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Pasts that last: The moderating role of education and former occupation for men's volunteering after retirement

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Abstract

This study uses nationally representative cross-sectional data to investigate the relationship between retirement and volunteering among men aged 50–70 in the Netherlands, and how this relationship is influenced by educational and occupational background. Based on a life-course perspective, it is hypothesized that education, socio-economic status related to the occupation and non-manual occupations will moderate the relation between retirement and volunteering activities for several reasons. Results from tobit regressions indicate that retirees, the highly educated, people with high occupational status and former non-manual workers are more involved in volunteering. While no interaction between retirement and educational level is found, the characteristics of the occupation (socio-economic status and non-manual versus manual work) are indeed found to interact with retirement, leading to higher volunteering rates for male retirees from occupations with high status, and retirees from non-manual occupations. Implications, strengths and limitations of the study are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The group of retirees is steadily growing across Western countries. A suggestion has been to optimally exploit the large potential of this group by promoting civic engagement among senior citizens, especially retirees (Morrow-Howell, 2010; Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007). Some have even stated that this group

could 'save civil society' by engaging in productive communal activities such as formal volunteering (Freedman, 1997). The idea is that society benefits from the vast resources that retirees have, while they themselves can profit from the non-monetary advantages that volunteer work has to offer. For these reasons, knowledge about how retirement affects volunteering activities, and, more specifically, *which* retirees decide to volunteer and which do not is important.

While previous research has recurrently shown that, in general, retirement positively influences volunteering (Chambré, 1984; Choi, 2003; Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Hank & Erlinghagen, 2009; Mutchler, Burr, & Caro, 2003; Principi, Warburton, Schippers, & Di Rosa,

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2012; Van den Bogaard, Henkens, & Kalmijn, 2014), there are good reasons to suspect that this effect differs for people from various backgrounds. In social stratification research, the question whether it is mostly human capital or rather class that is at work as a differentiating factor in society has been debated extensively. It has been argued that cultural resources, like cognitive skills and knowledge, have become dominant over traditional class hierarchies for explaining differences between people (Bell, 1976; Bourdieu, 1984; Brint, 1984; Gouldner, 1979; Pakulski & Waters, 1996). The relative importance of education over occupation has also been attested empirically, mostly for values and attitudes (Davis, 1982; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2007; Svallfors, 2005; Van de Werfhorst & De Graaf, 2004). On the other hand, there are those who maintain that the class position of a person, usually measured by their occupation, remains the principal component (Evans, 1993; Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992; Hout, Brooks, & Manza, 1993). This study is among the first to recognize the influence of retirees' educational and occupational heterogeneity on their volunteering and investigate which one of these is most influential.

Earlier studies have shown that education (McPherson & Rotolo, 1996; Wilson, 2000) and other stratification variables such as class and job status (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994; Smith, 1994; Wilson & Musick, 1997b) are important predictors for volunteering. That is, on average, those with more education and higher status tend to do more volunteering. To the knowledge of the authors, this has not been coupled with the finding noted earlier that retirement prompts (more) volunteering. A question that thus remains is how the social position and human capital of people during their working life shapes their volunteering activities after retirement. This study adds to the literature by offering insight into *how men's retirement affects their volunteering, and how this relationship is influenced by educational level and occupational background*.

Educational and occupational characteristics have been attested to be highly influential for retirement outcomes other than volunteering, such as *well-being*. For example, Quick and Moen (1998) showed that various occupational status groups (e.g., professional, sales-clerical) differ in their levels of satisfaction with retirement. In a similar vein, Van Solinge and Henkens (2008) found that people who experience their job as challenging are less satisfied with their retirement and adjust less well to it – indicative of them 'missing' their job and the accompanying experiences. This can be related to the finding that well-being in retirement

is also dependent on educational background and the 'need for cognition': when putting their human capital to use some people require more variety and complexity in their experiences than others to be happy (Bye & Pushkar, 2009).

Regarding post-retirement *activities*, surprisingly little is known about how the different backgrounds of retirees influence retirement outcomes. Wang, Zhan, Liu, and Shultz (2008) showed that one such activity, bridge employment, is more prevalent among those with higher education and less likely for those with stressful (former) jobs. With regard to *volunteering* as a post-retirement activity – the focus of this study – research that recognizes the educational and occupational heterogeneity of retirees is virtually non-existent. This hiatus is remarkable, since differences in human capital, social class and status can be expected to matter for the effect of retirement on people's activities. For example, one person may be a highly educated managing director in a challenging environment and with many connections, while another does hard physical labor in a monotonous, repetitive job. People differ in their individual human capital and occupational background, and are likely to shape their post-retirement activities accordingly.

There is some debate on the extent to which different types unpaid activities count as volunteering, and should be distinguished from each other (Wilson, 2000). A distinction is often made between formal volunteering, such as an active membership of a public association, and informal volunteering, such as driving an elderly neighbor to the store for groceries. Like most of the literature, this paper will employ a mostly formal definition of volunteering since such forms of unpaid activities may serve as the most satisfying substitutes for paid work (Brady et al., 1995; Chambré, 1984; Choi, 2003; Erlinghagen & Hank, 2006; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994; Hank & Erlinghagen, 2009; Mutchler et al., 2003; Principi et al., 2012; Smith, 1994; Van den Bogaard et al., 2014; Wilson & Musick, 1997b). Use is made of Dutch data from 2003 and 2007, nationally representative for men.

Regarding retirement, the Netherlands does not deviate considerably from most Western-European countries (Commission of the European Union, 2000; Euwals, de Mooij, & van Vuuren, 2009). Like in many other countries, policies on labor-market and retirement were under pressure and changing at the time of data collection. Working longer was being encouraged while early exit from the labor market was steadily becoming less financially attractive. Still, the general culture was and is one of the early exit with many people moving out of the labor force fully or partially before the age of 65.

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