

The Relationship Between Volunteering and Happiness

Research Question

- Does volunteering have an impact on how happy someone is?
- Are there gender differences with this potential association?

Significance

- It is important to look at the potential relationship of volunteering on general happiness in order to determine if volunteering positively impacts those who volunteer.
- In the US about 44% of adults participate in voluntary activities every year (Borgonovi, 2008).

Previous Research

- Volunteering is related with increased health and happiness (Borgonovi, 2008).
- Volunteer work enhances happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, physical health, and a sense of control over life (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).
- Volunteering could increase one's sense of purpose and life meaning (Lee, 2018).
- Few studies examined differences between volunteer work and volunteer charity work.
- Women have been found less likely than men to volunteer (Plagnol & Huppert, 2009). Few studies examined gender differences in the association between volunteering and happiness.

Hypotheses

- Any volunteer work is related to happiness.
- Volunteer charity work will overall be related to happiness.
- These associations are greater for men than for women.

Data & Sample

- General Social Survey (GSS)
- 2012 public data (N = 1,974)
- American adults ages 18 and older who live in non-institutionalized households

Dependent Measures

General Happiness

- "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days?"
 - Very Happy 30.2%
 - Pretty Happy 55.7%
 - Not Too Happy 14.1%

Control Measure

Gender

- Men: 44.8%
- Women: 55.2%

Independent Measures

Any Volunteering

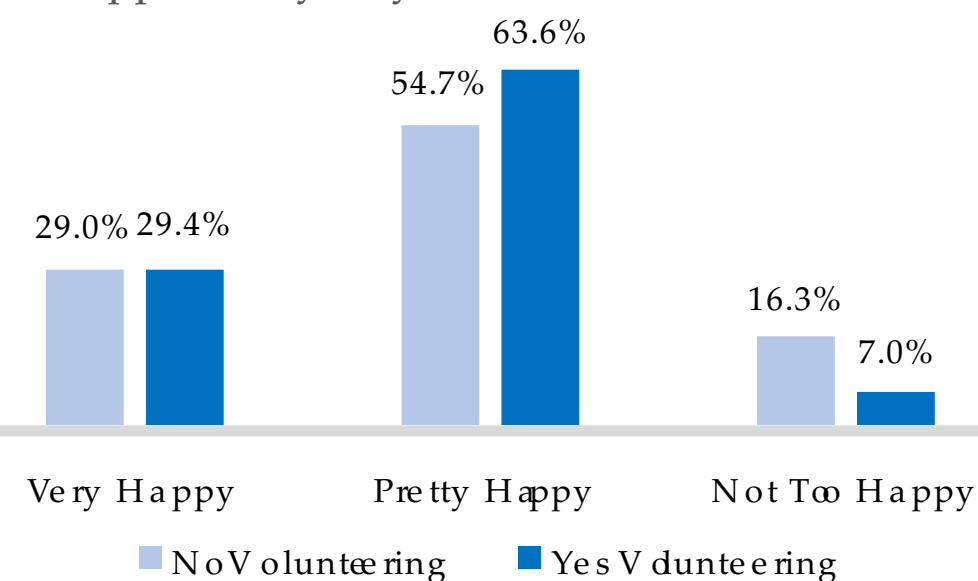
- Asked respondents whether they have done any volunteer activities through or for an organization in the past year.
 - Any Volunteering 40.0%
 - No Volunteering 60.0%

Charity Work Volunteering

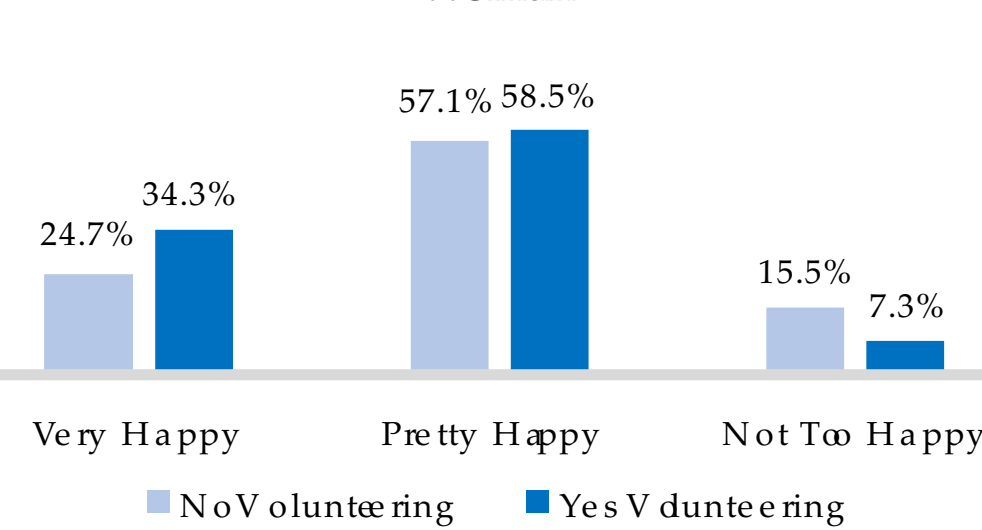
- Asked respondents how often have you done volunteer work for a charity in the past year.
 - Some Volunteer Charity Work 45.5%
 - No Volunteer Charity Work 54.5%

Results

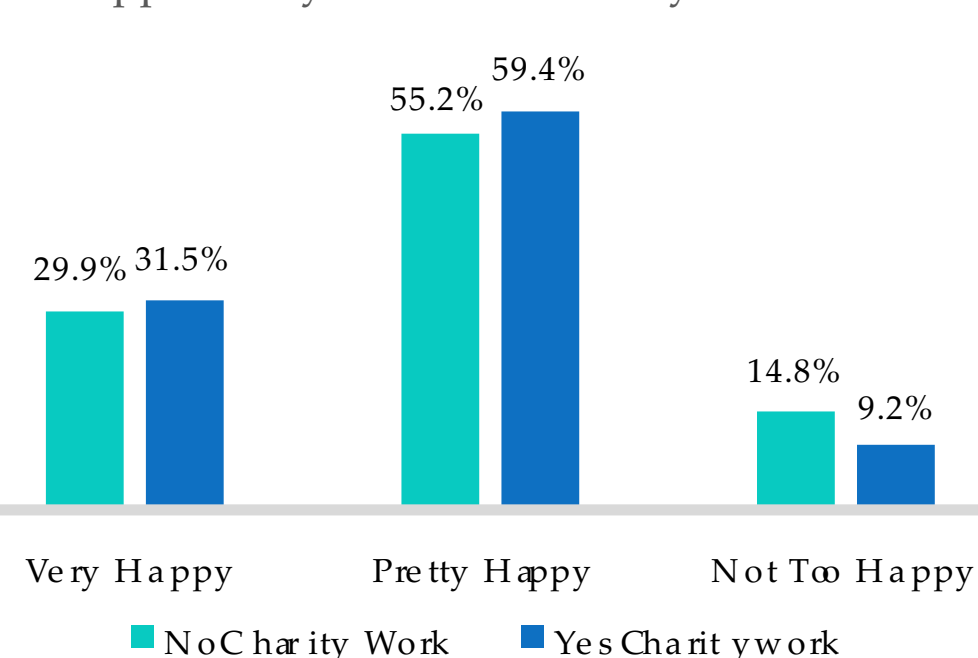
Percentage Distribution of General Happiness by Any Volunteer Activities: Men



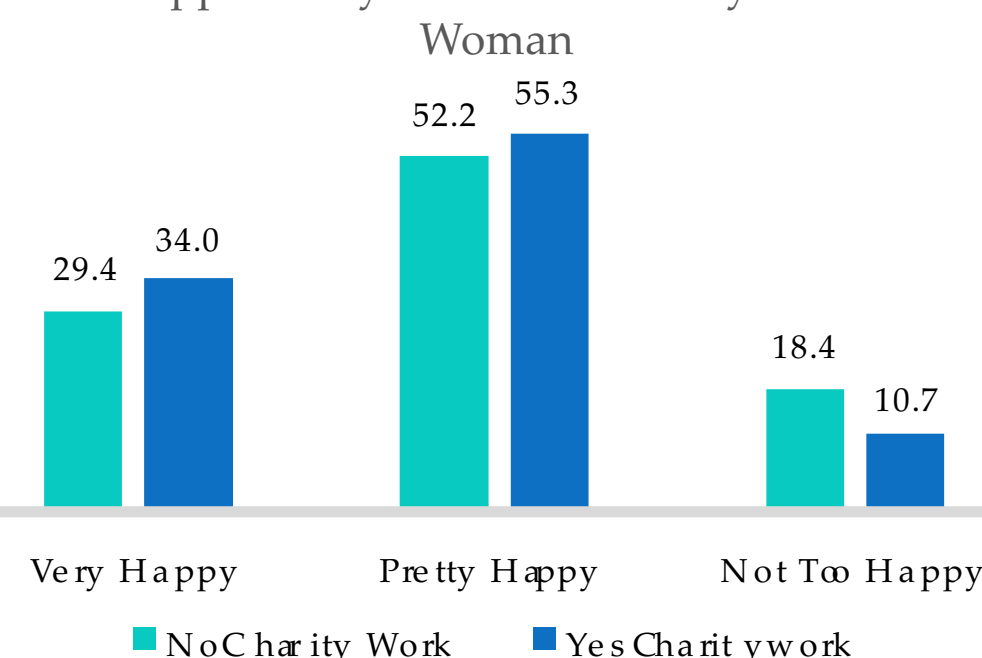
Percentage Distribution of General Happiness by Any Volunteer Activities: Woman



Percentage Distribution of General Happiness by Volunteer Charity Work: Men



Percentage Distribution of General Happiness by Volunteer Charity Work: Woman



Summary of Results

- Any volunteer work is related to more happiness for both genders. Happiness was highest for men and women who participated in volunteer work over the last 12 months and lowest among men and women who did not participate in volunteer work at all in the last 12 months.
- Volunteer charity work was not related to happiness for men. Volunteer charity work was, however, associated with happiness for women. Happiness was highest for women who participated in volunteer charity work over the last 12 months and lowest among women who did not participate in volunteer charity work at all in the last 12 months.

Implications

- Happiness can be enhanced by providing psychological resources. For example, one might gain a sense of purpose and life meaning by volunteering (Lee 2018).
- Providing opportunities for people to get involved and volunteer might increase general happiness for individuals.
- Companies may want to offer volunteer opportunities to increase work happiness.

References

- Borgonovi, F. (2008). Doing well by doing good. The relationship between formal volunteering and self-reported health and happiness. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66(11), 2321–2334.
- Lee, M.-A. (2018). Volunteering and happiness: Examining the differential effects of volunteering types according to household income. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Online First.
- Plagnol, A. C., & Huppert, F. A. (2010). Happy to help? Exploring the factors associated with variations in rates of volunteering across Europe. *Social indicators research*, 97(2), 157–176.
- Thoits, P. A., & Hewitt, L. N. (2001). Volunteer Work and Well-Being. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, 42(2), 115–131.