

Volunteerism Among Older Adults in Singapore

**ROSA RESEARCH BRIEF
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Introduction

Volunteerism is recognised as a beneficial activity for individuals for many reasons. Beyond the potential of volunteerism to create new and meaningful communities (Hodge et al., 2013), it offers numerous benefits including improvement to one's mental health (Willigen, 2000), self-esteem (Russell et al., 2018), and social connectedness (Hodge et al., 2013). Volunteering has also been found to provide a sense of purpose in one's life (Schwingel et al., 2009). For these reasons and more, voluntary work among older adults may be a meaningful and effective pathway towards successful ageing, particularly for those in retirement. In Singapore, the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), a champion of the City of Good vision, has similarly identified volunteer work as an important and beneficial activity for older adults (NVPC, 2018).

This research brief thus seeks to bolster efforts to promote older adult participation in voluntary work by examining some of the key motivations and barriers associated with the uptake of volunteer work by older adults in Singapore. The integrated theory of volunteering proposed by Wilson and Musick (1997) serves as a useful framework for understanding the factors that shape an individual's willingness to volunteer. This theory posits that volunteering is a productive activity that requires various resources - namely human, social, and cultural capital. The more resources an individual has, the more able and likely they are to volunteer. This paper will focus on examining the importance of two significant categories of resources (capital) that Wilson and Musick highlight:

1. Human Capital: Resources tied to one's individual demographic traits (e.g., income, education level, health) that make volunteering easier to carry out.
2. Social Capital: The number and type of social connections present in one's life that may increase their likelihood of engaging in volunteer activities.

This brief hence identifies factors related to human and social capital that potentially shape volunteerism among Singapore Life Panel (SLP) respondents, both in terms of the likelihood of volunteering as well as the duration of volunteer experience.

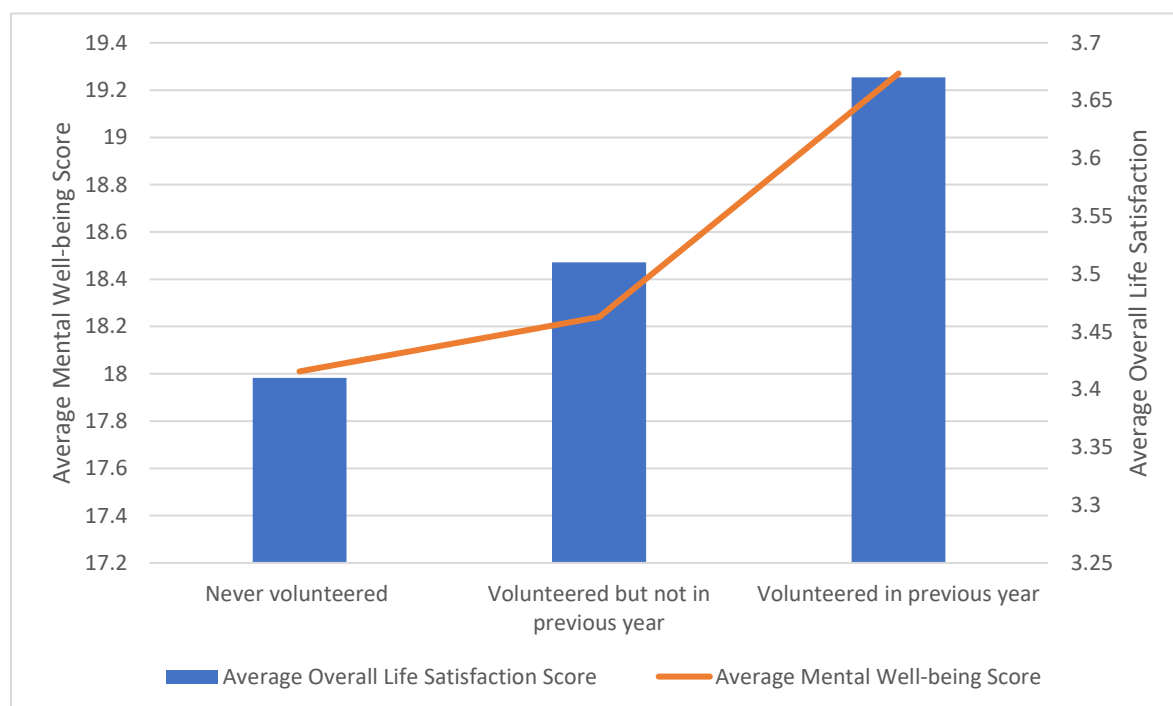
Singapore Life Panel Data

The current brief utilizes data from the Singapore Life Panel (SLP), a monthly panel survey that has been conducted since July 2015 (see Vaithianathan et al. (2018) for details regarding methodology). Respondents are part of a nationally representative sample of 56–75-year-old (in 2021) Singaporeans and their spouses. About 7000 to 7500 respondents participate in the SLP survey every month. Specifically, this paper uses data collected from modules fielded in February 2021 ($n = 7104$), when volunteering was studied, and December 2020 ($n = 7130$), when marital satisfaction was studied.

Volunteerism and Well-being

Before investigating the determinants of volunteerism among our respondents, we first examined the associations between volunteerism and well-being among our respondents in order to confirm the positive association that has been observed in the existing studies mentioned above. The following figure thus presents the bivariate associations between volunteer status (based on whether respondents had volunteered in the previous 12 months, volunteered before but not in the previous 12 months, or never volunteered before) and two measures of well-being; overall life satisfaction¹ and mental well-being².

Figure 1: Average Mental Well-being and Overall Life Satisfaction Scores by Volunteer Status



As can be seen in [Figure 1](#), a positive association between volunteer status and well-being (as measured by overall life satisfaction and mental well-being) is observed, with respondents who had volunteered in the previous year having on average the highest levels of well-being, followed by respondents who had volunteered before but not in the previous year, and finally followed by respondents who had never volunteered. This finding thus suggests, in congruence with existing literature, that there is a positive relationship between volunteerism

¹ Overall Life Satisfaction is measured as a single item. Respondents are asked to rate their satisfaction with their life overall in the previous month on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 Very Dissatisfied to 5 Very Satisfied. Values presented are the average overall life satisfaction scores for each volunteer status group.

² Mental Well-being is measured using 4 items derived from the CESD Depression scale. Items are summed (minimum score = 4, maximum score = 24) and reverse coded such that a higher score reflects fewer depressive symptoms and hence better mental well-being.

and well-being among older adults in Singapore. This therefore preliminarily confirms that volunteerism is a factor worth investigating in order to improve the well-being of older adults.

Human Capital and Volunteerism

In line with Wilson and Musick's (1997) understanding of how human capital shapes volunteerism, this section explores the relationship between demographic traits and volunteerism among SLP respondents. This relationship has been widely explored in the existing literature. Age, for example, has been shown to have a curvilinear relationship with volunteer activity, with volunteerism peaking at mid-life before declining in later life (Jongeneelis et al., 2019; Niebur et al., 2018; Selbee & Reed, 2001; Wilson, 2000). While age is an important factor associated with patterns of voluntary activity, it usually works together with or through other variables such as health (Jongeneelis et al., 2019) or life events (Selbee & Reed, 2001). Additionally, resources related to one's socioeconomic status (SES) such as income and education have been found to be positively associated with volunteer likelihood (Kim et al., 2007; Lin, 2017; Niebur et al., 2018). Wilson and Musick (1997) argue that the skills and knowledge that come with education make an individual more attractive to volunteer organisations and thus more likely to secure volunteer opportunities.

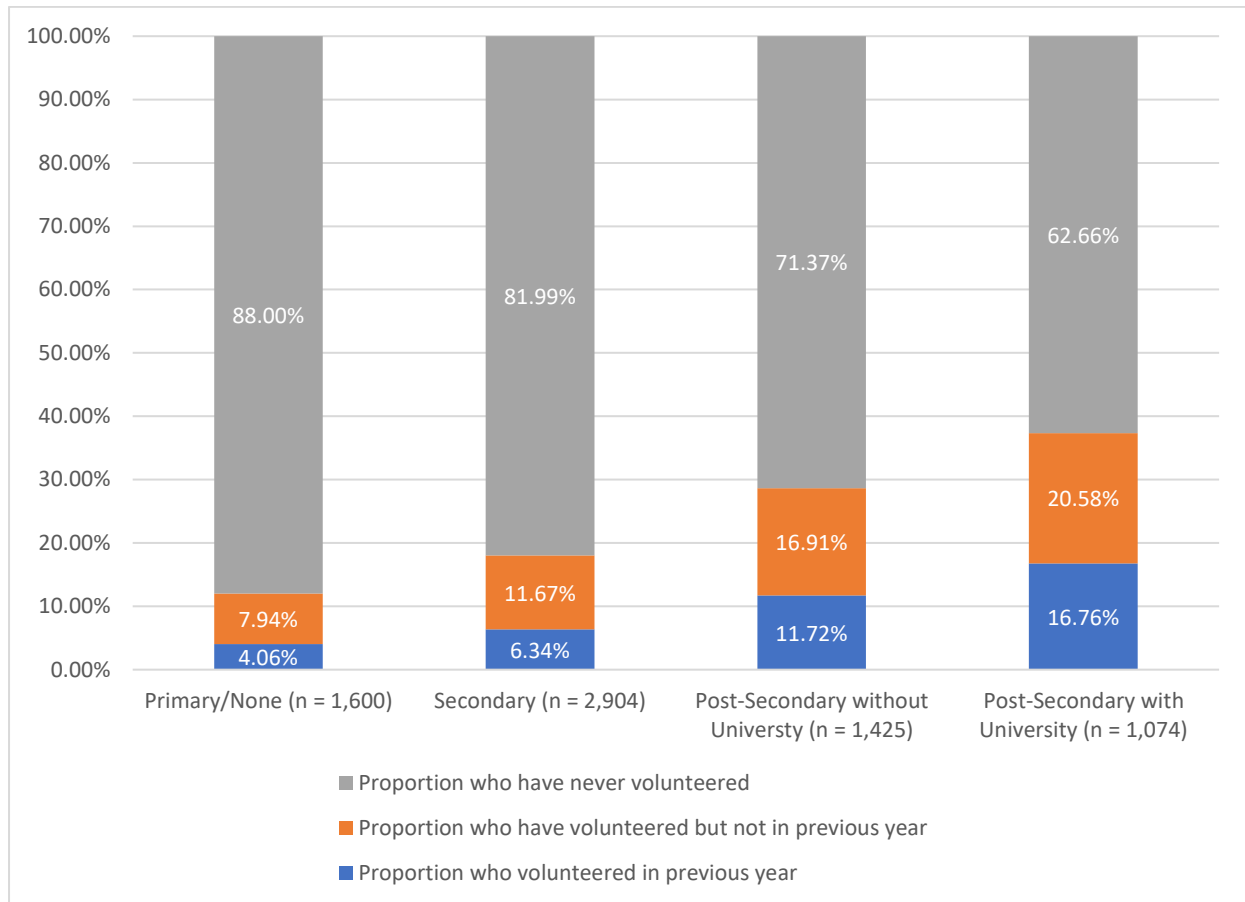
Given the importance of demographic factors in shaping an individual's likelihood to volunteer, this section examines how age, education, house type, race, and gender, are associated with volunteerism among the SLP respondents, measured in terms of both whether they had volunteered before as well as the duration of volunteer experience.

Volunteer Status

We first sought to examine if demographic factors were associated with respondents' volunteer status – in particular, whether they had volunteered in the last 12 months, whether they had volunteered before but *not* in the last 12 months, and whether they had never volunteered. In sum, education and house type were significantly associated with whether or not respondents had volunteered before, while other factors examined (i.e., age, race, and gender) did not appear to be significantly associated with whether or not respondents had volunteered before (see [Table A.1](#) in the Annex for full proportions).

Education

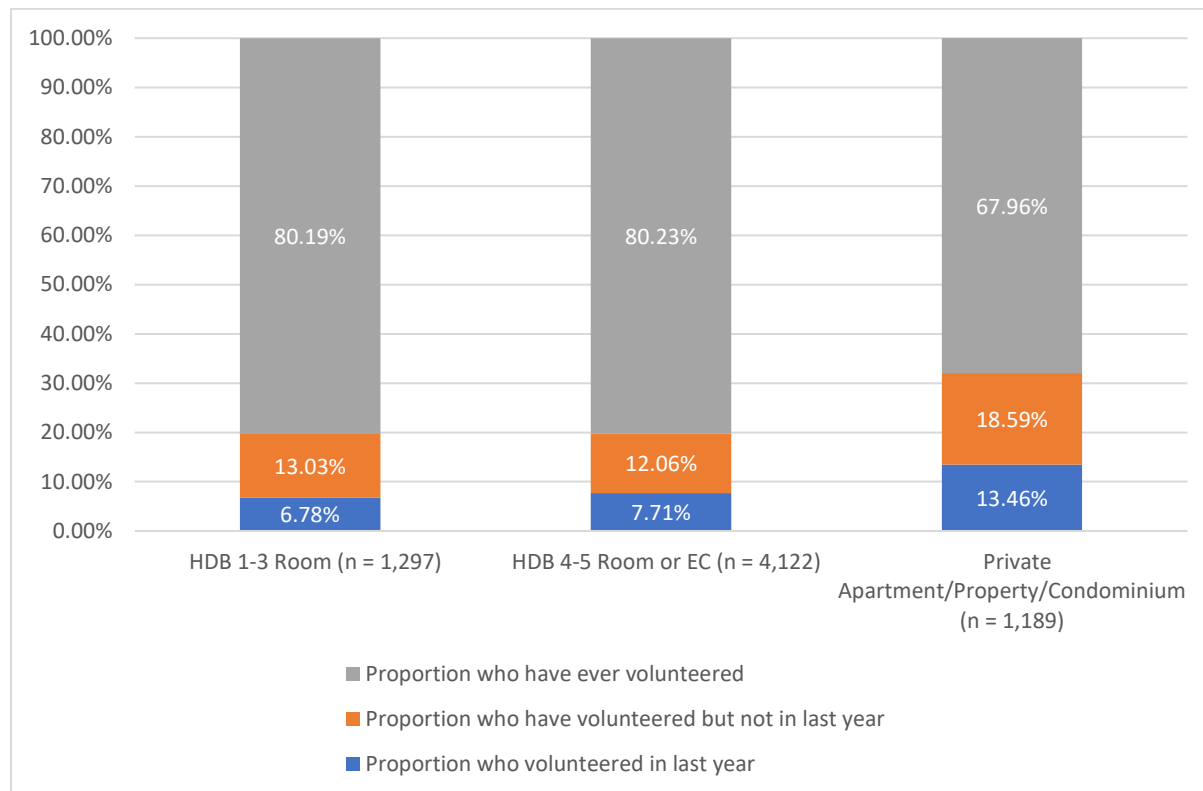
Figure 2: Volunteer Status by Education



[Figure 2](#) shows that respondents who had higher levels of education were more likely to have volunteered before, either in the last 12 months or prior to that. Respondents who had received a Post-secondary with University education were more likely to have volunteered recently or formerly, with 16.76% of their group having volunteered in the last 12 months, and 20.58% of their group having volunteered previously. Conversely, respondents with Primary or no formal education had the lowest likelihood of volunteering, with only 4.06% having volunteered in the last 12 months and 7.94% having volunteered previously.

House Type

Figure 3: Volunteer Status by House Type



Respondents residing in private apartments and properties had the greatest proportion of their group having volunteered recently or formerly with 13.46% having volunteered in the last 12 months and 18.59% having volunteered previously (see [Figure 3](#)). There were no significant differences found in the volunteering likelihood between respondents living in 1-3 room HDBs and 4-5 room HDBs.

Number of Years Volunteered

As a further point of analysis, we subsequently examined the duration (in years) respondents had volunteered for among respondents who had volunteered before. [Table 1](#) presents the distribution of the average years volunteered per demographic group, as well as the statistical significance of the differences in duration.

Table 1: Volunteer Years by Demographic Group

Demographic Group	Both groups	
	Mean years volunteered	Oneway Anova (p-value indicating significant association between demographic variable and variable of interest if $p < .05$)
Age		
56-60	7.7	0.0057
61-65	8.34	
66-70	9.28	
71-75	10.34	
Education		
Primary or no formal	7.34	0.0002
Secondary	7.69	
Post-Secondary without University	9.26	
Post-Secondary with University	10.26	
House type		
HDB 1-3 Room Flat	7.57	0.0292
HDB 4-5 Room Flat	8.69	
Private apartment/property	9.75	
Race		
Chinese n=(6147)	8.32	< .001
Malay n=(379)	10.67	
Indian n=(357)	11.38	
Other n=(132)	15.45	
Gender		
Male	9.37	0.0158
Female	8.14	

Age

Significant differences in the average number of years that respondents had volunteered for between age groups were found, with the oldest respondents (71-75 years old) having the highest mean years volunteered (10.34) and the youngest respondents having the lowest mean years volunteered (7.7).

Education

Significant differences were also found between the mean number of years that respondents volunteered when comparing respondents with different education levels, with respondents who had Post-Secondary with University education having the highest mean years volunteered (10.26) and those with only Primary or no formal education having the lowest mean years volunteered (7.34).

House type

Significant differences were also found between respondents living in different house types, with respondents living in the most expensive house types such as private properties having the highest mean years volunteered (9.75) and those living in the least expensive house type (1-3 room HDBs) having the lowest mean years volunteered (7.57).

Race

Significant differences were found between different ethnic groups as well. The Other group had the highest mean years volunteered of 15.45 years, followed by Indian (11.38 years), Malay (10.67 years), and Chinese (8.32).

Gender

Finally, significant differences were found between men and women, with men having volunteered longer on average (9.37) than women (8.14).

Barriers to Volunteering

We further sought to identify the main barriers to volunteerism among our respondents. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed that 10 factors may have been a barrier for them in their past volunteering experiences.

Table 2: Barriers to Volunteering

Barrier	Mean Extent to which Respondents Agreed by Volunteer Status (Minimum 1-6 Maximum, higher score reflects greater agreeableness with the statement)		
	Respondents who have volunteered but not in last 12 months	Respondents who had never volunteered before	Overall
I do not think that volunteering work has a positive impact	2.05	2.22	2.18
I do not have enough time to volunteer	2.82	3.17	3.12
Volunteering schedules are not flexible enough	2.37	2.69	2.64
I was not feeling connected to the other volunteers and staff	1.95	nil	nil
I have physical limitations due to my health	2.02	2.53	2.46
The expenses involved in volunteering are too high	1.72	2.25	2.18
I do not have the right skills for volunteering	1.88	2.71	2.59
Volunteering opportunities are too far from my house	2.09	2.48	2.42
I prefer to donate money instead of volunteering	2.28	2.75	2.69
The people whom I was volunteering with stopped volunteering	1.91	nil	nil

Among respondents who had volunteered before, the top three barriers that were faced by respondents were related to issues of accessibility in terms of lack of time (2.82), rigid volunteering schedules (2.37), and preference to donate money instead of volunteering (2.28).

As for respondents who had never volunteered, accessibility was reported to be a significant barrier as well. However, in their case, the lack of time *as well as* relevant skills were among the top barriers most identified with barriers to volunteering.

Discussion

While further study is required to explore the reasons behind the impact of different demographic factors (age, race, and gender) on respondents' years volunteered, the existing

literature offers some possible explanations as to why education and house type affect volunteer status and years volunteered. Education has consistently been found to be positively associated with the amount of voluntary activity one engages in (Jongenelis et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2007; Lin, 2017; Niebur et al., 2018). One way education could be increasing the respondents' access to volunteer opportunities is by increasing their knowledge of volunteer opportunities and ways to engage with them (Wilson and Musick, 1997). Respondents with higher education levels may also be exposed to more volunteer opportunities in general such as in the workplace. Wilson and Musick (1997) have also highlighted, as mentioned above, that individuals with higher educational qualifications may possess sets of skills perceived as desirable by volunteer organisations, possibly increasing their general access to volunteer work.

House type is a common proxy for socioeconomic status (SES) in Singapore, especially among retired older adults whom may not be earning a monthly income, which in turn can be regarded as human capital and a necessary resource for volunteerism (Niebur et al., 2018; Wilson and Musick, 1997). One reason for this is that individuals with higher incomes are more likely to be able to comfortably take time off work or unpaid labour to engage in recreational activities and volunteering. Wilson and Musick (1997) have also argued that higher incomes are indicative of higher SES which makes an individual more attractive to volunteer organisations, thus increasing their chances of finding volunteer work. Respondents residing in more expensive housing who are more likely to have higher incomes may have more free time than those with lower incomes and may thus be ultimately more able and likely to take up volunteer work.

This point is supported by the additional finding that the availability of time to volunteer was the most cited barrier preventing older adults to volunteer, as well as the fact that among older adults who had never volunteered, the impression that they did not have the relevant skills to volunteer was the second most cited barrier. According to the integrated theory of volunteering (Wilson and Musick, 1997), time is an important resource that is needed to carry out volunteer work. When time is limited, individuals may struggle to take on volunteer work as they may have to prioritise other aspects of their lives first (Tang et al., 2010). The presence of other commitments in one's life may thus prevent individuals from volunteering even if they want to (Willems & Dury, 2017). Respondents who have greater time constraints may thus be deterred from volunteering especially if flexible options for participation are not available to them.

With respect to the barrier of having a perceived lack of skills to volunteer, the literature has shown that a lack of preparedness and training may evoke a sense of frustration and low self-confidence, and people may avoid volunteering due to their belief that they are not prepared enough or able to make a difference (Principi et al., 2012). Lack of training and preparedness may thus worsen an individual's general sense of efficacy with regards to volunteer efforts,

which could subsequently go on to cause them to stop volunteering or not volunteer (Warburton et al., 2007). Respondents who believe they are not trained enough may experience such frustration and doubt regarding their ability to make a difference which could explain their reluctance to volunteer.

Thus, preliminary analyses into the trends with regards to who volunteers and the barriers that older adults may face in volunteering highlight the issue of accessibility in facilitating greater rates of volunteerism among older adults. In particular, they draw attention to the need to make volunteering more accessible for respondents, particularly for older adults from a lower SES background, both in terms of flexibility in volunteering schedules, as well as the availability of relevant training to boost older adults' confidence in their value as volunteers.

Social Capital and Volunteerism

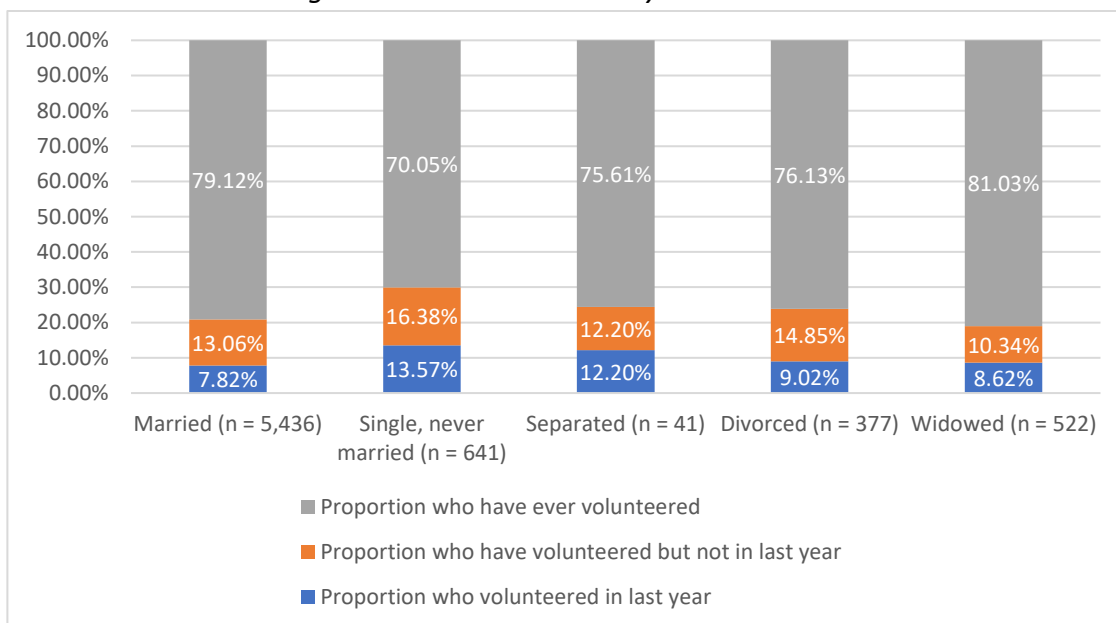
This section explores the relationship between social factors and volunteerism. As part of the integrated theory of volunteering, Wilson and Musick (1997) argue that the number and types of relationships one has is a resource relevant to volunteering. They argue that having a greater number of social connections and having the right connections can increase one's opportunities for volunteer work. Additionally, such social connections can provide a sense of support and even obligation which can increase one's likelihood of volunteering. Other scholars have applied this theory to their studies which explored the effects of different relationships on volunteer likelihood (Niebur et al., 2018; Selbee & Reed, 2001). For example, the literature has found that marital status and spousal quality can impact one's volunteer likelihood (Butrica et al., 2009; Jongenelis et al., 2019; Niebur et al., 2018; Selbee & Reed, 2001). Given these findings, this section focuses on the relationship between the number of close contacts, level of perceived social support, marital status, and the volunteer status of our SLP respondents. Looking beyond marital status, we also preliminarily investigate whether marital satisfaction is an important factor in older adult volunteerism.

Marital Status and Satisfaction

Volunteer Status

We first examined the proportions of respondents in each marital status group that had volunteered before, in the last 12 months, and who had never volunteered before. The results are displayed in [Figure 4](#) below.

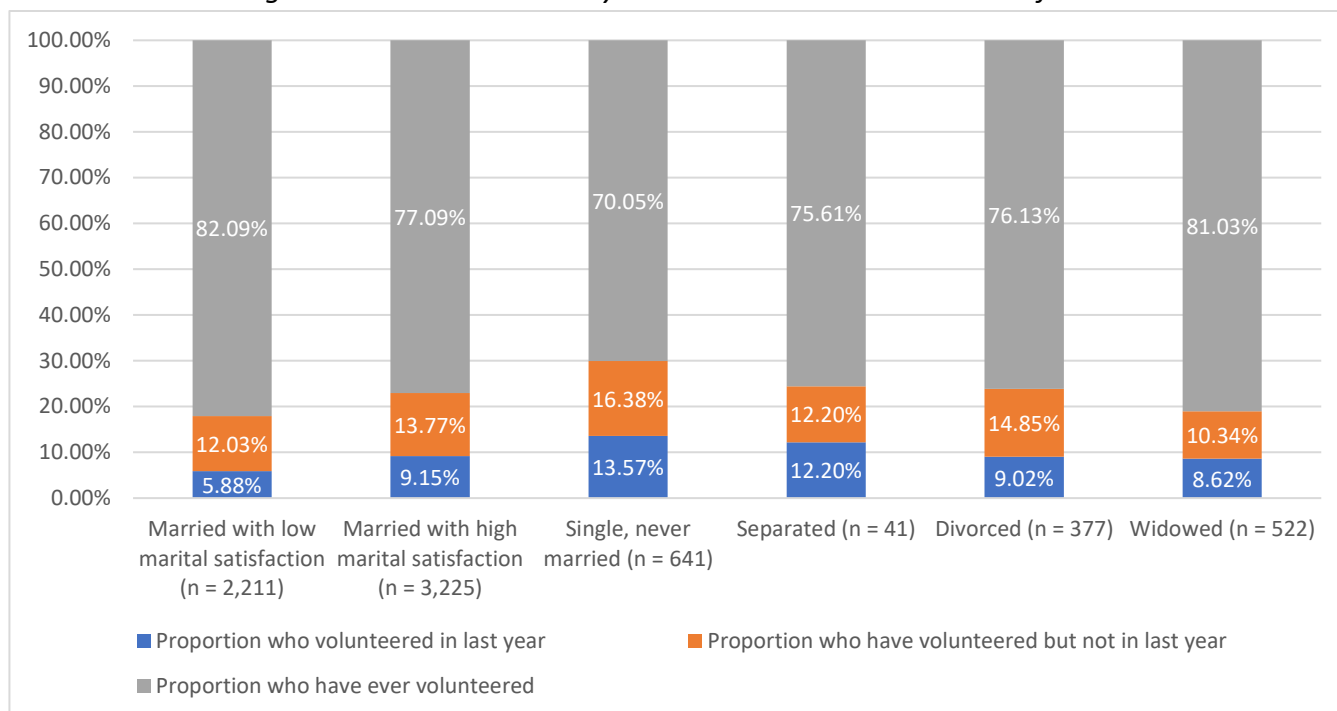
Figure 4: Volunteer Status by Marital Status



Single respondents who had never been married were found to have the highest proportion of respondents who volunteered in the last 12 months (13.57%) and former volunteers who had not volunteered in the last 12 months (16.38%). On the other hand, married respondents had the lowest proportion of respondents who volunteered in the last 12 months (7.82%), followed by those who were widowed (8.62%), those who were divorced (9.02%), and those who were separated (12.20%).

To examine the effect that marital satisfaction may have on volunteer status, we subsequently distinguished between respondents with low levels of marital satisfaction (below the mean) and respondents with high levels of marital satisfaction (above the mean).

Figure 5: Volunteer Status by Marital Status and Marital Satisfaction



As can be seen in [Figure 5](#), after distinguishing between respondents with low and high levels of marital satisfaction it is observed that married respondents with low marital satisfaction are in fact the least likely to have volunteered in the last 12 months, with only 5.88% of such respondents having done so. Meanwhile, married respondents with high marital satisfaction were the third most likely to have volunteered in the last 12 months, with 9.15% of such respondents having done so.

Table 3: Mean Marital Satisfaction by Volunteer Status

Volunteer Status	Mean Marital Satisfaction (Minimum 9 - 45 Maximum, higher score reflects more marital satisfaction)
Volunteered In the Last 12 Months	35.32
Volunteered But Not in the Last 12 Months	34.19
Never Volunteered	33.43
P-Value (significant if < 0.05)	< 0.001

Significant differences were found in the mean marital satisfaction scores between respondents of different volunteer statuses. Among the respondents who were married, those who had volunteered in the last 12 months were found to have the highest mean marital satisfaction (35.32) as compared to those who had volunteered but not in the last 12 months (34.19) and those who had never volunteered before (33.43). While these differences were significant, it should be noted that the effect was small.

*Volunteer length**Table 4: Years Volunteered by Marital Status and Satisfaction*

Marital Status	Mean Years Volunteered	One Way Anova Test of Significant Differences Between Groups
Married with Low Marital Satisfaction	7.3	P < 0.05
Married with High Marital Satisfaction	9.43	
Single, Never Married	9.79	
Separated	9.45	
Divorced	7.61	
Widowed	9.31	

In terms of years volunteered, it was further found that married respondents who had rated high in marital satisfaction had the third highest mean years volunteered at 9.43 years, while married respondents who had rated low in marital satisfaction had the lowest mean years volunteered at 7.3 years. Single respondents were found to have the highest mean years volunteered at 9.79 years. Interestingly, respondents who were separated were found to have the second highest mean years volunteered at 9.45 years, while those who were divorced were found to have the second lowest mean years volunteered at 7.61 years.

Discussion

The results illustrate that based on preliminary bivariate analysis, marital status and satisfaction are associated with volunteer status and years volunteered among older adults. Single respondents were found to have the greatest proportion of active volunteers and longest mean years volunteered, while married respondents with low levels of marital satisfaction had ranked second lowest in terms of volunteer status and years volunteered.

The relationship between marital status and volunteerism has been well studied, with existing studies also finding that single individuals are more likely to not only volunteer, but volunteer more often (Mesch et al., 2006). One possible explanation for trend that has been put forward is the argument that single individuals are likely to have less social capital (i.e., fewer social connections), and hence may resort to volunteering as a means to build their social capital and networks (Bryant et al., 2003).

The relationship between marital satisfaction and volunteerism, however, is less explored. Based on existing literature that has illustrated the positive effect that volunteering has on well-being, one possible explanation for the preliminary finding that married respondents

with high levels of marital satisfaction were more likely to both volunteer and volunteer longer than unmarried respondents could be that volunteering may have a positive effect on marital satisfaction for married individuals. In other words, volunteering could possibly lead to increased marital satisfaction for married volunteers. Further research is needed to explore this in greater detail.

Social Integration and Social Support

Two other important aspects of social capital that were examined were the relationships between the social integration and social support of older adults and their volunteering activity. Social integration was measured in terms of the number of close contacts the respondent had.

Table 5: Volunteer Status by Level of Social Support and Number of Close Contacts

Volunteer Status	Mean Social Support (Minimum 1 - 20 Maximum, higher score reflects 'better' felt social support)	Mean Number of Close Contacts
Volunteered In the Last 12 Months	15.26	15.33
Volunteered But Not in the Last 12 Months	14.72	13.6
Never Volunteered	14.15	11.33
P-Value (significant if < 0.05)	< 0.001	< 0.001

Respondents' social integration was found to be positively associated with volunteer activity. Respondents who had volunteered in the last 12 months were found to have the highest mean number of close contacts (15.33) among the three groups. Conversely, respondents who had never volunteered before had the lowest number of mean close contacts (11.33). Similarly, respondents who had volunteered in the last 12 months had the highest score for mean social support (15.26) as compared to those who had volunteered but not in the last 12 months (14.72) and those who had never volunteered before (14.15).

Table 6: Years Volunteered by Social Support and Social Integration

Pearson's R Test of Correlation	Social Support		Close contacts	
	Correlation	P-value	Correlation	P-value
Years Volunteered	0.0758	< 0.01	0.1614	< 0.01

Similar trends in the number of years volunteered were found as well, with respondents with higher levels of social support and social integration being more likely to have volunteered

for longer. It should be noted that the relationship was stronger between the number of close contacts respondents had and the number of years respondents volunteered.

Discussion

Preliminary analysis suggests the relevance of social integration for volunteering behaviour. It should be noted, however, that the cross-sectional nature of the current study does not infer causality - the findings on the number of close contacts thus could suggest either that respondents with more close contacts (wider social networks) are more likely to volunteer or that those who volunteer are more likely to make more social contacts, or neither or both. Nevertheless, the findings are congruent with the past research that has argued that individuals who are more integrated into their communities via community involvement and number and quality of their contacts are more likely to volunteer (Jongenelis et al., 2019; Niebur et al., 2018). Such individuals are likely to be more active in community activities, which include volunteer opportunities as well. It is possible that the same can be said for the respondents.

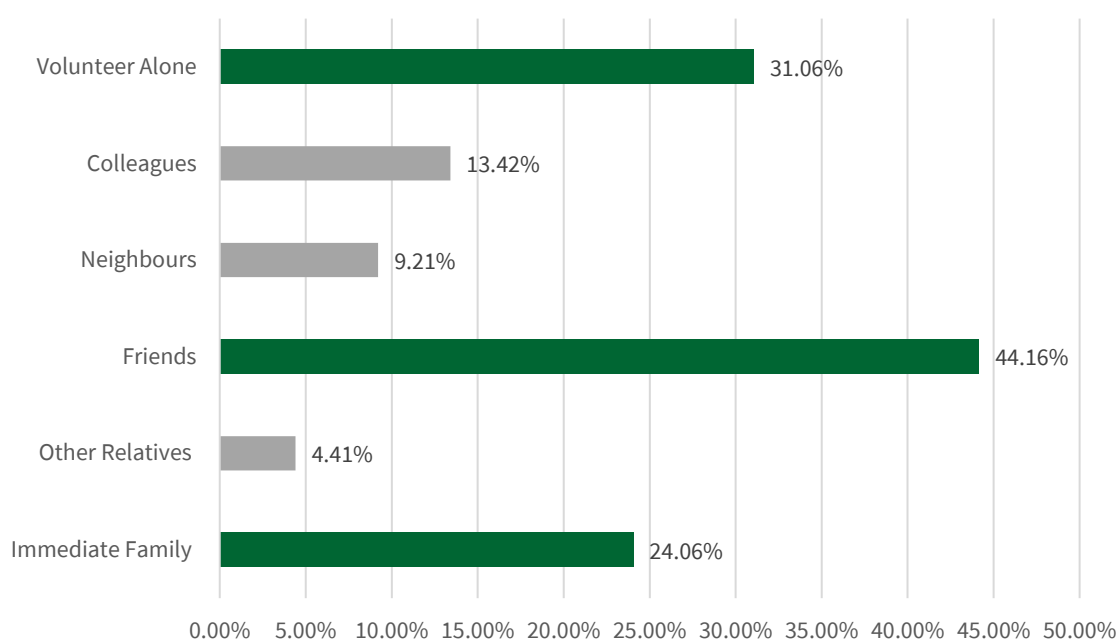
Similarly, the findings on social support suggest either that those who receive more social support are more likely to volunteer, or that those who volunteer may in turn receive more social support. While directionality of effect cannot be inferred again, there appears to be a strong association between social integration and one's volunteer status and years, suggesting that certain types of social relationships possibly matter in influencing the likelihood of volunteering among older adults in Singapore. These findings resonate with the literature which highlights how individuals who receive more social support are more likely to feel comfortable caring for those beyond themselves and their immediate families and thus more likely to volunteer (Lin, 2017). Further study may also be required to develop a deeper understanding as to how having more social contacts possibly increases one's access to volunteer opportunities. For social support, respondents who feel more supported in their daily lives may be more comfortable taking time off to carry out activities on behalf of those other than themselves such as volunteer beneficiaries (Lin, 2017).

Alternatively, the results could also suggest that volunteering may be a possible pathway through which the social integration and social support of older adults can be bolstered. For instance, other studies have also argued that volunteering leads to a greater availability of positive social exchanges and social support from friends and family, leading to overall improvements in the subjective well-being of older adults (Pilkington et al., 2012). This would suggest that, in congruence with past studies, the preliminary findings of the current report do also identify increasing volunteerism amongst older adults as a possible strategy to reduce social isolation among older adults.

Volunteer Preferences and Motivations

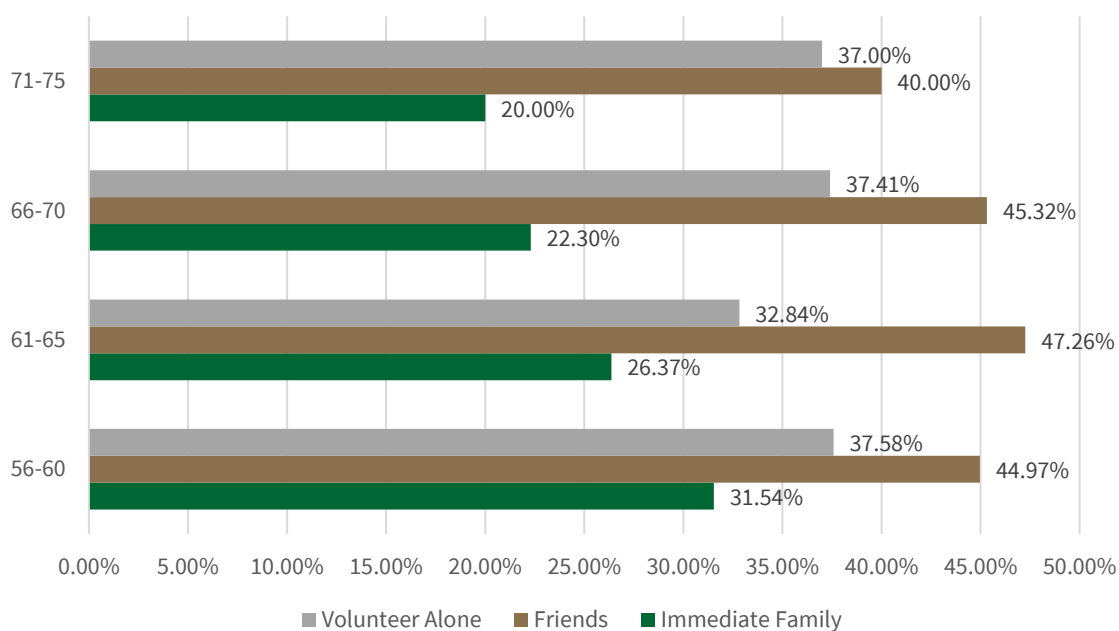
Given the relevance of social factors to volunteering behaviour, in this final section we examine the volunteering preferences of respondents who had volunteered before. Respondents were asked to indicate if they preferred to volunteer alone or with other social contacts such as their friends and family (respondents were able to select more than one option if they volunteered with different groups of individuals at different times, so proportions will not sum up to 100%) (see [Table C.1](#) in the Annex for a full break down of who older adult volunteers choose to volunteer with, by volunteer status, and [Table C.2](#) for a breakdown by demographic group).

Figure 6: Who Volunteers Chose to Volunteer with



As shown in [Figure 6](#), respondents were most likely to volunteer with their friends, with 44.16% of respondents who had volunteered before stating that they volunteered with their friends. This was followed by respondents who volunteered alone, with 31.06% of respondents indicating that they volunteer alone, and then by respondents who volunteered with their immediate family (24.06% of respondents who had volunteered before indicated that they do so).

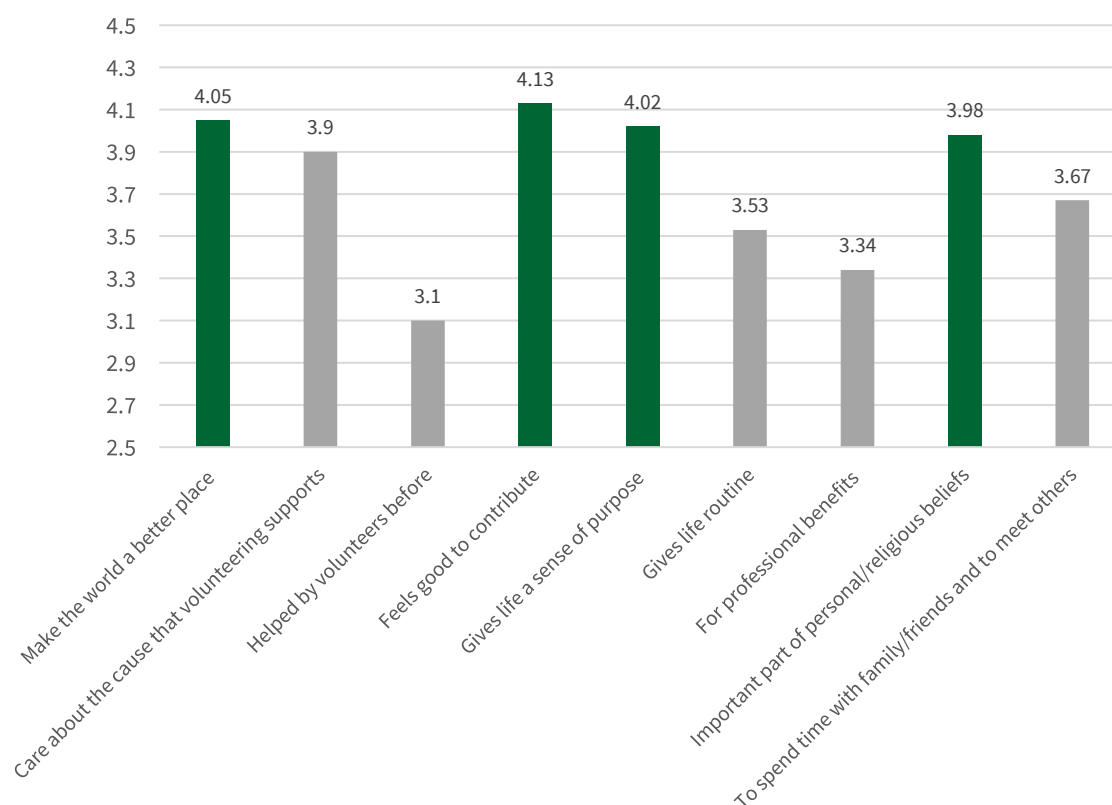
Figure 7: Who Volunteers Chose to Volunteer with by Age



When looking at the volunteering preferences of respondents by age (see [Figure 7](#)), we observed a similar trend across all age groups where volunteering with friends remains the most likely, followed by volunteering alone and finally by volunteering with family. Separately, however, we do also observe that older respondents tend to be less likely to volunteer with their immediate family, as the proportion of respondents stating that they do so decreases with age.

These findings illustrate that volunteering among older adults remains a social activity for most, with a majority of respondents across all ages choosing to volunteer either with their friends or with their immediate family. Nevertheless, a significant number of respondents also choose to volunteer alone at times. This could potentially be due to the fact the volunteering has been shown to be perceived as a good way to meet new people (Morrow-Howell & Mui, 1989) – thus, older adults who volunteer alone may be doing so as a means to build their social networks.

Figure 8: Motivations for Volunteering



It is, however, also likely that this finding highlights the importance of intrinsic motivations for volunteering, given that many respondents choose to volunteer alone. As can be seen in [Figure 8](#), the top four most popular motivations among our respondents were intrinsic in nature, having to do with beliefs regarding the meaningfulness of volunteering, for instance that it made respondents feel good or that volunteering helps to make the world a better place. Thus, while indeed social factors do seem to play a significant role in shaping and motivating older adults to volunteer, it is also important not to neglect the role of more intrinsic factors as well see [Table D.1](#) in the Annex for a breakdown of volunteer motivations by volunteer status).

Recommendations

Increase Accessibility of Volunteer Work

This brief analysed patterns of volunteer work uptake using an integrated theory of volunteerism (Wilson and Musick, 1997) and the preliminary findings have provided evidence supporting the claim that resources tied to one's demographic background and social network are key to increasing older adults' opportunities to volunteer. This brief thus recommends increasing accessibility of volunteer work for all, especially those who may be lacking in resources and thus less able to volunteer. We propose three main ways in which accessibility can be increased.

Firstly, more targeted messaging could serve to better inform older adults of existing volunteer platforms. The Giving.sg website, for example, allows individuals to find volunteer opportunities based on suitability. Similarly, The Organisation of Senior Volunteers (RSVP Singapore) curates events and programmes that are suitable for seniors. Though these volunteer platforms and opportunities for seniors exist, some seniors may benefit from training or guidance on using existing platforms to find suitable and meaningful volunteer roles.

Secondly, the creation of more flexible and ad hoc volunteer roles could potentially increase volunteer uptake rates for older adults who may lack time, income support, and other resources to commit on a regular or sustained basis.

And finally, social support within volunteer organisations is vital to ensuring that older adult volunteers have access to mentorship and training. This could encourage new volunteers to sign up and possibly prevent attrition of existing volunteers due to a lack of support or sense of doubt in their abilities. Mentorship and guidance from more experienced volunteers could thus increase the accessibility of volunteer work for those who perceive themselves to be lacking in the skills and experience needed to be an effective volunteer.

Volunteerism as a Strategy to Reduce Social Isolation

Volunteerism can and ought to be tapped on as a possible strategy to address social isolation in older adults. The preliminary findings suggest a strong relationship between volunteering and social integration. Additionally, the findings also show that respondent motivations for volunteering may be social in nature. Given that social isolation is a key social issue among older adults, particularly in light of COVID-19 restrictions and safe management measures, the findings lend support for initiatives to encourage older adults to volunteer as a means to reduce their levels of social isolation.

Volunteer opportunities can also be presented as a meaningful social activity to incentivise volunteering for those who view such activities as a viable way to spend time with friends, family, or to meet new people. Doing this could leverage on individual motivations for engaging in altruistic activities which could increase the uptake of volunteer work.

Future Studies

This brief suggests two key areas for future studies to focus on for the purposes of building a better understanding of what facilitates and motivates volunteering among older adult Singaporeans. This knowledge can ultimately support efforts to increase volunteer uptake rates among older Singaporeans.

Marital Status and Satisfaction

This brief has preliminarily shown a positive association between marital satisfaction and volunteer likelihood, an understudied facet of the existing literature which has largely focused on marital status. Many of the implications and suggestions from the findings regarding marital status and satisfaction and their association with volunteer likelihood remain largely speculative. Future studies may explore linkages between marital status, marital satisfaction, life satisfaction, and volunteering. This could allow us to better understand why singles who had never been married before and married couples with high marital satisfaction tended to be those who had volunteered more frequently and for longer.

Social Aspects of Volunteering

Future studies can attempt to establish links between social integration and other variables that have shown to be positively associated with volunteering such as socioeconomic status. This is to try to explore pathways through which social integration (support and close contacts) can possibly impact volunteer rates. Future studies can also explore why volunteering with friends and alone are the main choices of who to volunteer with our respondents have chosen. Developing a deeper understanding on the how voluntary activities are socially facilitated and driven can assist in efforts to incentivise volunteering for older adults especially in the creation of targeted promotion for different audiences. This can possibly improve volunteer rates among older Singaporeans in the long run.

Conclusion

Various studies have brought to light the benefits of volunteering which this brief believes may be applicable here as well. Volunteerism is largely regarded as an overall beneficial and meaningful activity which ought to be promoted amongst older adults in Singapore as a part of the efforts made for them to age gracefully and successfully.

The preliminary results from the SLP have highlighted a number of challenges faced in the overall efforts to boost volunteer rates. Firstly, a majority of older adults in Singapore remain as non-volunteers and represent an untapped pool of potential volunteers who may be more inclined to participate when given the necessary support and matched to the most suitable roles. Adults who may be keen on volunteering or on continuing their volunteer activities may be deterred from doing so due to a lack of time and feeling inadequately prepared or suited for volunteer work. This brief has also shown that those of a lower SES and who are less socially supported tend to be less likely to volunteer. These are some of the challenges that must be addressed to increase volunteer rates.

The results also offer some preliminary evidence regarding the motivations behind the decisions of older Singaporeans to volunteer – they do so because it feels good, is a meaningful activity and a good way to meet others.

While much more work needs to be done to better understand the relationship between many of the variables this study has found to be associated with volunteering and volunteering itself, there are a number of immediate actions that can be taken and that are recommended by this brief, particularly in terms of reducing the barriers to volunteering, and leveraging on volunteerism to reduce social isolation. Future studies should also be conducted to deepen the general understanding of the benefits of volunteerism, the social aspects of volunteer work, and how motivations and barriers to volunteering differ between different demographic groups.

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ANNEXES

The annexes below outline some of the key measures that were fielded in the survey to better understand volunteering behaviour among older adults. Additional distributions of responses to these measures that were not discussed in the main-text of the manuscript due to the need for brevity are also presented for the reader's reference, should they feel that the information would be useful for their efforts.

ANNEX A – Overall Volunteering Patterns

Volunteer Status

Question:

In the next few questions, we would like to understand your volunteering activities. By volunteering, we mean activities you do out of your own free will, without expecting financial payment, to help others outside of your household, family, relatives or friends. Activities which provide allowances for meals and transportation are still considered volunteering activities. Volunteering may be formal through organisations such as charities (e.g. The Salvation Army, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities) or places of worship. Volunteering may also be informal which involves helping others directly without going through any organisation. For example, if you help others directly such as by delivering food to homeless people, you are an informal volunteer. Volunteering does not include compulsory community work such as Values In Action (VIA), Community Involvement Program (CIP) in schools and Corrective Work Order (CWO). If you are involved in compulsory community work, you are a volunteer if you served more than the compulsory hours. In this survey, volunteering does NOT include acts such as giving up your seat on public transport. Based on the above definition, have you volunteered in the past 12 months?

Respondents answered with the following options:

- 1 Yes
- 2 No, but I have volunteered before
- 3 No, I have never volunteered

Years volunteered

Question:

For how many years have you volunteered in your life

Respondents were given the option to list 0 – 100 years.

Table A.1 – Proportion of respondents in each volunteer status category (volunteered in last year, volunteered but not in last year, and never volunteered) by demographic group

Variable	Volunteer Status		
	Proportion who volunteered in last year (Row %)	Proportion who have volunteered but not in last year (Row %)	Proportion who have never volunteered (Row %)
Age Group			
56-60 (n = 2,096)	8.54	14.22	77.24
61-65 (n = 2,106)	9.69	13.20	77.11
66-70 (n = 1,546)	7.24	12.94	79.82
71-75 (n = 1,110)	7.84	12.07	80.09
Education Level			
Primary/None (n = 1,600)	4.06	7.94	88.00
Secondary (n = 2,904)	6.34	11.67	81.99
Post-Secondary without University (n = 1,425)	11.72	16.91	71.37
Post-Secondary with University (n = 1,074)	16.76	20.58	62.66
Housing Type			
HDB 1-3 Room (n = 1,297)	6.78	13.03	80.19
HDB 4-5 Room or EC (n = 4,122)	7.71	12.06	80.23
Private Apartment/Property/Condominium (n = 1,189)	13.46	18.59	67.96
Race			
Chinese (n = 6,144)	8.35	13.17	78.48
Malay (n = 379)	4.75	13.46	81.79
Indian (n = 355)	11.83	14.37	73.80
Other (n = 132)	16.67	11.36	71.97
Gender			
Male (n = 3,308)	8.25	12.42	79.32
Female (n = 3,709)	8.71	13.99	77.30

ANNEX B – Types of Volunteering

Question:

Which types of activities have you done while volunteering in the past 12 months? Please check all that apply.

Respondents were given the option to select as many types of volunteering out of the list below. As respondents were allowed to select more than one type of volunteering, proportions will not add up to 100%.

Table B.1 – Proportion of respondents in each group (by volunteer status) who participated in each type of activity

Type of Volunteering	Volunteered in Last 12 Months (n = 605)		Volunteered but not in last 12 months (n = 957)		Both groups (n = 1556)	
	Frequency	% of Respondents	Frequency	% of Respondents	Frequency	% of Respondents
Other	204	33.72%	214	22.36%	416	26.74%
Administrative services (e.g. clerical, volunteer coordination, event management, sitting on boards and committees of non-profit organisation)	176	29.09%	211	22.05%	385	24.74%
Human services (e.g. befriending, mentoring, escorting elders to medical appointments or excursions)	139	22.98%	190	19.85%	327	21.02%
Fundraising	87	14.38%	189	19.75%	276	17.74%
Health services (e.g. nursing, therapy, eldercare, nursing homes or senior activity centres)	84	13.88%	163	17.03%	247	15.87%
Hospitality & transportation services (e.g. cooking, cleaning, delivery, running errands)	90	14.88%	149	15.57%	239	15.36%
Education services (e.g. tuition, life skills, reading, parent-teacher associations)	63	10.41%	100	10.45%	163	10.48%

Green efforts (e.g. gardening, environmental protection, recycling, haze relief)	66	10.91%	97	10.14%	163	10.48%
Sports & recreation services (e.g. coaching, refereeing)	24	3.97%	46	4.81%	70	4.50%
Arts-based (e.g. performing, ushering, museum guiding, heritage trails)	24	3.97%	29	3.03%	53	3.41%
Animal care (e.g. animal rescue, grooming, dog walking)	10	1.65%	23	2.40%	33	2.12%

ANNEX C – Who Older Adults Volunteer With

Question:

Who do you volunteer with? Please check all that apply.

Respondents were given the option to select all types of contacts that they have volunteered with. As respondents were allowed to select more than one type of contact, proportions will not add up to 100%.

Table C.1 – Proportion of respondents in each group (by volunteer status and overall) that volunteered with each type of social contact

Volunteer Partner Categories	Volunteered in Last 12 Months		Volunteered but not in last 12 months		Both groups	
	Freq	% (n= 599)	Freq	% (n= 949)	Freq	% (n= 1542)
Immediate family (spouse, parents, siblings, children)	153	25.54%	218	22.97%	371	24.06%
Other relatives	27	4.51%	41	4.32%	68	4.41%
Friends	272	45.41%	409	43.10%	681	44.16%
Neighbours	84	14.02%	64	6.74%	142	9.21%
Colleagues	53	8.85%	156	16.44%	207	13.42%

I volunteer alone	143	23.87%	349	36.78%	479	31.06%
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Table C.2 – Proportion of respondents in each demographic group that volunteered with each type of social contact, among those who had volunteered in the last 12 months (n = 596)

Demographic Group	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer with immediate family (spouse, parents, siblings, children) (%)	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer with other relatives (%)	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer with friends (%)	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer with neighbours (%)	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer with colleagues (%)	Proportion of demographic group who volunteer alone (%)
Age						
56-60 (n = 149)	31.54%	6.04%	44.97%	2.68%	10.07%	37.58%
61-65 (n = 201)	26.37%	2.99%	47.26%	6.97%	8.96%	32.84%
66-70 (n = 139)	22.30%	5.04%	45.32%	7.19%	7.19%	37.41%
71-75 (n = 100)	20.00%	3.00%	40.00%	12.00%	9.00%	37.00%
Education						
Primary or no formal (n = 65)	16.92%	12.31%	60.00%	7.69%	1.54%	26.15%
Secondary (n = 186)	26.88%	4.30%	51.08%	7.53%	7.53%	31.18%
Post-Secondary without University (n = 167)	26.35%	2.99%	40.12%	5.39%	10.18%	41.32%
Post-Secondary with University (n = 181)	26.52%	3.31%	39.23%	7.73%	11.60%	38.67%
Housetype						
HDB 1-3 Room Flat (n = 90)	15.56%	3.33%	44.44%	7.78%	4.44%	46.67%

HDB 4-5 Room Flat (n = 381)	21.26%	4.72%	40.68%	6.82%	8.66%	25.72%
Private apartment/property (n = 161)	31.68%	3.73%	40.37%	5.59%	7.45%	37.89%
Race						
Chinese (n = 516)	25.78%	4.26%	46.32%	6.59%	8.53%	35.66%
Malay (n = 18)	11.11%	0.00%	38.89%	0.00%	5.56%	61.11%
Indian (n = 42)	21.43%	4.76%	35.71%	9.52%	11.90%	35.71%
Other (n = 22)	36.36%	13.64%	45.45%	18.18%	13.64%	18.18%
Gender						
Male (n = 274)	31.75%	4.38%	40.88%	6.57%	11.68%	36.86%
Female (n = 325)	20.31%	4.62%	49.23%	7.38%	6.46%	34.77%

ANNEX D – Why do Older Adults Volunteer?

Question:

To what extent do you agree that <<reason>> was a motivation for you in volunteering?

Respondents answered with the following options:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

Table D.1 - Mean agreement with motivation by volunteer status

Reasons/Motivations for Volunteering	Mean Agreement Score		
	Volunteered in Last 12 Months	Volunteered but not in last 12 months	Both groups
By volunteering, I can help make the world a better place	4.2	3.96	4.05
I care about the cause that my volunteering supports	4.09	3.78	3.9
I have been helped by volunteers before, so I want to give back	3.16	3.05	3.1
It feels good to contribute to my community	4.26	4.05	4.13
Volunteering gives my life a sense of purpose and meaning	4.22	3.89	4.02
Volunteering gives my life routine, keeps me busy, and gives me a reason to leave the house	3.68	3.44	3.53
Volunteering has professional benefits (e.g. develop skills, improve my resume)	3.37	3.31	3.34
Volunteering is an important part of my personal values or religious beliefs	4.19	3.84	3.98
While volunteering I can spend time with family/friends and expand my social network	3.75	3.61	3.67

ANNEX E – Which organizations do Older Adults volunteer with/through?

Question:

Through which organisation do you volunteer?

Respondents were given the option to select the main organization that they volunteer with from the list below.

Table E.1 - Overall Distribution

Volunteered via	Frequency	% of total who volunteered in last 12 months (N = 597)
Through my employer (e.g. corporate volunteering, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives)	30	5.03
Through other corporate volunteering initiatives not involving my employer	29	4.86
Through religious organisations (e.g. churches, mosques, temples)	228	38.19
Through charitable and/or non-profit organisations (e.g. HCA Hospice Care, Singapore Children's Society, National Kidney Foundation, Children's Cancer Foundation, etc.)	94	15.74
Through umbrella bodies / initiatives (e.g. National Council of Social Service, People's Association)	92	15.41
Through educational institutions	17	2.85
Informally (volunteered but not through any organisation, e.g. helping neighbours)	92	15.41
Through online platform that has various volunteering opportunities (e.g. Giving.sg)	15	2.51

ANNEX F – Older Adult interest in various volunteering activities

Question:

How interested are/would you be in this volunteering activity? (listed below)

Respondents answered with the following options:

- 1 Not at all interested
- 2 Slightly interested
- 3 Moderately interested
- 4 Very interested
- 5 Extremely interested

Table F.1 - Average Interest in Prospective Volunteering Activities by Volunteer Status and Overall

Type of volunteering	Average Interest			
	Volunteered in last 12 months	Volunteered but not in last 12 months	Never Volunteered	All Groups
Administrative services (e.g. clerical, volunteer coordination, event management, sitting on boards and committees of non-profit organisation)	2.65	2.2	2.2	2.29
Animal care (e.g. animal rescue, grooming, dog walking)	1.64	1.62	1.65	1.64
Arts-based (e.g. performing, ushering, museum guiding, heritage trails)	2.12	1.87	1.85	1.9
Education services (e.g. tuition, life skills, reading, parent-teacher associations)	2.39	2.06	1.95	2.06
Fundraising	2.06	1.91	1.75	1.85

Green efforts (e.g. gardening, environmental protection, recycling, haze relief)	2.62	2.33	2.35	2.4
Health services (e.g. nursing, therapy, eldercare, nursing homes or senior activity centres)	2.46	2.17	2.02	2.15
Hospitality & transportation services (e.g. cooking, cleaning, delivery, running errands)	2.4	2.14	2.15	2.19
Human services (e.g. befriending, mentoring, escorting elders to medical appointments or excursions)	2.67	2.27	2.14	2.28
Sports & recreation services (e.g. coaching, refereeing)	1.89	1.78	1.71	1.76

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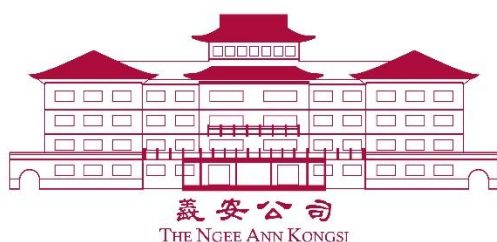
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About the Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA)

ROSA is a multidisciplinary research centre based in SMU. It was established with an MOE Tier 3 social sciences research grant, as well as the generous support of The Ngee Ann Kongsi. Research at ROSA seeks to define and measure a holistic construct of well-being and to identify the factors that impact Singaporeans' well-being as they progress through the later phases of life. Through close collaboration with government and other partner agencies, ROSA also aims to translate research insights into policy innovations that advance the well-being of older adults holistically and promote successful ageing in Singapore. ROSA brings together a diverse team of leading international and local researchers in ageing and age-related issues from various disciplines. Through empirical evidence derived from a longitudinal methodological approach, the multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research team advances propositions that promote successful ageing in Singapore.

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