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Investigating volunteer activities in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This is the first South African study that analysed all three available waves of Statistics South Africa's Volunteer Activities Survey data, which was linked to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey in the third quarter of the same year (2010, 2014 and 2018). The empirical findings showed that volunteers were predominantly female Africans without Matric, aged 25–34 years and resided in the urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo. In 2018 the labour force participation rate and unemployment rate of the volunteers were 62% and 34% respectively. These rates were both a bit higher than the corresponding rates of people who did not volunteer. The volunteers spent 20 h in the past four weeks on volunteering activities relating to service work and elementary occupations. More than 85% of volunteers did not expect to receive anything back. For those who indicated otherwise, they most likely expected to receive out-of-pocket expenses and food.

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Codes: J00; J24

1. Introduction

Since the advent of democracy took place nearly 30 years ago, numerous changes have been happening in the South African labour market. Pertaining to the movements in the labour market, due to the end of apartheid with the abolishment of unfair legislative acts (e.g. Job Reservations Act, Group Areas Act and Bantu Education Act, to name but a few) and the advent of democracy, the previously disadvantaged people – Africans, females and disabled – are no longer excluded. Nonetheless, the post-apartheid economy has been experiencing various persistent socio-economic problems, most notably poverty, inequality and unemployment. With regard to the latter, the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data showed that the unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2022 was 33.9%, with 7.99 million people unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

The South African government has implemented numerous economic policies to boost employment. For example, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) aims to address social and gender inequalities in the labour market by promoting the appointment of more Black people in senior positions. The Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) was implemented to alleviate the country's unemployment, poverty and inequality. One of the most recent economic policies, National

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Development Plan (NDP), intends to reduce the unemployment rate to 6% and increase total employment to 24 million by 2030. However, one over-looked policy option is encouraging people to involve themselves in volunteer activities, as the experience gained from it may boost their labour market outcomes (Nelson, 2005).

Historically, adults took part in volunteering to remain active after retiring from the labour market (Morrow-Howell, 2010). Nonetheless, volunteering can also be regarded as an activity to encourage more people to work in the labour market. In first-world countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Australia and Canada, involvement in voluntary activities is quite common. In addition, even developing countries (e.g. Columbia, Portugal, Argentina and Brazil) have experienced an increased incidence in voluntary activities (Nelson, 2005).

Throughout the world, there are efforts which aimed at promoting volunteerism (Stukas et al., 2016) to improve oneness and unity in various communities. Volunteering also helps erase social norms, encourage people to engage more, as well as create and enhance ethical values. For instance, in certain parts of the USA, volunteering is considered as common ethics as people sacrifice their time to help one another (Grimm et al., 2007).

It is somehow surprising that whilst three waves of the Volunteer Activities Survey (VAS) have been conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) since 2010, there are hardly any empirical studies examining the activities of volunteers and how they have been faring in the South African labour market. Therefore, the general research objective of the study is to investigate the relationship (if any) between labour market outcomes and volunteering incidence of the South African working-age population, by analysing all three available waves of the VAS data. The more specific research objectives that the study aims to achieve are as follows:

- Derive the personal characteristics of volunteers.
- Examine the activities the volunteers were involved in.
- Investigate how the volunteers fared in the labour market in terms of labour force participation and employment probabilities as well as work activities (if employed).
- Conduct multivariate econometric analysis to investigate the impact of various personal – (including labour market status) and household-level characteristics on the likelihood to volunteer.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining volunteers

A volunteer is an individual who is fully willing to offer unremunerated help in the form of services, skills and time to organisations (Statistics South Africa, 2010). Statistics South Africa (2020), eight years later, more officially distinguished someone as a volunteer when he/she completed any work that is non-compulsory without remuneration outside one's household in four weeks prior to the interview. Chacón et al. (2017) argue that volunteering is a non-obligatory, well-planned and assisting behaviour that continuously grows over time, and such behaviour benefits various parts of the society. Wilson (2012) as well as Synder and Omoto (2008) added that volunteers

freely and deliberately help others whom they are not related to, without expectation of any form of compensation in return over a period of time.

Yeung et al. (2018) categorised volunteering into two sub-categories. Other-oriented volunteering takes into consideration people who volunteer in religious, philanthropic services, health and social services. On the other hand, self-oriented volunteering relates to people who are involved in activities that promote self-development and self-actualisation, such as arts and culture, animal welfare, environmental and political services. Furthermore, formal and informal volunteering can also be classified (Paine et al., 2013): the former takes place through a group or organisation such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs) whereas the latter is conducted in a personal premise.

Lastly, volunteering takes on various explanations in the different fields of study. Psychologically, self-concepts, motivation and personality are taken into consideration when defining volunteers (Wilson, 2012). Thus, factors that drive individuals and affect people internally and externally are what lead to participation in voluntary activities. Extroverts are agreeable and more likely to be volunteers because they are more outgoing and usually form part of social groups (Binder & Freytag, 2013). Sociologically, Wilson (2012) emphasises volunteering by focusing on sociodemographic characteristics (such as gender, race, social class and ecological aspects) to define volunteering. These individuals are more comfortable to volunteer where their beliefs and values are respected.

2.2. Motives for and benefits of volunteering

Clary & Snyder (1999) and Chacón et al. (2017) reported that the six main motives to volunteer are as follows, with the first three being relatively more important:

- Values: Volunteers express altruism;
- Understanding: Volunteers learn new things and gain adequate experience;
- Enhancement: People feel better about oneself by volunteering;
- Social: People volunteer as one may know other people who also volunteer;
- Protective: People volunteer to avoid negativity or personal issues;
- Career: Volunteering is a good preparation for employment opportunities.

Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen (1991) added that both altruistic and non-altruistic motives drive the decision to volunteer. The former relates to one's unselfish concern towards other people's welfare and needs, while the latter relates to one's self-benefits and self-motivation. Furthermore, Stukas et al. (2015) noted that differences in skills, ability and personality play an important role to determine a person's current and future motivation to volunteer. For example, when an upcoming chef is motivated to seek work in the food industry, he/she is highly likely to volunteer in the field that best suits their skills. Lastly, personal identity helps create a positive environment that can endorse a healthy self-image and steer away from elements that can affect one's physical, emotional and mental well-being negatively (Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

Many individuals volunteer at various places to gain experience for future endeavours. This is confirmed by Smith et al. (2010) who state that one of the reasons why younger people volunteer is to boost work-related experience. On the contrary, some volunteers

quit due to feelings of not being able to find paid employment within an organisation (Akintola, 2011). Furthermore, Rego et al. (2016) argued that the transferral of soft skills are best developed through volunteer programmes with the ultimate aim to improve employability.

Volunteering in a community is associated with the creation of an environment that is cohesive and fundamentally stable. Volunteering has also been attributed to the increase of both social and health benefits of the individuals. Those involved in volunteering enjoy greater functional abilities, lower morality rates and depression likelihood than those who do not volunteer. Socially, volunteering helps individuals reinforce social ties that protect one from feeling isolated in tough times (Grimm et al., 2007).

Even though volunteering assists in building social bonds, Akintola (2011) noted that certain people volunteer only because they were asked to do so, i.e. the free-will aspect is not present. However, the author also asserted that through volunteering, opportunities are created for people who share the same dreams and wishes for the future to work together. Lastly, volunteering is associated with socio-economic benefits; in some developed countries (such as USA and Canada), chances of obtaining a tertiary qualification and potentially finding employment are greater through volunteering (Wilson, 2012).

2.3. Theoretical framework

Figure 1 uses the simple individual labour supply theoretical framework to explain the impact of volunteering on leisure and work hours, utility as well as total income, assuming the person was initially unemployed. Firstly, BC stands for the budget line before the

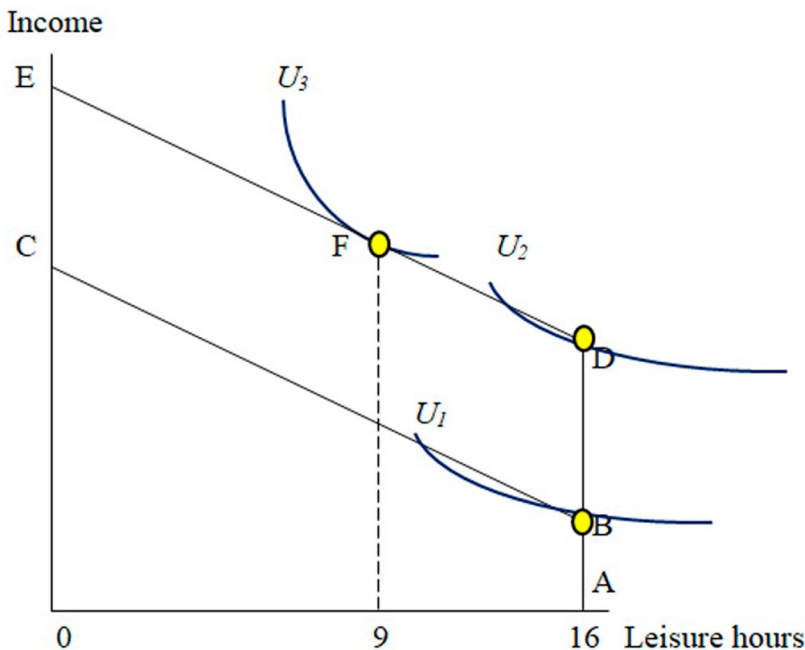


Figure 1. Impact of volunteering on total income, if the volunteer was initially unemployed. Source: Adapted from Yu & Roos (2018).

person takes part in volunteering activities. When the person is involved in volunteering activities, DE is the new budget line after the person becomes a volunteer by assuming he/she unexpectedly receives a once-off lump-sum payment by taking part in the volunteering activities (e.g. receipt of stipend 'income' to support the transport expenditure).

Points B , D and F convey different messages. At the initial equilibrium point B , before the individual became a volunteer, work hours were zero and leisure hours were 16, that is, the person was unemployed and achieved a utility level of U_1 . After the individual partook in volunteering activities, this person reached point D . At this point, the person's utility increased to U_2 but still did not take part in work activities in the labour market.

After getting some volunteering experience, the person eventually felt more confident to seek work, so he/she supplied his labour services in the labour market, and ended up at point F . At this point, the utility of the individual further increased to U_3 . Also at this point, the individual worked seven hours and only spent the nine hours on leisure. Finally, total income consists of labour market income (from paid work activities in the labour market) and non-labour market income (once-off stipend 'income' from volunteering activities – assuming the person continues to volunteer even after obtaining work in the labour market).

Figure 2 presents what happened to the volunteer's income and utility if he has always been employed. Before becoming a volunteer, the person's budget line was represented by HI . At equilibrium point M , the person worked eight hours per day, total income equalled OL and utility level was U_4 . As a result of taking part in volunteering activities, the person enjoyed psychic benefit of volunteering, so he acted *as if* he gained a non-labour income of MP . At the new equilibrium point P , labour hours and leisure hours both remained unchanged at eight, but the person's utility increased from U_4 to U_5 .

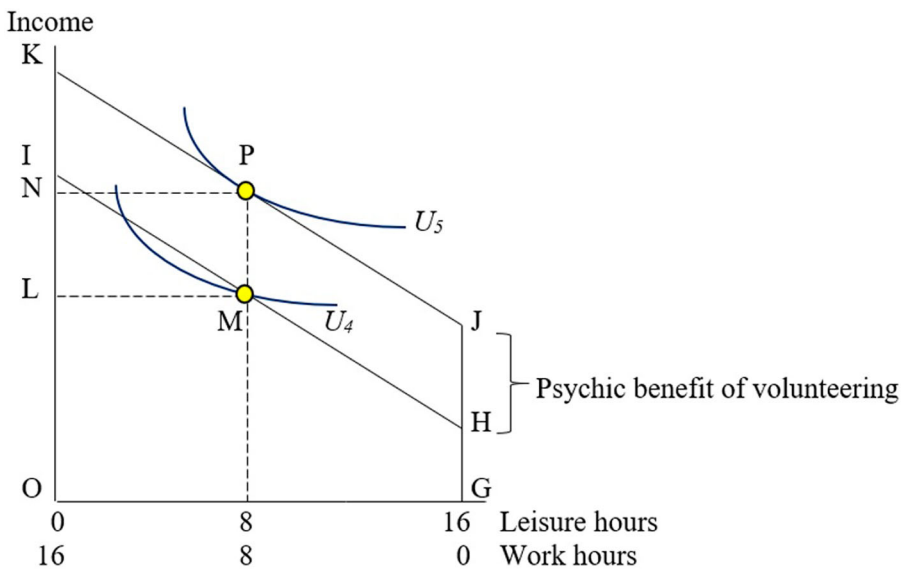


Figure 2. Impact of volunteering on total income, if the volunteer was initially employed. Source: Adapted from Yu & Roos (2018).

Lastly, his total income increased to *ON*, which consists of the same monetary income of *OL* and the non-monetary psychic benefit of *LN*.

2.4. Past empirical studies

Numerous international studies examined the relationship between volunteering status and labour market outcomes. First of all, Day & Devlin (1998) found the positive and significant impact volunteering had on earnings in Canada using a 1987 survey data. The authors employed the human capital model to examine the determinants of earnings such as education years and experience. The use of human capital in this study was a good framework as volunteering could help people acquire essential skills. Nonetheless, the empirical findings also indicated that the positive and significant impact of volunteering on labour market earnings only happened for those who worked at international and environmental organisations, but the impact was somehow negative who volunteers who worked at religious organisations.

Van Willigen (2000) analysed the 1986 and 1989 Americans Changing Lives Survey data, and found that Black individuals were relatively less likely to volunteer compared to the non-Black counterparts (32% versus 40% probability, respectively). In addition, the empirical findings shows that people who volunteered for more than one organisation experienced a 26% increase in life satisfaction and 63% increase in health benefits, compared with those who only volunteered at one organisation. The study by Hirst (2001) found that volunteering did not necessarily lead to employment in the UK between July 1999 and June 2000, as 45% of survey participants revealed the difficulty in combining work and volunteering activities. Nonetheless, the author also found that 49% of participants who were involved in volunteering subjectively perceived that the volunteering experience would aid their prospects by gaining some additional form of 'work' experience and improving their chances of promotion in the long run.

Meier & Stutzer (2004) found that 23% of the German population volunteered in 1986–89. In particular, those who volunteered on a weekly basis had an average life satisfaction of 7.35 points, compared with 6.93 points for those who did not volunteer. Hackl et al. (2007) also adopted the human capital framework just like the earlier reviewed Day & Devlin (1998) study, and found that volunteers in Austria enjoyed significantly greater earnings in the labour market compared to those who did not volunteer (if both groups were employed). On the other hand, Wilson (2012) found that individuals who volunteered enjoyed less depression symptoms compared with those who neither worked nor volunteered.

Looking at other international studies, Paine et al. (2013) analysed the 2008 British Household Panel Survey data; they found that volunteering did not have a strong positive correlation with labour force participation and employment likelihoods, but should rather be regarded as a complement to personal and work activities. Similarly, Spera et al. (2013) investigated what happened in the USA between 2002 and 2012, and found that volunteers only had a 27% chance of being employed.

Coen et al. (2014) investigated what happened in Northern Ireland by mainly examining volunteering status and its relationship with labour market outcomes. The empirical findings suggested that the main motive for volunteering was to improve future employability by obtaining work experience, whereas the quantitative findings indicated

that students who participated in volunteering activities were more likely to be involved in activities relevant to their field of study. In addition, some employers reported they were involved in volunteering activities as it helped them better understand the characteristics, attributes and traits of future employees. Lastly, the findings reported in Lawton et al.'s (2020) study corroborated those of the earlier reviewed Wilson's (2012) study by finding individuals who volunteered once a month experienced better mental health compared with those who did not volunteer or only volunteered intermittently. Active volunteers were also found to be happier over time.

South Africa has a serious shortage of empirical studies related to volunteering; at the time of writing, only three studies have been published. First, Niyimbanira & Krugell (2014) used the 2010 VAS data to conduct statistical and econometric analysis. The findings revealed that Black South Africans were more likely to volunteer than their white counterparts. Moreover, using the human capital framework, the authors found that income and rewards were positively related to volunteering, as the more hours spent volunteering, the higher the reward.

In 2015, Niyimbanira analysed the 2006 September and 2007 March waves of the Labour Force Surveys (LFS) data. The author found that people in the 24–34 years cohort were associated with the greatest volunteering likelihood, while 58.5% of volunteers were females. Moreover, the province with the highest volunteering incidence was the Eastern Cape (11.4%), followed by the Western Cape (6.5%). In contrast, volunteering probability was the lowest in Mpumalanga (2.7%).

Lastly, Niyimbanira and Krugell (2017) analysed the 2010 VAS data to publish another study in 2017, with specific focus on volunteering hours by ethnic group. The empirical findings revealed that white South Africans had a negative association with hours volunteered compared with other population groups, as the white individuals spent 8.5% fewer hours compared to Coloured and Black population groups on volunteering. In addition, the average volunteering hours were the highest amongst the Blacks, but this result could not be explained by individual characteristics such as gender, educational attainment, labour market status and income.

To conclude, whilst the past international empirical studies examined the relationship between volunteering status and labour market status, earnings, mental health and life satisfaction level, the rare South African studies did not conduct highly sophisticated empirical analysis. In fact, none of the local studies examined all three available waves of the VAS data. Hence, it is obvious that the VAS data was under-utilised, and this study aims to fill this research gap in the literature by conducting a comprehensive study on volunteering in South Africa by analysing all three waves of VAS data.

3. Methods and data

3.1. Methods

The study will conduct descriptive analysis on the personal characteristic of volunteers such as gender, race, age, education, provinces, area type, labour market status and work activities (if employed) of volunteers. It is followed by an examination of the type of activities conducted by the volunteers. To better understand the association between labour market status and volunteering likelihood after controlling for differences in

other personal- and household-level characteristics, the study will move on by running multivariate probit regressions to investigate the impact of various explanatory variables on volunteering likelihood. The dependent variable is binary, which is equal to one if the person volunteered but zero if the person did not volunteer at the time of the VAS.

On the other hand, the independent variables include the following:

- Gender (Reference category: Female)
- Population group (Reference category: African)
- Age cohort (Reference category: 15–24 years)
- Province (Reference category: Eastern Cape)
- Area type (Reference Category: Rural)
- Years of education and years of education squared
- Marital status (Reference category: No married not living with a partner)
- Labour market status (Reference category: Inactive)
- Number of children 0–14 years in the household
- Number of male adults 15–59 years in the household
- Number of female adults 15–59 years in the household
- Number of elderly 60 + years in the household

3.2. Data

The VAS was implemented for the first time in 2010 before it took place again in 2014 and 2018. The main objectives of the VAS are as follows (Stats SA, 2020):

- Collecting accurate data about those involved in volunteer activities;
- Identifying direct volunteering and organisation-based volunteering;
- Deriving the profile of volunteers;
- Making correct estimations of the economic value of volunteer opportunities.

The survey was conducted in two stages. Firstly, individuals who were involved in volunteering activities were identified; secondly, the volunteers were interviewed to capture information on their volunteering activities. Furthermore, the 2010, 2014 and 2018 VAS data was linked to the third quarter 2010, 2014 and 2018 Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data, respectively. Therefore, in the forthcoming empirical analysis, it is possible to examine the labour market status and even labour market activities of the volunteers (if they were employed) by using the VAS-QLFS linked data.

One drawback of the study is that VAS is not a panel dataset. Hence, it is not possible for this study to track the changes (if any) of volunteering status and activities of the survey participants over time. It is also not possible to investigate if people who volunteered at time $(t-1)$ later enjoyed better labour market outcomes at time t .

4. Empirical findings

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the profile of volunteers. Firstly, the number of volunteers more than doubled during the 8-year period under study (2010: 1.11 million; 2018: 2.56 million).

Table 1. Personal characteristics of volunteers (% , unless stated otherwise).

	2010	2014	2018
<i>Number (1 000s)</i>			
Number	1 109	2 047	2 556
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	34.86	39.50	37.44
Female	65.14	60.50	62.56
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Race</i>			
African	71.78	79.79	88.52
Coloured	10.68	6.57	3.97
Indian	2.59	2.65	1.91
White	14.95	10.98	5.61
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Age cohort</i>			
15–24 years	11.28	13.05	12.64
25–34 years	24.28	25.75	27.41
35–44 years	26.96	25.97	26.15
45–54 years	23.18	22.29	20.54
55–64 years	14.30	12.94	13.26
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Mean (years)</i>	39.96	39.27	39.09
<i>Province</i>			
Western Cape	14.53	9.10	4.79
Eastern Cape	9.48	15.42	8.57
Northern Cape	3.81	2.38	1.76
Free State	11.60	7.53	6.81
KwaZulu-Natal	9.97	18.04	23.63
North West	2.53	6.30	4.18
Gauteng	24.90	22.59	20.01
Mpumalanga	4.10	5.82	13.35
Limpopo	19.08	12.82	16.89
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Area type</i>			
Urban	67.38	56.87	51.94
Rural	32.62	43.13	48.06
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Educational attainment</i>			
None	3.13	4.12	2.95
Incomplete primary	10.29	9.03	8.51
Incomplete secondary	40.90	40.97	45.84
Matric	23.32	24.87	26.57
Matric + Cert/Dip	12.67	9.92	8.38
Degree	9.43	10.19	7.30
Other/Unspecified	0.24	0.90	0.45
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Mean (years)</i>	10.25	10.27	10.29

More than 60% of volunteers were females in all three waves of VAS; this finding corresponds with the Niyimbanira (2015) study, which also found that females were more likely to volunteer than males. The greater volunteering incidence of females may be attributed to the fact that they are relatively less likely to be the primary breadwinners of the households (by engaging in full-time work activities in the labour market), so they may have more time available to volunteer.

Africans were the most dominant ethnic group, as they represented the greatest racial share of volunteers in all waves, as also found by Niyimbanira & Krugell (2014). In fact, the African share increased continuously across the waves (2010: 71.78%; 2018: 88.52%), at the expense of both the Coloured and white shares. This result is not surprising as Africans are the most dominant ethnic group in South Africa. Moving on to results by age

cohort, the majority of volunteers were aged 25–54 years at the time of survey, with a mean age of 39–40 years.

As far as provincial shares are concerned, the results are somewhat mixed. Gauteng has always featured in the top two provincial shares (at least 20% in all three waves). KwaZulu-Natal took over from Gauteng in 2018 to represent the greatest provincial share of volunteers (23.63%), increasing from a relatively low share of 9.97% in 2010. Limpopo moved up to be ranked third in 2018 (16.89% share). Interestingly, there was a rapid and continuous decline of the Western Cape share (a drop of about five percentage points between every two consecutive waves). Lastly, provincial share was the lowest in Northern Cape across all three waves; this result is expected due to the low population in this province.

The majority of volunteers resided in urban areas at the time of each survey, even though this share dropped from 67.38% in 2010 to 51.94% in 2018. This finding suggests the improved volunteering incidence in rural areas. With reference to the educational attainment of volunteers, those with incomplete secondary education represented the greatest share (41–46% range across the three waves), followed by those with Matric only (about 25% share). In fact, the volunteers were not particularly highly educated, as they only had about 10 years of educational attainment, on average.

Table 2 presents the labour market characteristics of the volunteers. The top rows of the table show that about 50% of volunteers were employed at the time of the 2010 VAS, and this share dropped to 44% in 2014 and even further to 41% in 2018. Moreover, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of the volunteers was above 60% in all three waves whereas the unemployment rate increased from 23.86% in 2014 to 33.52% in 2018.

Figure 3 compares both the LFPR and unemployment rates between those who volunteered and those who did not. The results show that the LFPR of these volunteers were a bit higher in all three waves. This finding aligns with what was found by Paine et al. (2013). On the other hand, while the unemployment rate was relatively lower amongst the volunteers in 2010 (23.9%, compared with 25.1% amongst those who did not volunteer), the opposite took place in both 2014 and 2018 as the unemployment rate was relatively higher for those who volunteered. In fact, the difference in this rate between the two groups was the greatest in 2018 at about 6.4 percentage points (volunteers: 33.5%; not volunteers: 27.1%). This finding implies that some people volunteered to gain certain soft skills as well as maintain a decent level of life satisfaction and mental health, but they still actively seek work in the labour market at the same time. In addition, the findings as shown in Figure 2 concur with what was found by Hirst (2001) and Spera et al. (2013) that involvement in volunteering activities did not necessarily lead to significantly higher employment likelihood.

Going back to Table 2, for volunteers who were employed, they were most likely to be involved in elementary occupations (27.50% in 2018), work as service workers (15.27%) and clerks (10.18%). In fact, the share represented by elementary occupations increased continuously over time (from 16.89% in 2010 to 27.50% in 2018). On the other hand, more than half of the employed volunteers engaged in the community, social and personal (CSP) services as well as wholesale and retail industries (32.47% and 19.47% respectively, in 2018). These two shares were quite stable across the three waves. Also, approximately two-thirds of employed volunteers worked in the formal sector.

Table 2. Labour market characteristics of volunteers (% , unless stated otherwise).

	2010	2014	2018
<i>Labour market status</i>			
Employed	50.28	44.02	41.19
Unemployed	15.76	16.84	20.77
Inactive	33.95	39.14	38.04
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>LFPR</i>	66.04	60.86	61.96
<i>Unemployment rate</i>	23.86	27.67	33.52
<i>Broad occupation category (if employed)</i>			
Managers	12.35	11.04	8.68
Professionals	9.75	7.50	6.53
Associate professionals	18.65	16.57	9.40
Clerks	9.75	8.47	10.18
Service workers	11.01	13.22	15.27
Skilled agriculture	1.43	0.83	0.53
Craft and related trades	8.82	7.90	9.98
Operators	3.66	3.39	4.82
Elementary occupations	16.89	23.43	27.50
Domestic workers	7.69	7.64	7.12
Other/Unspecified	0.00	0.00	0.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Broad industry category (if employed)</i>			
Agriculture	4.03	2.94	4.37
Mining	0.68	1.08	1.89
Manufacturing	8.48	5.42	7.25
Utilities	0.58	0.78	0.74
Construction	6.43	6.70	8.07
Wholesale and retail	20.09	20.97	19.47
Transport	3.30	4.88	4.77
Finance	11.48	13.15	12.12
CSP services	36.38	35.36	32.47
Private households	8.56	8.73	8.84
Other/Unspecified	0.00	0.00	0.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Sector (if employed)</i>			
Formal sector	71.32	67.33	65.03
Informal sector	20.12	23.96	26.13
Private households	8.56	8.73	8.84
	100.00	100.00	100.00

Turning our attention to the volunteering activities, [Table 3](#) shows that about two-thirds of the volunteers were involved in activities in the service workers and elementary occupations broad occupation categories. Moreover, most of the volunteers spent 1–10 h on their main volunteering activities in the past four weeks. The mean volunteering hours dropped from 22.30 in 2010 to 15.30 in 2018.

[Table 4](#) provides more detail on the type of activity performed by the volunteer, and the results suggest that the volunteers most likely ‘worked’ as a cook across all three waves. Other popular volunteering activities include elementary sales and services, home-based personal care, domestic work, as well as doorkeepers and watchpersons.

Going back to [Table 3](#), more than 85% of the volunteers in all three waves indicated that they did not expect to receive something back from the volunteering activity. For those who said they did expect something, in 2010, 33% expected to receive out-of-pocket expenses while 30% expected to gain valuable skills and experience. The question was asked differently in both 2014 and 2018 as the respondents were allowed to report more than one type of expected return; in 2014, out-of-pocket expenses was the most popular answer (60.77%), followed by food (47.26%) and experience/skills (47.06%). In

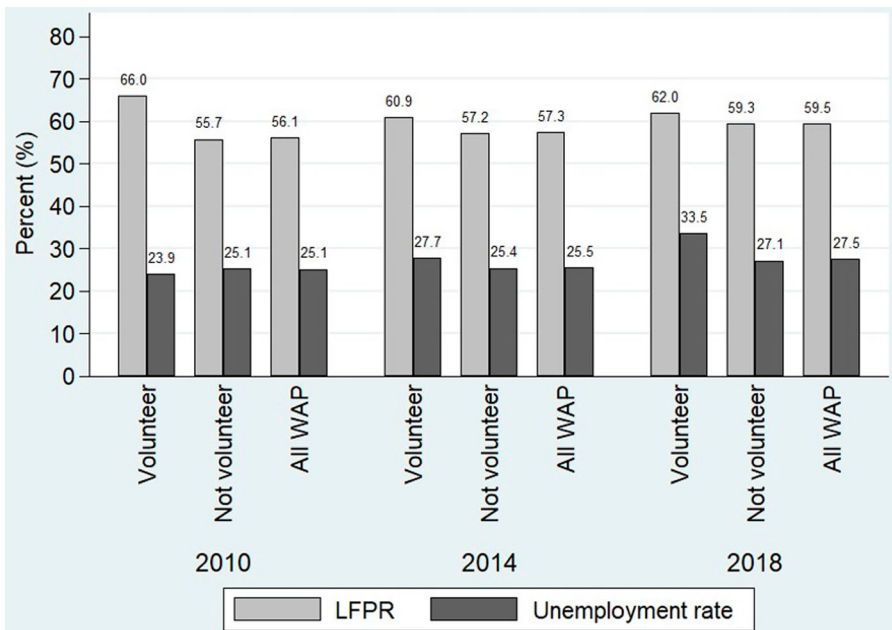


Figure 3. Labour force participation rates and unemployment rates by volunteering status. Source: Authors' own calculations using the 2010, 2014 and 2018 QLFS and VAS linked data.

2018, the food option took over as the top category (74.48%), followed by out-of-pocket expenses (61.28%).

Looking at the remaining results of [Table 3](#), more than half of the volunteers declared that the volunteering activity was performed as an individual. For the other volunteers who performed the activity through an organisation, the type of organisation was more likely to be either religious (40–50%) or charity / NGOs / NPOs (20–30%).

4.2. Econometric analysis

The last part of the empirical analysis presents the results of the probit regressions on the volunteering likelihood of the working-age population. The results in general correspond with the descriptive statistics in [Table 1](#). First, after controlling for differences in other characteristics, males were significantly less likely to volunteer (marginal effects ranged between 1.4% and 2.4%, in absolute terms). With regard to race, in general, Coloureds, Indians and whites were less likely to volunteer (compared with the reference category – Africans), but the results were statistically insignificant with the exception of the Indian dummy variable in 2010 [Table 5](#).

Compared with people aged 15–24 years, people from the four older cohorts were significantly more likely to volunteer, *ceteris paribus*, and the marginal effects were the greatest in the 55–64 years cohort (ranging between 4.1% and 6.2%). The results by province are somewhat mixed and ‘inconsistent’ just like the descriptive statistics presented in [Table 1](#), as many provincial dummy variables had the sign of marginal effects changed across the three waves. For example, the Western Cape dummy variable was statistically significant in all three waves but the marginal effects were only positive in 2010. The

Table 3. Main volunteering activities of the volunteers (% , unless stated otherwise).

	2010	2014	2018
<i>Broad occupation category of the volunteering activity</i>			
Managers	4.19	0.65	1.14
Professionals	3.94	0.93	0.22
Associate professionals	16.68	11.71	6.10
Clerks	3.74	1.78	1.47
Service workers	29.24	39.10	29.81
Skilled agriculture	0.30	0.76	0.12
Craft and related trades	5.05	5.36	8.45
Operators	1.96	2.22	1.19
Elementary occupations	27.25	31.19	43.65
Domestic workers	7.61	6.26	7.86
Other/Unspecified	0.00	0.00	0.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Skills level of volunteering activity</i>			
High skilled	24.81	13.29	7.46
Semi-skilled	40.29	49.22	41.04
Low skilled	34.86	37.45	51.51
Other/Unspecified	0.00	0.00	0.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Hours spent on the main volunteering activity past four weeks</i>			
1–5 h	32.22	30.05	31.21
6–10 h	24.05	27.53	34.91
11–20 h	15.76	19.00	16.19
21–30 h	6.34	5.79	5.29
31–40 h	5.96	4.34	4.02
More than 40 h	12.07	8.81	5.26
Unspecified	3.60	4.48	3.12
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Mean volunteering hours past 4 weeks</i>			
	22.30	19.72	15.30
<i>Expectation on receiving something from the activity</i>			
Yes	13.87	6.12	4.63
No	86.13	93.88	95.37
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Item/Reward expected to receive</i>			
Out-of-pocket expenses	33.01	60.77	61.28
Food	12.51	47.26	74.48
Transport	1.99	28.16	51.07
Clothes	3.31	25.17	48.75
Shelter	2.54	19.53	55.95
Experience/Skills	29.55	47.06	52.95
Other	17.09	25.01	52.28
	100.00	N/A [#]	N/A [#]
<i>Activity done through an organisation or as an individual</i>			
Through an organisation	38.83	28.48	19.43
As an individual	54.77	67.06	77.16
Both	6.40	4.46	3.42
	100.00	100.00	100.00
<i>Type of organisation (if the activity was done through an organisation)</i>			
Charity/NGO/NPO	31.78	19.03	20.10
Religious	43.39	44.51	49.62
Political	1.78	7.70	2.49
Union	0.49	1.02	0.73
Private business	4.07	3.60	1.99
Education institution	5.85	5.17	4.38
Health institution	2.34	1.39	1.94
Economic, social and community development	0.00	4.95	3.68
Culture and recreation	0.00	2.25	3.15
Fund-raising organisation	0.00	0.40	0.00
Natural resource conservation and protection	0.00	0.49	0.32
Law enforcement	0.00	4.23	2.38
Other government entity	10.30	1.66	0.86

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

	2010	2014	2018
Other	0.00	3.18	8.36
Unspecified	0.00	0.41	0.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00

#More than one option could be chosen in 2014 and 2018, and therefore the proportions did not add up to 100%.

Table 4. Top 10 detailed occupations of the main volunteering activities of volunteers (%).

SASCO code	Detailed occupation	%
2010		
5122	Cook	11.52
9190	Elementary sales and services occupations not elsewhere classified	7.83
9131	Domestic worker	7.61
5133	Home-based personal care worker	6.51
9152	Doorkeepers, watchpersons and related workers	4.94
5162	Police or traffic officer	4.21
3480	Religious associate professional	3.83
5139	Personal care and related workers not elsewhere classified	3.47
3460	Social work associate professional	3.44
9132	Helpers and cleaners in offices, hotels and other establishments	3.21
2014		
5122	Cook	25.81
9152	Doorkeepers, watchpersons and related workers	7.14
9312	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams and similar constructions	6.42
9131	Domestic worker	6.26
5133	Home-based personal care worker	5.92
9190	Elementary sales and services occupations not elsewhere classified	5.35
5139	Personal care and related workers not elsewhere classified	3.73
9132	Helpers and cleaners in offices, hotels and other establishments	3.56
3480	Religious associate professional	3.01
3475	Athletes, sportspersons and related associate professionals	2.43
2018		
5122	Cook	19.91
9190	Elementary sales and services occupations not elsewhere classified	15.84
9312	Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams and similar constructions	10.02
9131	Domestic worker	7.86
9132	Helpers and cleaners in offices, hotels and other establishments	4.99
9152	Doorkeepers, watchpersons and related workers	4.99
5131	Childcare workers	3.58
5133	Home-based personal care worker	3.50
9211	Farmhands and labourers	3.19
7411	Butchers, fishmongers and related food preparers	2.97

KwaZulu-Natal dummy variable was also significant in all three waves, but the marginal effects were positive in 2018 only.

Both the education years and education years squared variable were included in the regressions. In 2010 and 2014, the latter variable was statistically significant, yet the marginal effects were extremely small (close to zero). On the other hand, the education years linear variable was associated with negative marginal effects in 2010 and 2014, but the result was only statistically significant in the latter year. This finding implies higher educational attainment was associated with significantly lower volunteering probability in 2014, holding other explanatory variables constant.

Looking at other results, it is interesting that the urban dummy variable was significant and negative. This finding implies that after controlling for differences in other characteristics, urban residents were significantly less likely to volunteer (even though [Table 1](#)

Table 5. Probit regressions on volunteering likelihood of the working-age population.

	Marginal effect		
	2010	2014	2018
Gender: Male	-0.014***	-0.014***	-0.024***
Race: Coloured	-0.001	-0.007	-0.008
Race: Indian	0.020***	-0.006	-0.009
Race: White	0.003	0.004	-0.009
Age: 25–34 years	0.009**	0.009**	0.017***
Age: 35–44 years	0.025***	0.022***	0.032***
Age: 45–54 years	0.048***	0.044***	0.049***
Age: 55–64 years	0.062***	0.041***	0.054***
Province: Western Cape	0.012**	-0.021***	-0.012*
Province: Northern Cape	0.022***	-0.017***	0.006
Province: Free State	0.033***	0.002	0.062***
Province: KwaZulu-Natal	-0.016***	-0.026***	0.036***
Province: North West	-0.018***	-0.026***	-0.002
Province: Gauteng	-0.007	-0.031***	-0.005
Province: Mpumalanga	-0.010**	-0.023***	0.070***
Province: Limpopo	0.044***	-0.015***	0.066***
Area type: Urban	-0.006*	-0.032***	-0.032***
Education years	-0.001	-0.004***	0.001
Education years squared	0.000***	0.000***	0.000
Marital status: Married	0.005**	-0.002	0.004
Labour market status: Employed	-0.013***	-0.015***	N/A
Labour market status: Unemployed	N/A	N/A	0.026***
Number of children 0–14 years in the household	0.002***	0.005***	0.001
Number of males 15–59 years in the household	-0.007***	-0.003**	-0.004**
Number of females 15–59 years in the household	-0.004***	-0.008***	-0.007***
Number of elderly 60+ years in the household	-0.008***	-0.003	-0.004
Number of observations	27 794	27 915	24 702
Observed probability	0.0382	0.0447	0.0574
Predicted probability at x-bar	0.0288	0.0375	0.0460
Chi-squared statistic	614.35	440.73	698.30
Prob > Chi-squared	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Pseudo R-squared	0.0777	0.0551	0.0744

*** Significant at 1% ** Significant at 5% * Significant at 10%.

N/A: Imperfect collinearity.

showed that urban residents accounted for the majority of volunteers). The negative marginal effects of the urban dummy variable may be attributed to the fact that urban areas are associated with a higher employment likelihood, and hence the urban residents may struggle to find time to engage in volunteering activities.

Moreover, the married dummy variable was statistically significant only in 2010 with positive marginal effects. Furthermore, in both 2010 and 2014, individuals who were employed were about 1.5% significantly less likely to volunteer; in 2018, people who were unemployed were 2.6% significantly more likely to volunteer. These findings imply that, once people had a job in the labour market, they most likely would not have time available to volunteer; however, when they were unemployed, they were more likely to volunteer, possibly with the main motives of attaining some essential soft skills and maintaining a certain level of mental health and life satisfaction.

As far as the household-level explanatory variables are concerned, the presence of more children in the household was associated with a significantly greater volunteering likelihood in 2010 and 2014. It is possible that some working-age individuals (especially females) were unable to work in the labour market due to childbearing responsibility, but could still find a little bit of time to involve in volunteering activities to maintain some

contact with the society. On the other hand, the greater the number of male and female adult members in the household, the significantly lower the volunteering likelihood. Lastly, the presence of more elderly members in the household was related to lower volunteering probability (as the individuals may need to spend time to take care of the elderly members), but the result was only statistically significant in 2010.

Lastly, it was mentioned in the methods section that as the VAS-QLFS linked data is not a panel dataset, it is impossible to find out if people who volunteered at time ($t-1$) later enjoyed greater employment probability at time t . Nonetheless, Heckprobit regressions on employment likelihood (conditional on labour force participation) were conducted, with a volunteering status dummy variable (it is equal to one if the person volunteered but zero if the person did not volunteer) as one of the explanatory variables. Whilst the results are not shown, after controlling for differences in other personal- and household-level characteristics, the volunteering dummy variable was statistically significant with marginal effects of about -25% in all three waves. This finding suggests that volunteering is not necessarily associated with greater employment incidence, as also found by the earlier reviewed past international studies such as Hirst (2001) as well as Spera et al. (2013).

5. Conclusion and policy suggestions

This is the first South African study that analysed all three available waves of VAS data (that was linked to the third quarter QLFS of the same year) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of volunteering activities and profile of volunteers in South Africa. The key empirical findings indicated that volunteers were predominantly female Africans aged 25–34 years, without Matric, living in the urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces. More than 60% of them were labour force participants and their unemployment probability was about 30%.

On average, the volunteers spent about 20 h in the four weeks prior to the interview taking place on volunteering activities, which were more likely related to service work and elementary occupations (e.g. cooking, domestic care, home-based personal care, elementary sales and services). More than 85% of volunteers did not expect to receive anything back; for those who indicated otherwise, they most likely expected to receive food and out-of-pocket expenses. Lastly, the majority of volunteers performed the activity as an individual instead of doing so through an organisation.

As discussed earlier in the study, one of the reasons people volunteered is to gain necessary skills that can be applied in medium to long-term employment opportunities, thus, one may argue if volunteers should be given a once-off financial reward or stipend as an incentive. A stipend is a financial remuneration rewarded to volunteers for services conducted (McBride et al., 2009), as a way to encourage people to seek employment and lessen their strain by using the stipend as a temporary financial survival plan (Smith et al., 2020). Akintola (2011) argues that people who receive a stipend are more highly motivated to gain extra skills than those who have low paid jobs. This emphasises the positive impact that the stipend has on individuals. Nonetheless, it is also argued that volunteers should not be remunerated, because if one is financially reimbursed, the volunteering activity is no longer considered as a sacrifice (McBride et al., 2009).

One issue that is not investigated in this study is whether people who volunteered in earlier periods enjoyed greater employment likelihood later. This investigation is only possible with the presence of panel data that asks questions such as ‘have you been involved in volunteering activities in the past year?’ It is strongly recommended that this question can be added in the future waves of the VAS and even panel data such as the National Income Dynamics Study, so that the above-mentioned research study would be feasible in future. Subsequently, the government can better understand the impact of volunteering on labour market outcomes, thereby implementing more informed and effective labour market policies in the long run.

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