

Immigrants' Experiences of Volunteering; A Meta-Ethnography

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Abstract

Among policy makers and governments in the Global North, the voluntary sector is considered a central arena for immigrant integration. The aim of this interpretive synthesis was to systematically review research to understand immigrants' volunteering experiences and explore how volunteering may influence immigrants' health. A systematic literature review was performed using six databases. Eleven studies met our inclusion criteria. Meta-ethnography was applied for the interpretive synthesis. Immigrants' perceived volunteering contributed to improving self-conception, engaging in the community, developing skills and knowledge, and building social networks. Under certain conditions, volunteering could be an arena for developing meaningfulness and belongingness and capacity building in the new community for immigrants. Our study indicates that volunteering may have a health-promoting impact that may contribute to immigrants' sense of belonging and positive well-being. However, this effect seems complex, and volunteering activities and contexts must be further explored.

Keywords

immigrants, inclusion, volunteering

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Introduction

The number of international migrants is increasing, leading to more social, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in many societies worldwide (Appave & David, 2017). In 2019, it was estimated that 272 million people lived in countries other than their countries of birth, representing an increase of 119 million people compared to 1990 (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019). In the process of resettlement, acculturation, which, according to Berry (2005), is a dual process of cultural and psychological change resulting from contact between individuals from different cultural groups, occurs. Berry (2005) claimed that immigrants seek to acculturate in several ways. Preferences for acculturation strategies have been extensively studied, yielding various results, but integration is often argued to be the desired outcome (Berry et al., 2006). This outcome is central to government policies in the Global North but has been criticized for promoting specific imaginaries of culture, race, ethnicity, and belonging that cast immigrants inferior (Rytter, 2019). There are large differences among immigrants; immigrants are not a homogeneous group, but in this study, we included immigrants into one practical category (Brubaker, 2002) denoting that they for some reason left their countries of origin to settle in another country.

The Voluntary Sector

In the Global North, governments are placing an increasingly high value on volunteering and the voluntary sector as an arena for integration. It is suggested that recruiting and including immigrants in volunteering may help immigrants learn about their new society and language and facilitate easier entrance into the labor market (Christensen & Christensen, 2006; Meld. St. 10, 2018-2019; J. A. Smith et al., 2004). Volunteering has various definitions, but in this study, we define volunteering as freely contributing without an expectation of a reward or other compensation to benefit individuals or groups outside one's household and social network in an organized context (Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wollebæk et al., 2000).

Immigrants' Volunteering and Health

Research related to volunteering among immigrants is primarily descriptive and mainly discusses participation compared to the majority population, volunteer hours, and motivation and barriers to participation (Eckstein et al., 2015; Gele & Harsløf, 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Wilson, 2012). Thus far, immigrants' experiences with participation in voluntary work have been sparsely investigated (Torres & Serrat, 2019; Wilson, 2012). Given that studies show that acculturation may be a stressful experience that can result in negative health impacts (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2021; Yeh, 2003) and that social support and social networks have been found to be beneficial to mental health (Berkman et al., 2000; Dominguez-Fuentes & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2012; Kim et al., 2012; Seeman, 1996), volunteering may be an arena to build social networks and exchange social support (Lidén, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Wilson, 2012).

The objective of this review is to *explore and synthesize the existing qualitative research concerning immigrants' experiences of being formal volunteers and how this may influence their health*. Our research question is as follows: Which experiences related to participating in formal volunteering do immigrants have?

Method

We applied a meta-ethnographic approach following the seven steps developed by Noblit and Hare (1988). We chose this method to interpret the existing research concerning immigrants' experiences of volunteering instead of conducting a narrative review aggregating findings based on a wide range of database searches. Meta-ethnography is a well-established form of interpretative review that synthesizes concepts to further develop conceptual meanings based on heterogeneous samples and contexts. The steps are as follows: getting started (step 1), deciding what is relevant to the initial interest (step 2), reading (and rereading) studies to discover the main concepts (step 3), determining how the studies are related (step 4), translating the studies into one another (step 5), synthesizing translations (step 6), and communicating the synthesis in text (step 7).

Search Strategy and Selection of Studies

Electronic searches were performed using six databases in June 2020 by the first author under the guidance of a research librarian. The following databases were included: MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Global Health, and Amed. We searched with subject headings and used all search terms as keywords in each database. Search 1, "minority group" and search 2, "volunteers" were combined with the Boolean operator AND (see the search strategy in the appendix). The search was limited to qualitative studies and obtained 3,642 hits. The first screening, which included duplicates and the inclusion and exclusion of studies based on the title and abstract, was performed by the first author. The third author screened a sample of the articles. The full texts of 50 articles were downloaded for further screening by the first and third authors. Thirteen articles were obtained from manual searches of the reference lists of the included articles, contact with experts and other singular searches. In total, 11 articles were included in this review. A flow diagram is presented in Figure 1.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were as follows: qualitative articles concerning volunteering among immigrants and ethnic minorities with a minority status in their country of residence on the basis of their place of birth, language, ethnicity, or cultural differences (18 years of age or above) and their experiences of being volunteers in organizations in high-income countries; full-text empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish; and articles published from the inception of each database to June 2020.

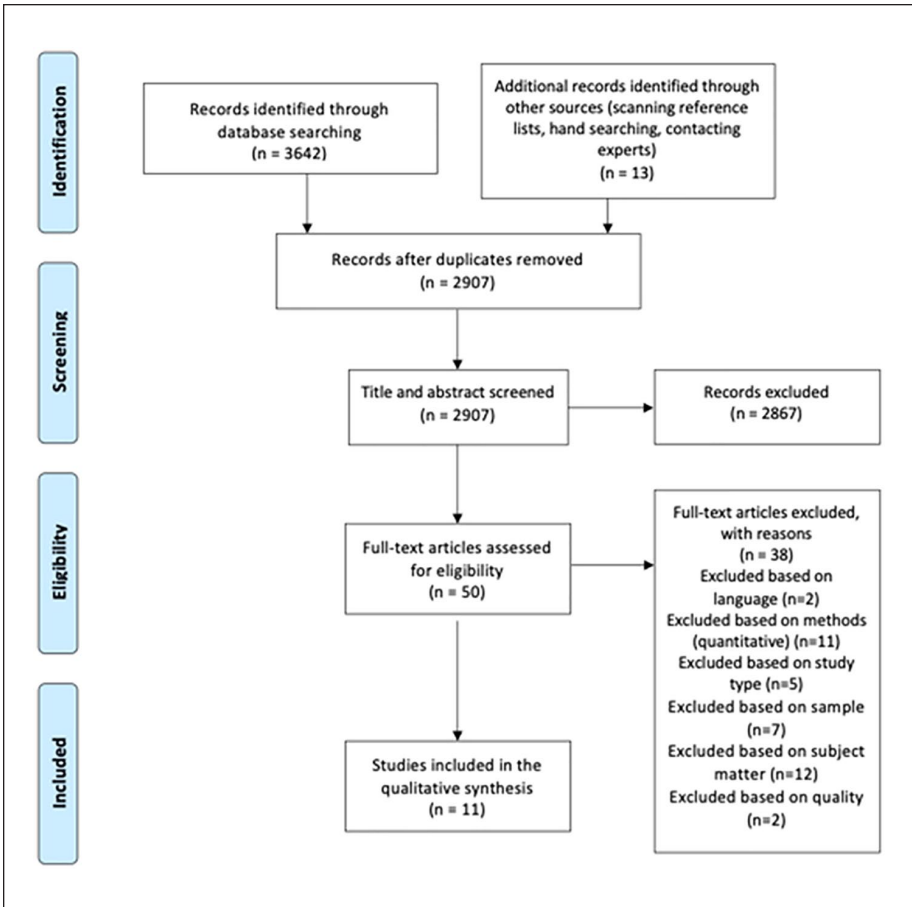


Figure 1. Flow diagram based on Moher et al. (2009).

Exclusion Criteria

Studies in which immigrants were only a part of the study samples or the qualitative results of the groups were not differentiated were excluded. Any study that did not report the data collection or strategy for analysis was also excluded.

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The data extraction was conducted independently by the first and third authors, and then, the extracted data were compiled and organized in a data extraction sheet. The two authors extracted information from the full primary studies and included both first- and second-order constructs. Descriptive information, such as the author, year,

title, and publication, and information concerning the aim, methods, design, data collection, sampling, theoretical framework, analysis, findings, themes, and discussion were noted. The results concerning immigrants' experience of volunteering were the main interest. Information concerning the participants, context and culture of voluntary work was also extracted. A short description of the included studies is presented in Table 1.

The evaluation of the quality of the studies was guided by a checklist covering aims, reflexivity (authors preconceptions and meta-positions), methods and design, data sampling and collection, theoretical framework, analysis, results, discussion, and conclusion (Malterud, 2001) and EPICURE (Stige et al., 2009). Any disagreements were noted and resolved by consensus among the authors.

Data Synthesis

The first and third authors read and reread the included studies to discover the main concepts (step 3). Common themes and concepts were identified (step 4). The common themes and concepts were compared and matched across the articles. The first author chose Wood et al. (2019) as an index study based on the quality and richness of the article. The studies were analyzed using the following categories from Wood et al.'s article: "sense of self and self-worth," "belonging in a new community" and "work, health and illness." The meanings of the themes and concepts identified were matched, compared, and organized in a table by the first author. All authors collaborated in the translations (step 5). The analysis included several steps. The first-order interpretations involved identifying and interpreting the meanings of the themes, concepts, and metaphors in each study, while the second-order interpretations included interpretations of how the identified concepts related to each other. The authors grouped the concepts from the articles and developed four themes that covered the concepts. Reciprocal interpretations, that is, meanings of themes and concepts that were similar, were synthesized. The reciprocal relationship in the studies made it possible to develop a line of argument. All authors collaborated to further synthesize the themes under the concepts of "meaningfulness," "belongingness," and "capacity building" (step 6). This article is an attempt to express the synthesis. All authors collaborated in the writing of this article (step 7).

Results

This review is a synthesis of qualitative literature concerning immigrants' experiences of volunteering. This review includes studies with samples from a range of ethnic backgrounds in different countries and regions. The participants volunteered for different organizations, such as student organizations, church organizations, immigration-serving agencies, festivals, and community services. The volunteer activities included operating health resource centers; creating cultural meetings, such as book clubs; creating groups for physical activities; cooking and serving meals; providing counseling to young people and different activities for children; developing and leading organizations for social change; and assisting newly arrived immigrants.

Table 1. Descriptive Details of the Included Studies.

Study, location, and study design	Aims	Sampling strategy and recruitment	Sample size and brief description	Data collection methods and analysis
Wood et al. (2019), Australia, regional area, qualitative study	Exploring how employment and volunteering influence the health and wellbeing of refugees in Australia and identify areas for appropriate service provision	Purposive sampling was conducted through community organizations using word-of-mouth referrals	9 adults (7 men and 2 women) with refugee backgrounds; average age 38	Semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis; strength-based theoretical framework
Chan (2011), USA, public university in a large Midwestern city, qualitative study	Exploring the impact of civic engagement on Asian American college students' social and academic development	Students from various student groups received a recruitment email, and the primary investigator visited all Asian American studies courses	24 participants (10 women and 4 men); ages 18 to 22; immigrants and children of immigrants; Asian Americans	Semi-structured interviews; grounded theory
Safrit and Lopez (2001), USA, Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio, qualitative study	Identifying the attitudes, motivations, and barriers of Hispanic Americans regarding participation in volunteer programs	Leaders of Cuyahoga County Hispanic American organizations were contacted to identify potential study participants	20 participants (8 men and 12 women); ages 20 to 70; Hispanic Americans	Face-to-face interviews, open-ended questions; constant comparative method
H. C. Smith (2015), United Kingdom, qualitative study	Exploring individuals' experiences of occupation before leaving their home countries, during the asylum process and after seeking asylum. Exploring the meaning given to the occupation by individuals	Recruitment was conducted sensitively, with two trusted link agencies used to promote trust. Staff and volunteers facilitated contact	10 participants (6 men and 4 women); ages 25 to 45; various nations in Africa and the Middle East; time of settlement in UK of 1 to 8 years	Phenomenological method; conversational interviews
Daoud et al. (2010), Israel, qualitative study	Examining the benefits of volunteering through the experience of lay Arab and Jewish women in the Women for Women's Health Program in Israel	42 Jewish and 25 Arab volunteers in the Women for Women's Health Program were contacted and invited	In this review, only Arab participants were included because of the minority perspective; ages 29 to 51	Focus-group interviews; content analysis
Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015), USA, mixed method study	Describing the patterns of civic engagement of Latino first- and second-generation (immigrant origin) young adults and provide insight into the differences in these patterns	Recruitment was conducted through churches, community organizations, community colleges, and 4-year universities	58 Latino young adults of immigrant origin residing in northeastern cities (56.8% women); ages 18 to 25; Dominicans, Mexicans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans	Semi structured in-depth interviews; analysis: interview strategies derived from open coding

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Study, location, and study design	Aims	Sampling strategy and recruitment	Sample size and brief description	Data collection methods and analysis
Taurini et al. (2017), Spain, Andalusia, qualitative study	Exploring how the community engagement of Moroccan leaders in southern Spain contributes to their wellbeing in their new settlement context	Founders or official leaders of community organizations established and managed by Moroccan migrants were recruited	10 participants (7 men and 3 women); ages 27 to 53; Moroccans	In-depth face-to-face interviews; open-ended questions; theoretical thematic analysis
Handy and Greenspan (2009), Canada, Halifax, Regina, Toronto and Vancouver, mixed method study	Examining whether and how immigrants participate in volunteering activities, the factors facilitating their decisions to volunteer, and whether this experience eventually helps them better integrate into Canadian society	Purposive sampling was performed in religious congregations in four major urban centers in Canada	34 participants in individual interviews and 33 focus groups with 6 to 10 participants; participants of different ages, ethnicities, and gender and both recent and established immigrants; in a few cases, youths; ages above 18	In-depth interviews, focus groups and surveys (the surveys were excluded in this review); grounded theory approach
Dudley (2007), Canada, mixed method study	Examining volunteering experiences from the perspective of adult immigrant second-language learners	Samples of two cohorts of adult immigrant students were enrolled in a 20-week English as a second-language program. Interview participants were recruited from among the questionnaire participants who reported having volunteered in Canadian settings	8 participants (2 men and 6 women); ages 22 to 52	Questionnaire (excluded in this review) and semi-structured interviews; analysis based on similar themes
Jensen (2008), USA, Washington DC, qualitative study	Examining the cultural dimension of immigrants' civic engagement or lack thereof and their conceptions of their civic engagement	Recruitment was performed through local religious institutions (Catholic churches and Hindu temples). Snowball sampling strategy	Included in this review: 40 participants, 20 Asian Indian and 20 Salvadorans (mean age 44); 30 women and 10 men	Semi-structured interviews; narrative analysis; content analysis
Yap et al. (2011), United Kingdom, London, Norwich & Portsmouth, qualitative study	Examining how volunteers talk about themselves and their work as volunteers	Sampling within a volunteer organization that provided orientation and emergency provisions to refugees. Interested volunteers responded to an advertisement	9 volunteers (5 men and 4 women); ages 28 to 67; various countries of origin: Kenya, Liberia, Iraq, Chad, Eritrea, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe	Semi-structured interviews; Foucauldian discourse analysis

Second-Order Analysis

We first present our synthesis based on the second-order analysis with reciprocal translation of the main findings in the primary studies included. The following four main themes arose from our synthesis: (1) improving self-conception, (2) building social networks, (3) developing skills and knowledge, and (4) engaging in the community. Examples of the primary data that support each theme are presented in Table 2.

Improving Self-Conception

The participants experienced personal growth and increased self-confidence through their volunteering (Chan, 2011). Some participants reporting becoming braver (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010), feeling more comfortable in social interaction with foreigners, and improving their interpersonal skills (Safrit & Lopez, 2001). Others reported that volunteering increased their sense of importance, usefulness, and self-worth (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). Some participants discussed philanthropic values, the ability to be a part of something larger than their own lives (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), and the opportunity to focus on others' needs and not their own problems (H. C. Smith, 2015). Volunteering also created a sense of purpose for their lives (Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). Being busy and having some degree of daily structure were important for some participants (H. C. Smith, 2015). Seven studies reported that the participants who experienced volunteering had a better self-image and self-esteem and a more positive view of themselves (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). The participants also reported improved connection with their original culture by establishing social relations with people from similar ethnic backgrounds. Some participants also found that they learned about and explored their own ethnic background. Some felt that this process helped them understand their development and contributed to a feeling of normality (Chan, 2011).

Building Social Networks

Some participants found that volunteering contributed to a sense of belonging in the new country and community (Chan, 2011; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Wood et al., 2019). In eight studies, the participants reported that volunteering could build strong social relations and friendships (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; H. C. Smith, 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Building a social network in the new society was important, and some participants emphasized the value of making new social relations since they left their families and felt socially isolated (Dudley, 2007; Jensen, 2008). Group interaction in volunteer activities could also promote a sense of mutual respect, trust, and fellowship within the volunteer organization, which helped the participants establish

Table 2. Examples of Quotes From the Included Studies That Support Each Theme.

Themes	Examples of quotes
Improving self-conception	<p>“I have become a lot braver; I am willing to try different things; whereas before (volunteering) I would just ignore every opportunity that would come to me” (Chan, 2011, p. 201)</p> <p>“I feel now that I am worthy. When someone asks me for help filling out a job application and that person gets the job, I feel great, and more important” (Safrit & Lopez, 2001, p. 13)</p> <p>“I always like volunteering, since when I was young, they brought us up like that. To try doing something for people” They spoke of the value of “helping” (H. C. Smith, 2015, p. 617)</p> <p>“I feel healthier . . . I feel good about myself that I can give to others” (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 213)</p> <p>“(. . .)It is not an obligation, but more like I want to do (these things). (They make) me feel better. It’s sort of my calling” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 90)</p> <p>“Giving help to others is for me essential! It makes me feel good and it makes the others (who received help) feel good” (Taurini et al., 2017, p. 9)</p>
Developing knowledge and skills	<p>“Because it’s a beautiful thing to feel that you are able to help, to feel that one serves someone else. It comes from our tradition and religion” (Jensen, 2008, p. 79)</p> <p>“I like the fact that I’m helping people, yeah, to see them, to see their problem solved and to see them leave happy, that gives me good, good feeling, good sense really . . . to know that you’re helping someone” (Yap et al., 2011, p. 166)</p> <p>“Volunteer, that could have a huge impact on my career . . . Even if they help you write your resume, and you are going to look for the work where they require for experience, it is still nothing. What I mean, I am trying to say that experience they are requiring, how can I get it?” (Wood et al., 2019, p. 8)</p> <p>“We learned about breast cancer, something (cancer) we were afraid to even mention . . . now we talk directly about it and encourage other women to go and be examined” (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 211)</p> <p>“It gave me the experience to put on my resume. Volunteerism is a very respectable way to get into job here. It shows that you are responsible and good person” (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 972)</p> <p>“Through volunteer jobs, I have become involved in Canadian culture” (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 973)</p> <p>“I feel I am contributing to the growth of my community” (Safrit & Lopez, 2001, p. 12)</p> <p>“I like to do volunteering well because I need to build my experience. I need to build my skills, so I’m happy to meet people, talk to them, and then after that, I know how, I have this experience if I get job” (Yap et al., 2011, p. 162)</p>

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Themes	Examples of quotes
Building social relations	<p>“Volunteering makes me feel I belong here. I live in a disadvantaged neighborhood and did not like this town and always wanted to leave. Now I have met these women, with whom I can talk and discuss things, this make me feel differently about the place” (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 214)</p> <p>“Getting involved in a community activity means that a lot of Spanish people get to know you in a more direct way” (Taurini et al., 2017, p. 38)</p> <p>“I think that’s what we lose when we come here. When you come from countries that have very little, their people are more community oriented. When they come here, there is isolation and disconnection. So for immigrants it’s almost critical. To me, it’s the way to keep people healthy—mentally healthy. Because when they have left their families behind, coming to a place where they find that they cannot talk to family, you know, it makes a whole lot of difference. It makes the transition easier. People are just better faster” (Jensen, 2008, p. 80)</p> <p>“In the group we have come closer to one other, made friendships and talked to each other about variety of things” (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 214)</p>
Community involvement	<p>“For Smith, he goes to church to meet God; for me, I go to church to meet Smith . . . This is true for more than two-thirds of the congregants who come for social and psychological needs, and the other third [come] for their theological needs” (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 971)</p> <p>“You, when you come here, the doors are open for you, you need to come and help to build a window so that other windows will be open for other people. It’s like, what you give back . . . And that’s why I tell people I’m always very proud of myself, right” (Wood et al., 2019, p. 7)</p> <p>“I guess it wasn’t really a decision; it was more . . . like a calling. It just felt like such a huge moral responsibility and . . . social responsibility, as a human being. I just couldn’t stand and watch and not be in solidarity with people” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 96)</p> <p>“I like helping—I like being a part of something bigger than who I am, so I like giving to society . . . and to find myself . . . I want to give something to this world. So . . . I want to help out . . . Community does that for me” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 94)</p> <p>“I am too an immigrant, and it hurts me to see that there are people that are really suffering here and are in need. (. . .).” (Jensen, 2008, p. 79)</p> <p>“I think everyone has the right to a fair life and a fair opportunity to have this life, and also, a fair way of dealing with this case. According to the rules, and according to the law. And that’s why I’m doing it (Yap et al., 2011, p. 166)</p>

networks and social capital (Daoud et al., 2010). Some participants described their fellow volunteers as a part of an extended family (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). In addition to fulfilling social needs, social relations could provide an important link in the community (Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Taurini et al., 2017) or implied that the participants had someone to ask for advice in a nonthreatening environment, which could reduce feelings of anxiety in their new country (Dudley, 2007). The participants also reported that they became friends with other cultural kin through volunteer activity (Chan, 2011; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

Engaging in the Community

Many participants described volunteering as a way to engage with and contribute to society. The participants claimed that their engagement was a reciprocation of the support and help they received upon their arrival in the new community (Chan, 2011; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

Volunteering also represented an opportunity to contribute to social change and support other immigrants (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2011). In seven studies, the immigrants reported that their volunteering resulted in a form of acceptance from the majority population (Daoud et al., 2010; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). The contact established between the immigrants and the majority population was also considered important for reducing prejudice and racism (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011).

Developing Skills and Knowledge

Volunteering also represented an arena for acquiring knowledge regarding the majority's culture, and the participants considered volunteering crucial for becoming a part of their new community (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; H. C. Smith, 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Some participants stated that volunteering increased their understanding and knowledge of the community needs (Safrit & Lopez, 2001), while others mentioned that they acquired general competences, such as organizing their day and respecting others' time. Knowledge regarding health and illnesses, health care rights and health care services in the new country was also reported as a benefit of volunteering (Daoud et al., 2010).

For many participants, developing and practicing language skills in voluntary organizations were considered important for facilitating integration (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al.,

2011). The two-way integration process through which the participants encountered a mutual learning environment and could share knowledge with others was also a positive outcome of volunteering for some participants (Daoud et al., 2010; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

Volunteering was viewed by many immigrants as a way to obtain skills, knowledge, and work experience that could help them in their future careers (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). This included knowledge regarding the employment sector that could help them adjust better to it (Wood et al., 2019). Some participants emphasized that volunteering improved communicative skills crucial for entering the labor market (Taurini et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2011). Volunteering could also be included in the immigrants' resumé when applying for work, and the participants found volunteering a respectable way to obtain a paid job (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Many participants clearly used volunteering as leverage into the employment force, which was their goal (Chan, 2011; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019).

Difficulties in Engaging in Volunteering

Although the participants reported many positive outcomes of volunteering in their new countries, some reported negative experiences. A few participants experienced difficulties practicing the new language while volunteering as some shared their mother tongue with other volunteers, making it natural to communicate in this language. Others found that people were too busy to talk to them or that people did not adjust the speed and clarity of speech to allow the immigrants to learn (Dudley, 2007). Some participants reported that knowing the language was crucial for being liked and accepted (Safrit & Lopez, 2001).

A few participants reported that they experienced prejudice and racism while volunteering (Daoud et al., 2010) and that it was difficult to be accepted and involved in the community (Jensen, 2008).

Summary of the Line of Argument

A line of argument synthesis was developed to explain and link the four themes to health. The voluntary sector may be a health-promoting arena for immigrants as it can provide meaningfulness through improved self-conception and an experience of being worthy and engaged in a meaningful activity. Capacity building may lead to empowerment, and the study showed that capacity building was obtained through the acquisition of knowledge and skills that could be a door-opener to the labor market. The immigrants also experienced a heightened sense of belonging through social relations and knowledge regarding the culture and community. Volunteering may represent both altruistic and instrumental dimensions that could lead to a positive impact on health.

Discussion

Belongingness

In our meta-ethnography, volunteering was considered a contribution to building social relations. The link between social relations and health is complex. Berkman et al.'s (2000) conceptual model of how social networks impact health shows that this relationship involves factors, such as social structural conditions (macro level), social networks (mezzo level) and psychosocial mechanisms (micro level). Depending on the context, the characteristics of the social relations and how social support is given and received, social relations may impact a person's behavior, psychological processes and physiological functions (Berkman et al., 2000). The studies in our review indicate that social relations affect people in a positive way and may be a health promotive factor for immigrants. This finding is consistent with studies arguing that inclusion and social relations are particularly promotive of immigrants' mental health (Guruge et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2020). However, social networks may also be stressful if they act as a source of conflict, social support is lacking (Guruge et al., 2015) or social networks are difficult to access according to a few studies included in this meta-ethnography.

Capacity Building

Governments promote the voluntary sector as a possible door-opener to language training, education and participation in the workforce for immigrants (Christensen & Christensen, 2006; Meld. St. 10, 2018-2019; J. A. Smith et al., 2004). In our meta-ethnography, volunteering is viewed as an arena for capacity building that may be a door-opener to practicing language and joining the labor market. Volunteering may be health promotive since employment is found to have a positive effect on mental health (Dalgard & Thapa, 2007; van der Noordt et al., 2014). It is increasingly accepted that volunteering can increase the chances for higher education and, consequently, a better job (Eimhjellen & Seggaard, 2010; Paat, 2022; Wilson, 2012). However, it is not obvious that volunteering will lead to employment for immigrants as other structural factors might also have an impact. Immigrants may have difficulties accessing a volunteer activity to develop appropriate skills and networks (Allan, 2019), and even if they develop these skills and networks, some immigrants experience limited access to the labor market (Oreopoulos, 2011; Tomlinson, 2010).

However, this bold view of volunteering as an arena for building qualifications instead of a philanthropic activity based on altruism represents a shift in the role and understanding of volunteering.

Philanthropic Activity or a Qualifying Arena?

The motivation for volunteering may also impact the benefits of volunteering. In this study, the intrinsic reasons to volunteer may be connected to meaningfulness and helping others without obtaining anything in return, and the extrinsic reasons may be volunteering with the purpose of building capacity to more easily obtain access to the labor market.

However, this issue is complex, and both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons may apply to many people. Volunteering for intrinsic reasons may be the most beneficial for volunteers (Degli Antoni, 2009; Konrath et al., 2012) and is stressed as important for sustained involvement in volunteering. However, extrinsically motivated volunteers may still have a considerable amount to offer communities and can be satisfied when their volunteer activity matches their motivation for volunteering (Stukas et al., 2016). Based on the government's perspective of promoting the voluntary sector as a qualifying arena, development toward a more instrumental dimension of volunteering makes it important to consider how the voluntary sector might change. What will be the experiences of volunteers and beneficiaries of volunteering if the voluntary sector becomes a time-limited steppingstone for marginalized groups to enter the labor market? Should the voluntary sector change from a philanthropic activity to an arena for the qualification of labor resources or should the labor market be such a qualify arena? This may be a development feature linked to the growing individualism in many high-income countries and could perhaps make us question the nature and sustainability of the voluntary sector.

Strengths, Limitations, and Reflexivity

Meta-ethnography is criticized for not being standardized, and thus, the reporting of the analysis and synthesis lacks clarity and comprehensiveness (France et al., 2014). In this meta-ethnography, we followed Noblit and Hare's (1988) methodology and expanded efforts to clearly report the procedures to ensure the quality of the review (France et al., 2019). A limitation of such synthesis is the difficulty in ensuring that no relevant studies were overlooked because of the search limitations or the focus of the review. We chose to include health databases, which may omit relevant studies that are not indexed in these databases. The search and some screenings of the search results were performed by one reviewer due to time and resource considerations. The validity is supported by our presentation of examples of the studies contributing to the themes, our search strategy and the description of the methods.

The 11 included articles constituted a small sample but provided overall diversity in the participants' ethnic backgrounds, reasons for and time since migration, age, gender, and countries of resettlement. Some studies used terms that were broader than "volunteering" but included volunteering as an activity, such as "community engagement," "civic participation," and "occupation." We screened the results to ensure that we only extracted results related to volunteering. The quality of the included studies varied. Some studies provided a limited quantity of results, and some studies were mainly descriptive. Eight studies did not remark on reflexivity, and five studies did not include theoretical frameworks. Five studies did not discuss the shortcomings, limitations, or strengths of the study. This issue may have limited the quality of the meta-ethnography.

Implications of the Review

The 11 studies included in this meta-ethnography largely support volunteering as an activity that has health-promotive impacts. However, it is important to stress that

volunteering occurs in different contexts and that variations exist in how volunteer organizations recruit, facilitate and support volunteers, which again might yield various outcomes (Greenspan et al., 2018). Moreover, immigrants do not constitute a homogeneous group. Some immigrants do not have any wish to participate in the larger society (Berry, 2005). People with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds might also have different comprehensions of volunteerism and volunteer roles (Eimhjellen et al., 2020; Hobbs, 2001; Schwingel et al., 2017). To determine whether people benefit from volunteering, it is crucial to study the type of meaning volunteers attribute to volunteer activities, the quality of social interactions in volunteer activities, and the support and guidance volunteers receive from staff and other volunteers (Morrow-Howell, 2010). The experiences and outcomes of volunteering seem quite complex, and the activity and context must be scrutinized to determine whether and how volunteering can be health promoting.

Appendix

Search Strategy: Medline

Database: Ovid MEDLINE(R) ALL <1946 to June 08, 2020>

Search Strategy:

1. Minority Groups/ (13739)
2. Minority group*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms] (17773)
3. exp Ethnic Groups/ (152106)
4. Ethnic group*.mp. (86570)
5. Ethnicity.mp (66962)
6. (Emigrants and immigrants).mp. (12133)
7. exp "Emigrants and Immigrants"/ (12255)
8. immigrants.mp (23948)
9. immigration.mp. (32694)
10. human immigration.mp. (7)
11. exp "Transients and Migrants"/ (11521)
12. (transients and migrants).mp (11554)
13. migrants.mp. (19036)
14. exp Refugees/ (10098)
15. refugees.mp (12776)
16. Guest-work*.mp. (76)

17. Non-profit work*.mp. (1)
18. exp Volunteers/ (28729)
19. volunteers.mp (186026)
20. volunteers experiences.mp. (24)
21. volunteer workers.mp. (92)
22. voluntary.mp. (72306)
23. voluntarism.mp. (215)
24. non-governmental organizations.mp. (1414)
25. third sector.mp. (258)
26. voluntary work*.mp. (477)
27. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 or 15 (283805)
28. 16 or 17 or 18 or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 or 23 or 24 or 25 or 26 (257019)
29. 27 and 28 (3060)
30. limit 29 to “qualitative (best balance of sensitivity and specificity)” (632)

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