

## Sloan Network Encyclopedia Entry

---

### Helping Behaviors: Volunteerism and Taking Care of Kin (2005)

**Author:** Hetty van Emmerik, Utrecht University, Dept. of Sociology

**Date:** April 2005

#### **Basic Concepts and Definitions**

Traditionally, work and family were distinct research areas. Nowadays, increasing attention is paid to spill-over effects of the work and home contexts. Researchers have expanded their focus to activities such as household and leisure management. Further, the work-family interface consists of the intersection of various work and family characteristics and this has direct effects on work, family, and individual outcomes. These effects may be moderated by social categories and coping resources, e.g., helping behaviors (Voydanoff, 2002). As Rotola and Wilson (2004) argue, women's family roles are linked to helping behaviors in a number of ways and much of the time devoted to volunteer work can be seen as an extension of those roles. Consequently, changes in household composition may impact helping behaviors. This entry focuses on yet another field of activities of people: Helping behaviors. Helping behaviors (i.e., behaviors as carried out to produce and maintain the well-being and integrity of others) can be considered to be a key strategy that many working families use to manage their own family responsibilities. That is, many working families depend on the helping behaviors of their friends and families to manage obligations such as transporting school age children to after school activities.

Helping behaviors can be broadly defined as any kind of activities entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or cause (Wilson, 2000). Helping behaviors have been conceptually associated with social responsibility and prosocial behaviors. Volunteering can also be seen as form of communal work, which is generally characterized as the absence of monetary payment for work undertaken. Often, a distinction is made between formal and informal volunteering. Organized activities, such as helping within charity institutions, are considered to be formal volunteering and this is typically carried out in organizational contexts. Informal volunteering refers to helping friends, neighbors, and relatives living outside the household. Generally, people engage in several kinds of helping behaviors.

As suggested by the figure below, different types of helping behaviors can be conceptualized as "formal" helping behaviors enacted at work/formal at home; informal helping behavior; at either the level of individuals/small groups (e.g., taking care of kin and neighbors) or communities (e.g., volunteerism).

<p><b>Formal: Helping Individuals</b></p> <p>At Home      At Work</p>	<p><b>Formal: Helping Communities</b></p> <p>At Home      At Work</p>
<p><b>Informal: Helping Individuals</b></p> <p>At Home      At Work</p>	<p><b>Informal: Helping Communities</b></p> <p>At Home      At Work</p>

Within the area of work and family studies, two types of helping behaviors are especially relevant. 1), **volunteerism**, such as cooking for drug addicts. 2), **taking care of kin and neighbors**. An example of this latter form of helping behaviors is doing an elderly neighbor's shopping.

Both types of helping behaviors are usually long-term and involve thoughtful decisions of people to seek out situations in which they can provide help (Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997), although it is possible that people might just help a neighbor once or volunteer once at a shelter. Further, these types of helping behaviors are essentially carried out to produce and maintain the well-being and integrity of others. Volunteerism and taking care of kin and neighbors differ on several dimensions. For instance, helping behaviors can vary according to the degree of familiarity with the recipients. Typically, compared to volunteerism, taking care of kin and neighbors is directed to familiar and close recipients. In contrast, volunteerism is frequently directed to non-familiar recipients (Van Emmerik, Stone, Jawahar, 2003). Frequently, volunteers do not know in advance who they help, since they are matched with recipients by service organizations (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Moreover, helping behaviors can also vary with respect to the extent of perceived moral obligation. Helping behaviors can be viewed as a moral obligation: Not only are individuals expected to care for their own welfare, but they are expected to consider what is best for others. Compared to helping kin and neighbors, volunteerism may be less motivated by feelings of moral obligation, although much volunteerism may come out of activities organized by faith-based institutions and congregants may participate on moral grounds. Commonly, helping kin and neighbors seems to be motivated by genuine feelings of moral obligation and is considered a demanding but an obligatory part of everyday life (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993). Even though these types of relationships can also be instrumental or task oriented, e.g, carpooling kids to sports practice.

**Importance of the Topic to Work-Family Studies**

Generally helping behaviors (i.e., volunteerism and taking care of kin and neighbors) are less valued than paid work and this holds especially for taking care of kin and neighbors (Van Emmerik, Stone, and

Jawahar, 2003). Customarily, there is less attention for taking care of kin and neighbors in the research literature and it is frequently excluded from studies on helping behaviors among employees. Women are more likely to engage in this sort of helping behavior than men. Taking care of kin and neighbors, like domestic work more generally, is unevenly distributed across family members. Both husbands and wives believe that it is women who should keep in touch with and care for kin and studies show that women provide more care than do men, especially to aging parents (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993), although these beliefs are changing (Moen & Sweet, 2002). Although they are quite different in many ways, both taking care of kin and neighbors and housework are types of work that are devalued and often taken for granted, not only by policy makers and social analysts, but sometimes even by providers themselves.

### **State of the Body of Knowledge**

Most of the attention on helping behaviors has focused on helping behaviors in the context of paid labor and a substantial body of research has focused specifically on helping behaviors of paid-employees (i.e., Organizational Citizenship Behaviors or OCBs).

In contrast, research on helping behaviors outside the workplace has been less common. Such studies have documented a relationship between altruism and volunteerism, and helping kin and neighbors (Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Outside the context of paid labor, volunteerism is a phenomenon in Western countries. It has been estimated that in the United States 46% of people engage in some kind of volunteering: 34% can be classified as non-religion based, while 12% of these activities can be classified as religion based volunteerism. In Europe, the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are frontrunners with their proportion of the population that engages in volunteering, but volunteering in these European countries is less faith-based (Dekker, 1999). In the last decades, women have increasingly participated in paid labor, with older people engaging more in volunteering, and in the same period, differences between levels of education have diminished. Nowadays, men and women without either an extensive paid job or extensive household tasks are most active in volunteering (Dekker, 1999; Knulst & Van Eijck, 2002). Studies vary on sex differences in volunteerism, but generally speaking men are more often active on behalf of professional organizations, in the articulation of interests and in the sports and hobby sphere, whereas women are active in education and development, in child care, in women's organizations and in unofficial advice and help, such as taking care of kin and neighbors (Knulst & Van Eijck, 2002).

The engagement in different activities, such as caring tasks and volunteerism, is dependent on the availability of time. For instance, when leisure time is scarce, people may pursue alternatives that better distribute work and leisure time. Moreover, volunteers can easily choose to allocate their time to other activities when alternatives become more attractive (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). When context demands for an individual's time are greater than their desire to contribute, this may have negative consequences for the extent of volunteering and taking care of kin (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). When hours of paid labor increase, time spent on helping behaviors may diminish. Time demands are also associated with the

presence of children living at home. When the number of children living at home increases, so too will the number of hours devoted to such tasks as transportation, school-related activities, cooking and shopping (Frone & Yardley, 1996) and consequently less time remains for volunteering and taking care of kin. Volunteers in the Farmer & Fedor study (2001) reported fewer volunteer hours when volunteering demands interfered with their family activities. The energy level of people who are willing to engage in helping behaviors is important. To be involved in helping behaviors supposes not only enough time, but also enough energy. Thus, helping behaviors are less likely for people who are exhausted from work and other activities than for those who have more energy.

In search of the antecedents of voluntary behaviors, one of the most important sources is altruism. Altruism concerns the degree that the individual helps from a desire to reduce the distress or increase the benefit of the person in need. Since altruism is more directed at helping others, it can be expected to be more associated with actual helping behaviors and consequently to be more associated with involvement in low-status volunteering (Van Emmerik & Stone, 2003).

Altruism, the enduring tendency to benefit others, is one of the most consistent individual resources that has been related to helping behaviors (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991). Studies show that employees give altruistic reasons for becoming involved in helping behaviors, such as wanting to help others and actual volunteerism (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Within the paid work context achieving material rewards is important to people, e.g., earning money. Since helping behaviors do not involve monetary rewards, other goals are likely. Most studies on motives to engage in helping behaviors use various positive concepts such as altruism and helping others and the community, personal satisfaction, personal or family involvement, social interaction, and fulfilling or recognition of contributions (Farmer & Fedor, 2001).

It has been suggested that some important consequences of helping behaviors are associated with positive emotions, e.g., deriving positive feelings from helping behaviors (Fredrickson, 1998). Following Frederickson's perspective, it has been argued that the experience of positive affect that accompanies helping behaviors may further energize an individual to continue to help. Thus, according to this perspective, rather than depleting one of energy, the engagement in one type of helping behaviors may energize an individual to engage in other types of helping behaviors as well. However, helping behaviors, especially taking care of kin, often entails a great deal of work, is often taken for granted, and, as a result, it can be easily associated with heightened levels of psychological distress (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993; Van Emmerik, Stone, & Jawahar, 2003).

Helping behaviors are associated with altruism but can also be thought of as shaped by social structural forces, and several studies suggest that for helping behaviors the division of labor also will be similar to paid-labor occupational categories (e.g., Van Emmerik & Stone, 2003; Wilson & Musick, 1997). That is

helping behaviors are expected to be differentiated according to the status associated with different kinds of helping behaviors. Jobs that are supportive in nature, for example caring tasks or purely clerical (not administrative) activities can be considered to be low in the status hierarchy. Administrative and supervisory activities can be thought of as high status work. Examples of high status volunteering are being a member of the board of a nursing home, or being the spokesman for an action committee. Examples of low status helping behaviors are cooking for drug addicts, doing the paper work for the sports club or serving coffee to the residents of the nursing home (Van Emmerik & Stone, 2003).

Generally, gender differences in the extent of involvement in helping behaviors have been reported in a number of studies. For instance, helping behaviors of women are more frequently directed at family and friends than are the helping behaviors of men. Thus, women seem to engage less in formal volunteering settings, and more in informal volunteering than do men (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993). Overall, studies report that women are more likely to become involved in volunteerism (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). The explanation of such gender differences may have originated in differential socialization practices. Typically, the distinction between high and low status volunteering may go along gender lines. That is, women may specialize in lower status caring and support tasks, and men predominantly may occupy supervisory and administrative tasks, generally seen as higher status (Van Emmerik & Stone, 2003). Consequently, men are expected to be more involved in high status volunteering, such as management and coordination tasks, and committee work, whereas women are expected to be more involved in lower status volunteering, such as personal care and assistance and preparing and serving food (Van Emmerik & Stone, 2003).

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

There are several reasons why (joint) examination of different types of helping behaviors is important for work and family studies and the broader societal context. First, despite some apparent similarities, there are also some marked differences among helping behaviors. For example, volunteerism and taking care of kin and neighbors differ with regard to the degree of familiarity of the recipients and feelings of moral obligation to help. An awareness of similarities and differences among the different types of helping behaviors and their association with antecedents, such as altruism, can serve as the basis for stimulating helping behaviors. Second, when analyses of helping behaviors are limited to organizational contexts (i.e., OCBs), that may imply that other helping behaviors are of minor importance (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993). From a broader societal perspective, helping behaviors beyond the paid labor context may be just as important as helping others within labor organizations. In addition, it is possible that the different types of helping behaviors are not independent of each other and that engagement in one type of helping behavior may interfere with the engagement in other helping voluntary?. For instance, taking care of kin can be time consuming and exhausting, and could come at the expense of other types of helping behaviors, particularly volunteerism. Indeed, family obligations in the form of helping kin and the concomitant depletion of energy are often regarded as a reason for the relatively high rate of turnover in

volunteer organizations (Wilson, 2000). Wilson and Musick (1997) stress that studying the connection between work and volunteering is important for another reason. There is an increase in demand for helping behaviors at a time when more and more women are working outside the home and when people are working longer hours and have less free time for leisure and helping behaviors. The supply of helping behaviors has always been insufficient to meet the demand (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Research is needed that integrates the knowledge of different types of helping behaviors and their relationship with the work-family interface. Such research might provide direction to employers and organizations.

## References

- Carlo, G., Eisenberg, N., Troyer, D., Switzer, G., & Speer, A. L. (1991). The altruistic personality: In what contexts is it apparent? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*(3), 450-458.
- Dekker, P. (Ed.). (1999). *Vrijwilligerswerk vergeleken (Civil society and voluntary work)*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
- Farmer, S. M., & Fedor, D. B. (2001). Changing the focus on volunteering: An investigation of volunteers' multiple contributions to a charitable organization. *Journal of Management*, *27*(2), 191-211.
- Flanagan, C. A., Bowes, J. M., Jonsson, B., Csapo, B., & Sheblanova, E. (1998). Ties that bind: Correlates of adolescents' civic commitments in seven countries. *Journal of Social Issues*, *54*(3), 457-475.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions. *Review of General Psychology*, *2*, 300-319.
- Frone, M. R., & Yardley, J. K. (1996). Workplace family-supportive programmes: Predictors of employed parents' importance ratings. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, *69*(4), 351-366.
- Gerstel, N., & Gallagher, S. K. (1993). Kinkeeping and distress: Gender, recipients of care, and work-family conflict. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *55*(3), 598.
- Knulst, W., & Van Eijck, K. (2002). *Vrijwilligers in soorten en maten II. Ontwikkelingen in de periode 1985-2000 (Analysis of developments in time use for voluntary work)*. Tilburg: Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen, KUB Tilburg.
- Moen, P., & Sweet, S. (2002). Two Careers, One Employer: Couples Working for the Same Corporation. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *61*, 466-483.

Omoto, A. M., & Snyder, M. (1995). Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIDS volunteers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(4), 671-686.

Penner, L. A., Midili, A. R., & Kegelmeyer, J. (1997). Beyond job attitudes: A personality and social psychology perspective on the causes of organizational citizenship behavior. *Human Performance*, 10(2), 111-131.

Piliavin, J. A., & Charng, H. W. (1990). Altruism: A review of recent theory and research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 27-65.

Rotolo, T., & Wilson, J. (2004). What happened to the "Long Civic Generation"? Explaining cohort differences in volunteerism. *Social Forces*, 82(3), 1091-1121.

Van Emmerik IJ.H., & Stone, T. (2003). Engagement in high and low status volunteering. *Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 239-251.

Van Emmerik IJ.H., Stone, T. H., & Jawahar, J. (2003). The relationship between altruism and helping behaviors: Some moderating effects of burnout. Proceedings of the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (Best Papers Proceedings), Seattle.

Voydanoff, P. (2002). Linkages between the work-family interface and work, family, and individual outcomes: An integrative model. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(1), 138-164.

Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 215-240.

Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1997). Who Cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 694-713.

### **Other Recommended Readings**

Farmer, S. M., & Fedor, D. B. (2001). Changing the focus on volunteering: An investigation of volunteers' multiple contributions to a charitable organization. *Journal of Management*, 27(2), 191-211.

Gerstel, N., & Gallagher, S. K. (1993). Kinkeeping and distress: Gender, recipients of care, and work-family conflict. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55(3), 598.

Omoto, A. M., & Snyder, M. (1995). Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIDS volunteers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(4), 671-686.

Penner, L. A., Midili, A. R., & Kegelmeyer, J. (1997). Beyond job attitudes: A personality and social psychology perspective on the causes of organizational citizenship behavior. *Human Performance*, 10(2), 111-131.

Van Emmerik I.J.H., & Stone, T. (2003). Engagement in high and low status volunteering. *Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 239-251.

Van Emmerik I.J.H., Stone, T. H., & Jawahar, J. (2003). The relationship between altruism and helping behaviors: Some moderating effects of burnout. Proceedings of the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (Best Papers Proceedings), Seattle.

Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 215-240.

Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1997). Who Cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 694-713.