

PROTOCOL FOR A RAPID EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT OF THE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IMPACTS OF VOLUNTEERING ON VOLUNTEERS

The review questions

Core question

1. What are the subjective wellbeing impacts associated with volunteering for volunteers?

Sub questions

- a. Are there differences in the wellbeing outcomes of volunteering between different population groups?
- b. What are the key mechanisms by which wellbeing outcomes are achieved for volunteers?
- c. Do these key mechanisms differ or are they the same across different contexts and population groups?
- d. What types of volunteering are particularly associated with wellbeing outcomes for volunteers, including the roles, duration, intensity, structured/unstructured or other characteristics?
- e. What are the barriers to improving wellbeing through volunteering for volunteers?
- f. What are the enablers to improving wellbeing through volunteering, in particular what are the organisational practices which can maximise wellbeing outcomes for volunteers?

Searches

Electronic databases will be searched using a series of search strings. The databases include: Sociological Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, PsycINFO, ASSIA, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Social Policy and Practice and Google Scholar. We will cross reference that key journals are represented in the above databases using Ulrichs Periodical Directory. Electronic searches of individual journals will be undertaken if necessary. Searches of reference lists will be undertaken to identify additional relevant empirical evidence.

A search of grey literature will be carried out via an online search of key databases (including OpenSIGLE and Open Grey database), a search of key organisational websites and a call for evidence via the What Works Centre for Wellbeing and other networks.

Search Strategy

Search strings will use boolean operators such as AND and OR and will be constructed for each research question (see example below). The search strings reflect the impacts, outcomes and mechanisms identified in the theory of change for volunteering and wellbeing developed as part of the review in collaboration with a panel of experts. Search strings will be appropriately adapted for different databases and will be subjected to testing and revision as part of the search process.

Example draft search strings for the core question ‘What are the subjective wellbeing impacts associated with volunteering for volunteers?’

volunteer* OR voluntarism OR “voluntary action” OR “volunt* work” OR “social action” OR “civic service” OR “unpaid help” OR “community help” **AND** wellbeing OR well-being OR “well being” OR happ* OR unhapp* OR “life satis*” OR “quality of life” OR “purpose in life” OR autonomy OR depress* OR anxiety OR belong* OR confiden* OR “self-esteem” OR worthwhile* OR stress* OR pressure OR burnout **AND** impact* OR outcome* OR benefit*

volunteer* OR voluntarism OR “voluntary action” OR “volunt* work” OR “social action” OR “civic service” OR “unpaid help” OR “community help” **AND** wellbeing OR well-being OR “well being” OR happ* OR unhapp* OR “life satis*” OR “quality of life” OR “purpose in life” OR autonomy OR depress* OR anxiety **AND** trust* OR empower* OR exclu* OR isolat* OR empath* OR “self-efficacy” OR mindset OR resilien* OR anger OR identit* **AND** impact* OR outcome* OR benefit*

Types of study to be included

Inclusion and exclusion criteria have been identified for the review. We will include the following:

- Empirical research, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies and evaluations
- Evidence published from 2008 - 2020
- English language studies only
- Evidence from the UK, Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. If we find sufficient evidence we will only focus on the UK at data extraction and synthesis
- Studies where a full report, paper, report is available
- Studies where the author, individual or organisation is stated

Reports/papers which do not include empirical evidence will not be included in the review including opinion pieces, discussion articles and commentaries.

Condition or domain being studied

Subjective wellbeing of volunteers.

Participants/population

Inclusion: unpaid volunteers who are aged 16 and over who are participating in formal volunteering (through an organisation, group or club).

Exclusion: paid volunteers, compulsory volunteering (e.g. community service, work programmes); informal volunteers (volunteering carried out individually outside an organisational context); other stakeholders (e.g. service users/ beneficiaries of volunteering).

Intervention(s)/ exposure(s)

Focus on formal volunteering (volunteering through an organisation, group or club). Volunteering is defined as '*... an activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups (other than or, in addition to close relatives)*' (The Compact, 2009; p7).

Comparator(s) /control

No volunteering/inactive comparator, time-based comparator or no comparator.

Context

Studies carried out in voluntary, community, public or private sector contexts. Research from countries economically similar to the UK will be included. Depending on the volume and quality of studies will may focus only on the UK at data extraction and synthesis.

Main outcome(s)

Subjective wellbeing of volunteers using any recognised measure or method.

Additional outcome(s)

The study will also explore:

- The mechanisms through which the subjective wellbeing impacts and outcomes are achieved for volunteers; and
- The barriers and enablers which can limit or facilitate the improvement of wellbeing through volunteering for volunteers.

Screening and data extraction

Evidence will be assessed at a number of different stages:

- Stage 1 screening: titles and key words (if applicable) scanned to remove reports/articles which obviously don't meet the inclusion criteria
- Stage 2 screening: abstract/executive summary read to remove irrelevant reports/articles according to inclusion/exclusion criteria and research questions
- Stage 3: full paper/report retrieved and assessed for relevancy. At this stage studies will be excluded if:
 - The study is not relevant to the research questions
 - The study measures wellbeing by proxy (e.g. staff member)
 - There is no clear statement(s) about the aims of the research
- Data extraction and quality assessment of evidence

At first 20% of papers will be independently screened by two reviewers at stage 3. Discrepancies will be discussed and once agreement is reached (more than 90% of records are agreed on) the remaining full papers will be screened by one reviewer.

At stage 3 search results from the different sources will be merged using EPPI Reviewer Web. Duplicate records will be removed (i.e. records reporting the same journal title, volume and pages)

Once the papers and reports have been screened for inclusion, key information will be extracted and recorded in Eppi Reviewer. This will include: details of the type of study and research design (including methods and where the study takes place); description of the study sample and sample size; details of the statistical testing; how wellbeing is being defined or measured in the study; details of the volunteering taking place (including type of role/activity, field/cause, type of host organisation/group/club, frequency, amount, duration and intensity of the volunteering; the setting for volunteering and the volunteer management practices); summary of findings for the research questions; identification of limitations and gaps in research and rating of quality.

Risk of bias (quality assessment)

To assess the quality of qualitative and quantitative studies we will use adapted versions of the checklists detailed in the What Works Centre for Wellbeing [guide for evidence review methods](#) (developed for systematic reviews). This will focus on how well the study has been designed and appropriately carried out and analysed. We will also use the judgements made by authors about the quality of the evidence and risk of bias and incorporate this into our assessments.

Twenty percent of studies will be independently assessed by a second reviewer (i.e. they will be double reviewed). The second reviewer will not have sight of the first reviewer's appraisal.

Data synthesis

We will develop narrative syntheses of information collected for each research question, bringing together the evidence from the review that helps to answer each question. Matrices will group information by key criteria which will be determined by the content of the included studies. The synthesis of the evidence will be discussed within a broader context of volunteering and the changing trends of the volunteering landscape.

Reporting

A technical report and short executive summary of findings for practitioners will be produced.

The REA and synthesis will be used to validate and revise the theory of change developed at the beginning of the REA process. The revised theory of change will be published alongside the technical report and executive summary for use by practitioners, policy makers and funders.

Contact details for further information

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February 24th 2020

Anticipated completion date

July 31st 2020