

Volunteering, Income Support Programs and Disabled Persons†

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Abstract

We study the propensity of disabled persons to engage in volunteer activity with the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) -- a unique Canadian dataset which provides extensive information on disabled persons as well as volunteering behaviour. Our principal focus is on the effects of various income support programs on disabled person's participation in volunteer activities. We find that certain income support programs (e.g., workers' compensation) are associated with decreases in the probability of volunteering while others (e.g., Pension Plans) are associated with increases in the propensity to volunteer. The reason is that not all income support programs are identical with respect to their implications for unpaid work. There are some -- like workers compensation -- that embody strong disincentives to volunteering while others like public Pensions that explicitly encourage unpaid work. Our conclusion is that program characteristics can significantly affect volunteering. This conclusion is further supported when we look at other income support programs that embody ambiguous or no incentive effects. As one would anticipate, these 'incentive neutral' programs have no significant impact on volunteering. The relevance of these results to both theories of volunteerism and public policy is discussed.

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Keywords: Disability, Income Support Programs, Incentive Effects, Volunteer Activity

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