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Religion and Episodic Volunteering

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Abstract

Connections between religion and volunteering have been widely documented. Religion is a key motivating factor for volunteering in religious settings and elsewhere. Episodic volunteering is one of the fastest growing forms of volunteering, but literature on episodic volunteering and religion is scarce. In this article, we analyze connections between religion and religiosity, and episodic volunteering. First, we identify types of episodic volunteers at religious events. Second, we use a set of three independent variables (declared religious denomination, importance of religion, spiritual motivation) to understanding episodic volunteering participation. Third, we examine whether those who volunteer both episodically and regularly are more religious. Finally, we identify differences across religious affiliations. Using data from a cross-national survey, we apply different data segments in each area of our study. Our findings suggest that episodic volunteers are influenced by religion and religiosity, with especially strong connections among Protestants. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

Key words: Episodic volunteering, volunteering, religion, religiosity, motivation

Religion and Episodic Volunteering

Introduction

Connections between religion and volunteering have been widely documented in numerous studies (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Cnaan et al., 2016; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006). Though, as Hustinx et al. point out (2015), the relationship is far from simple. Most religions share common emphases of hospitality, altruism, and philanthropy; yet, the forms these emphases take vary (e.g., Cnaan et al., 2016; Grönlund and Pessi, 2015; Putnam and Campbell, 2010). On one hand, connections between religion and volunteering can be relatively obvious, as when religious communities organize volunteering among members; or, when volunteers acknowledge and explicate a religious motivation for participation. On the other hand, these connections can be more subtle, as when religion shapes values and norms that support volunteering at societal, communal, or individual levels (Grönlund, 2019). For example, a country's cultural values often intertwine with its religious history and can influence the ways volunteering motivation is acknowledged and explicated at the individual level (Grönlund, 2019; Grönlund et al., 2011).

Furthermore, connections between religion and volunteering are changing alongside shifts in religious landscape and styles of volunteering (e.g., Hustinx et al., 2015; Woodhead, 2017). In many contexts, increasing religious pluralism, individualized and privatized religiosity, and secularization and nonreligion shape the role of religion in the lives of individuals and societies. At the same time, commitment to volunteering is shifting. Short term, infrequent participation known as episodic volunteering is gaining popularity among volunteers (Hyde et al., 2014; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Macduff, 1990, 2004). People are no longer members of the traditional community where individuals are bound by shared beliefs and values, such as the *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1887/2001). Instead, many live in *Gesellschafts*, or associational

communities motivated by self-interest. People underwent a transition from organic to mechanical solidarity. These shifts are essentially communities of limited liability (Hunter and Suttles, 1972; Milofsky, 2019), where residents maintain limited involvement in the local community. In these communities, residents' emotional investment in their social environment is dependent on the degree to which the community meets their needs rather than by a sense of belonging. The process of disengagement and limited liability is intensified by modernity as individuals question their commitments and periodically reassess the merits of local institutions (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). As such, people give their time, effort, and skill in measured ways only as it suits and benefits them personally. Consequently, it is argued that episodic volunteering and informal volunteering are on the rise, while ongoing volunteering is showing signs of stability or decline (United Nations, 2018).

Literature on episodic volunteering is burgeoning (e.g., Cnaan et al., in press; Compion et al., in press (a); Compion et al., in press (b)). Yet, to our knowledge, no previous study has yet attended to religion's role in episodic volunteering. Religions that play a major role in traditional ongoing volunteering may also impact episodic volunteering. Thus, our focus in this article is fixed on the relationships between religion and episodic volunteering.

Episodic volunteering is a one-time (usually a few hours) assignment to perform an uncomplicated task that does not require elaborate training. Upon completion of the task, the volunteer has no further commitment to the organization, even if the organization wishes the volunteer to return or become further involved. However, the scope of episodic activities may extend over a longer period via multi-day events or international missions, which may address a specific goal or require enhanced skills. In all its forms, episodic volunteering extends a hand but not necessarily a commitment and does not involve leadership or policymaking responsibilities.

Episodic volunteers are not ongoing sustainers or organizational leaders; rather, they fill a role, sometimes an important one, but it is more often a task than a mission. Thus, in the ongoing story of the nonprofit organization, these volunteers populate a single episode (Cnaan et al., in press; Hyde et al., 2014; Macduff, 1990, 2004).

While not a new phenomenon, episodic volunteering is gaining popularity as more and more people prefer this model. Historically, Rochester (2018) provides that many volunteer projects were driven by a core of ‘highly committed serious leisure volunteers who formed the ‘inner group of willing people’’ (p. 36), who were then assisted by a host of episodic volunteers—even if they were not named as such. In a study by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) (2006) assessing trends in volunteering between 1974 and 2005, it was found that episodic volunteers have increased since 1989. The authors note ‘the critical role that time constraints have on the potential for people to volunteer may help to explain the reason why episodic volunteering became more common between 1989 and 2005’ (CNCS, 2006, p. 8). Hyde et al. (2014) note that organizations working with volunteers are nowadays required to understand episodic volunteering, as volunteers increasingly prefer short-term, one-off volunteering to long-term, loyal service. As such, the field is in need of both conceptual knowledge about episodic volunteers and practical knowledge for how to recruit and manage them.

In this article, we introduce connections between religion and episodic volunteering and formulate hypotheses regarding episodic volunteering based on knowledge related to ongoing volunteering. We then introduce our methodology, proceed to results, and discuss the role religion plays in episodic volunteering at religious and people-serving events, while considering religious and national variations.

Understanding connections between religion and volunteering

As mentioned above, religion was found to be associated with volunteering (and other forms of prosocial behaviors) in a myriad of studies. The mechanisms driving this connection have been tested and explained in terms of psychological, social, and societal factors or with individual, collective, and cultural dimensions of religion (e.g., Cnaan et al., 2016; Paxton et al., 2014; Prouteau and Sardinha, 2015; Putnam and Campbell, 2010). Many religious communities encourage volunteering through their values, norms, practices, and social pressures. As individuals are socialized into religious communities with these traits, they learn to act in accordance with them, which thus reinforces these values and norms (Cnaan et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2013; Park and Smith, 2000; Putnam and Campbell, 2010).

Volunteering and pro-social behaviors in general are especially connected with religious activity such as attending places of worship and active membership in a religious community (Paxton et al., 2014; Wiepking and Bekkers, 2012; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Smith and Stark, 2009). Furthermore, the influence of religion through social ties seems to spread beyond the individual in a religious community. This so-called spill-over effect shows that the more friends and social ties individuals maintain within a religious congregation, the more likely they are to volunteer (Lim and McGregor, 2012; Putnam and Campbell, 2010).

At the psychological level, an individual's religiosity can be linked to prosocial values and motives for action (e.g., Cnaan et al., 2012). Most religious traditions promote altruistic and prosocial behavior, thus motivating participation in voluntary activities (e.g., Musick and Wilson, 2008). A common way to assess this dimension is to test connections between religious affiliation and volunteering to determine whether religiously affiliated people volunteer more than others. Many studies have confirmed this connection (Cnaan, Kasternakis, and Wineburg,

1993; Monsma, 2007; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Wiepking and Bekkers, 2012). Another approach is to test for differences between different religious affiliations. In this case, results are mixed (Paxton et al., 2014).

Religious affiliation is only one way of considering religious identification, and it can be problematic, as religious affiliation may not reflect much about an individual's actual religiosity (e.g., Davie, 2012). Ganesh et al. (2009), for example, reveal that studies rarely analyze how religiosity is constructed in the everyday lives of volunteering individuals. Indeed, when social ties and religious participation are controlled for, most research (Prouteau and Sarindha, 2015; Putnam and Campbell, 2010) does not support individual religiosity as a driver of volunteer activity. The importance of religion and/or individual religious values, however, has been found to connect to volunteering (Bekkers and Schuyt, 2008; Paxton et al., 2014; Wuthnow, 2004). On average, spiritually motivated volunteers and volunteers at religious events tend to participate out of altruistic rather than egoistic motives. Additionally, Paxton et al. (2014) found in a study of 14-countries that importance of religion and in general private religiosity strengthened the effect of religious attendance on volunteering, although did not have a connection on its own. Similarly, Cnaan et al. (2016) concluded that combining different features of religion and religious organizations—such as faith, doctrines, social norms, and community—resulted in the highest levels of volunteering. Qualitative studies (Einolf, 2011; Grönlund, 2011, 2012) similarly found that an emotional identification to religion and consideration of religion as an important feature of personal identity also promoted volunteering. It is possible that religious values play an even stronger role in episodic volunteering, as both the time commitment and personal investment are limited. In other words, ongoing volunteering is a more serious commitment that

needs congregational social support. Episodic volunteering may originate by faith alone, even when the person is not a congregation member.

The connections between religion and volunteering are also influenced by contexts such as national culture, prevalence of religious people in a certain ecology, and dominant religious tradition. Luria et al. (2017) found differences across countries in relationships between attendance at places of worship and volunteering. In their research on 17 countries, there was a connection in nine countries, no connection in seven, and a reversed connection in one. Both level of individualism and cultural values were found to moderate religion's effect on volunteering, revealing stronger relationships between religious attendance and volunteering in less individualistic and more self-expressive countries. Most countries with no connection between attendance and volunteering were poor countries, and the country with a reversed connection was an ex-communist nation that is also one of the world's least religious. Luria et al. (2017) called for further research on the importance of cultural contexts on volunteering and the relationships between religion and volunteering. Lim and McGregor (2012) located a spill-over effect, finding that nonreligious people with religiously affiliated close friends were more likely to volunteer for religious and nonreligious causes (see also Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006), but that local-level religious context moderates the ways in which religion influences volunteering.

Thus, national culture influences this connection in many ways. Both volunteering and religion are contextual phenomena, which are together and separately influenced by national political systems and welfare models, the scope and consistency of the non-profit sector, as well as cultural values and norms (Grönlund et al., 2011; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Salamon et al., 2017). Some studies have shown religious values and context influence volunteering activities of

non-religious or unaffiliated individuals in a given religious context (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006), such that societies with active religious attendance have smaller differences in volunteering activity between members and non-members of religious communities when compared to more secular societies. Other studies, however, have not supported this (Lim and MacGregor, 2012; Prouteau and Sardinha, 2015). As Prouteau and Sardinha (2015) conclude, religion must be considered in interplay with cultural and societal aspects.

Previous research on the role of religion in episodic volunteering is extremely limited. Very little is known about episodic volunteering in general, and even less about participant motivation (Hyde et al., 2014; Dunn, Chambers, and Hyde, 2016). The few existing studies related to religion and episodic volunteering focus on religious contexts such as religious megaevents (Cnaan et al., 2017; Gallarza et al., 2018). Perhaps unsurprisingly, they show religious or spiritual motivation as central to episodic volunteering in religious organizations or events. In a study conducted at two religious mega-events in the U.S., up to 72% of respondents stated that they volunteered at the event to fulfill spiritual satisfaction (Cnaan et al., 2017). However, as the scant research on episodic volunteering shows, episodic volunteering in religious contexts has multifaceted motivations. For example, additional motives such as emotional satisfaction, fun and productivity, and civic duty motivated volunteers at religious mega-events (Cnaan et al., 2017). Interestingly, the higher-rated motives of volunteers in this study were all related to self-satisfaction; whereas literature on regular ongoing volunteering shows that more altruistic motives almost always pervade (Chacón et al., 2017; Erasmus and Morey, 2016). Gallarza et al. (2018) and Floristán et al. (2013) studied mega-events with regard to the value dimension as the best predictor for loyalty (as likelihood of repeating or/and

recommending a similar event). However, only a handful of studies have examined the role of religious motivation in episodic volunteering in non-religious activities. One exception is a study of both episodic and regular volunteers at the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House, where Hustinx et al. (2008) found that episodic volunteers were driven by a civic or religious sense of duty more frequently than regular volunteers. However, the impact of religion on episodic volunteering, especially outside of mega-religious events, is an uncharted territory.

Connections between religion and volunteering are multi-dimensional and contextual. Religion has a special role in volunteering through different, intertwining influences. In the following sections, we analyze connections between religion and episodic volunteering, and test whether the connections between religion and regular volunteering introduced above hold in this specific type of volunteering, across cross-cultural contexts, different religions, and different countries.

Study hypotheses

Based on our review of the literature, we divided our hypotheses into four groups. Group one is related to individuals volunteering at a religious event. We presume this cohort will score high on all three measures of religiosity (declared religious affiliation, stated importance of religion in everyday life, and spiritual motivation). They are a small but interesting sub-set of the sample (N = 465).

The second set of hypotheses is related to the wider sample and focuses on how any aspect of religiosity (declared religious affiliation, stated importance of religion in everyday life, and spiritual motivation) is associated with the type and area of episodic volunteering (people-service events vs. other types). We assume that based on all religions' commitment to help the needy, more religious people will gravitate toward people-serving events. By people-serving

events we refer to activities that are directly geared to assist people like a day of tutoring, food distribution, and immunization as compared with activities that do not have specific individuals who are being helped such as ‘sport,’ ‘fundraising,’ ‘environment’ or ‘arts/culture events.’

Given the prevalence of literature on religion and ongoing/regular volunteering, we pose a third group of hypotheses. Group three includes our wider sample and assesses if religious people are more likely to report being ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to volunteering episodically.

Finally, our fourth group of hypotheses relates to culture. We focused on country of residence and specific religious affiliations as explanatory variables to volunteering in people-serving events.

Hypotheses for volunteering for a religious event:

H1: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to volunteer at a religious event than all other events.

H2: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to volunteer at a religious event than those who are not religiously affiliated.

H3: Those who volunteer at a religious event will report stronger spiritually based motivations than others.

H4: Among those who volunteer at a religious event, social and material motivations will be lower than volunteers at other events.

Hypotheses related to volunteering for people-serving events:

H5: Volunteers who are spiritually motivated will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of events.

H6: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of volunteer events.

H7: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of events.

Hypotheses related to ongoing/regular volunteering:

H8: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering.

H9: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering.

H10: Those who volunteer at a religious event will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering.

Hypotheses related to cultural contexts:

H11: Different religions will have varying levels of correlation between religiosity and type of episodic volunteering (people-serving events vs. other events).

H12: Different countries will report varying levels of correlation between religiosity and type of episodic volunteering (people-serving events vs. other events).

Methods

The research project

This research forms part of a cross-national, global comparative study of short-term, event-based volunteering. This newly recognized and fast-growing sub-field of volunteering has received little attention in the literature, and most papers have come from English-speaking countries. Another set of related papers regarding sport volunteers and religious mega-event

volunteers was published in leisure and sport journals. It became clear that there is lack of cross-national and cross-fields of volunteering information regarding episodic volunteering.

Over a period of three years, while attending professional conferences such as the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) and the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR), a group of scholars met to discuss the need to gather data from various countries and create a joint database. Researchers from 19 countries participated. Some scholars were able to carry out random national online or phone-based samples. Some scholars attended events and interviewed volunteers in vivo. Others scholars sent requests for responses post events. As each scholar had to find events using episodic volunteering in their home countries, they relied on personal knowledge and snowball-event sampling resulting in each country reporting from different fields of volunteering. Yet, this is the largest and most comprehensive data set of episodic volunteers. We expect findings from this international scholarly collaboration to set the foundation for a fruitful future of research on episodic volunteering.

Data was collected through a 40-question survey aimed at gathering information about motives for volunteering; volunteering experience; and assessing the activities, management, and organization of the episodic volunteer event. Data was also collected on interpersonal interactions, support, and proclivity to volunteer in the future. Activities at these events ranged from picking up rubbish in a public park and washing floors at a hospital, to collecting food for the homeless and participating in a fun-run to supporting a religious event. Research teams gathered over 300 surveys in each country from a broad swath of the population, representing different types of organized volunteering events. Not all countries reported religiously-related

volunteering; as such, the sample for our first group of hypotheses is relatively small and limited to a few countries.

Data collection

In each participating country, a local researcher found a few events in which episodic volunteers were used. Upon contacting the organizers, event participants were asked to fill out the 40-item questionnaire. Given differing attitudes toward responding to questionnaires in the various countries, the method of data elicitation was not uniform. In some countries, a pen-and-paper, self-administered questionnaire was distributed; others collected questionnaires using an online platform; and in others, research assistants interviewed volunteers. As the focus was on participants at various events, the sample was not random and was limited to the local researchers' accessibility to events taking place in their respective countries.

Sampling

Our analysis is based on 14 countries for which data was scrutinized by our data management center. Our sample size is 6,108. The sample size was not equal across all countries and ranged from 165 respondents in Australia to 851 respondents in China. Five countries were excluded from this subsample (Russia, Israel, and the three Gulf countries), as responses to the relevant variables in this study were not compatible. For example, in the Gulf countries, all respondents were assumed to be practicing Muslims; likewise, in Israel, the sample was exclusively Jewish.

Variables

Studying people's religiosity is a complex task, as the term has many dimensions which may be both interrelated and unique. Various sources suggest using more than one measure of religiosity to better capture the myriad dimensions of religiosity (Maynard et al., 2001; Sinha et al., 2006). Thus, we used three independent variables to assess the relationships of religiosity and

episodic volunteering: declared religious affiliation, volunteering to fulfill spiritual satisfaction, and respondent perception of religion's importance in daily life. Religious affiliation does not always mean a person considers oneself religious as religious affiliation can, for example, be a strong cultural norm or expectation, not a personal choice. Also, the variable, which measures fulfilling spiritual satisfaction as a motive for volunteering, can be interpreted in different ways. Spirituality can be viewed as a part of religiosity or a separate phenomenon, which is not necessarily linked with any religion. Hence, we use these three different variables to complement one another.

Regarding religious affiliation, Table 1 shows that our sample had a robust number of Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, and Buddhists. We also had a large group with no religious affiliation (referred to as the 'none' category). As expected, religious affiliation was not distributed evenly between the 14 countries. There were more Catholics in Colombia and Mexico, more Muslims in Tanzania, more Hindus in India, more Buddhists in Japan and South Korea, and more unaffiliated respondents in Spain. This uneven distribution limited our ability to handle the interaction between specific religious affiliations, as well as country and national cultures. For the purposes of this article, we distinguished between those having a religious affiliation and others. Having a religious affiliation is thus a dichotomous variable where 'none' and 'prefer not to answer' were grouped into people without a religious affiliation. While these two groups are not identical, they consist of people who did not report a specific faith tradition and as such were grouped as those without a declared religious affiliation.

Insert table 1 about here

Respondents were asked their motivation for volunteering at the specific event where they participated. There were nine categories, and respondents were instructed to answer each of

them on a Yes/No basis. The highest-rated motive was to ‘fulfill emotional satisfaction’ (50.7%) and the lowest-rated motivation was to ‘fulfill [a] school requirement’ (9.6%). More relevant to this study was the motive ‘fulfill spiritual satisfaction’ (39.5%). As such, we analyzed those motivated spiritually versus those who were not. In addition, to test social and egoistic motives (H4), we also used the following motivational variables: ‘showing an employer that the person is involved in the community’ (28.1%) and ‘wanting to meet new people’ (36.4%).

Respondents were also asked ‘how important is your religion to your daily living?’ Answers ranged from (1) not at all to (5) very much. In this paper, we grouped people who answered (4) a lot and (5) very much as one group for whom religion is important in their daily lives, as compared to the rest of the sample for whom religion is slightly to not at all important (45% and 55%, respectively).

To make sure these three measures did not overlap, we tested their interrelationships. When we tested the relationship between spiritual motivation to volunteer and reported religious affiliation, the relationship was significant ($X^2 = 24.85$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). We found that among people with a stated religious affiliation, 63.1% were motivated by a spiritual commitment, as compared with only 56.3% of unaffiliated participants who also reported a spiritual motivation to volunteer. This finding suggests that even among religiously unaffiliated participants, more than half reported a spiritual motivation to volunteer.

Next, we tested the relationship between respondent rankings of the importance of religion and spiritual motivation to volunteer. The results were significant ($X^2=52.28$, $df=4$, $p<.001$) in the expected direction. Here, 51.6% of those who reported a spiritual motivation said religion mattered ‘a lot’ or ‘very much,’ as compared to 40.6% who did not report a spiritual motivation and said religion mattered ‘a lot’ or ‘very much.’ Again, the variables are associated,

though far from exclusively similar. This suggests that one measure of religiosity alone is not all encompassing and only sheds light on a limited aspect of religiosity. Hence, we used all three in this article.

Finally, we tested the relationship between the importance of religion in everyday life and religious affiliation. Here, the association was significant, the strongest, and in the expected direction ($X^2=1625.16$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). Among those who stated a religious affiliation, 54.4% reported religion to be 'important' or 'very important' compared with only 8.7% of those who did not report a religious affiliation. Note that the significant associations between the variables prohibit us from conducting multi-variable regressions, as the models will likely be biased by multicollinearity.

We used two key dependent variables. First, respondents were asked to state the field of activity in which they volunteered. There were fourteen different volunteering fields such as sports, fundraising, environment, culture, arts, and music. Of the 6,107 surveyed, only 465 (7.61%) respondents listed their activity as religion related. In ten countries, episodic volunteers listed their field of volunteering as religion, with Ghana and Finland reporting higher rates of volunteering at religious events.

Second, we focused on a group of events defined as people-serving events. Among the fields of activities, there were five events we considered people serving. These included events focused on: 'health/medical,' 'relief,' 'orphans/homeless/needful people,' 'assistance/welfare,' and 'education/pedagogy.' People-serving events can be viewed as more charitable activities when compared to 'sport,' 'fundraising,' 'environment' or 'arts/culture events.' We grouped people who reported any of these five event types into respondents who participated in people-serving events and compared them with participants who volunteered at all other types of events.

Regarding this variable, in six countries (Finland, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, and the U.S.) there were none to very few (less than five respondents) who reported partaking in people-serving events.

Findings

Sample characteristics

As reflected in Table 1, the largest age group was people between 18 and 24 years of age (24.1%). Age was distributed fairly evenly, except for a small number of participants who were under age 18 (2.2%). There were slightly more females (53.5%) than males (46.2%), with .3% transgender participants. Less than half (45%) were single and about the same were married (47.3%). About three in five earned an undergraduate degree or higher academic degree (58.8%). Given that a quarter of the sample is under 24 years of age and a similar percentage are students, the level of education is higher than these numbers indicate. These characteristics resemble those reported by previous studies and systematic reviews of the field of episodic volunteering (Cnaan et al., in press; Compion et al., in press; Hyde et al., 2017; MacDuff, 2005).

First set of hypotheses

Our first set of hypotheses focused on differences between episodic volunteers who assisted in a religious event versus all other episodic volunteers. As noted above, this is a relatively small subsample (N = 492) drawn from a small number of countries (mostly Ghana and Finland). Although generalizations are limited, most of our hypotheses were supported, providing an indication that those who volunteer for religious events are likely to be religious.

Our data supported the first hypothesis (H₁) regarding the importance of religion with regards to participating in a religious event ($X^2=277.82$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). Among people who participated in religious events, 88.1% reported religion to be very important or important in

their lives, as compared to only 41.5% of those who participated in non-religious events. Our data also supported the second hypothesis (H₂) regarding religious affiliation and participating in a religious event ($X^2=164.07$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). We found significant association in the expected direction. Among people who participated in a religious event, 88.9% reported a specific religious affiliation compared to only 56.7% of those who participated in the non-religious events. Similarly, the third hypothesis (H₃) regarding religious motivation to volunteer and participating in a religious event was also supported ($X^2=268.11$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). Among those who participated in a religious event, 76.9% reported spiritual motivation, as compared to only 36.4% of those who participated in non-religious events.

Our fourth hypothesis (H₄) predicted that people who participate in religious events are less likely to be motivated by social or material motivations. For this hypothesis, we conducted three separate analyses. First, we studied the association between volunteering at a religious event and being motivated by showing an employer that the person is involved in the community ($X^2=11.98$, $df=1$, $p<.001$), then fulfilling a school requirement ($X^2=10.82$, $df=1$, $p<.001$), and finally wanting to meet new people ($X^2=7.23$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). In the first two analyses, the associations were significant in the expected direction. However, regarding meeting new people, the association was in the opposite direction. We found that among people who participated in religious events, 39.5% did so to meet new people, compared to only 32.7% of those who volunteered in non-religious events. Therefore, our fourth hypothesis regarding religious volunteers having lower levels of social or material motivations was *partially* supported, with the exception of meeting new people.

Second set of hypotheses

Our second set of hypotheses aimed to understand how any aspect of religiosity (declared religious affiliation, stated importance of religion in everyday life, and spiritual motivation) is associated with episodic volunteering. We intended to study this set of hypotheses for the whole sample. However, in some countries, our collaborators did not cover people-serving events. Consequently, only five countries (Australia, China, Mexico, South Africa, and Spain) captured enough people who volunteered into people-serving events. In the other countries, there were no or very few (up to five) episodic volunteers who participated in people-serving activity. As such, we limited our sample for the second set of hypotheses to the five above-listed countries where episodic volunteers could be interviewed regarding people-serving event. As noted above, people-serving events were those aimed at helping individuals better feel, perform, or function (such as health and medicine, needy assistance, and education).

Our fifth hypothesis (H_5) was statistically significant in the expected direction ($X^2=29.12$ $df=1$, $p<.001$), supporting the prediction that volunteers who are spiritually motivated are more likely to volunteer in people-serving events than other types of volunteering events. As hypothesized, among people who were not spiritually motivated, 17.1% participated in people-serving events, compared to 23.0% who were religiously motivated. Similarly, our sixth hypothesis (H_6), stating that volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to volunteer in people-serving events than other types of volunteering, showed statistical significance in the expected direction ($X^2=116.45$ $df=1$, $p<.001$). Among people who did not state a religious affiliation, only 7.7% participated in people-serving events compared to 21.5% who stated a specific religious affiliation.

Finally, our seventh hypothesis (H_7) was statistically significant in support of our hypothesis ($X^2=130.99$ $df=4$, $p<.001$), predicting that volunteers who indicated that religion is

important in their everyday lives would be more likely to volunteer to people-serving events than other volunteering. Among people who believed religion is important to very important in their lives, 27.17% participated in people-serving events. This can be compared to only 12.80% of the people who did not state religion was important in their lives.

Third set of hypotheses

Given the large volume of literature reviewed above linking volunteering and religion, we expected that people who reported higher levels of religiosity would be more ongoing/regular volunteers than people who are not religious. People can volunteer to episodic events regardless of whether they volunteer regularly or not. To that end, we used our entire sample. Overall, 59.3% of the sample reported to also being regular volunteers.

Our eighth hypothesis (H_8), that episodic volunteers who are spiritually motivated would be more likely to volunteer regularly, was statistically significant in the expected direction ($X^2=80.12$ $df=1$, $p<.001$). Among people who were spiritually motivated, 65.9% also volunteer regularly, as compared to 55.6% of those not spiritually motivated. Similarly, our ninth hypothesis (H_9) was statistically significant in the expected direction ($X^2=58.27$ $df=1$, $p<.001$), supporting that episodic volunteers who declared a religious affiliation would be more likely to volunteer regularly. Among people who did not state a religious affiliation, only 55.3% participated in a people-serving event, as compared to 66.1% who stated a specific religious affiliation. Finally, our tenth hypothesis (H_{10}) stating that episodic volunteers who stated religion is important in their everyday lives would be more likely to volunteer regularly was statistically significant in the expected direction ($X^2=37.75$ $df=4$, $p<.001$). Among people who believed religion is important to very important in their lives, 59.2% volunteer regularly, as compared to 50.5% of the those for whom religion was not important.

Findings from the entire sample confirm the same trend that was found regarding ongoing volunteering. The literature suggests that people who are higher on religiosity variables are more likely to regularly volunteer (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Cnaan et al., 2016; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006). In our large sample, those who reported regular/ongoing volunteer activities reported higher levels of religiosity, thus confirming previous knowledge and providing this sample with some validity.

Fourth set of hypotheses

In this set of hypotheses, we aimed to find out if participation in people-serving events is unique to religion or nation. That is, are trends in participation at people-serving events among certain religious groups or nations explained by either level of religion importance in daily life or motivated by for spiritual satisfaction?

In three of the seven religious groups (Catholics, Hindus, and Muslims), none of the two religious independent variables (importance of religion in daily life or being motivated for spiritual satisfaction) was a significant predictor of volunteering at a people-serving event. In two other religious groups (Protestants and religious others), significant associations were found between each of the religious independent variables and the dependent variable, suggesting they were significant predictors in explaining volunteering in people-serving events. For example, among Protestants who said that religion is important to very important in their daily lives, 60.9% volunteered for people-serving events as compared with only with 28% who said religion is less important in their lives. Similarly, among Protestants motivated to volunteer for spiritual satisfaction, 57.1% chose people-serving events, as compared with 13% of those who did not. Similar findings were uncovered regarding members of 'other religions' (which included religions such as Judaism, Greek/Russian Orthodox, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists).

In the ‘other religions’ case, 61.3% of those who believed that religion was very important and important participated in a people-serving event, compared to 11.9% who believed religion was less important. Similarly, among ‘other religions,’ 36.2% of those who were spiritually motivated were involved in people-serving events, compared to only 16.5% of those who were not spiritually motivated.

In the case of Buddhists and the ‘none’ group, we found no significant association. Interestingly, among those who stated that they do not have a religious affiliation (‘none’), 7.4% of them reported religion to be important or very important in their lives.

Finally, we tested the impact of national culture on the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. As noted above, only five countries (Australia, China, Mexico, Spain, and South Africa), recorded a large enough number of people who volunteered in a people-serving event to be evaluated. However, in some of these countries, the religious variables were not amenable to statistical analysis. For example, in China, we did not ask about religious importance or declared religious affiliation. As such, we were unable to carry out a reliable analysis of country-by-country comparisons.

Limitations

While this is the first study to focus exclusively on the role of religion and religiosity on episodic volunteering in a cross-national context, the study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. We used data collected by 14 local scholars in 14 countries, which created a situation with key limitations. First, we had no control over how many had access to a religious event. Each collaborating researcher selected the episodic events accessible to them. Some had easy access to religious events, and some did not. Some had access to people serving events and some did not. As such, we were restricted to the events selected by the participating researchers

and could not guaranteed that all will include respondents fitting to our study. It is possible that, with more data from religious events, our findings could have been more conclusive. Second, we had to transform many of the variables into a dichotomous variable, such as religious affiliation, and thus we may have lost some sensitivity in the process. We could have included the variable with 10 discrete categories, but it would have been more difficult to make sense of the differences between one faith and another because some countries only included one religion.

We also found out that not all countries asked religious-related questions and/or provided sufficient variability. Also, in six countries, too few or no one volunteered at a people-serving event. This does not mean these countries have no people-serving events; rather, it indicates only that our national collaborators did not gain access to these events. Our findings are limited to the cross-national nature of data collection in each country. It is possible that the same volunteers we captured helping at a sports event on a given day later helped serve food in a soup kitchen. In our study, they will be recorded as not participating in a people-serving event. Furthermore, it is certainly possible that many religious and people-serving events took place in countries where our data did not record them. Given that this is the first study focused on the impact of religiosity on episodic volunteering, and that our seven relevant hypotheses were supported, it is possible that the findings can be extrapolated to a larger population. Future studies should follow our work to substantiate or contradict our findings using more focused samples and similar samples in each studied country.

Furthermore, we were forced to study each group of hypotheses using a different subset of our sample. In some of these groups, we relied on a very small subset of respondents (N = 492) and in another we used the full sample (N = 6,108). Our purpose in doing so was to avoid

including respondents who did not meet criteria in each group of hypotheses; however, it poses questions of compatibility between findings from different sub-samples.

As noted above, the data was collected by scholars in different countries and not all of them covered the same type of events. While our findings are promising and shed new light on the role of religion in episodic volunteering, these cross-national data limit our ability to perform multi-variate analyses, and we were restricted to bivariate analyses. Nonetheless, the fact that almost all hypotheses were supported in the expected direction supported the validity of the findings. Future studies will be able to use our findings as a springboard toward data collection that is amenable to regression modeling and interaction effects.

Discussion and conclusions

Our aim in this article was to understand the role that religion and religiosity play in episodic volunteering. As we demonstrated in the literature review, volumes of studies have shown that religious people, especially those who attend places of worship, volunteer more than others (e.g., Cnaan et al., 2016; Paxton et al., 2014; Prouteau and Sardinha, 2015). However, we lack knowledge about the relationships between religion and the growing phenomenon of episodic volunteering. It is quite possible that when the request for volunteering is short-term and undemanding, religion and level of religiosity may not play a key role. Being asked to assist one afternoon in a cultural event may be an easy task that people would agree to regardless of religiosity. Participation in a one-day event may be decided on the spur of the moment irrespective of religiosity. Long-term ongoing volunteer commitment, however, requires assessment, planning, and a serious commitment where religiosity may be more impactful. Our knowledge regarding associations between religiosity and episodic volunteering is lacking and we offer early insights into this domain in the present article.

We built our study on four sets of hypotheses, summarized in table 2. The first set focused on people who participated in an episodic religious event. With this group of volunteers (mostly from Finland and Ghana), most of our hypotheses were supported. These people were indeed more religious, as many perceived their religion as important in their lives; they were more likely to report a clear religious affiliation, and they were more motivated by wishing to fulfill spiritual commitment through their volunteering. They were less likely to volunteer to gain material benefits compared to all other volunteers, but they were more inclined to seek social bonding through episodic volunteering. Congregational life is predicated on face-to-face interactions and social solidarity. As such, it may be less surprising that these volunteers were looking for social interactions in episodic volunteering activities, much like other volunteers. Given the small sample size and its reliance on volunteers from few countries, these findings can only be viewed as indications. However, the fact that almost all hypotheses were supported gives rise to the possibility that those participating in religious events are more religious on average and do so based on spiritual motivations with less expectation for personal gain. These findings line up with results from other scholars who study religious events (Cnaan et al., 2017; Floristán et al. 2013; Gallarza et al., 2013; Gallarza et al., 2018).

Insert table 2 about here

In the second set of hypotheses, we focused on individuals who contributed time to people-serving events. When we limited the analyses to countries in which people-serving events were included, all three hypotheses were supported. Put differently, in the countries where our collaborators covered people-serving events, all three measures of religiosity variables were positively associated with participation in people-serving events. These three findings suggest that people who are religious tend to volunteer in contexts geared towards serving people in

need, rather than sporting events, arts and cultural events, fundraising events, or environmental events. This set of findings supports the literature on congregational and faith-based organizations' involvement in providing care for people in need (Ammerman, 2005; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan and Boddie, 2001)

As was found in the literature (e.g., Bekkers and Schuyt, 2008; Paxton et al., 2014; Wuthnow, 2004), our third set of hypotheses revealed that more religious people were more likely to be regular/ongoing volunteers. About three out of five episodic volunteers were also ongoing volunteers, suggesting that even at a one-time event, regular volunteers are a majority and more likely to be religious (Cnaan et al., in press). This finding lends support for the validity of our findings as it corresponds to findings from previous studies. It may be that people high on the religiosity scale are less affected by the consequences of modernity (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). It would require further research, but it is possible that people who are engaged in religious behavior are more likely to keep their ongoing volunteering. Yet, a decline in religious participation may be co-occurring with modernity, and as such, we may witness a greater decrease in ongoing volunteering.

In the fourth set of hypotheses, we focused on national and religious affiliation as explanatory variables for participation in people-serving events. We focused on two key aspects: the impact of various religions and the impact of the specific countries. We found two religions for which our hypotheses were found significant: Protestants and 'other religions.' In both groups, being spiritually motivated and perceiving religion as important in daily life were significantly associated with participating in a people-serving event. The 'other religions' group included religions where we had too few people to statistically keep as one group, including Jews, Greek/Russian Orthodox, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. What is common to

this group is the Judeo-Christian background, and many were Evangelical/Protestant Christians. We aimed to study national variations, but due to methodological limitations, we were unable to do so.

The fact that Protestants were more likely to participate in people-serving events may suggest that within this broad religious group, moral teaching is better actualized into volunteering and even into episodic volunteering. On the other hand, the lack of connection in other religious groups may suggest a stronger spill-over effect, which evens out differences between more (people who are spiritually motivated or find religion important in their everyday lives) and less religious members of those groups. People can also actualize the moral teaching of their religion (or nonreligious world view) in other ways than volunteering. Higher rates of volunteering among Protestant Christians (when compared with Catholics) and more broadly generous acts towards those in need have been documented in previous studies (e.g., Bekkers and Schuyt, 2008; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Will and Cochran, 1995). Differences among streams of Protestantism have also been found (e.g., Regnerus, Smith, and Sikkink, 1998; Wilson and Janoski, 1995). The explanations for these differences continue to be debated. To conclude, it does seem that Protestantism (or more broadly a Judeo-Christian traditions) does produce a special connection between religion and (episodic) volunteering, yet more research is needed to affirm this connection.

As noted in the limitations section, our data regarding each country varied both in religious variables and opportunities to volunteer at people-serving events. Although in some sub-samples our hypotheses were supported, we cannot categorically support the universality of the connection between religion and people-serving volunteering. Previous research showed that national cultures make a difference in these relationships (e.g., Hustinx et al., 2015; Luria et al.,

2017; Salamon et al., 2017). As such, future studies should further focus on cross-national variations in the relationships between religion and episodic volunteering.

Despite limitations in our data, we cautiously conclude that religion matters in episodic volunteering. As noted in the literature review section, research on religion and episodic volunteering is extremely scarce. Our results suggest that the power of religion to influence volunteering extends to episodic forms of volunteering at least in some (Protestant, Judeo-Christian) religious and cultural contexts. Our results resemble previous research on connections between religion and ‘regular’ volunteering (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Cnaan et al., 2016; Luria et al., 2017; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006). In our study, being religiously affiliated, finding religion important in one’s daily life, and identifying spiritual satisfaction as a motive for volunteering were all found to be significantly associated with episodic volunteering at religious and people-serving events although this association was tested only with limited data (sub-samples). Despite the limitations, this new knowledge adds to our understanding of the importance of religion and religiosity on episodic volunteering.

We found differences between various religious affiliations in the connections between religion and people-serving volunteering, some of which are difficult to interpret. For example, the influence of religion through social ties and culture (e.g., Lim and McGregor, 2014; Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006) can explain why there was no connection between religion and people-serving volunteering in Catholic and Muslim contexts. Furthermore, people with no religious affiliation found religion important and stated spiritual satisfaction as a motive for their volunteering (and some people with religious affiliation did not find religion important nor state spiritual satisfaction as a motive). Religion is an increasingly diverse and complicated concept, especially in individualistic and secularizing contexts (e.g., Davie, 2012; Woodhead, 2017).

Spiritual satisfaction, for example, can mean very different things to different people and may have a connection with religiosity or not. To understand the ways in which religion is lived and constructed in relation to (episodic) volunteering in different contexts calls for nuanced and qualitative approaches in addition to the established measures we have deployed in this research.

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Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of the study sample

| Variable | Category | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Age group | Under 18 | 2.2 |
| | 18–24 | 24.1 |
| | 25–34 | 19 |
| | 35–44 | 14.1 |
| | 45–54 | 15.6 |
| | 55–64 | 15.1 |
| | 65+ | 10 |
| Gender | Male | 46.2 |
| | Female | 53.5 |
| | Transgender | .3 |
| Marital status | Single | 45 |
| | Married/cohabitating | 47.3 |
| | Divorced/widowed | 7.7 |
| Education | High school or below | 23.2 |
| | Some college | 18.1 |
| | Undergraduate degree | 29.9 |
| | Graduate education | 28.9 |
| Religious affiliation | Catholic | 18.65 |
| | Protestant | 17.95 |
| | Muslim | 3.18 |
| | Hindu | 7.37 |
| | Buddhist | 6.66 |
| | None | 19.40 |
| | Other religions | 8.66 |
| | Prefer not to respond | 18.13 |

Table 2: Supported and rejected hypotheses

| Hypotheses | Supported / rejected |
|---|--|
| <i>Hypotheses for volunteering for a religious event</i> (subsample, Finland, Ghana, N= 492) | |
| H1: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to volunteer at a religious event than all other events. | Supported |
| H2: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to volunteer at a religious event than those who are not religiously affiliated. | Supported |
| H3: Those who volunteer at a religious event will report stronger spiritually based motivations than others | Supported |
| H4: Among those who volunteer at a religious event, social and material motivations will be lower than volunteers at other events. | Partially supported (exception of meeting new people) |
| <i>Hypotheses related to volunteering for people-serving events</i> (subsample consisted of data from Australia, China, Mexico, South Africa, and Spain; N= 2,542) | |
| H5: Volunteers who are spiritually motivated will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of events. | Supported |
| H6: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of volunteer events. | Supported |
| H7: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to volunteer at people-serving events than other types of events. | Supported |
| <i>Hypotheses related to ongoing/regular volunteering</i> (The entire sample; N = 6,108) | |
| H8: Volunteers who state religion is important in their everyday lives will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering. | Supported |
| H9: Volunteers who are religiously affiliated will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering. | Supported |
| H10: Those who volunteer at a religious event will be more likely to be ongoing/regular volunteers in addition to episodic volunteering. | Supported |
| <i>Hypotheses related to cultural contexts</i> (The entire sample; N = 6,108) | |
| H11: Different religions will have varying levels of correlation between religiosity and type of episodic volunteering (people-serving events vs. other events). | Supported |
| H12: Different countries will report varying levels of correlation between religiosity and type of episodic volunteering (people-serving events vs. other events). | Data insufficient to test the hypothesis |