

**Employer Support for Employee Volunteer Work in Canada:  
Impacts, Gender Puzzles and Policy Issues \***

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## ABSTRACT

### **Employer Support for Employee Volunteer Work in Canada: Impacts, Gender Puzzles and Policy Issues**

One quarter of all formal volunteer work in Canada is undertaken by employed individuals with some form of support from their employers. Organizations have seen such support as a way of meeting corporate social responsibility goals. This paper focus on (i) whether employer's support for the volunteer work of their employees increases the quantity of volunteer work and (ii) the forms of employer support that employee volunteers receive. These issues are important given the increased interest in social capital from public policy-makers. The analysis is based upon the Statistics Canada, the *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating*, and a specially-designed survey of Human Resources directors undertaken by the authors. Employer support for the volunteer work of their employees is found to increase the level of volunteer work in total and across a wide range of voluntary activities. We identify two gender puzzles, one, relating to gender differences in the receipt of employer support and another, to the forms in which it is received. We explore the policy implications of these findings. Our findings may be of interest to researchers in other countries, since, as far as we know, other countries have not invested in national data collection on employer support for volunteer work.

**KEYWORDS:** Volunteer work, gender, public policy, human resources management

# Employer Support for Employee Volunteer Work in Canada: Impacts, Gender Puzzles and Policy Issues

## 1.0 Introduction

Volunteer work, as a reflection of trust between individuals, can contribute to social capital (Putnam 1993; OECD 2001; World Bank 1998). Policy-makers in the public sector have therefore shown an increasing awareness of the importance of volunteer work and of the voluntary sector as shown, for example, by the federal government's Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) in Canada in 2000. More generally, social capital is a public policy issue, as Schuller (2007) notes, if public policy can increase social capital or "articulate public commitment to cohesive social values".<sup>1</sup> At the same time, employers have found employee volunteer activity an important mechanism in meeting corporate social responsibility goals.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is estimated that one quarter of all formal volunteer work in Canada is undertaken by employed individuals with some form of support from their employers (Luffman 2003).

While academic research on the voluntary sector has increased, there remain some important under-explored areas, especially the nexus between employers and volunteer work. Despite the importance of employer-supported volunteer work, relatively little is known about what impact this support has on the levels and range of voluntary activities, who receives this support, what forms

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<sup>1</sup>. For Canada, see the Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative project on Social Capital (<http://policyresearch.gc.ca/>). Social capital and public policy has also been addressed in other countries, see OECD (2001) and World Bank (1998).

<sup>2</sup>. For a review of the corporate social responsibility literature, see Broomhill (2006).

it takes and whether there are significant gender differences in its application. This paper examines these issues using data from a national survey undertaken by Statistics Canada, the *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating*, and a specially-designed survey of Human Resources directors undertaken by the authors.

Here we focus on two main questions: does employer support for the volunteer work of their employees increase the quantity of volunteer work?; and, what forms of employer support do employee volunteers receive? In terms of impacts, our findings indicate that employer support for the volunteer work of their employees does increase the level of volunteer work in total and across a wide range of voluntary activities.

We also identify two gender puzzles. Firstly, we find that although employer support for employee volunteer work has a greater impact on increasing women's volunteer hours than men's, women are less likely to receive to employer support than men. Secondly, we find that men are more likely to receive employer support for their voluntary activities in the form of time-off and flexible work scheduling than women, despite the fact that women appear to be more time constrained than men. These gender puzzles lead us to question whether the gendered nature of social norms play a subtle role in influencing who asks for and who receives employer support and to explore policy responses.

The contribution of this paper is two-fold. First, this paper adds a gender analysis of who receives employer support for volunteering and the forms of employer support and discusses the public and private policy implications of this

analysis. Second, since Canada is, as far as we know, the only country to have invested in national data collection on employer support for volunteer work, the issues raised in this paper may be of interest to researchers in other countries in terms of what data might be collected to address questions of this type in other countries.

Before examining employer-supported volunteer work in detail, we first provide the context for the analysis by reviewing the complex relationships among volunteer work, social capital and corporate social responsibility. The methodology and data are outlined in Section 3. The results are presented in Section 4 where we discuss impacts, gender puzzles and policy issues. A conclusion is provided in Section 5.

## **2.0 Intersections of Gender, Social Capital, Volunteer Work, Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Policy**

It has been argued that social capital contributes to a nation's well-being through its contribution to personal satisfaction, social cohesion (Dekker and van den Broek 1998) and economic growth (Temple 2001).<sup>3</sup> Social capital here refers to "networks with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups" (OECD 2001). The focus of much of the economic literature on social capital is on the economic benefits arising from networks. Networks are, in part, created and maintained through volunteering

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<sup>3</sup>. For a discussion of the meanings of the terms "social capital", "social cohesion" and "social economy" see Jenson (1998). See also the set of articles in the *Review of Social Economy*, 65, 1, 2007, particularly Knorriga and van Staveren (2007).

and involvement in voluntary organizations. Volunteer work reflects trust between individuals and commitment to social organizations and it can potentially enhance social cohesion, cooperation, and shared societal values, as well as providing services of direct benefit to society.

The relationships between volunteer work and social cohesion are, however, complex. Woolley (2003) provides a useful summary of the possible relationships and suggests that the relationship between volunteerism and social cohesion may, in fact, have an inverted-u shape. She argues (2003: 164) that “voluntary activity level may be low in both low-cohesion and high-cohesion societies”. The former would be societies “with such a paucity of common values that no voluntary activity is possible”, whereas, the latter would be “countries with very strong family, church, or other institutions, and possibly also those with great equality of incomes where voluntary activity is unnecessary.”(ibid). In between these two extremes are countries where the degree of income inequality is sufficiently high to produce the need for assistance and where extended family structures have been eroded by “market-induced mobility” and yet “where there is a sufficiently strong social fabric that people can turn to voluntary associations and try to do something about poverty and form community networks that compensate for lack of family.” (ibid) Canada might best be thought of as fitting this intermediate category, one where volunteer work has the potential to increase social cohesiveness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. The roles of voluntary activities, and voluntary organizations, have not, however, remained constant over time. In particular, Evans and Shield (2000) have argued that the period 1945-70 saw the complementary expansion of

Public policy has moved in the direction of paying increasing attention to the importance of the voluntary sector. The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), for example, was launched by the federal government in 2000 with the aim of increasing government-voluntary sector cooperation to enhance the ability of the latter to meet the challenges it faces. The government-voluntary nexus, of which the VSI is one example, has received increasing attention in Canada and elsewhere (see, for example, Evans and Shield, 2000; Phillips 2001 for Canada and Lewis 1999 for Britain). More generally, the concept of social capital and its role in affecting public policy is of considerable interest to public policy makers. For example, in Canada, the federal government has recently completed an extensive research project on “Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool”.

At the same time as public policy has paid increasing attention to the voluntary sector, employers have promoted the voluntary activities of their employees, as a way of meeting corporate social responsibility goals.<sup>5</sup> As a concrete example, fifty percent of 123 employers our *Employer Survey*,

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government services and voluntary organizations. Since the mid-1970s, however, Canada in common with many other countries shifted to the policies associated with neoliberalism i.e. to the policy framework associated with a reduced role for government in the economy generally and in the provision of services. This shift of emphasis on the appropriate – more limited - role for government led to an increased reliance on the voluntary sector. In these circumstances, Evans and Shield argue that increasing activity by voluntary organizations may not be an indicator of increasing social capital. They argue that neoliberal restructuring “is contributing to the deterioration of social cohesion and is hampering development of social capital” (2000: 18), a process which voluntary organizations are increasingly ill-equipped to offset as a result of their “lost autonomy vis-a-vis the state” (ibid: 16-17) and their own externally-driven commercialization.

<sup>5</sup>. See, for example, Foster and Meinhard (2003). See also Broomhill (2006) for a review of the corporate social responsibility literature.

described in more detail below, indicated that they actively encouraged volunteer activity among their employees.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, 85 percent of employers agreed, or strongly agreed, with the statement that employees' volunteer activities improved the organizations' reputation. Employers indicated that corporate social responsibility and pressures from shareholders for "triple bottom line" reporting had led them to seek more ways of increasing and supporting voluntary activities by their employees.

Thus, there is an emerging intersection among public policy goals, corporate behaviour and the activities of the voluntary sector. Captured within this intersection is the fact that employer behaviour is likely to be an important determinant of the quantity of volunteer work performed in society and to influence the composition of volunteers. However, the employer-voluntary sector nexus has received little analysis. Data limitations, undoubtedly, explain a large part of this. While many national statistical agencies are now undertaking surveys

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<sup>6</sup>. The scale of this encouragement varies. Some employers, such as credit unions for example, have community involvement and support as part of their corporate vision. Such employers have developed extensive mechanisms to support employee voluntary activity, such as forming volunteer teams, electronically distributing monthly activity bulletins and having a draw among volunteers who contribute a certain minimum number of volunteer hours for an extra week of paid vacation time. One employer held information sessions on how to include family members in volunteer activity, so employees were not forced to choose between volunteer time and family time. Many employers offer matching financial support for employee-supported charities and some of the larger employers had established their own foundations to which employees could apply for support. Some large employers either officially sponsored campaigns (such as the United Way) or had their own charities. One employer reported having one day per year when all employees would undertake a community project from a list supplied by the employer. Although, in the latter case, the "voluntary" nature of the activity might be open to debate.

of voluntary activity, Statistics Canada is the only one that we are aware of that explicitly includes questions of employer support for these activities.

We do know that employers often provide support for employees' volunteer activities in the form of time release, flexible work scheduling or other contributions (Erickson 2001). Luffman (2003) reports that employed Canadians provide more volunteer work than non-employed Canadians. Furthermore, her study indicates that approximately one quarter of all volunteer work in Canada receives some kind of employer support. As such, employers play a potentially important role in facilitating the building of social capital.

In the remainder of the paper, we focus on the employer-voluntary sector nexus in more detail. We ask, firstly, whether employer support increases the level of volunteer work and, if so, in which activities. We then examine whether all employees receive the same levels of employer support and, if not, what explanations there might be for this.

In undertaking our analysis, we adopt a gender perspective. Individuals' participation in paid and unpaid work and in the private and public spheres is partly structured by social norms. As is well-known, women typically perform more domestic unpaid labour than men and have different attachments to, and experiences in, the paid labour market. Within organizations, too, women often face different career paths than men. The different experiences in the paid and unpaid labour markets, and therefore in the realities of women's and men's lives, are also reflected in gender differences in volunteer work (see MacPhail and Bowles 2007). Volunteer activity must be understood as taking place within the

wider structures of social norms which condition men and women's activities in many spheres.

In the next section, we describe the data on which this study is based.

### 3.0 Data

The data used in this paper have been gathered from three sources. The main data source is Statistics Canada, *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participation 2000* (NSGVP).<sup>7</sup> The NSGVP 2000 contains responses from a sample of 14,724 individuals aged 15 and over from across the country and is representative of 24.38 million Canadians aged over 15 in the 10 provinces.<sup>8</sup> Survey weights are used to generate estimates representative of the population.

Data collected by the NSGVP include: types of voluntary activities undertaken; time spent on volunteer work; whether employer support was given for volunteer work; the form in which employer support was received; and why (more) volunteer work was not performed. Demographic and labour force variables (such as occupation and hours worked), along with personal and household income variables are also available. All data refer to activities undertaken between October 1, 1999 and September 30, 2000.

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<sup>7</sup>. The survey was first administered in 1997 as a special survey; it was repeated in October 2000 as a supplement to that month's *Labour Force Survey*. See Hall (2001) for a discussion of methodological issues.

<sup>8</sup>. However, since the NSGVP was administered in conjunction with the LFS, it does not include the estimated two percent of the over 15 years of age population who are residents of Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, persons living on Indian reserves, full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces and inmates of institutions.

We focus on analyzing volunteer rates and hours in the formal volunteer sector defined as that which is carried out through a voluntary organization. In the analysis, we also focus on individuals aged 25-64 years since younger and older workers are less likely to be as fully active in the labour market. The unweighted sample size for this age group is 10,325, of which 6,333 are employed.

The second data source is an *Employer Survey* which was designed by the researchers to answer questions relating to corporations' formal policies governing employer-supported volunteer work. We solicited responses to the survey by working with the British Columbia Human Resources Management Association (BCHRMA), with a purchased list of Human Resources directors across Canada (Scott's Human Resources Professional List), and with our own compilation of firms and organizations using business directories. A combination of mail-out and web-based surveys were used.

The firms and organizations contacted were concentrated geographically in Toronto/Ottawa, Vancouver and Montréal in order to sample major employers and including their headquarter offices. Sectorally, the firms and organizations were in the private (manufacturing, retail, hotel, finance and banking) and public (municipal, provincial and federal) sectors. The sample cannot, therefore, be said to be random. Rather it was drawn from a number of sources and represents the best efforts of the researchers to obtain a reasonably sized sample. The *Employer Survey* includes responses from 123 employers.

The third data source is a set of in-depth, structured telephone interviews with 15 Human Resources directors who participated in the *Employer Survey* to obtain information on employer policies for supporting employees' voluntary activities. Specifically, we sought data to address issues relating to gender differences in employers' valuations of workers' volunteer efforts, and policies which might potentially facilitate employer support of women's volunteer work. The sample of 15 (five from each of the three locations) was drawn from a subgroup of 52 completed questionnaires in which the respondent indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview, and the respondent's organization supported employees who undertake volunteer work.

## **4.0 Analysis of Volunteer Work and Employer Support**

### **4.1 Impacts**

Many corporations actively encourage their employees to undertake volunteer work and yet the success of such initiatives has not been evaluated. We start by examining whether employer support increases the level of volunteer activity in terms of volunteer hours and across a range of volunteer activities.

To provide a context for the subsequent discussion of employer support for employee volunteer activity, we start by noting volunteer rates for various population groups differentiated by gender, age and employment status. As shown in Table 1, volunteer rates of people who are employed, aged 25-64 years are higher than the volunteer rate for the wider population group of the same age range (which includes those unemployed and not-in-the labour force). For

example, the volunteer rate for employed men and women, aged 25-64 years is 28.3 percent compared to the 28.0 percent for the wider population. Women in all population groups have higher volunteer rates than men; for employed women, the volunteer rate is 31.2 percent compared to 25.7 percent for men.<sup>9</sup> Among employed people who volunteer, we find that 48.9 percent of this group receive some form of employer support. Disaggregating by gender, as shown in Figure 1, we find that 50.8 percent of employed male volunteers and 47.1 of employed female volunteers receive support from their employer.

We now turn to the question of whether employer support for the volunteer work of their employees increases the quantity of volunteer work. Although the employed population group exhibits higher volunteer rates than the comparably aged total population group, as Table 2 indicates, the number of hours of volunteer work that the employed group contributes is lower on average than the total population group. However, as Table 2 also shows, this difference is smaller for those employees that receive employer support.

Receiving employer support is associated with employees providing volunteer hours to a slightly larger number of organizations on average, and a higher number of annual hours by 9.8 hours (or 7.1 percent) per year. Male volunteers with employer support provide an additional 6.7 hours (or 4.3 percent

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<sup>9</sup>. Logistic regression results of the determinants of volunteering (not reported here), also indicate that employment is associated with a greater odds ratio of volunteering, compared to being unemployed or not in the labour force; further, employed women are 36.4 percent more likely to volunteer, than men, after controlling for a variety of age, education, marital status, regional and labour force variables.

more) per year of volunteer work, compared to male volunteers without employer support. The comparable increase in hours for women, attributable to employer support, is 11.7 hours (or 9.6 percent more) per year. Employer support is associated with a larger increase in volunteer hours for women than men, even though they still provide overall fewer hours of volunteer work than men.

Employer support for employees' volunteer activity occurs across a wide range of volunteer activities. Focusing upon the group of employed people who volunteer, an examination of participation rates in various volunteer activities shows that employees with employer support have higher rates of participation in all of the voluntary activities considered for women and in 14 of the 15 categories for men.<sup>10</sup> For example, as shown in Table 3a, for employed women volunteers, the volunteer rate for the activity of "canvassing, campaigning, fundraising" is 41.3 percent without employer support and 52.3 percent with employer support. For the same activity, for men, the volunteer rates are 37.4 and 42.1 percent respectively (see Table 3b).

The presence of employer support for volunteer work does appear to be a mechanism to increase the level of volunteer activity, in terms of both hours and participation. Employer support for volunteer activity results in a greater number of hours contributed to volunteer work. Further, there is no evidence that it results in a drop in volunteering in activities which may not be supported by employers, because the volunteer rates are higher in all but one volunteer activity when an employee has support.

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<sup>10</sup>. Self-help group is the exception.

## 4.2 Gendered Puzzles

Given the potential of employer support to increase hours of volunteer work and participation in volunteer activities, we now consider who receives employer support. In particular, given that employer support increases women's voluntary hours by the greatest amount, we examine whether there are gender differences in the incidence of employer support.

To examine this question we estimate a binary logistic model where the dependent variable is whether the employee receives employer support or not and the model is estimated for the group of employed workers, aged 25-64 years, who volunteer. In the NSGVP, we can only observe the outcome – receipt of employer support. This outcome occurs if employees request employer support and it is granted, or employer's offer support and it is accepted by the employee.

We hypothesize that a range of demand side and supply side variables should be considered in this context. From the perspective of workers, or the demand for employer support, factors affecting individuals' requests for employer support will be influenced by their desire to undertake volunteer work and this will be affected by such factors as age, education, marital status, presence of children in the household, and region of residence.<sup>11</sup> The gendered nature of domestic labour may give rise to gender differences in requests for employer

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<sup>11</sup>. These are the factors which are typically used to explain the decision whether to volunteer or not (see Vaillancourt 1994), and hence, are likely also of relevance when deciding how much to volunteer. We further hypothesize that whether to request employer support or not depends on how much volunteer activity is undertaken.

support. To capture the gendered division of domestic labour we include a set of variables including age, education, marital status, presence of children, and region.

From the perspective of the supply side, employers may be less likely to offer employer support to employees in certain occupations and industries given that the nature of the work process makes it more difficult to grant requests and similarly for certain industries. The existence of occupational and industrial segregation by gender in the workplace may result in gender differences in who is offered employer support. To capture the constraints of work process we include variables such as occupation, industry, and part-time or full-time work status. While it would be useful to include firm size and union status, neither variable is available in the *NSGVP*.

We include a gender variable in the regression to test whether there is a gender difference in who receives employer support and who does not once both the supply and demand side factors identified above are taken into account. The results are presented in Table 4.<sup>12</sup>

We can evaluate the demand side explanation by referring to the results in column 1 of Table 4. Here, after controlling for factors such as age, education, marital status and presence of children, the results indicate that the odds ratio for women receiving employer support is 0.842. This result means that women are

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<sup>12</sup>.There is, of course, the possibility, that unobserved characteristics such as abilities, preferences, and interests of the employees may affect whether the individual receives employer support. However, we cannot control for these factors.

15.8 percent less likely than men to receive employer support, even after controlling for factors which we expect would influence their willingness to request employer support. With respect to the other variables in column 1, employed volunteers 35 years and older have lower odds of receiving employer support compared to employed volunteers aged 25-34 years; employed workers with at least a high school diploma have higher odds of receiving employer support compared to employed volunteers without a high school diploma; married workers have lower odds of receiving employer support, compared to other marital status groups; and employed volunteers in Atlantic Canada have a higher odds of receiving employer support, compared to other regions, except the Prairies.

If we now include the supply side factors then, as shown in column 2 of Table 4, the female variable has an odds ratio of 0.830. This result indicates that women are 17.0 percent less likely to receive employer support, compared to men, after controlling for occupational and industrial segregation and also part-time work status.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, after controlling for both personal characteristics and occupational and industrial characteristics, all of which may influence whether

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<sup>13</sup>. One objection to this conclusion might be that the levels of aggregation in the occupation and industry categories are so large that it is still entirely possible that men and women are engaged in completely different work processes within each occupational and industrial category. We recognize this possibility but are unable to test at a more disaggregated level given the form in which the data has been collected. While there exists considerable intra-occupation and intra-industry variations in job task assignment by gender, we do not think that this is likely to be sufficient to completely overturn the results above based on the more aggregated data.

employer support for volunteer work is received or not, we still find that there is a significant gender difference in the receipt of employer support. This provides us with our first gender puzzle: despite the fact that employer support for volunteer work has the largest impact for women employees, they are less likely to receive such support. We return to the possible explanations for this in section 5.

If we turn now from the analysis of the receipt of employer support to the form of employer support received, data from the *Employer Survey* indicate that for organizations providing support for voluntary activities, firstly, they provide a range of forms of support and, secondly, they often provide several different forms of support. The five most common forms, in rank order, are as follows with the percentage of organizations indicating use of each form of support given in parentheses:

- donated financially to the organization (69 percent);
- approval to take time off or to use work time for volunteer activities (67 percent);
- approval for use of facilities or equipment (66 percent);
- approval of change of work hours (63 percent); and
- donated prizes etc. (62 percent).

Apart from contributions to the voluntary organization (either financially or in-kind), the most common forms of support are in the form of time reductions and time flexibility for employees. This may explain why the hours of volunteering

by employees with employer support is higher than the amount provided by employed volunteers who do not receive employer support.

Evidence from the *NSGVP* allows us to examine the forms in which employer support is received and to disaggregate this by gender. The percentages of employed volunteers with employer support for each type of support are shown in Table 5. Columns 1 and 3 of Table 5 show the percentage of volunteers who receive each form of employer support; the percentages shown in columns 2 and 4 are for the volunteers who receive at least one form of employer support. These percentages show that the use of facilities is similar between men and women volunteers. However, there is a 7.5 percentage point difference in the percentage of men and women receiving employer support in the form of time off and a 6.0 percent difference for a change in work hours (in both cases, the differences refer to gender differences presented in columns 1 and 3). In both cases, men are more likely to receive employer support in these forms than women do. Women, in contrast, are more likely to receive employer support through recognition than men.

The finding that women are less likely, than men, to receive the forms of employer support such as Time-off and Change of work is somewhat surprising given the greater time constraints women typically face in undertaking volunteering. Corroborating support for this comes from data on “reasons for not volunteering” in the *NSGVP*. The estimates presented in Table 6 indicate that the largest single reason why people do not volunteer is because of a lack of time. This is true for men and women in all population groups. However, it is highest

for employed women. Here, 84 percent of respondents indicated that the time constraint was a contributing factor to not volunteering. The higher time spent by women, on average, on household work has been well documented in Canada and other countries and this, combined with employment commitments, makes women's time constraints more binding than men's. This is also likely to explain the result, described above, that women who receive support from their employer are able to increase their voluntary hours by ten percent.

The finding that time constraints on volunteer work for employed women are likely to affect volunteer work is also supported by international evidence. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released in 2001 a report entitled *Voluntary Work Australia*, based on survey work undertaken in 2000. The report provides information on the gender distribution of voluntary work and the gender distribution of participation in voluntary activities. Similar to the findings for Canada reported here, they indicate that women have higher participation rates in volunteer work (33 percent for women versus 31 percent for men). However, among full-time employees, the volunteer rate is higher for men than women (34 percent versus 31 percent). The largest difference comes, however, when considering the gender differences in hours contributed to volunteer work. In this case, the ABS (2001: 4) reports that "among males the largest contribution (58% of male hours) came from those employed full-time while among females the largest contribution (44% of female hours) was made by those not in the labour force." It would appear, therefore, that as in Canada, employed women in

Australia operate under a greater time constraint than employed men and that this results in less volunteer hours being undertaken.<sup>14</sup>

The finding that women are less likely than men to receive the form of employer support which would ease their time constraint, leads us to speculate that the types of jobs in which women are employed make it more difficult for employers to offer these types of employer support. For example, if the work process is such that it is disruptive to have workers change schedules or be absent for volunteer work, then workers in these jobs would be less likely to receive the employer support in the form of time-off and change of work hours. Thus, if women tend to be in such jobs, then they will be less likely to receive the employer support in this form. A second explanation is that women are more likely to be in part-time jobs than men, and therefore, may not require the time flexibility as much as men. We test for these two explanations using a logit model where the dependent variable is whether or not the employed volunteer receives the employer support in the form of “time-off”. We include the same set of variables as in the model of who receives the employer support and the results are presented in Table 7. The main result is that women are still less likely to receive the “Time-off” form of employer support, even after controlling for a set of variables affecting the request for employer support in the form of time-off including part-time hours and variables such as occupation and industry which affect work process, and hence employers’ abilities to offer this support. Notice

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<sup>14</sup>.The ABS survey does not include information on employer support for voluntary work and so it is not possible to make comparisons with Canada in this respect.

the odds ratio on the female variable is 0.760 indicating that women are 24 per cent less likely than men to receive Time-off. It is possible that to fully test the work process hypothesis, industrial and occupational data with a greater level of disaggregation are required.

This then presents the second gendered puzzle: employed women are likely to experience the most binding time constraint on volunteer time and yet women employees are less likely than men to receive employer support in the form of time off or flexible work schedules. We consider the implications of these results for policy in the next section.

### **4.3 Policy Issues**

Many governments promote volunteer work as a way of increasing social capital. At the same time, many firms view employer support for employee volunteer work as a way of meeting corporate social responsibility goals; organizations seem to have largely taken on board the need to support voluntary activity as part of their corporate strategy. Convincing employers of this does not appear to be needed. The results presented here suggest that employer support for employee voluntary activity does have a significant impact on increasing the level of volunteer work and across a wide range of activities.

It appears, however, that employer support does not realize the potential that it has to increase voluntary activity. This arises because of our two puzzles: women do not receive as much support as men, despite the fact that it has the greatest impact on women and, furthermore, women receive less support than

men in the form of time off which would be of the greatest use to them. These two findings may indicate that employer support is not being used to maximize voluntary activity but, in general, knowledge of the process by which employee requests are made and considered is needed to provide a wider assessment of the efficacy of employer support. To address these issues, we asked questions in the *Employer Survey* designed to elicit information on the processes used to make and grant requests for employer support.

The first point to note is that considerable heterogeneity exists among firms. With respect to the organizational level at which decisions are made considerable variation occurs. The majority of employers reported significant local autonomy with employees making requests to their immediate supervisor in the first instance for employer support. The following responses were obtained in this respect:

- Decisions made at the local level (50%),
- Follow company-wide policies but with considerable local discretion (22%),
- Referred to head office (20%), and
- Follow detailed company-wide policy manual (7%).

With respect to whether the firm had a formal policy regarding employer support, approximately one-third of the respondents indicated that this was the case. Formal policies are more common among the largest organizations in our survey and in those which include clearly identified 'community values' as part of their vision. The nature of the policies varies considerably. Some examples

include: offering 1 or 2 days of paid work time/year to volunteer and specific opportunities are identified; establishing a paid position to coordinate volunteer activities; and recognizing volunteer activities of employees and providing prizes for volunteers who contribute more than 40 hours per year of volunteer activity on their own time. In unionized workplaces, these policies are included in collective agreements. For example, some collective agreements include a provision for 1 day of paid leave to undertake volunteer work per year. However, while this provides employees with rights to engage in voluntary activity, it also often sets the maximum time that can be used for this purpose and reduces flexibility in this respect. That is, several Human Resources directors indicated that they would support requests for time off for volunteer work up to the (typically) 7.5 hours per year stipulated in the collective agreement but could not sanction more, even if they wanted. The 7.5 hours amounts to approximately 5-6 percent of the average total number of hours which employed volunteers contribute to volunteer work each year. Respondents indicated that the strengths of having a policy are that it makes a statement about the values of the organization and helps HR directors and employees know which activities will potentially be supported. However, while formal policies can be important for establishing employee entitlements, it may be the case that greater flexibility might be beneficial. In the other two-thirds of the organizations, there were no formal policies guiding support for employee voluntary activity.

We turn now to consider whether the nature of Human Resources policies regarding employer support for volunteer activity might contribute to the finding

that women are less likely to receive employer support, compared to men. From the *Employer Survey*, 77 percent of employers reported that there were no gender differences in employees supported by their organization and 18 percent reported that women were more likely to be supported than men. Forty-two percent of employers reported that full-time employees were more likely to be supported and 58 percent reported no difference between full-time and part-time employees. About three quarters of employers reported no age difference in their employee volunteers and 78 percent reported that volunteers were likely to be found equally throughout their income ranges.

From the *Employer Survey*, the majority of responding Human Resources directors indicated that there were no differences in male and female participation in the organizations' employer support program. This point was followed up in the telephone interviews, and again, respondents indicated that there was no apparent difference, although they also indicated that it was not formally measured. Likewise, respondents in the in-depth employer interviews could not identify ways in which their policies might contribute to different behavioural responses of men and women to the volunteer activities. On questions relating to the benefits accruing to the workplace and business as a result of the employee volunteer effort, respondents did not identify any gender differences. Thus, these findings indicate there are no formal policies in place that deliberately discriminate in the allocation of employer support for volunteer work on the basis of age, income or gender. As one employer respondent said:

*We do not track by gender (nor do we really care which gender does more volunteering). Our policy is designed to assist those people who want to volunteer.*

However, while the majority of Human Resources directors did not consider that there were any gender effects of their policies, the results from the NSGVP analysed here indicate that employer support is more likely to take the form of recognition for women than men, and more likely to take the form of time-off and a change to work hours for men than women. Employers need to be made aware of this and to examine their own practices in this light. Also evident from our surveys and interviews, and as illustrated in the quote above, is the almost total absence of any monitoring or review of organization's employee support programs.

There has been no consideration by organizations of whether they are, for example, as amenable to requests from women for time flexibility as they are to the same request for men, whether the nature of the work processes makes it easier for men to make this request than women and, if so, what changes to work processes might compensate for this. Of particular significance is whether there is a subtle but pervasive view within the organization that women employees are more likely to be satisfied by recognition than men. This is a plausible conclusion given that the decision to provide employee volunteers with recognition is one that is likely to be made solely by organizations themselves; time off and flexible work schedules are more likely an outcome of employee requests and employer decisions. In this respect, it is plausible to argue that organizations are implicitly following gendered social attitudes which place a low value on women's

contributions in the unpaid (in this case, voluntary) sphere. In terms of policies relevant for employers, a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation process should be adopted with respect to their support for employee voluntary activity. It may also be necessary to educate female employees of their rights to employer support and the forms that it can take. It may be that women employees view voluntary work, as a part of the care economy, as being part of their responsibilities. As such, women may be less inclined to ask for employer support. This is clearly an area where further research is needed.

Given the heterogeneity of policy approaches found in organizations, this raises the question of whether a better, or complementary, approach might be to include employee volunteer time provisions in the federal Canada Labour Code and in provincial Employment Standards legislation. These avenues provide the legal framework within which all employers operate and are designed to regulate the rights of employees for time off for various purposes such as statutory holidays. Over time, these pieces of legislation have changed to include provisions for vacation pay, and maternity, parental and adoption leave entitlement. Indeed, legislation is continually being amended in this area with emergency leave (in Ontario), family responsibility leave (in British Columbia, New Brunswick and Quebec) and compassionate care leave (Canada Labour Code) being some examples of recent changes.<sup>15</sup> Thus, provisions for employee time-off (both paid and unpaid) are continually being considered and result in

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<sup>15</sup>. See Family-Related and Other Leaves, HRDC 2001, available at [http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/cli/eslc/family\\_e.pdf](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/cli/eslc/family_e.pdf)

legislative changes to reflect changing attitudes and conditions in society.<sup>16</sup> To date, no provision has been made for employee voluntary activity; however, a case can be made for further extending the legislation to include employee volunteer work. Employee volunteer work can be seen as extension of the principle of giving employees' time-off for family-related causes to include wider social causes. It might also be thought of as akin to the paid leave which is given to employees for jury duty (in provincial Employment Standards legislation) or to vote in federal elections under the provisions of the Canada Elections Act; participation in civic duties such as voting and jury duty is supported by employers through legislated employee entitlements. Participation in social capital building volunteer activities could be supported on similar grounds.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The intersection between paid work, volunteer work, corporate social responsibility and public policy with respect to social capital is one that is of importance but which has received relatively attention. In this paper, we sought to shed light on the impacts of employer-supported employee volunteer work using data for Canada.

We found that employer support makes a difference to the levels of volunteer work undertaken by employees and in a wide range of activities.

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<sup>16</sup>. See Social Development Canada website [http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/lp/spila/cli/dllc/16\\_2004\\_2005.shtml&hs=lz](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/lp/spila/cli/dllc/16_2004_2005.shtml&hs=lz) for details of the extensive annual changes to employment standards legislation.

Employer support clearly makes a difference and has the potential to contribute to the building of social capital.

However, it is questionable whether the potential of employer support to build social capital is being fully realized. This arises because those to whom employer support makes the greatest difference – women – are also the least likely to receive it. Furthermore, the forms in which women receive employer support are less likely to be those that ease their time constraints. These outcomes may be due to women making fewer requests and/or organizations offering less support. In either case, pervasive gendered social norms concerning women's roles and rewards may help to explain these outcomes.

Policy responses such as gender-sensitive monitoring by organizations are appropriate and consideration should be given to whether there is a role for government legislation which extends to all employees the right to engage in voluntary activities on employer time. Our conclusions are necessarily tentative given the existing state of knowledge, but this is an area where further research would be beneficial.

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**Table 1: Volunteer Rates**

Population Groups	Volunteering (%) <sup>2</sup>
	Formal
<b>Men and Women</b>	
age 15 and above	26.7
age 25 ~ 64	28.0
age 25 ~ 64, employed <sup>1</sup>	28.3
<b>Men</b>	
age 15 and above	25.2
age 25 ~ 64	25.2
age 25 ~ 64, employed <sup>1</sup>	25.7
<b>Women</b>	
age 15 and above	28.1
age 25 ~ 64	30.7
age 25 ~ 64, employed <sup>1</sup>	31.2

Notes:

<sup>1</sup>. The group of employed people excludes those who are self-employed.

<sup>2</sup>. The number of people who volunteer divided by the number of people in the particular age and employment group.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied.

**Table 2: Formal Volunteer Work: Number of Organizations and Hours Volunteered, Annually**

Population Groups	For People Who Are Volunteers	
	Number of Organizations	Number of Hours
<b>Men and Women</b>		
Age 15 and above	1.7	161.7
Age 25 ~ 64	1.7	154.3
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	1.7	138.0
Age 25 ~ 64, employed, employer support	1.9	147.8
<b>Men</b>		
Age 15 and above	1.6	169.5
Age 25 ~ 64	1.7	164.0
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	1.6	155.5
Age 25 ~ 64, employed, employer support	1.8	162.2
<b>Women</b>		
Age 15 and above	1.7	155.0
Age 25 ~ 64	1.8	146.3
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	1.7	121.7
Age 25 ~ 64, employed, employer support	1.9	133.4

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied.

**Table 3a: Volunteer Rates by Type of Volunteer Activity, by Employment and Employer Support Status, Women**

Type of Volunteer Activity	Employed Women Volunteers		
	Both ES and No ES	No ES	With ES
Canvassing, campaigning, fundraising	46.5	41.3	52.3
Board member	42.8	38.3	47.9
Information for education	28.2	22.0	35.1
Organize activity	57.2	51.6	63.4
Consulting, executive, administrative work	30.6	26.4	35.3
Teach, coach	23.4	20.8	26.2
Care, support, counseling	23.3	19.9	27.2
Health care	6.5	5.6	7.4
Self-help group	7.5	6.9	8.1
Collect, serve food	23.9	19.2	29.1
Maintain, repair building	8.8	7.7	10.1
Driving	18.6	14.8	22.8
First aid, firefighting	4.6	2.8	6.7
Protect environment	11.1	8.3	14.3
Other	21.4	20.5	22.3

Note: ES refers to employer support.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied.

**Table 3b: Volunteer Rates by Type of Volunteer Activity, by Employment and Employer Support Status, Men**

Type of Volunteer Activity	Employed Men Volunteers		
	Both ES and No ES	No ES	With ES
Canvassing campaigning, fundraising	39.8	37.4	42.1
Board member	46.1	40.2	51.9
Information for education	29.7	22.8	36.3
Organize activity	61.7	55.5	67.6
Consulting, executive, administrative work	32.6	26.3	38.7
Teach, coach	34.5	30.0	38.8
Care, support, counseling	21.6	19.8	23.3
Health care	3.6	3.5	3.7
Self-help group	6.6	7.6	5.7
Collect, serve food	20.1	17.0	23.1
Maintain, repair building	23.5	22.4	24.6
Driving	21.7	19.4	23.8
First aid, firefighting	11.6	7.5	15.5
Protect environment	18.4	16.3	20.3
Other	16.5	13.8	19.1

Note: ES refers to employer support.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied

**Table 4: Logistic Regression of Employer Support, Employed Volunteers, Men and Women Combined**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Employer Support or Not	
	(1)	(2)
Constant	0.994 (0.329)	0.917 (0.000)
Female	0.842 (0.000)	0.830 (0.000)
Age ( <i>benchmark 25-34 years</i> )		
35-44	0.988 (0.000)	0.953 (0.000)
45-54	0.918 (0.000)	0.827 (0.000)
55-64	0.775 (0.000)	0.716 (0.000)
Education ( <i>benchmark less than high school diploma</i> )		
High school	1.180 (0.000)	1.067 (0.000)
Some post-secondary	1.135 (0.000)	0.971 (0.000)
Post-secondary diploma	1.263 (0.000)	1.112 (0.000)
University degree	1.385 (0.000)	1.017 (0.000)
Marital Status ( <i>benchmark married</i> )		
Single	1.064 (0.000)	1.079 (0.000)
Widow/er	1.694 (0.000)	1.737 (0.000)
Separated/divorced	1.143 (0.000)	1.134 (0.000)
No Children ( <i>benchmark children</i> )	0.896(0.000)	0.897 (0.000)
Region ( <i>benchmark Atlantic</i> )		
Quebec	0.711 (0.000)	0.692 (0.000)
Ontario	0.865 (0.000)	0.847 (0.000)
Prairies	1.156 (0.000)	1.181 (0.000)
British Columbia	0.890 (0.000)	0.854 (0.000)
Part Time ( <i>benchmark full-time</i> )		0.704 (0.000)
Occupation ( <i>benchmark Processing Manufacturing &amp; Utilities</i> )		
Management		2.068 (0.000)
Business, finance and administration		1.356 (0.000)
Natural and applied science		1.103 (0.000)
Health occupations		1.177 (0.000)
Social, education, religion		2.094 (0.000)
Art, culture and recreation		1.903 (0.000)
Sales and service		1.569 (0.000)
Trades, transportation		1.030 (0.000)
Primary industry		0.597 (0.000)

**Table 4 (continued): Logistic Regression of Employer Support**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Employer Support or Not	
	Men and Women (1)	Men (2)
Industry ( <i>benchmark public administration</i> )		
Agriculture		0.800 (0.000)
Forestry, fishing, mining		1.214 (0.000)
Utilities		0.886 (0.000)
Construction		1.107 (0.000)
Manufacturing — durables		1.089 (0.000)
Manufacturing — non-durables		1.267 (0.000)
Wholesale trade		0.856 (0.000)
Retail trade		0.818 (0.000)
Transport and warehousing		0.845 (0.000)
Finance, insurance, real estate		1.169 (0.000)
Professional, scientific, technical		1.028 (0.000)
Management, administration		0.833 (0.000)
Educational services		0.880 (0.000)
Health care, social assistance		1.076 (0.000)
Information, culture, recreation		0.908 (0.000)
Accommodation, food services		1.085 (0.000)
Other services		1.417 (0.000)
N (unweighted)	3,751	3,751

Notes:

1. Estimated for employed individuals (excluding self-employed) aged 25-64 years, who are volunteers, using cross-section weights.
2. The p values are shown in parentheses. P values less than 0.001 are significant.

Source: Authors' logit estimates based on the *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation*, 2000, estimated using SPSS.

**Table 5: Percentage of Volunteers Who Receive Employer Support, by Form of Employer Support <sup>1</sup>**

Type of Employer Support	Women		Men	
	Receipt of the specific form of Employer Support/ Volunteers (%)	Receipt of the specific form of Employer Support/ Volunteers with at least one type of Employer support (%)	Receipt of the specific form of Employer Support/ Volunteers (%)	Receipt of the specific form of Employer Support/ Volunteers with at least one type of Employer support (%)
Use facilities	28.2	58.5	31.7	60.5
Time off	24.6	51.0	32.1	61.2
Change work hours	22.8	47.3	28.8	55.0
Recognition	22.7	47.1	20.5	39.2
Other support: <sup>2</sup>	7.5	15.6	6.5	12.4
Prizes	37.7		37.5	
Company goods	13.1		13.5	
Financially	28.1		33.6	
Transportation	2.4		7.7	
Entry fees	38.5		31.0	

Notes:

1. For volunteers who are employed, aged 25-64 years,
2. For each of the five types of “Other Support” below, the percentage refers to the percentage of volunteers who have received at least one form of Other Support.

Source: Authors’ calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied.

**Table 6: Reasons for Not Volunteering**

Population Groups	Percentage of Non-Volunteers Reporting					
	Have Already Made Contribution	Do Not Have Any Extra Time	Have Health Problems or Physically Unable	No One You Know Has Personally Asked You	Do Not Know How to Become Involved	Financial Cost to Volunteer
<b>Men and Women</b>						
Age 15 and above	21.8	69.4	24.0	36.5	19.7	18.6
Age 25 ~ 64	19.6	74.8	18.3	35.6	18.5	18.8
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	19.6	81.0	11.6	36.3	17.9	16.6
<b>Men</b>						
Age 15 and above	22.6	68.6	19.5	39.3	21.3	20.0
Age 25 ~ 64	20.7	73.2	14.9	37.6	19.2	19.4
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	21.1	78.5	9.0	38.6	19.4	17.1
<b>Women</b>						
Age 15 and above	20.9	70.2	28.4	33.7	18.1	17.3
Age 25 ~ 64	18.4	76.4	21.7	33.5	17.7	18.2
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	17.8	84.0	14.7	33.6	16.0	16.0

**Table 6 (continued): Reasons for Not Volunteering**

Population Groups	Percentage of Non-Volunteers Reporting <sup>a</sup>				
	Concerns Could Be Sued/Taken to Court	Have No Interest	Give Money Instead of Time	Unwilling to Make Year-Round Commitment	Dissatisfied with Previous Volunteer Experience
<b>Men and Women</b>					
Age 15 and above	7.2	24.5	37.7	46.2	8.1
Age 25 ~ 64	7.6	23.9	39.3	47.7	7.3
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	6.8	23.7	41.6	49.1	6.5
<b>Men</b>					
Age 15 and above	9.1	28.5	38.7	50.8	9.4
Age 25 ~ 64	10.3	27.2	39.8	51.1	8.2
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	9.6	26.6	41.1	51.6	7.3
<b>Women</b>					
Age 15 and above	5.2	20.6	36.8	41.5	6.8
Age 25 ~ 64	4.7	20.3	38.9	44.1	6.4
Age 25 ~ 64, employed	3.5	20.3	42.2	46.2	5.4

Notes: Calculated for individuals who do not volunteer. Individuals may report more than one reason.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, with the sample survey weights applied.

**Table 7: Logistic Regression of Receipt of Time-Off to Support Volunteer Work, Employed Volunteers, Men and Women Combined**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Time-off or Not
	(2)
Constant	0.495 (0.000)
Female	0.760 (0.000)
Age ( <i>benchmark 25-34 years</i> )	
35-44	0.715 (0.000)
45-54	0.667 (0.000)
55-64	0.769 (0.000)
Education ( <i>benchmark less than high school diploma</i> )	
High school	0.779 (0.000)
Some post-secondary	0.881 (0.000)
Post-secondary diploma	0.898 (0.000)
University degree	0.939 (0.000)
Marital Status ( <i>benchmark married</i> )	
Single	1.057 (0.000)
Widow/er	0.752 (0.000)
Separated/divorced	1.615 (0.000)
No Children ( <i>benchmark children</i> )	0.847 (0.000)
Region ( <i>benchmark Atlantic</i> )	
Quebec	0.473 (0.000)
Ontario	0.870 (0.000)
Prairies	1.051 (0.000)
British Columbia	0.955 (0.000)
Full Time ( <i>benchmark part-time</i> )	1.574 (0.000)
Occupation ( <i>benchmark Processing Manufacturing &amp; Utilities</i> )	
Management	1.789 (0.000)
Business, finance and administration	1.231(0.000)
Natural and applied science	0.970 (0.000)
Health occupations	0.932 (0.000)
Social, education, religion	1.143 (0.000)
Art, culture and recreation	1.474 (0.000)
Sales and service	1.170 (0.000)
Trades, transportation	0.721 (0.000)
Primary industry	0.587 (0.000)

**Table 7 (continued): Logistic Regression of Receipt of Time-Off to Support Volunteer Work, Employed Volunteers, Men and Women Combined**

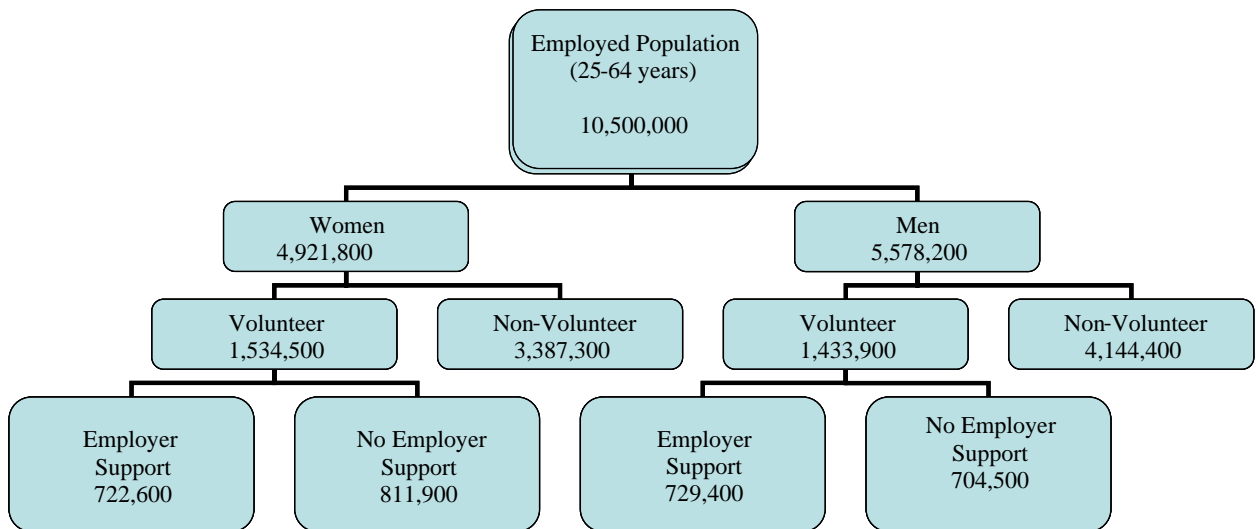
Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Employer Support or Not
	Men (2)
Industry ( <i>benchmark public administration</i> )	
Agriculture	1.176 (0.000)
Forestry, fishing, mining	0.966 (0.002)
Utilities	0.987 (0.273)
Construction	1.468 (0.000)
Manufacturing — durables	0.791 (0.000)
Manufacturing — non-durables	1.639 (0.000)
Wholesale trade	1.178 (0.000)
Retail trade	0.830 (0.000)
Transport and warehousing	1.331 (0.000)
Finance, insurance, real estate	1.287 (0.000)
Professional, scientific, technical	0.744 (0.000)
Management, administration	0.534 (0.000)
Educational services	0.717 (0.000)
Health care, social assistance	0.706 (0.000)
Information, culture, recreation	1.083 (0.000)
Accommodation, food services	0.806 (0.000)
Other services	1.264 (0.000)
N (unweighted)	3,646

Notes:

1. Estimated for employed individuals (excluding self-employed) aged 25-64 years, who are volunteers, using cross-section weights.
2. The p values are shown in parentheses. P values less than 0.001 are significant.

Source: Authors' logit estimates based on the *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation*, 2000, estimated using SPSS.

**Figure 1: Volunteers with Employer Support**



Source: Authors' calculations using data from the NSGVP, 2000, applying the sample survey weights. Following Luffman's (2003) categorization.