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Recent Research Abstracts

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VOLUNTEERING

Gooch, Margaret. (2004). Volunteering in catchment management groups: Empowering the volunteer. *Australian Geographer*, 35 (2), 193-208.

This paper investigates the experience of volunteers who offer their time to a variety of catchment care groups in coastal Queensland. Data was collected through group and individual interviews with volunteers from Brisbane to Mossman. The paper examines one of the broad themes that emerged from the research – that of volunteer empowerment. Analysis of the interviews found that some volunteers felt personally empowered through gaining skills that they would not otherwise have developed. Others saw the empowerment aspect coming to fruition through the ability to have a say in decisions affecting the management of local resources. Many of the volunteers, however, revealed difficulties experienced as a result of participation, such as power play within groups and at a community level, when groups wanted have a say in the governance of local resources. Despite setbacks, the research showed that participation in volunteering led to the individuals concerned having at least some voice rather than no voice at all in resource management. (author affiliated to CSIRO)

Rotolo, Thomas; Wilson, John. (2006). Substitute or complement? Spousal influence on volunteering. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68 (2), 305-319.

Social scientists have documented the influence of family status on volunteering, but have often ignored intra-family effects. Using newly issued data from the Current Population Survey on the volunteer behaviour of 19,626 American couples, the authors tested two competing theories concerning spousal influences on volunteering. Substitution theory predicts that spouses will trade off volunteer work; complementarity theory predicts that spouses' volunteer work is positively linked. Using structural equation methods to control for simultaneity bias, the authors found support for the complementarity theory. The wife's influence, however, is stronger than the husband's. Spousal influence is stronger if both spouses volunteer in the same domain. The findings underline the importance of close relationships in mobilising volunteer workers. (authors affiliated to Washington State University and Duke University respectively)

John, Peter. (2005). The contribution of volunteering, trust and networks to educational performance. *Policy Studies Journal*, 33 (4), 635-656.

Social capital can have a beneficial effect on public policy outcomes by helping to solve collective action problems and by providing individuals and communities with efficient social networks. In education, it also assists students' self-confidence, which can foster motivation and academic success. To investigate the social capital-outcome link, this article analyses a panel survey of 15-16 and 16-17 year olds in 27 English schools, testing whether social capital, both at the individual and at the school levels, tends to increase grades and examination performance. The analysis concludes that individual-level trust and voluntary action improve pupil performance, but that the parental networks of some young people, particularly those from low socioeconomic status families, have negative rather than positive consequences. The findings add to a debate about the differential impact of social capital and the relative importance of its bridging and its bonding elements. (author affiliated to University of Manchester)