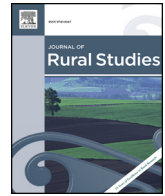


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

## Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud)

# Who are the future volunteers in rural places? Understanding the demographic and background characteristics of non-retired rural volunteers, why they volunteer and their future migration intentions

Amanda Davies<sup>a,\*</sup>, Leonie Lockstone-Binney<sup>b</sup>, Kirsten Holmes<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth 6845, Western Australia, Australia

<sup>b</sup> William Angliss Institute, 555 La Trobe Street, Melbourne 3000, Victoria, Australia

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Rural volunteers  
Rural outmigration  
Rural development

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the demographic characteristics of the current pool of volunteers for rural areas and how volunteering relates to individuals' rural background, sense of connection to the community and future intentions to remain in the community. The paper uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and a survey of rural households in the state of Western Australia. The survey received 10,444 valid responses and this paper used a subset of 6666 responses from the non-retired population. The analysis confirmed a high rate of volunteering in rural communities, and identified this was the case for both males and females across most age groups. The rural background of volunteers, the nature of their employment, family structure and their sense of community was associated with involvement in volunteering. The study revealed that an important volunteer cohort was planning to leave their community within a few years and a major reason for this planned outmigration was the lack of essential services in rural towns. We conclude that if governments wish to maintain or enhance the utilisation of local volunteers for essential and non-essential service delivery in rural areas, attention must be given to better supporting the existing rural volunteer workforce and to addressing the underlying causes of rural outmigration.

## 1. Introduction

Rural communities across the world face significant and increasing challenges of economic, environmental and social adaptation. The means through which rural communities can deal with change are limited, with reliance on the voluntary sector increasing (Imperiale and Vanclay, 2016; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). In developed and developing countries, volunteering underpins the delivery of many essential services and in rural areas these include emergency services, healthcare and aged care. Importantly, rural communities are particularly dependent on local volunteers, as typically there are no alternative commercial providers for many essential services. This dependence has led researchers to question the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce (Onyx and Leonard, 2010). However, the fragmented nature of the voluntary sector has made it difficult to capture the 'state of play' or to forecast future needs. This fragmentation is repeated in the scholarship on rural volunteering, where studies have focused on specific sectors or organisations including health services (Fahey et al., 2014), emergency services (McLennan et al., 2009), sports clubs (Tonts, 2005), art organisations (Jones and Birdsall-Jones, 2014), tourism (Davies,

2015; Edwards, 2012) and environmental management (Byron and Curtis, 2001; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2016).

Although the literature on rural volunteering is thematically fragmented, there is broad agreement that structural population ageing is a major threat to the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce (Lewig et al. 2007; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). The structural ageing of the population, it is argued, will cause increased demand for volunteer provided services and reduce the pool of labour available to fill volunteer positions (Davies, 2011; Joseph and Skinner, 2012; Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013; Munoz et al., 2014). To ensure the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce, evidence is needed about how demand for volunteer services and the volunteer labour supply will change in response to social, economic and demographic changes. This paper focuses on addressing the need for knowledge about supply side issues by documenting the demographic features and future intentions of the rural volunteer workforce in Australia.

The paper centres on examining volunteering in rural Western Australia. Rural Western Australia provides a useful and interesting setting to examine volunteering as, for over four decades, volunteers have had a heightened role in community and industry adaptation

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [a.davies@curtin.edu.au](mailto:a.davies@curtin.edu.au) (A. Davies), [LeonieL@angliss.edu.au](mailto:LeonieL@angliss.edu.au) (L. Lockstone-Binney).

efforts (Davies and Tonts, 2010; Davies and Oliver, 2018; Pick et al., 2011). During this period, the nature of activities undertaken by local volunteers has expanded from being primarily concerned with supporting social, cultural and infrastructure development to include being the primary agents for the delivery of many essential services including health care, social welfare, financial, governance and emergency services (Davies, 2009; Tonts and Jones, 1997). The Western Australian case study is also particularly useful as in recent years rural Australia has experienced an overall decline in volunteering. While on average, Australia's rural communities have had a higher rate of participation in volunteering than their urban counterparts (ABS, 2015), there has been a recorded net decrease in volunteering in Australia<sup>1</sup> (ABS, 2015). The decline in volunteering coincides with a projected increased need for volunteers due to structural population ageing (Productivity Commission, 2013). However, as is the case for many countries, within Australia there is no system wide evidence to indicate the breadth and depth of involvement in volunteering. Little is known about participation rates for different age groups, why people are involved in local volunteer work and what factors might influence their likelihood to remain involved.

The paper draws on the results from a survey of rural residents in Western Australia as well as data compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on volunteering. The survey of rural residents had 10,444 responses and is, we believe, the largest data set of this type. This paper focuses on the non-retired rural population, for which there were 7451 survey respondents, 6666 who provided a valid response to a question about their volunteering status. Previously scholars have examined volunteering by older rural residents and also volunteering for ageing rural communities (Skinner et al., 2014; 2016; 2017; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). Whilst focused on older residents, these studies have also identified there was a need to better understand the factors underpinning rural volunteer involvement at different phases of the life course, and as such this paper focuses on the non-retired volunteer workforce. In doing so, this paper seeks to extend knowledge about volunteering involvement for this cohort of the rural population, providing evidence of potential future supply side issues that may compromise the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce.

## 2. Literature review

Volunteering has been an enduring focus for researchers in considering the nature and functions of rural societies. Over the last four decades, as the state and private sector adjusted their models and scope of service provision in rural areas, the role for volunteers has also shifted (Rogers, 1987; Rochester et al., 2010; Winterton and Warburton, 2014). Over this period there has been an increased reliance on volunteers to deliver a broader range of services within rural communities (Skinner et al., 2016).

A dominant theme across the rural volunteering scholarship maintains that rural volunteers have long had a critical role in the wellbeing of rural communities and in recent decades this role has diversified and responsibilities intensified. In one of the earliest papers to report on rural volunteering, Rogers (1987, p. 355) wrote 'Voluntarism, in both its formal and informal forms, pervades the whole of the rural sector' and commented that rural communities have long established traditions of volunteers delivering essential services. However, he noted that since the 1960s, volunteers have had a heightened role in 'self-help' initiatives. In a 1988 study, Banister and Norton also identified there had been a broadening of activities in which rural volunteers were involved. They linked this to the withdrawal of government provided services and a failure of the private sector to fill the resulting void in service provision (Banister and Norton, 1988). The very considerable body of work published during in the 1990s that documented the major social and

economic upheavals in rural communities in developed countries provided extensive case evidence for Banister and Norton's (1988) observation that the withdrawal of government services had necessitated a diversification and intensification of the responsibilities for rural volunteers (Jones and Tonts, 1995; Gray and Lawrence, 2001).

Cheshire (2000) (along with others including Peck and Tickell, 2002; Tonts and Jones, 1997; Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie, 2005; Milligan and Conradson, 2006; Edwards and Woods, 2006) theorised this broadening of service delivery responsibilities for rural dwellers resulted from the adoption of 'neo-liberal' ideologies in policies and programs for rural community service provision and community development. Cheshire observed that governments' had moved away from a focus on agricultural associated development strategies 'topped up' by social welfare programs to focusing more closely on the viability of rural communities. Savoie (2000, p. 7) described the broadening role for rural community volunteers as 'the latest fashion in regional development'. This shift in policy focus resulted in a change in approach to rural development 'based upon notions of individual and community responsibility, self-help and & bottom-up techniques' which empower the community and reduce its dependence on government structured programs (Cheshire, 2000, p. 203). Rural volunteering was placed at the forefront of rural adaptation and development programs and the burden for the viability of rural communities was largely passed to rural communities (Wallington and Lawrence, 2008).

Since the early 2000s, a large body of work has been published that documents various community level responses to social, economic, political and environmental change. The expanded role for local volunteers to design and implement strategies for social wellbeing, economic adaption, service delivery and environmental protection has been normalised within much of this literature. For example, Breland (2005), in a review of the role of rural volunteers in delivering social welfare and support services for families, positioned volunteers as a resource that could be developed and shared between communities using appropriate governance frameworks. Delfmann et al. (2013) in a review of rural entrepreneurship and 'side activities' highlighted the critical role of local actors in sustaining bridging and bonding social capital. The voluntary participation of local residents in participating in side activities facilitated a space for social networking to be created. Examining themes similar to Delfmann et al. (2013), Nousiainen and Pylkkanen (2013) studied rural communities in Finland and argued that enhanced community involvement in designing and delivering essential and non-essential services was critical for rural identity formation and performance and this positively related to rural wellbeing. Edwards (2012) who examined rural festivals and Beel et al. (2017) who examined rural heritage echoed the arguments of Nousiainen and Pylkkanen.

Through documenting the broadening roles for rural volunteers and the factors that have underpinned this, researchers have identified the growing reliance on volunteer labour as a risk for rural viability (Alston, 2002; Cloutier-Fisher and Skinner, 2006; Talbot and Walker, 2007; Skinner, 2008) despite programs being rolled out across rural spaces to equip rural dwellers with the skills to participate in endogenous community development initiatives (Davies, 2009). In particular, the intensification of reliance on volunteer labour has increased the vulnerability of rural communities to inadequate essential service provision. Moseley and Owen (2008) published the results of an ambitious study undertaken in 2005, which sought to set out various scenarios for service delivery in rural England for the year 2015. Drawing on extensive interviews with service providers and rural dwellers they concluded that volunteers would continue to have a critical and comprehensive role in both essential and non-essential service delivery. However, they commented that the voluntary sector could not respond to government's expectations for service delivery due to insufficient investment in capacity building and infrastructure (Moseley and Owen, 2008). With volunteers providing many essential services in rural communities such as emergency services, (McLennan et al., 2009),

<sup>1</sup> This trend is explained further in Section 3.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545280>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545280>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)