

Outcomes Of Volunteering: Some Causal Insights And Resulting Challenges For Sport Organisations

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Aim of the research

For the promotion of volunteerism, knowledge about potential volunteering outcomes, such as subjective well-being, and information about causality is needed, i.e., whether volunteering indeed increases subjective well-being or whether happier people are more likely to volunteer (Gimenez-Nadal & Molina, 2015). The purpose of this study is to examine whether specific voluntary roles in sport and subjective wellbeing are causally related or not.

Theoretical background and literature review

Subjective well-being can be defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002, p. 63). Theoretically, volunteering is assumed to affect subjective well-being through the exercise of altruism or the production of relational goods (Becchetti, Pelloni, & Rossetti, 2008). Relational goods are based on interpersonal sharing and encounters rather than market exchanges. They include, for example, a sense of belonging, companionship, emotional support, and solidarity. The examples indicate that these goods explicitly consider the impact of an individual’s behaviour on the welfare of others (Becchetti et al., 2008). Meier and Stutzer (2008) suggest further mechanisms how volunteering affects subjective well-being, including receiving direct rewards, enjoyment, and investment in social and human capital. In another context, Koustelios, Bagiatas, and Kellis (1999) have indicated that divergent expectations of employees can negatively affect subjective well-being and even lead to burnout. Research examining the determinants of subjective well-being has used volunteering in sport (Wicker & Frick, 2015) or in general (Downward & Dawson, 2016) only as a control variable and does not distinguish between different voluntary roles. However, the effect of volunteering in sport on subjective well-being has not yet been examined systematically.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

This research uses survey data from the Eurobarometer 80.2 wave which were collected in 2013 and comprise individuals from 28 countries of the European Union (n = 24,577). Respondents were asked about whether they engage in voluntary work that supports sporting activities and if so, what type of work they do. The ten answer categories yielded three variables measuring the number of administrative roles (board or committee member, administrative tasks; 2.75% of respondents have at least one role), sport-related roles (coach or trainer, referee or other official; 2.39%), and operational roles (organise or help to run a sporting event, support day to day club activities, provide transport, maintain sports facilities, and maintain sports equipment; 5.95%). Subjective well-being is captured with a measure for general life satisfaction (1 = not at all satisfied, 4 = very satisfied). The summary statistics reveal country-specific differences in volunteerism and life satisfaction levels. The empirical strategy is two-fold. First, a linear regression is estimated with subjective well-being as the dependent variable, the three independent variables of interest (administrative, sport-related, and operational roles), and a set of controls, including age, gender, marital status, number of children and persons in household, town size, difficulty paying bills, regular sport and physical activity, and walking. The second step considers that both the volunteering variables as well as the measures for sport participation, physical activity, and walking are endogeneous. Therefore, a set of instrumental variables (membership in sport and health/fitness club, sport opportunities in local area, cooperative person etc.) is used whose validity is confirmed with the Hansen J test and joint F-test. Importantly, instrumental variables allow identifying causal effects rather than only relationships. Since heteroscedasticity is likely in large-scale cross-sectional data, the generalised method of moments (GMM) estimator is used in the second regression model. Standard errors are clustered by country.

Results, discussion, and implications

The results of the linear regression analysis show that all three voluntary roles have a statistically significant and positive association with subjective well-being. The instrumental variables estimates, however, reveal that only the number of operational roles has a significant positive effect on subjective well-being, while the number of sport-related roles is insignificant and the number of administrative roles is even negative and significant. It is possible that operational roles yield quicker and more visible outcomes than strategic

roles, and that observing these outcomes adds to subjective well-being. It is also possible that these are ports of entry for volunteers and that, as more experience brings with it additional responsibilities, the level of frustration grows with more roles undertaken and exceeds potential benefits from volunteering (Sheptak & Menaker, 2016), which undermines subjective well-being. These findings have management and policy implications. Since voluntary activity cannot be produced by the government, the challenge for sport organisations is to develop organisational capacity that fosters desirable outcomes for all volunteering roles.

References

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