encourage more to volunteer. Research participants suggested that workplaces may be an effective intermediary through which to raise awareness of volunteering and encourage non-volunteers to try volunteering.

It is also possible that individuals may be reluctant to put themselves forward for volunteering but would be more likely to do so if they are asked directly by someone known to them.

Some research participants mentioned that the current Disclosure Scotland process is seen as lengthy, complex and expensive. More people may be able to volunteer if this process was simplified – for example, by removing the need to apply for a separate disclosure check for every voluntary position applied for, but, rather, introducing a single disclosure check valid for any position that must be updated after a certain period of time. This issue is currently being addressed by the Scottish Government.

Trends in Volunteering

We carried out a time series analysis of volunteering trends in Scotland between 1999 and 2006. It should be noted that changes to the SHS's volunteering suite of questions make it

difficult to analyse trends over time. However, we are able to comment on a number of trends in volunteering between 1999 and 2006.

As can be seen in Figure 1, reported rates of volunteering in Scotland varied between 1999 and 2006.

We examined demographic variables and their relationship to rates of volunteering, and found that, between 1999 and 2006: the age group with the largest proportion of volunteers was aged between 35 and 59; the proportion of female volunteers was consistently higher than males; the self-employed or part-time employed were more likely to be volunteers than any other economic status; households with an annual income of above £20,000 had a larger proportion of volunteers than those with a lower income; and remote rural areas had a higher rate of volunteering than any other urban/rural classification.

Moving Forward

Based on our analysis, we have made a series of recommendations interspersed throughout the relevant sections of text above. These relate to:

- improving the quality of volunteering data gathered through the volunteering suite of questions in the SHS
- raising awareness of and promoting the benefits of volunteering among groups with specific socio-demographic characteristics identified as target groups by then Scottish Executive's Volunteering Strategy (2004)
- using findings related to the intensity of volunteering to demonstrate to non- and former volunteers the flexibility of volunteering in terms of time commitment
- using findings related to attractions and barriers to volunteering to encourage more people to volunteer.

These recommendations are intended to assist the Scottish Government in achieving their policy priorities in relation to volunteering, particularly in encouraging a higher rate of volunteering among their key target groups.

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The report, "Scottish Household Survey Analytical Topic Report: Volunteering", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent>

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