

ARTICLE

# Understanding volunteering intensity in older volunteers

Giang Huong Le<sup>1\*</sup>  and Marja Aartsen<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway and <sup>2</sup>Norwegian Social Research, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

\*Corresponding author. Email: [gianghuo@oslomet.no](mailto:gianghuo@oslomet.no)

(Accepted 16 August 2022)

## Abstract

Although volunteering is considered a good strategy for successful ageing, not many older adults are engaged in voluntary work and those who are do so mainly sporadically. This study focuses on time invested in volunteering rather than on doing voluntary work or not, as is often done in studies so far. By combining the theory of resources for volunteering with a functional and structural approach to volunteering, this cross-sectional study seeks to shed light on a wide range of factors associated with the intensity of volunteering. The study is based on a sample of 1,599 volunteers aged 50 and older participating in the Norwegian study on Life Course, Ageing and Generation Study (NorLAG). The survey includes, among others, detailed information about demographics and time invested in voluntary work and questions about attitudes, motivations, structural and other potential barriers to volunteering. Multivariate linear regression analyses indicate that a religious attitude is associated with elevated hours spent on voluntary work, while co-habitation is associated with a decreased engagement in voluntary work. In addition, people who are motivated to volunteer because they find it interesting and because volunteering allows them to use their competence spend more time volunteering. Human capital, *i.e.* education, income and subjective health, are not associated with the number of hours invested in voluntary work. The likelihood of contributing more volunteering hours of older men is 17.5 per cent higher than that of older women. We found no indication of a relation between work status, functional limitations, urbanisation or ethnicity and voluntary work engagement. Policies aiming to increase time investment of volunteers should strive for an optimal fit between the nature of the voluntary work and the interests and skills of the volunteers. In designing interventions to stimulate higher engagement in voluntary work, one should further promote strategies for flexible time commitment.

**Keywords:** older adults; voluntary work; resource perspective; functional approach; oppressive factors

## Introduction

### Background

Formal volunteering is a productive activity undertaken by individuals to help others in a collective style and within an organisational environment, without receiving any payment or only a minimal remuneration (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Morrow-Howell, 2010). Doing voluntary work, in particular after retirement age when access to the labour market is limited, plays a crucial role in the context of active ageing policies – one of the strategic policy solutions to demographic ageing in Europe (Walker and Maltby, 2012) – as it stimulates healthy ageing and wellbeing in later life which reduces pressure on health-care systems (Musick *et al.*, 1999; Morrow-Howell *et al.*, 2003; Harris and Thoresen, 2005; Lum and Lightfoot, 2005; Hansen *et al.*, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2022). Yet, the actual number of older volunteers and the intensity with which people do voluntary work is low in many European countries. A study based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and the Norwegian Lifecourse, Ageing and Generation (NorLAG) study showed that the rate of formal volunteering varies from 20 to 30 per cent in the north-west of Europe to less than 10 per cent in the south-east (Hansen *et al.*, 2018). While the prevalence of voluntary work is high in Norway compared to other European countries, less than 10 per cent of Norwegian older adults spend more than 3–4 hours per week on voluntary work (Hansen *et al.*, 2018), and this percentage is shrinking (Arbeids- og Sosialdepartementet, 2016). People aged between 67 and 74 spend most time volunteering (Hansen and Slagsvold, 2020b). Therefore, understanding the underlying factors of hours invested in voluntary work may help voluntary organisations to adjust the voluntary work to better fit the volunteers' needs and preferences rather than only focus on recruitment.

There is evidence of inequalities in volunteering, as it is mainly the higher-educated, higher-social status native man and those with better functional ability who engage in organisational voluntary work (Eimhjellen *et al.*, 2018; Southby *et al.*, 2019), which calls into question how volunteering can be more inclusive. Our study thus also pays attention to social oppression, including structural forces that limit possibilities to volunteer and push people out of voluntary work. To shed further light on variations in the intensity of volunteering, we examine a wide range of factors potentially associated with volunteering intensity derived from insights from Wilson and Musick's (1997) resource theory and Clary and Snyder's (1991, 1999) functional theory, while taking into account potential oppressive factors.

### Previous studies

In studies on volunteering, two approaches have been dominant: (a) an objective approach which observes 'people's objective attributes or their social position', including explicit factors reflected in various socio-economic and individuals' resources (Musick and Wilson, 2008: 37); and (b) a subjective approach, including implicit factors, such as motivational factors (Einolf and Chambré, 2011). Various researchers have documented the association between resources and older volunteering (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Warburton and Crosier, 2001; Choi, 2003;

Smith, 2004; Tang, 2005, 2008; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Lee and Brudney, 2012; Cramm and Nieboer, 2015; Dury *et al.*, 2015) and motivational factors and older volunteering (Clary and Snyder, 1991; Clary *et al.*, 1998; Bowen *et al.*, 2000; Warburton *et al.*, 2001; Meier and Stutzer, 2008; Finkelstien, 2009). These studies consistently show that more resources and stronger motivation are associated with an elevated likelihood of volunteering.

Despite the progress in our understanding of factors related to later-life volunteering, there are several knowledge gaps. First, previous studies mainly focused on examining the differences between volunteering and non-volunteering (Warburton *et al.*, 2001; Morris *et al.*, 2015; Bekkers *et al.*, 2016), but little is known about the relationship between the type of motivation and time spent on voluntary work. Secondly, most studies are based on either the resource theory by Wilson and Musick (1997) or the functional approach by Clary and Snyder (1991, 1999) to examine the factors associated with older volunteering, but few examined the relative importance of resources and motivations for voluntary intensity. Thirdly, most studies on voluntary work have been conducted in the United States of America, but there are also studies from Europe, China and Australia (Ma and Konrath, 2018). Still, there is a need to study volunteering in different countries because cultures, politics to stimulate voluntary work, welfare regimes and patterns of volunteering may affect the strength of associations with voluntary work (Principi *et al.*, 2012). Despite some notable exceptions (*e.g.* Wollebæk *et al.*, 2015; Folkestad and Langhelle, 2016; Hansen and Slagsvold, 2020a), not many studies focused on countries with strong welfare state provisions and culture of voluntary work, such as in Norway. Lastly, the two theoretical approaches that have been dominant do not consider potential structural barriers to volunteering leading to substantial inequalities, while there is solid evidence that voluntary work is hierarchically stratified, with more opportunities for the dominant groups in the society (Hustinx *et al.*, 2022; Meyer and Rameder, 2022). At the same time, the demand to recruit the most potential volunteers may exclude disadvantaged groups from volunteering. This study aims to address some of these shortcomings by answering two main research questions:

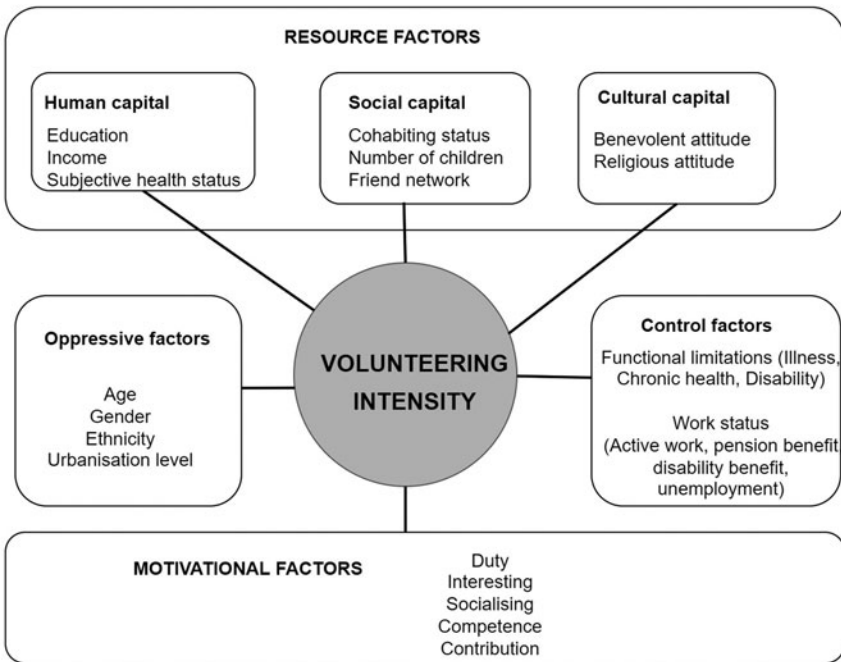
- (1) Which resources are associated with volunteering intensity in Norway?
- (2) Which motivations are associated with volunteering intensity, in addition to the resources?

Due to the further concern on the structural inequality in volunteering, our study additionally considers factors reflecting categories of differences, structural factors and other control factors. This will answer our third research question:

- (3) Is there any evidence for oppressive barriers that may lead to inequalities in volunteering intensity?

### **Towards a combined conceptual framework of older adults' volunteering**

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon and understanding correlates and variation in volunteering intensity requires an integrated theoretical strategy



**Figure 1.** Integrated conceptual framework of resource perspective (Wilson and Musick, 1997) and the functional approach of volunteering (Clary and Snyder, 1991, 1999), adjusted for oppressive factors and control factors.

(Hustinx *et al.*, 2010). A combined conceptual framework of the resource theory (Wilson and Musick, 1997) and the functional approach to volunteering (Clary and Snyder, 1991, 1999) that we apply in our study is such an integrated approach aiming at examining different explanations for volunteering intensity. Guided by these theories, we assume that people have a higher intensity of voluntary work if they possess sufficient resources and motivations (*see Figure 1*). Resource-rich people may find it less challenging to volunteer than resource-poor people because they have more *capability and conditions* to access and engage in voluntary work. In addition, psychological preferences, needs and goals should be satisfied to facilitate the *enthusiasm* for volunteering engagement.

The resource perspective of volunteering derived from Wilson and Musick distinguishes three aspects of voluntary work: ‘a productive activity’ that requires human capital, ‘a collective action’ that requires social capital and ‘an ethically guided work’ that requires cultural capital (Wilson and Musick, 1997: 694). Human capital, such as education, health and income, represents resources attached to individuals that make people more qualified for voluntary work and more attractive to voluntary organisations (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Forbes and Zampelli, 2014). Social capital refers to the interpersonal relationships illustrated by how many social connections people have, what kind of social connections and how they are organised (Wilson and Musick, 1997). The intensity of voluntary

work is likely to be higher when people have a substantial stock of social capital since they know more people who can link them and encourage them to do voluntary work. Cultural capital gives people the right information about the voluntary work that fits their attitudes and preferences, such as the culture of benevolence. In general, Musick and Wilson (2008: 112–113) highlighted that ‘volunteering is more attractive to the resource-rich than the resource-poor’. One premise of their model is that the more of each capital, the higher the intensity with which people are engaged in voluntary work (Musick and Wilson, 2008).

Although the resource perspective of volunteering is meaningful in understanding resource-based factors associated with volunteering, it does not consider the potential importance of motivations for voluntary work. The functional approach of volunteering is a motivation-based approach adopted to apprehend the various motivations to volunteering (Clary *et al.*, 1992; Clary and Snyder, 1999). Volunteering is motivated by satisfying certain needs and goals, such as the need to meet new people, or the need to learn new things, or improving chances to find a job (Clary and Snyder, 1999; Finkelstien, 2009). The functional approach thus underscores the preference, needs and goals as driving factors of volunteering.

Both approaches, however, have little attention to potential inequalities in voluntary work, despite evidence that people who are in a disadvantaged situation are less likely to volunteer (Southby *et al.*, 2019). For a better understanding of voluntary intensity, it is thus important to take factors into account that may interconnect to oppress an individual or a group of people. Based on work from Ferrer *et al.* (2017), we therefore also consider factors reflecting categories of difference, such as gender, age and ethnicity. Also, structural factors, such as urbanisation (Hooghe and Botterman, 2012; Dury *et al.*, 2016; Southby and South, 2016) may contribute to variations in voluntary work. We include these factors in our analytical models to evaluate whether these are related to voluntary work engagement.

## Data and sample

This study uses data from the third wave of NorLAG. NorLAG is a population-based, multi-disciplinary and longitudinal study that includes data on key areas in the second half of life, such as wellbeing, quality of life, health and care, work and retirement, and family relations (Veenstra *et al.*, 2021). NorLAG combines longitudinal survey data with annual data from the public registers from 1967 to 2017. Surveys were held three times (2002/03, 2007/08 and 2017), and data were collected three times by means of computer-assisted telephone interviews with self-administered questionnaires. In the third wave (here referred to as NorLAG3), detailed questions about voluntary work were asked. The register data and survey data were collected with the consent of participants.

The total eligible sample of NorLAG3 was 8,495 people, of which the non-response rate was 31.8 per cent ( $N = 2,846$ ). The self-administered questionnaire, including detailed questions about volunteering, was filled in by 4,461 persons representing 49.9 per cent of the sample (Veenstra *et al.*, 2021). In this study, we used a subsample of NorLAG3 and included only those that had done any formal voluntary work in the last 12 months. After deleting invalid data, the study sample comprised 1,599 volunteers aged between 50 and 89, with an average age of 64. A

slightly higher percentage of volunteers were men (55.1%). Over half of the study participants also participated in the paid labour market (54.8%), 0.8 per cent of the participants were unemployed and around 43 per cent received a pension and/or disability benefit. Most of the respondents are native Norwegians and 7 per cent of participants come from other European countries. Approximately 56 per cent of the respondents live in a large city, 33 per cent live in a town and 11 per cent live in rural areas.

## Measures

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable *intensity of voluntary work* is a categorical variable based on the question of how much time, in total, people do voluntary work for organisations in one usual week: (1) no time, (2) less than 1 hour, (3) 1–2 hours, (4) 3–4 hours, (5) 5–6 hours, (6) 7–10 hours, and (7) more than 10 hours. Although our dependent variable has an ordinal level, we treat it as an interval variable as the differences between the categories are almost equal, the underlying dimension is an interval variable, the sample is rather large and the variable is normally distributed (skewness = 0.752, kurtosis = 0.244).

### *Independent variables*

Guided by our integrated conceptual framework and within the possibilities of our data, we selected variables representing human capital, social capital, cultural capital, motivations, and potential structural and oppressive factors as our independent variables.

### *Resources*

Three indicators were included to capture human capital, *i.e.* education, income and subjective health (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Tang, 2005). Education is categorised into five groups: (1) no or primary education, (2) basic-level high school, (3) higher-level high school, (4) lower-level college and university, and (5) higher-level college and university, and doctoral degree. Income indicates the total income per year after tax of respondents. We recoded all values lower than 10,000 NOK as missing as these are most likely not adequate reflections of the actual income. Subjective health was assessed by asking respondents to evaluate their general health status, with the following options: (1) poor, (2) pretty good, (3) good, (4) very good, and (5) excellent.

Social capital is measured with four indicators and includes both kinship relations and friends. Kinship relations are captured by two indicators, *i.e.* co-habiting status and the number of children. Co-habiting status is a dichotomous variable with categories (1) not living with a partner and (2) living with a partner. The number of children reflects the total number of children the respondents have. The friend network is captured by two items: (1) apart from your own family, do you have good friends where you live? and (2) do you have good friends in other places? The variable was constructed by taking the arithmetic sum of these two items, subsequently leading to three categories: (1) do not have good friends, (2) having good

friends nearby or in other areas, and (3) having good friends both nearby area and in other areas.

Cultural capital is assessed by means of two indicators, *i.e.* benevolent attitude and religious attitude. A benevolent attitude is a sense of morality, reflecting the protection and promotion of others' interests (Shen *et al.*, 2017). The benevolent attitude was measured by asking the respondents to indicate how they identified themselves in relation to the following statement: 'It is important to help and care for others.' Answering categories are (1) not like me at all, (2) not like me, (3) only a little like me, (4) pretty much like me, (5) like me, and (6) very much like me. For religious attitudes, the respondents were asked whether they consider themselves as being religious. Answering categories are (1) no, (2) yes, little, (3) yes, pretty much, and (4) yes, very much.

### *Motivations*

Five variables were selected to assess the importance of each of the following motivations to do voluntary work: (1) to meet other people (*socialising*); (2) to contribute something useful (*contribution*); (3) I think it is fun and interesting (*interesting*); (4) I can use my competence (*competence*); and (5) I feel that I have a duty to do so (*duty*). The respondents indicated the importance of each motivation with a five-point Likert scale: (1) not important, (2) little important, (3) neither important nor unimportant, (4) important, and (5) very important.

### *Oppressive factors*

Gender is a dichotomous variable, coded (1) for men and (2) for women, and age reflects the years lived. Gender and age are included because formal voluntary work can be highly gender-segregated and may be different for various age groups (Jensen *et al.*, 2014; Principi and Perek-Białas, 2014). Ethnicity is measured by the country background of the respondents, categorised into three groups, *i.e.* Norway, European Union/European Economic Area countries and others. We also include urbanisation as a structural factor that varies within the country. Urbanisation is measured by the level of urbanisation where respondents are living, which was coded (1) as 'rural' if the municipality consisted of 1,999 residents or less, (2) as 'town' for a municipality with the number of residents between 2,000 and 99,999, and (3) as 'city' for a municipality with 100,000 or more residents.

### *Control variables*

The functional limitation variable, measuring whether respondents suffered from illness, chronic health problems or disability is included as a control variable as it may hinder volunteers from committing to voluntary work. Work status may relate to volunteering intensity as people who do not work may have more available time to volunteer (Mutchler *et al.*, 2003). The control variable 'work status' was recoded into four dummy variables: (1) active work, (2) pension benefit, (3) disability benefit, and (4) unemployment.



## Analytical strategy

Descriptive statistics (number of valid observations, missing values, percentage, mean, range) were used to illustrate the variables' main characteristics. Multivariate linear regression analyses were applied to examine the association between voluntary intensity and the independent variables. To answer the first research question, we examined the association between the dependent variable and resource factors, including indicators of education, income, subjective health, co-habiting status, number of children, friend network, benevolent attitude and religious attitude. To answer the second research question, we added the five motivation indicators discussed before. Age, gender, ethnicity and urbanisation were included in the third model. All variance inflation factor values for variables of interest were smaller than 5, indicating no multicollinearity (Alin, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2014). Data analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 27).

## Results

There is substantial variation in the number of hours people do voluntary work. As shown in Table 1, about 15 per cent are inactive as volunteers, one-quarter did less than 1 hour of voluntary work, approximately half of the sample volunteered between 1 and 4 hours, and 15 per cent spent more than 4 hours in one usual week.

Most of the respondents have secondary education (45.6%) or university education (45.1%). The average net income was 435,530 NOK per year. One-third of the participants reported that they have chronic health problems or disabilities. About three-quarters of the respondents lived with a partner, and the average number of children was two. Most of the volunteers (86%) reported that they have friends living nearby and in other areas. Most respondents evaluated themselves as having a benevolent attitude. Almost half of the people (47%) have a religious attitude. Most volunteers reported that they are motivated to do voluntary activities that are interesting, provide opportunities for socialising, opportunities to use their competence and to contribute something useful. One-third of the volunteers (32%) are motivated to do voluntary work out of duty.

Table 2 presents the multivariate linear regression results for the intensity of voluntary work regressed on resources, motivations, oppressive factors and control variables. Model 1 included resource variables, motivation variables were added in Model 2, and Model 3 included all resources, motivations, oppressive factors and control variables.

Model 1 indicates that of all resource variables, only co-habiting status, number of children and religious attitude significantly contribute to the explanation of the dependent variable ( $p < 0.05$ ). The volunteers who live with their partners or have more children are likely to have a lower intensity of volunteering ( $B = -0.218$  and  $B = -0.072$ , respectively), while volunteers who consider themselves religious are likely to spend more hours per week on voluntary work ( $B = 0.146$ ). Model 1, including the resource variables, explains 2.4 per cent of the variation in volunteering intensity.

The association between co-habiting status and religious attitude with the dependent variable remains significant after adding the five motivation variables



**Table 1.** Descriptive statistic of dependent, independent and oppressive factors and control variables

Variables	N	Missing	%	Mean	Range
The intensity of voluntary work:	1,599	0			
No time			15.2		
Under 1 hour			25.6		
1–2 hours			28.3		
3–4 hours			16.4		
5–6 hours			7.2		
7–10 hours			3.9		
More than 10 hours			3.3		
Education:	1,595	4			
No education and primary school			9.4		
High school, basic level			19.1		
High school, higher level			26.5		
University and college, lower level			32.9		
University and college, high level and doctoral degree			12.2		
Income (one year, in NOK)	1,575	24		435,530	10,000–4,460,000
Subjective health:	1,596	3			
Bad			3.8		
Pretty good			17.6		
Good			27.4		
Very good			30.6		
Excellent			20.6		
Co-habiting status:	1,599	0			
Not living with spouse/co-habitant			24.2		
Living with spouse/co-habitant			75.8		
Number of children	1,599	0		2.24	0–9
Friend network:	1,597	2			
Do not have good friends			0.8		
Having good friends at either living area or other areas			13.3		
Having good friends at both living area and other areas			85.9		
Benevolent attitude:	1,551	48			
Not like me at all			0.1		
Not like me			1.0		

*(Continued)*

Table 1. (Continued.)

Variables	N	Missing	%	Mean	Range
Only little like me			4.6		
Pretty like me			29.9		
Like me			46.0		
Very much like me			18.5		
Religious attitude:	1,591	8			
No			52.9		
Yes, little			24.4		
Yes, pretty much			14.2		
Yes, very much			8.5		
Motivation: socialising:	1,597	2			
Very little important			2.9		
Little important			8.3		
Neither important nor unimportant			7.4		
Pretty important			29.5		
Very important			52.0		
Motivation: contribution:	1,597	2			
Very little important			0.4		
Little important			0.8		
Neither important nor unimportant			2.4		
Pretty important			26.5		
Very important			69.9		
Motivation: interesting:	1,597	2			
Very little important			0.7		
Little important			3.3		
Neither important nor unimportant			5.0		
Pretty important			34.4		
Very important			56.7		
Motivation: competence:	1,597	2			
Very little important			3.1		
Little important			9.1		
Neither important nor unimportant			9.2		
Pretty important			31.6		
Very important			47.0		
Motivation: duty:	1,595	4			

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Variables	N	Missing	%	Mean	Range
Very little important			29.7		
Little important			26.2		
Neither important nor unimportant			12.4		
Pretty important			21.5		
Very important			10.2		
Age	1,599	0		64	50–89
Gender:	1,599	0			
Men			55.1		
Women			44.9		
Urbanisation:	1,485	114			
Rural			35.4		
Town			33.3		
City			31.2		
Ethnicity:	1,599	0			
Norway			93.1		
EU/EEA countries			4.0		
Others			2.9		
Functional limitations:	1,598	1			
No			66.8		
Yes			33.2		
Work status:	1,599	0			
Active work			54.8		
Pension benefit			38.5		
Disability benefit			4.7		
Unemployment			0.8		

Notes: N = 1,599. N: number of valid observations. EU/EEA: European Union/European Economic Area.

to the model (Model 2), while the number of children lost their significant association. Only two of the five types of motivations that people can have to do voluntary work were significantly associated with time spent on voluntary work: voluntary work is interesting and to use their competence. The association is positive, indicating that volunteers do more voluntary work when they consider that voluntary work is interesting ( $B = 0.247$ ) and allows them to use their competence ( $B = 0.114$ ). Adding the motivation variables to the models resulted in a 4 per cent increase in the explained variance.

In Model 3, we further added potential oppressive factors. Urbanisation was not significantly associated with volunteering intensity ( $p > 0.05$ ), whereas age and

Table 2. Linear regression models for the intensity of voluntary work regressed on resources, motivations and control variables

Factors	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	$\beta$	p	B	$\beta$	p	B	$\beta$	p
Human capital:									
Education	0.025	0.020	0.467	0.047	0.037	0.176	0.055	0.044	0.114
Income	$-1.797 \times 10^{-7}$	-0.034	0.216	$-1.184 \times 10^{-7}$	-0.023	0.407	$-8.932 \times 10^{-9}$	-0.002	0.953
Subjective health	-0.046	-0.035	0.195	-0.040	-0.031	0.249	-0.022	-0.017	0.592
Social capital:									
Co-habiting status	-0.218	-0.063	0.019	-0.224	-0.065	0.014	-0.192	-0.056	0.040
Number of children	-0.072	-0.056	0.040	-0.056	-0.044	0.104	-0.064	-0.050	0.061
Friend network	0.080	0.021	0.434	0.060	0.016	0.553	0.134	0.035	0.181
Cultural capital:									
Benevolent attitude	0.070	0.040	0.133	0.037	0.021	0.419	0.086	0.049	0.064
Religious attitude	0.146	0.098	0.000	0.130	0.087	0.001	0.116	0.078	0.004
Motivations:									
Socialising				0.062	0.046	0.114	0.049	0.036	0.207
Contribution				0.022	0.009	0.759	0.013	0.006	0.849
Interesting				0.247	0.132	0.000	0.226	0.121	0.000
Competence				0.114	0.085	0.004	0.113	0.084	0.004
Duty				-0.007	-0.006	0.811	0.018	0.017	0.531
Oppressive factors:									
Age							0.014	0.086	0.034

Gender	−0.173	−0.059	0.034
Ethnicity	0.041	0.011	0.682
Urbanisation	0.092	0.051	0.057
Control factors:			
Functional limitations	−0.036	−0.012	0.703
Work status: active work	−0.005	−0.002	0.990
Work status: pension benefit	0.319	0.106	0.429
Work status: disability benefit	0.503	0.073	0.241
Work status: unemployment	−0.076	−0.004	0.898
ANOVA (significance)	0.000	0.000	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.024	0.068	

Notes: N = 1,599. Dependent variable: How much time, in total, you spend on volunteering for an organisation in one usual week? (no time, under 1 hour, 1–2 hours, 3–4 hours, 5–6 hours, 7–10 hours, more than 10 hours). ANOVA: analysis of variance.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics reporting barriers towards volunteering commitment

Barriers	A great degree/to some degree (%)	A small degree/no degree (%)
I do not have enough time	46.6	53.4
My life situation is demanding	37.8	62.2
No one has asked me to join	32.4	67.6
I have health problems	21.7	78.3
There is little interest in my age in the organisation I want to join	14.6	85.4
There is little interest for my competence	13.3	86.7

Note: N = 1,599.

gender were significantly associated with the dependent variable, in which men ( $B = -0.173$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ) and older people ( $B = 0.014$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ) devote more time to voluntary work. Co-habiting status ( $B = -0.192$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ), religious attitude ( $B = 0.116$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and two motivations, 'interesting' and 'competence' in doing voluntary work, kept their significant association ( $p < 0.001$  and  $p = 0.004$ , respectively) with the dependent variable after adding oppressive factors and control variables. The result indicated higher voluntary intensity associated with not living with partner/spouse and a religious attitude. Our study also finds that volunteers who are motivated to volunteer because it is fun and interesting and because they can use their competence and skills spend a higher amount of time on voluntary work. The full model explained 10.6 per cent of the total variation in volunteering intensity.

As indicated, our information on oppressive factors that may be associated with the intensity of volunteering is limited, but we do have some information about what people perceive as barriers to volunteering (Table 3). While this may be biased as people are not always aware of social oppression, analysing these reasons may corroborate our findings about oppressive factors. The important reasons that people who wished to be more active gave were lack of time (46.6%) and a too demanding life situation (37.8%). Ten to 20 per cent of the volunteers mentioned health problems, lack of interest from the voluntary organisations because of their age and lack of interest in their competence.

## Discussion

Guided by the resource perspective of Wilson and Musick (1997) and the functional approach of Clary and Snyder (1991, 1999), this study aims to examine associations between resources and motivations and the intensity of volunteering among Norwegian people aged 50 years and older. We further examined associations between urbanisation, age, gender, ethnicity and controlled for functional limitations and work status. Overall, our study suggests that individual resources and motivations, as well as oppressive factors, help to understand variations in the intensity with which people do voluntary work. Having a religious attitude and

doing voluntary work that fits people's interests and competencies associated with an elevated volunteering commitment, while living with partners may decrease the time investment in voluntary work. Higher education, higher income, better subjective health, higher number of children, friend networks and benevolent attitude are not associated with the amount of volunteering time. As a result, our study is only partly in line with the theory of Wilson and Musick (1997) that voluntary work is more attractive to people who have more resources. Our results are, however, in line with previous empirical studies finding that a religious attitude stimulates spending more time on volunteering (Choi, 2003; Tang, 2008; Dury *et al.*, 2015), but in contrast with some findings (Wollebæk *et al.*, 2015; Folkestad and Langhelle, 2016) that having a partner, friends or other social contacts stimulate volunteering. A plausible explanation for this result may be that although social ties may give more opportunities to access the information to start voluntary work, they may also limit the volunteer's engagement if there are time conflicts between spending time with family and doing voluntary work. This is what the majority of the volunteers also mention when asked about reasons for not spending more time on voluntary work despite their wishes.

As for the association between motivational factors and voluntary work intensity, our results indicated that older volunteers do more voluntary work if the work is interesting and requires their competencies. Only two out of the five motivations for voluntary work that were asked are associated with volunteering intensity, suggesting that our results only partly support the functional approach of Clary and Snyder (1991, 1999). While most previous literature reported that volunteers might be mainly motivated by a sense of altruism, a sense of mission and social contacts (Ferreira *et al.*, 2009), our study reveals these motives are not major factors of time spent on voluntary work. We did not find that urbanisation or ethnicity are related to the intensity of voluntary work, whereas age and gender are associated with volunteering intensity. The finding that men have a higher intensity of voluntary work than women is consistent with the current finding that Norwegian men have a higher likelihood of volunteering engagement than women (Eimhjellen *et al.*, 2018). Although our finding suggests that older volunteers are likely to spend more time volunteering, when asking people about reasons for not spending more hours on voluntary work despite their wish to do so, approximately 15 per cent of them report that they feel excluded based on their age. There is no evidence that work status or functional limitations hinder the intensity with which older adults participate in voluntary work in our study. However, around one-fifth of older volunteers in our study reported that their health problems might prevent them from investing more volunteering hours. Although our result indicates that the relevance between volunteers' competence and skills with voluntary work is important to volunteers, our respondents think that there is a lack of interest in their competence in voluntary organisations. Therefore, one should acknowledge that older volunteers may perceive that their age, health conditions and competencies may prevent them from doing more volunteering hours.

The present study has some practical implications for voluntary organisations. If voluntary organisations are interested in increasing the potential of older volunteers, they can think of recruiting and retaining volunteers who can contribute more hours to voluntary work (Randle and Dolnicar, 2009), or stimulate volunteers



to invest more of their time. Concerning the latter, voluntary organisations may want to make sure that there is a good match between the type of voluntary work and the resources, preferences and competence of the volunteers. Second, in designing interventions to increase the time invested in voluntary work, organisations should acknowledge potential barriers. Our study suggests that co-habitation and lacking sufficient time or time conflicts between the time spent with family and doing voluntary work may hamper people from contributing more hours to voluntary work. Therefore, a more flexible volunteer schedule allowing people to choose their suitable time and place for voluntary work may help to increase the possibilities of volunteering. Volunteering from home, in particular, may provide flexible and tailored-made solutions to the particular needs and circumstances of volunteers and may facilitate an optimal balance between family duties and volunteering commitment. In addition, voluntary organisations should pay attention to the volunteers' perception of their age and health conditions as barriers to becoming (more) active in voluntary work.

### Limitations of study and suggestions for further studies

Although our study provides further insight into the intensity of formal volunteering, several limitations should be considered. One limitation is that motivations for volunteering have been collected at one point in time (the last round, 2017), which does not allow conclusions on the direction of effects. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the causal relationships between resources, motivations and volunteering. This study further suggests that a conceptual framework combining the resource perspective and functional approach of volunteering is a fruitful approach to understanding the intensity of voluntary work among older adults. The explained variance from our results is rather small (around 10%), suggesting that there are other factors not included in this study that explain variability in volunteering intensity. Future studies could also use various indicators to capture the resources, motivations and structural factors that our study has not examined. As there are very few people with a minority background in our study sample, we could not examine the various ethnic groups in Norway. Our results are based on data from Norway with the characteristic of a strong welfare state policy, characterised by high social security benefits and financial security, that may not apply to other countries with different cultural and economic conditions. To validate the value of this integrated approach to volunteering in other countries, data from other countries are needed.

### Conclusion

To our knowledge, this study is one of the first that used a theoretical framework that combined the resource perspective (objective approach), functional approach (subjective approach) and oppressive factors to examine factors associated with time spent on volunteering in later life. Our study contributes to the debates about older volunteering in that both resources and the right motivations enhance the likelihood of volunteering engagement among older adults. There is no sign of structural barriers that may affect voluntary engagement in our study. Older men in

Norway invest more hours in voluntary work than older women, and the amount of time invested increases with age. Increasing time investment in volunteering should focus on an optimal fit between volunteer tasks and the available time resource, suitable knowledge and skills, and preference of volunteers. Flexibility in working schedules could be further promoted.

**Acknowledgement.** This paper uses data from NorLAG Wave 3. The NorLAG data collections have been financed by The Research Council of Norway, four ministries, The Norwegian Directorate of Health, The Norwegian State Housing Bank, Statistics Norway and The Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), OsloMet. NorLAG data are part of the ACCESS Life Course infrastructure funded by the National Financing Initiative for Research Infrastructure at the Research Council of Norway (grant numbers 195403 and 269920).

**Author contributions.** GHL and MA together conceived the idea of the paper. MA helped to access the NorLAG data and suggested the theoretical framework. GHL reviewed the literature, conducted the analyses and drafted the manuscript. MA supervised the methods, consulted in analysing and interpreting the data, and commented on the paper drafts. Both authors read, edited and approved the final manuscript.

**Conflict of interest.** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical standards.** This paper has followed the major ethical considerations under the guidance of the Norwegian Data Protection Authority. The authors have assessed NorLAG data with permission of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) after signing a pledge of secrecy.

## References

- Alin A (2010) Multicollinearity. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Computational Statistics* 2, 370–374.
- Arbeids- og Sosialdepartementet (2016) *UNECE National Report on Ageing 2016 – Norway*. Available at [https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/country\\_rpts/2017/NOR\\_report.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/country_rpts/2017/NOR_report.pdf).
- Bekkers R, van Ingen E, de Wit A and Broese van Groenou M (2016) Why do people volunteer? A review of the literature. Paper presented at the 45th ARNOVA Conference, Washington, DC, November.
- Bowen D, Andersen M and Urban N (2000) Volunteerism in a community-based sample of women aged 50 to 80 years. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 30, 1829–1842.
- Choi LH (2003) Factors affecting volunteerism among older adults. *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 22, 179–196.
- Clary EG and Snyder M (1991) A functional analysis of altruism and prosocial behavior: the case of volunteerism. In Clark MS (ed.), *Prosocial Behavior*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 119–148.
- Clary EG and Snyder M (1999) The motivations to volunteer: theoretical and practical considerations. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 8, 156–159.
- Clary EG, Snyder M and Ridge R (1992) Volunteers' motivations: a functional strategy for the recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 2, 333–350.
- Clary E, Snyder M, Ridge RD, Copeland J, Stukas AA, Haugen J and Miene P (1998) Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: a functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, 1516–1530.
- Cramm JM and Nieboer AP (2015) Background characteristics, resources and volunteering among older adults (aged ≥70 years) in the community: a longitudinal study. *Geriatrics & Gerontology International* 15, 1087–1095.
- Dury S, De Donder L, De Witte N, Buffel T, Jacquet W and Verté D (2015) To volunteer or not: the influence of individual characteristics, resources, and social factors on the likelihood of volunteering by older adults. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 44, 1107–1128.
- Dury S, Willems J, De Witte N, De Donder L, Buffel T and Verté D (2016) Municipality and neighborhood influences on volunteering in later life. *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 35, 601–626.
- Eimhjellen I, Steen-Johnsen K, Folkestad B and Ødegård G (2018) Changing patterns of volunteering and participation. In Enjolras B and Strømsnes K (eds). *Scandinavian Civil Society and Social*

- Transformations* (Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies: An International Multidisciplinary Series). Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 26–55.
- Einolf C and Chambré SM** (2011) Who volunteers? Constructing a hybrid theory. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* **16**, 298–310.
- Ferreira MR, Proenca JF and Proenca T** (2009) Motivations and management factors of volunteer work in nonprofit organisations: a literature review. In *8th International Congress of the International Association on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*. *Apas Papers 181, Academic Public Administration Studies Archive - APAS*.
- Ferrer I, Grenier A, Brotman S and Koehn S** (2017) Understanding the experiences of racialized older people through an intersectional life course perspective. *Journal of Aging Studies* **41**, 10–17.
- Finkelstien MA** (2009) Intrinsic vs extrinsic motivational orientations and the volunteer process. *Personality and Individual Differences* **46**, 653–658.
- Folkestad B and Langhelle MH** (2016) *Potensialet for økt frivillig deltakelse i Norge*. Available at [https://www.samfunnsforskning.no/sivilsamfunn/publikasjoner/notater/notat\\_01\\_2016\\_v3.pdf](https://www.samfunnsforskning.no/sivilsamfunn/publikasjoner/notater/notat_01_2016_v3.pdf).
- Forbes KF and Zampelli EM** (2014) Volunteerism: the influences of social, religious, and human capital. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* **43**, 227–253.
- Hair JFJ, Black WC, Babin BK and Anderson RE** (2014) *Multivariate Data Analysis*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, USA: Pearson.
- Hansen T and Slagsvold B** (2020a) An ‘army of volunteers’? Engagement, motivation, and barriers to volunteering among the baby boomers. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* **63**, 335–353.
- Hansen T and Slagsvold B** (2020b) Refleksiv frivillighet i en norsk kontekst – om eldres deltakelse, motivasjon og potensiale. *Tidsskrift for Velferdsforskning* **23**, 4–19.
- Hansen T, Slagsvold B, Aartsen M and Deindl C** (2018) Dynamics of volunteering and life satisfaction in midlife and old age: findings from 12 European countries. *Social Sciences* **7**, 78.
- Harris AHS and Thoresen CE** (2005) Volunteering is associated with delayed mortality in older people: analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Aging. *Journal of Health Psychology* **10**, 739–752.
- Hooghe M and Botterman S** (2012) Urbanization, community size, and population density: is there a rural–urban divide in participation in voluntary organizations or social network formation? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* **41**, 120–144.
- Hustinx L and Lammertyn F** (2003) Collective and reflexive styles of volunteering: a sociological modernisation perspective. *Voluntas* **14**, 167–187.
- Hustinx L, Cnaan RA and Handy F** (2010) Navigating theories of volunteering: a hybrid map for a complex phenomenon. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* **40**, 410–434.
- Hustinx L, Grubb A, Rameder P and Shachar IY** (2022) Inequality in volunteering: building a new research front. *Voluntas* **33**, 1–17.
- Jensen PH, Lamura G and Principi A** (2014) Volunteering in older age: a conceptual and analytical framework. In Principi A, Jensen PH and Lamura G (eds), *Active Ageing: Voluntary Work by Older People in Europe*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, pp. 21–44.
- Lee YJ and Brudney JL** (2012) Participation in formal and informal volunteering: implications for volunteer recruitment. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* **23**, 159–180.
- Liu Y, Duan Y and Xu L** (2020) Volunteer service and positive attitudes toward aging among Chinese older adults: the mediating role of health. *Social Science & Medicine* **265**, 113535.
- Lum TY and Lightfoot E** (2005) The effects of volunteering on the physical and mental health of older people. *Research on Aging* **27**, 31–55.
- Ma J and Konrath SA** (2018) Century of nonprofit studies: scaling the knowledge of the field. *Voluntas* **29**, 1139–1158.
- Meier S and Stutzer A** (2008) Is volunteering rewarding in itself? *Economica* **75**, 39–59.
- Meyer M and Rameder P** (2022) Who is in charge? Social inequality in different fields of volunteering. *Voluntas* **33**, 18–32.
- Morris AO, Holly PO, Brian K, Kathryn AJ and Craig E** (2015) Value-expressive volunteer motivation and volunteering by older adults: relationships with religiosity and spirituality. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B* **70**, 860–870.
- Morrow-Howell N** (2010) Volunteering in later life: research frontiers. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B* **65**, 461–469.

- Morrow-Howell N, Hinterlong J, Rozario PA and Tang F (2003) Effects of volunteering on the well-being of older adults. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B* **58**, S137–S145.
- Musick MA and Wilson J (2008) *Volunteers: A Social Profile*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Musick MA, Herzog AR and House JS (1999) Volunteering and mortality among older adults: findings from a national sample. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B* **54**, S173–S180.
- Mutchler JE, Burr JA and Caro FG (2003) From paid worker to volunteer: leaving the paid workforce and volunteering in later life. *Social Forces* **81**, 1267–1293.
- Principi A and Perek-Bialas J (2014) Voluntary organisations' characteristics and practices towards older volunteers. In Principi A, Jensen PH and Lamura G (eds), *Active Ageing: Voluntary Work by Older People in Europe*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, pp. 245–274.
- Principi A, Chiatti C, Lamura G and Frerichs F (2012) The engagement of older people in civil society organizations. *Educational Gerontology* **38**, 83–106.
- Randle M and Dolnicar S (2009) Not just any volunteers: segmenting the market to attract the high contributors. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* **21**, 271–282.
- Shen HW, Delston JB and Wang Y (2017) Does a sense of benevolence influence volunteering and caregiving among older people? *Social Work Research* **41**, 155–166.
- Smith D (2004) Volunteering in retirement: perceptions of midlife workers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* **33**, 55–73.
- Southby K and South J (2016) *Volunteering, Inequalities and Barriers to Volunteering: A Rapid Evidence Review*. Leeds, UK: Leeds Beckett University.
- Southby K, South J and Bagnall AM (2019) A rapid review of barriers to volunteering for potentially disadvantaged groups and implications for health inequalities. *Voluntas* **30**, 907–920.
- Tang F (2005) What resources are needed for volunteerism? A life course perspective. *The Gerontologist* **45**, 638–639.
- Tang F (2008) Socioeconomic disparities in voluntary organization involvement among older adults. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* **37**, 57–75.
- Veenstra M, Herlofson K, Aartsen M, Hansen T, Hellevik T, Henriksen G, Løset GK and Vangen H (2021) Cohort profile: the Norwegian Life Course, Ageing and Generation Study (NorLAG). *International Journal of Epidemiology* **50**, 728–729i.
- Walker A and Maltby T (2012) Active ageing: a strategic policy solution to demographic ageing in the European Union. *International Journal of Social Welfare* **21**, supplement 1, S117–S130.
- Warburton J and Crosier T (2001) Are we too busy to volunteer? The relationship between time and volunteering using the 1997 ABS Time Use Data. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* **36**, 295–314.
- Warburton J, Terry DJ, Roseman LS and Sharp M (2001) Differences between older volunteers and nonvolunteers: attitudinal, normative, and control beliefs. *Research on Aging* **23**, 586–605.
- Wilson J and Musick M (1997) Who cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review* **62**, 694–713.
- Wollebæk D, Sætrang S and Fladmoe A (2015) *Betingelser for frivillig innsats. Motivasjon og kontekst* (Rapport 1/2015). Oslo: Senter for forskning på sivilsamfunn og frivillig sektor.
- Yang HL, Zhang S, Zhang WC, Shen Z, Wang JH, Cheng SM, Tao YW, Zhang SQ, Yang LX, Yao YD, Xie L, Tang LL, Wu YY and Li ZY (2022) Volunteer service and well-being of older people in China. *Frontiers in Public Health* **10**, 777178.