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GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

RESEARCH BRIEF

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International Volunteerism in the United States, 2008

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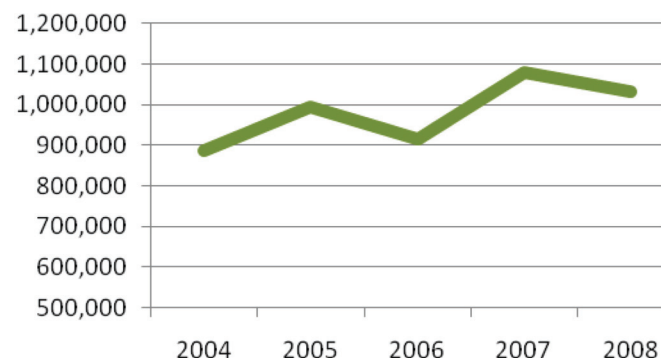
Over one million individuals reported volunteering internationally in 2008. Young or middle-aged, White, college graduates with higher incomes, employed full-time, and married without dependent children were the most frequent candidates for volunteer service abroad. The majority of international volunteers served with a faith-based organization.

Data for this report were gathered from the September 2004 through September 2009 volunteer supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS)—a monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households. The volunteer supplement includes questions about service performed domestically and abroad. Two items specifically assess the rate and frequency of international volunteer service. More detailed information about sampling, definitions, and analysis can be found under Methodological Notes at the end of this report.

Prevalence and Service Duration

Over one-million individuals (1,032,780) reported volunteering internationally at least once in 2008—an increase of over 145,000 volunteers since 2004 (see Figure 1). The 2008 volunteer supplement does not have an accurate measure of service duration. However, of those volunteers who spent most or all of their volunteering time abroad, 39% spent 2 weeks or less abroad (for a full breakdown see Appendix F).

Figure 1: Frequency of International Volunteers from 2004 to 2008



Prevalence by Selected Demographics

Gender

More women reported volunteering than men (54% and 46% respectively). However, among those who volunteered domestically or abroad, men were slightly more likely than women to spend their volunteer time abroad.¹



Age

Young people aged 15 to 24 years old were the age group most frequently volunteering internationally in 2008 (30%), followed by those aged 45 to 54 (21%). Participation of young people under 25 also had the greatest growth in the past three years, increasing from around 22,000 in 2005 to around 30,000 in 2008 (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: International Volunteers by Age Group (N = 1,032,780)

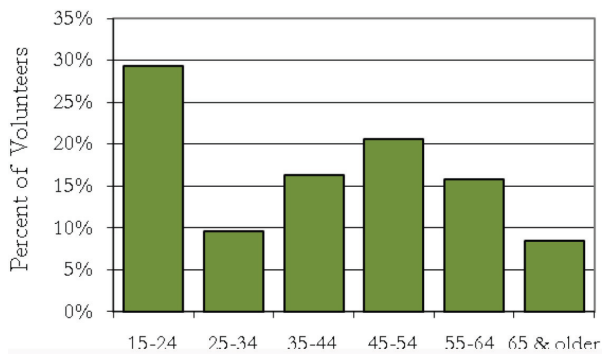
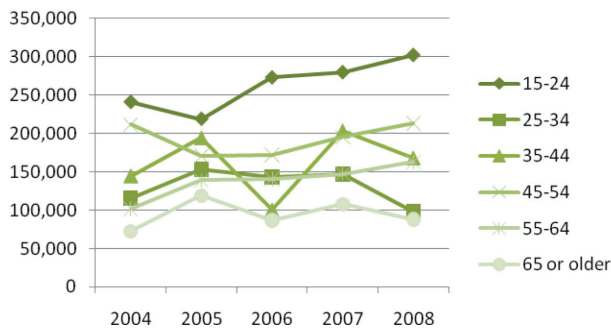


Figure 3: Number of International Volunteers by Age Group 2004 to 2008



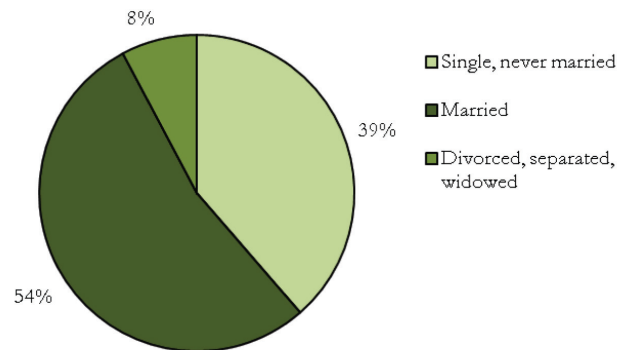
Race & Ethnicity

Considerably more White individuals reported volunteering abroad (88%), compared to those of other racial groups (12%). The majority of volunteers were of non-Hispanic ethnicity, with 8% identifying as ethnically Hispanic.²

Marital Status & Dependent Children

More than one half of volunteers were married (54%), and about four in ten were single and never married. The remaining 8% were divorced or widowed. Three in four volunteers did not have children younger than 18 years of age living in the household.

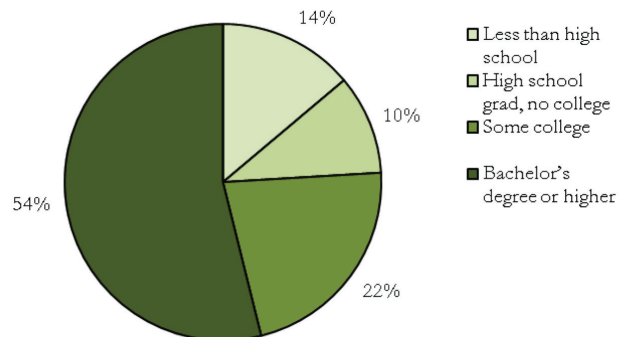
Figure 4: International Volunteers by Marital Status (N = 1,032,780)



Education

Volunteers with higher education were more likely to volunteer abroad.³ More than half (54%) of all international volunteers had a bachelor's degree or higher, with three out of four volunteers having attended at least some college. Among the 24% that had not started college, 55% were under 24 years old.

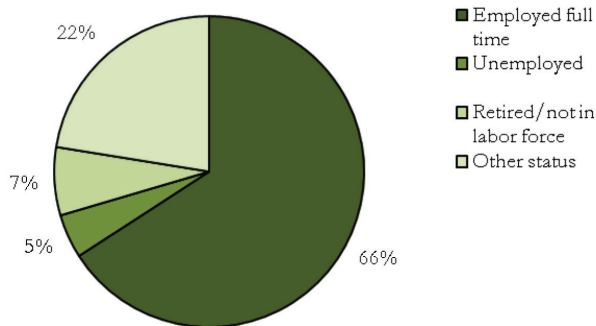
Figure 5: International Volunteers by Education in 2008 (N = 1,032,780)



Employment Status

About seven out of ten volunteers were employed part- or full-time (66%). A small number of unemployed persons volunteered abroad (5%). The remaining 29% of international volunteers were retired, disabled, or otherwise not in the labor force. Of those unemployed, the majority (45%) were less than 24 years old.

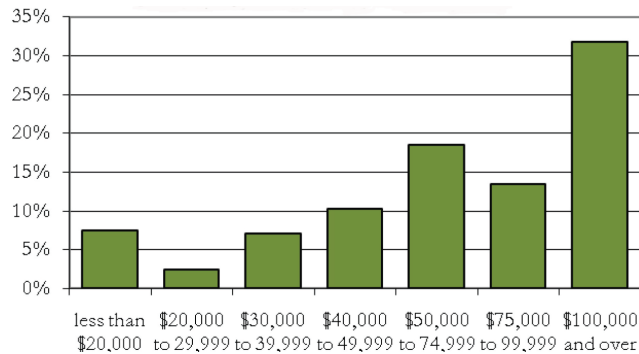
Figure 6: International Volunteers by Employment Status (N = 1,032,780)



Income

Nearly one in three volunteers lived in households earning incomes of \$100,000 or more. More income was a significant predictor of volunteer status.⁴

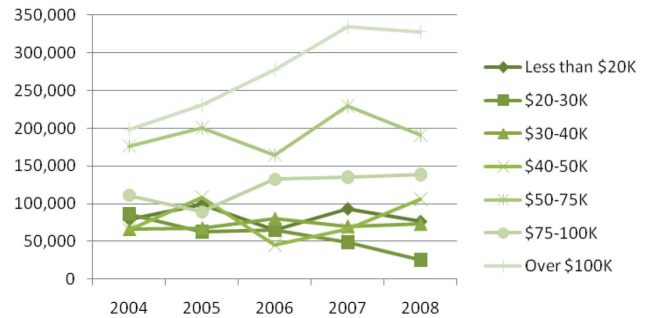
Figure 7: International Volunteers by Household Income (N = 1,032,780)



Seven out of ten volunteers lived in households earning more than \$50,000 per year. Although 8% of volunteers came from households earning less than \$20,000 per year, many of these low-income volunteers (39%) were under 24 years old. The frequency of international volunteers from households earning incomes of \$100,000 or more has steadily increased over time, from less than 200,000 in 2004 to more than 324,000 in 2008. Likewise, individuals from lower income categories tended

to decrease, with those from households making between \$20,000 and \$30,000 steadily declining to around 25,000 in 2008 from more than 85,000 in 2004 (See Figure 8).

Figure 8: Number of International Volunteers by Income 2004 to 2008



Number and Types of Organizations Sponsoring the Volunteer

Individuals in this survey reported volunteering with an average of about two organizations during the previous year—including their international and domestic volunteer activities. Due to the nature of data collection, it was not possible to isolate the type of organization by type of volunteer experience. Therefore, the type of organization sponsoring the international volunteer experience, specifically, is not known. To mitigate this issue, this section presents data from those who reported spending “all or almost all” of their time volunteering internationally.

For those who spent all or almost all of their time volunteering internationally, 48% were associated with a religious organization. This figure was significantly higher than for those who only volunteered domestically, with only 35% of domestic volunteers affiliated with a religious organization. Social or community service organizations accounted for the next most frequent type at 8%, followed closely by children’s education or recreational groups at 7% (See Appendix C).

Types of activities performed in the international volunteer’s main organization varied widely (See Appendix G). The most common activities of volunteers who spent most or all of their time volunteering abroad included general labor (33%), mentoring youth (29%), providing counseling or medical care (23%), and tutoring or teaching (22%).

Summary and Conclusion

More than one million individuals reported volunteering abroad. Currently available data make it difficult to determine the type of organization that sponsored the volunteer experience and the activities the volunteer performed. Greater specificity is needed in these areas. Therefore, this report provides only a tentative picture of the prevalence of international volunteer service in the US population and the characteristics of those who engage in international volunteerism.

Young people aged 24 and under were the age group most likely to volunteer internationally in 2008. They were also the age group with the greatest increase in participation since 2005. In contrast, numbers of older adults over age 65 has decreased since 2005, as have those aged 25 to 34. Opportunities or incentives to volunteer may have changed over this period. Lower participation rates in the 25 to 34 age group may be partially explained by their stage in the life course, as individuals of these ages are likely to have dependent children in the home—which is associated with lower volunteer rates abroad in this sample.

Less volunteering abroad by people with lower incomes may indicate less access to international volunteer service. It is unknown why individuals from households earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 had lower volunteer rates than other higher-income groups. Individuals with the highest volunteer rates were under 24 years old, had no dependent children at home, and made less than \$20,000, suggesting that perhaps these individuals were students.

Higher education was strongly associated with service abroad. Those in college may have greater exposure to international volunteer opportunities or may simply have stronger motivations to engage in international service. Most of those who volunteered abroad but did not have college experience were in the youngest age category; thus, one could deduce they were still in high school or had not yet entered college.

Although demographic data offer a description of the volunteers, data on types of organizational sponsors and volunteer activities are not sufficient to draw firm conclusions. The ability to associate these variables with the type of volunteer experience would improve understanding of international volunteerism in the US population and establish a benchmark from which to study volunteer status, form, and function over time.

Overall, these data are essential for understanding the field, identifying dimensions for further study, and generating implications for program and policy development.

Endnotes

1. After factoring in sampling bias among volunteers, men were more likely to volunteer internationally ($\chi^2 = 4.15$, $p = .046$, $df = 1$).
2. CPS data defines Hispanic/Non-Hispanic as an ethnicity—not a race. Therefore, all individuals with Hispanic background are included under the White, Black, or Other racial categories.
3. $\text{Wald}\chi^2 = 16.74$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$
4. $\text{Wald}\chi^2 = 7.32$, $p < .01$, $df = 1$

Acknowledgments:

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Appendix A: Methodological Notes

Sampling

Data from the volunteer supplement were collected during one week in the month of September each year. Nearly 56,000 households were surveyed in 2008. All members of surveyed households were asked about their volunteer activities for the previous year. Those who answered “yes” were further asked whether “any of the volunteer work you’ve done since September 1st of last year [took] place in a foreign country, that is, outside the United States or any of its territories?” Because the CPS is designed to provide information for all members in a household, about 70% of responses were self-reports; the remaining 30% of responses were answered by another member of the household in proxy for inaccessible respondents.

Statistics obtained from the CPS contain both sampling and non-sampling error due to methods of data collection. A more detailed analysis of sampling error, including specific parameters for computing the standard error of various demographic characteristics can be found under attachment 16 of the CPS supplement file for each year.

Definitions

Volunteers in this report include civilian non-institutional individuals over 15 years of age who performed self-reported unpaid activities in an organization outside of the US and its territories at any point from September 1, 2006/2007 until the survey week in September 2007/2008. Voluntary activities include unpaid labor (excluding expenses) specific to a formal organization; specific examples of volunteer activities are listed in Appendix G. An organization includes one of 13 categories of structured groups that share a common goal (as listed in Appendix C). The organization under which the volunteers spent the majority of their voluntary activities during the year is classified as the main organization. If the individual volunteered for more than one organization, activities performed for the main organization may not necessarily refer to volunteer activities outside of the US.

Analysis

Tables were constructed by crossing the international volunteerism variable with sample demographic variables and volunteer variables. Frequency, type, and length of volunteer activities include only those respondents answering affirmatively to volunteering internationally (N = 401 in 2008, unweighted). Tables crossing specific demographic characteristics include both positive and negative responses to international volunteerism (N = 26,422 in 2008, unweighted).

Raw data were cleaned and recoded as categorized in the tables, then weighted with the CPS volunteer supplement non-response weight, based on the standard CPS weighting program, to account for non-interviewed households and population distribution ratios. Final values as reported in the tables are weighted to approximate 2007/2008 US population parameters for individuals volunteering for an organization in a foreign country. A more detailed description of weighting issues can be found under attachment two of the CPS supplement file for each year. See <http://www.census.gov/apspd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html>

Appendix B: Number and percentage of those over age 15 volunteering abroad 2008 (weighted CPS volunteer supplement data, numbers in thousands)

Categorical variable	Volunteered internationally in 2008 (N=1,033)		Did not volunteer internationally in 2008 (N=61,542)		Total weighted sample (N=62,575) ¹	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender						
Men	476	46.1%	26,130	42.5%	26,606	42.5%
Women	556	53.9%	35,411	57.5%	35,967	57.5%
Age group by decade						
15-24	302	29.3%	9,015	14.6%	9,317	14.9%
25-34	99	9.6%	9,001	14.6%	9,100	14.5%
35-44	168	16.3%	12,748	20.7%	12,916	20.6%
45-54	213	20.6%	12,919	21.0%	13,132	21.0%
55-64	163	15.8%	9,245	15.0%	9,408	15.0%
65 and older	88	8.5%	8,612	14.0%	8,700	13.9%
Race						
White only	913	88.4%	52,827	85.8%	53,740	85.9%
Black only	37	3.6%	5,332	8.7%	5,369	8.6%
Other	83	8.0%	3,383	5.5%	3,466	5.5%
Hispanic ethnicity						
Hispanic/Latino ethnicity	84	8.1%	4,693	7.6%	4,777	7.6%
Non-Hispanic/Latino ethnicity	948	91.9%	56,849	92.4%	57,797	92.4%
Educational attainment						
Less than high school	143	13.9%	6,382	10.4%	6,525	10.4%
High school graduate, no college ²	105	10.2%	12,289	20.0%	12,394	19.8%
Some college ³	228	22.1%	17,948	29.2%	18,176	29.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	557	54.0%	24,923	40.5%	25,480	40.7%
Marital status						
Single, never married	399	38.7%	14,100	22.9%	14,499	23.2%
Married	554	53.7%	38,607	62.7%	39,161	62.6%
Divorced, separated, widowed	80	7.8%	8,835	14.4%	8,915	14.2%

Appendix C: Type of main organization for volunteers who spent all or almost of their volunteer time internationally in 2008 (N = 245,532)

Type of Organization	Frequency	Percent ¹
Religious org.	117,762	48.0%
Social and community service	20,742	8.4%
Children's educational or sports	16,609	6.8%
Hospital, clinic, or healthcare	15,935	6.5%
Some other type of org.	12,207	5.0%
International org.	8,968	3.7%
Environmental or animal care	8,648	3.5%
Health research or health	8,415	3.4%
Youth services group	7,435	3.0%
Cultural or arts org.	5,546	2.3%
Other educational group	4,353	1.8%
Political party or advocacy	3,356	1.4%
Sports or hobby group	501	0.2%
Missing	15,055	6.1%

1. Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Appendix D: Average time spent volunteering in organizations by those who volunteered internationally in 2008 (N = 1,032,780)

Variable	mean	sd
Annual weeks volunteered for the main organization ¹	25.3	20.0
Annual hours volunteered for the main organization	248.6	344.9
Annual hours volunteered for all organizations ²	294.1	369.2
Number of organizations	1.9	1.2

1. The main organization may not necessarily be an international volunteer organization.

2. All organization includes at least one international volunteer organization.

Appendix E: Total proportion of all volunteer time in 2008 spent internationally (N = 1,032,780)

	Frequency	Percent
Very little	348,704	33.8%
Less than half	251,575	24.4%
About half	101,291	9.8%
More than half	79,337	7.7%
All or almost all	245,533	23.8%
Don't know	6,340	0.6%

Appendix F: Total duration of volunteering for those who completed all or almost all of their volunteer time internationally (N = 226,515)¹

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 week	3,735	1.6%
1-2 weeks	84,870	37.5%
3-4 weeks	31,217	13.8%
1-2 months	33,844	14.9%
2-6 months	54,771	24.2%
More than 6 months	18,078	8.0%

1. Does not include 19,018 missing values

Appendix G: Type of activities completed in the main organization by those who completed all or almost all of their volunteer time internationally in 2008 (N = 245,553)

	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Engage in general labor	74,442	32.9%	152,072	67.1%
Mentor youth	64,996	28.7%	161,518	71.3%
Provide counseling, medical care, or protective services	51,860	22.9%	174,654	77.1%
Tutor or teach	50,291	22.2%	176,224	77.8%
Collect, make, or distribute clothing, crafts, or goods	48,951	21.6%	177,564	78.4%
Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food	37,693	16.6%	188,822	83.4%
Fundraise or sell items to raise money	36,315	16.0%	190,199	84.0%
Provide professional or management	26,992	11.9%	199,522	88.1%
Engage in music, performance, or other artistic activities	26,552	11.7%	199,963	88.3%
Provide information, be an usher greeter or minister	24,289	10.7%	202,225	89.3%
Provide general office services	20,805	9.2%	205,710	90.8%
Coach or referee	9,549	4.2%	216,965	95.8%
Any other type of activity	54,575	24.1%	171,939	75.9%

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