



Does it pay to care? Volunteering and employment opportunities

Baert, S. and Vujić, S. (2017). Does it pay to care? Volunteering and employment opportunities. *Journal of Population Economics*, 31(3), pp.819-836.

Overview

This study by Baert and Vujić contributes to the literature examining the effect of the volunteering premium in the job market to identify if volunteering experience helps jobseekers to successfully find employment.

Method

The method of this study was to create pairs of applications for real job openings advertised by the Public Employment Agency of Flanders. The pairs had identical education levels, past employment experience, and language and technology skills, but one application of the pair had volunteer experience and the other did not. Volunteer experience, volunteer activity combination and gender were randomised. There were three possible volunteering activities, including working for in food distribution for Poverello, fundraising for StichtingtegenKanker (a cancer charity) or providing logistical support for Korfbal Club Artemi, and it was possible to volunteer for one, two, or all of these charities.

In total, 576 applications were sent out between December 2014 and April 2015. Half of these applications had a mid-level of education (a secondary education degree in commerce) and half had a high-level of education (a bachelor's degree in office management). Only responses obtained after 40 days of the application being submitted were considered. The authors distinguish between two types of positive callbacks. A positive callback in the strict sense refers to the candidate being offered an interview. A positive callback in a broad sense refers to a response including any of the following aspects: suggestion of another position, an enquiry for more information to be sent to the employer, or a general enquiry to contact the employer.

Results

The results show that volunteering experience increases the chance of a positive reaction. In the strict sense, 11.1% of those displaying voluntary activity in their application were invited to an interview, compared with 8.3% of non-volunteers. More generally, 22.9% of the volunteering candidates received a positive reaction of some type, in comparison to 15.6% of non-volunteers. In the analysis of these results, the authors show that there wasn't a significant difference in positive reactions between those who volunteer with a higher or a middle level of education. However, it was shown that the volunteering premium is higher for women than for men, as women who volunteered were 6.9% more likely to be invited to an interview. Furthermore, those volunteering for the cancer charity or for the food charity were more likely to receive positive feedback, however the probability of a callback does not increase significantly with more than one volunteering experience.

Limitations

Whilst this study does demonstrate that the volunteering premium may help applicants to receive positive reactions from potential employers at the application stage, this does not necessarily mean that volunteering experience helps jobseekers to secure roles. The study does not go far enough to show if this experience can help applicants to find roles after the interview stage. Furthermore, this study only investigates the commercial and administrative sectors of employment. The results may be different in other areas, specifically those in the blue-collar industries, where extraverted personalities, known to be linked with volunteering participation, are not as sought after.