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University of Kent

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THE COHESION AND INTEGRATION NETWORK

Literature Review

Linking Volunteering and Social Cohesion: Causal Evidence in the UK and Beyond

Produced with Belong by

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Centre for the Study of Group Processes, University of Kent, March 2023

Belong – The Cohesion and Integration Network is a charity and membership organisation with the vision of a more integrated and less divided society. Belong connects, supports and mobilises people and organisations across sectors and neighbourhoods via its digital platform, events, training programmes and resources to improve the practice and policy of integration and cohesion.

The Centre for the Study of Group Processes (CSGP) is based in the School of Psychology at the University of Kent. Founded in 1990 by its director, Professor Dominic Abrams, the CSGP is at the heart of the school's excellent international reputation for experimental and applied social psychological research on groups and intergroup relations. Its research includes topics such as prejudice across the lifespan, collective action, social influence, leadership, group decision making, and community and political psychology.

Executive Summary

This review systematically assesses the academic and grey literatures on the relationship between social cohesion (including social capital) and volunteering. It first considers definitions and ways of evaluating cohesion and volunteering, then examines evidence on how each can influence the other. The review also considers the role of relevant demographic factors in volunteering and barriers to volunteer recruitment. Evidence is drawn from a broad literature focusing primarily on evidence in the US and UK from the year 2000 onwards to determine both what may be generalisable and what might be specific to different contexts. From an initial trawl of over 400,000 items of evidence, we identified 101 that could directly address the causal relationships between volunteering and cohesion. The central findings are as follows:

- Several conceptions of social cohesion exist in the literature, many key features of which are identified in the British Academy's *Cohesive Societies* analysis (The British Academy, 2019). This has identified 8 features of social cohesion; (i) sense of belonging, (ii) homogeneity of values, (iii) attitudes and regard for diversity, (iv) participation or collaboration, (v) rules and institutions which rely on consensus, (vi) wealth/income equality, (vii) equal access to resources, and (viii) personal and collective autonomy.
- Research has often treated volunteering as a proxy measure of social cohesion, making it impossible to evaluate how each affects the other. A central objective of this review is to examine them as separate constructs.
- The distinction between formal and informal volunteering is important, although the latter has often been neglected in definitions and measurement of volunteering. This review therefore attends to both forms of volunteering. We also distinguish the presence of volunteering (whether or not it happens) from its intensity or frequency.
- Quantitative research and case studies from the UK and US largely reveal a positive, bidirectional relationship between the presence of volunteering and social cohesion. That is, cohesion provides a basis for more volunteering, and volunteering helps to build further cohesion.
- The presence of formal volunteering has a larger impact on cohesion than does the presence of informal volunteering.
- The relationship between the intensity and frequency of volunteering and social cohesion is not clear, in part because those who volunteer most intensively may do so for, or in place of, formal employment.
- Social capital is a partial component of social cohesion, but research sometimes treats volunteering as a proxy measure of social capital. Overall, we detect a bidirectional relationship but also conclude that volunteering is not sufficient to overcome deficits in social capital and may actually further entrench inequalities in social capital which are affected by lack of resources and snowballing recruitment strategies. Bonding and bridging capital are more closely related to volunteering than is linking capital.
- The most consistent demographic patterns in volunteering are its associations with faith, gender, education, and socioeconomic status. Volunteering is more likely amongst people who are religious, women, more highly educated and have higher socioeconomic status. These factors appear to bear more clearly on the presence than the intensity of volunteering, and more on formal than on informal volunteering.
- There are several significant cohesion-relevant barriers to recruiting and sustaining volunteers. These are (i) diversity and contact in communities, (ii) diversity within volunteering organisations, (iii) social capital and personal connections, (iv) time, (v) travel

costs and feasibility, (vi) financial feasibility, and (vii) stereotypes, intergroup segregation, and lack of common interest. Time is the most commonly reported barrier to volunteering.

- Some barriers appear more significant for particular demographic groups, such as people who are elderly, have low-incomes or have disabilities, potentially further deepening current gaps in volunteering engagement and social capital.
- The evidence allows confident inference that investment in cohesion is likely to promote volunteering and that investment in volunteering is likely to improve cohesion, thus supporting the expectation that such investments can create a virtuous circle that creates tangible strengthening of community resilience. The evidence confirms that investment in cohesion promotes volunteering and that investment in volunteering improves cohesion. By working together, they create a virtuous circle that strengthens community resilience. Policy strategies that explicitly address the connection between the two are more likely to succeed than those that do not.

Contents

Executive Summary 2
Introduction 6
Scope of the review and methodology 6
Social cohesion 8
Defining social cohesion 8
Conceptualising social cohesion for research purposes 11
Social capital 12
Bonding social capital 13
Bridging social capital 13
Linking capital 14
Volunteering 14
Formal and informal volunteering 15
What is the relationship between formal and informal volunteering? 16
Implications for research 16
The Social Cohesion-Volunteering Relationship 17
Challenges in exploring the cohesion-volunteering relationship 17
Which forms of volunteering most impact social cohesion? 17
What are the conditions in which volunteering is more likely to lead to better connections and trust at a local level? 18
Which comes first? Local volunteering infrastructure or high levels of volunteering, and what Is the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion? 18
Volunteering as a driver of social cohesion- the 'volunteer drives' route 19
Social cohesion as a driver of volunteering- the 'cohesion drives' route 22
How Do Age, Life Stage, Ethnicity, Faith, Disability and Personal Circumstances Influence the Kind of Volunteering People Do? 24
Age 24
Ethnicity 25
Faith 26
Disability And Long-Term Health Issues 27
Gender 28
Education 28

Socioeconomic Status (SES) 29
Employment 30
Physical Geography 30
What Are the Cohesion-Related Barriers to Volunteering? Which Groups Are More or Less Likely to Volunteer, and What Stops Different Groups from Volunteering? 31
Diversity and contact in communities 31
Diversity within volunteering organisations 32
Social capital and personal connections 33
time 33
Travel costs and feasibility 33
Financial feasibility 33
Stereotypes, intergroup segregation, and lack of common interest 34
How Can More Volunteering Be Encouraged Particularly in Those Groups Less Likely to Volunteer? 35
Conclusions 35
References 37

Introduction

This review presents the conclusions of a search of the academic and grey literature to assess what we know about the relationship between social cohesion and volunteering. We set out our methodology and then describe the conceptual and operational definitions of cohesion on the one hand and volunteering on the other. This provides the framework within which we selected and assessed the empirical evidence for the connections between social cohesion and volunteering.

Understanding these connections is a key question because we can then assess where and how to invest resources to maximise the potential of both volunteering and cohesion. There are several possible aspects of this relationship: (i) *correlation*- cohesion and volunteering may simply be co-occurring features of a general set of circumstances and contexts, neither having any direct influence on the other; (ii) *cohesion drives*- greater cohesion may enable, support and/or promote volunteering; (iii) *volunteering drives*- volunteering may be a precursor, seedbed, or engine of greater social cohesion, and (iv) *mutual influence*- cohesion drives volunteering and vice versa. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and it is quite possible that the relationship between cohesion and volunteering may depend on where and when it is observed.

Scope of the review and methodology

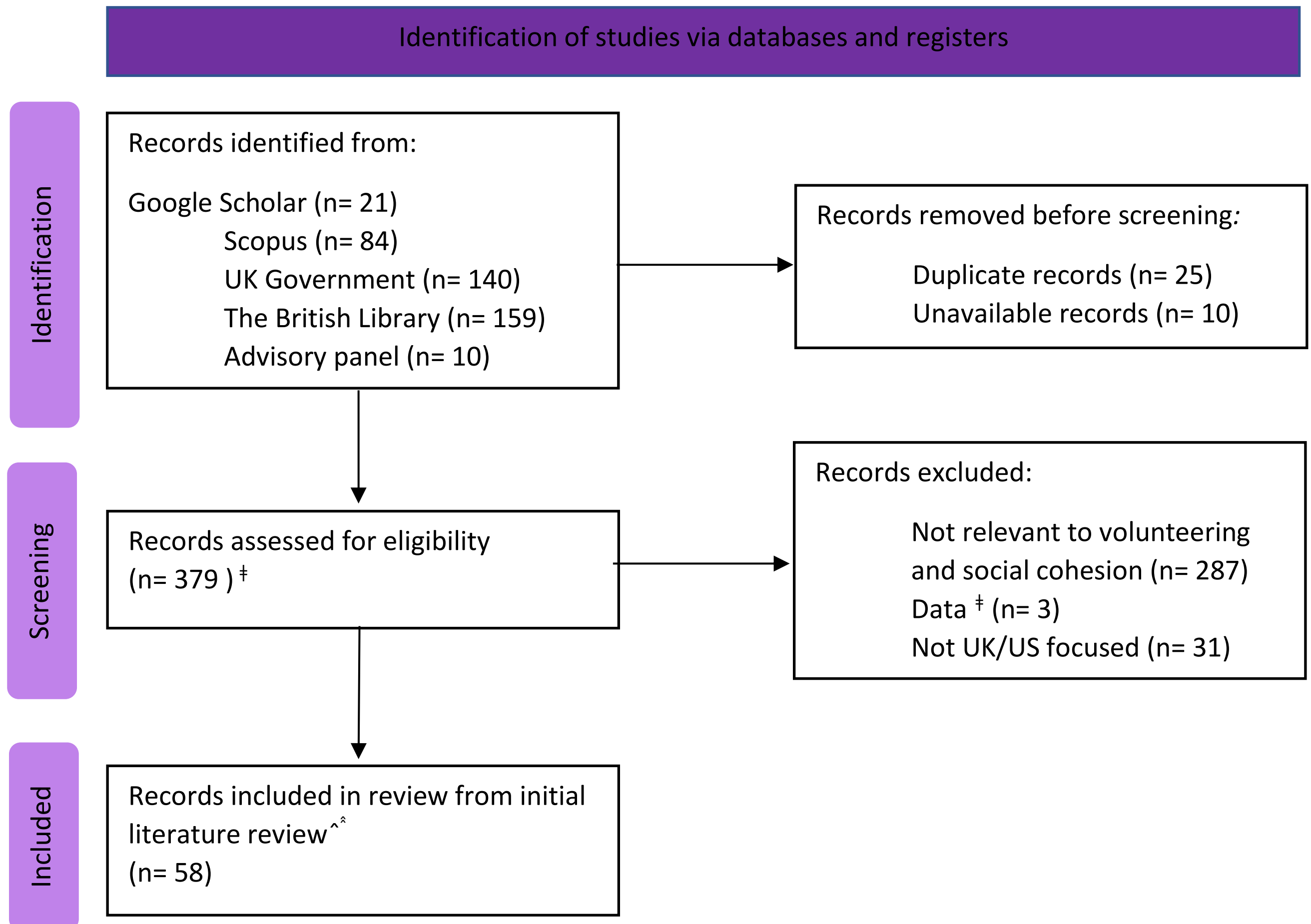
The terms of reference for this review are a) to focus primarily on evidence from the UK, b) to prioritise longitudinal and experimental evidence that can shed light on causal direction, c) to consider the quality and quantity of available evidence, d) to assess the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn from the evidence and e) to identify gaps in the evidence base. We also focus primarily, but not exclusively, on evidence from the last 10-20 years. The original prescription was a 20-page review with approximately 20 citations. The review has expanded considerably beyond that, albeit constrained by the available funding and time.

Our evidence searches were conducted through Google Scholar and Scopus for academic literature published during or after 2000 and focusing on US or UK contexts. We also identified the most highly cited works and worked outwards towards texts of interest that they themselves had cited. Social cohesion was searched using a variety of terms including 'societal cohesion' 'neighbo(u)rhood cohesion', 'social cohesion' and 'community cohesion'. This revealed 23,305 results, of which 29 were relevant for this review. The term 'volunteering' revealed 394,227 citations, and 43 included measures and evidence pertinent to this review.

We then searched for citations that included both volunteering and any of the social cohesion terms. As well as academic literature, we also explore some of the grey literature surrounding volunteering and social cohesion. Searches were conducted primarily through Google, the UK Government website and the British Library. We prioritised quantitative data for the purposes of this report, though systematic interview methodologies were also included. This yielded a total of 414 results, of which 58 were identified as relevant.

Figure 1 outlines the process by which grey and academic literature was identified for terms relating to social cohesion and volunteering.

Figure 1. *Identification of studies procedure and outcomes for academic and grey literature on volunteering and social cohesion*



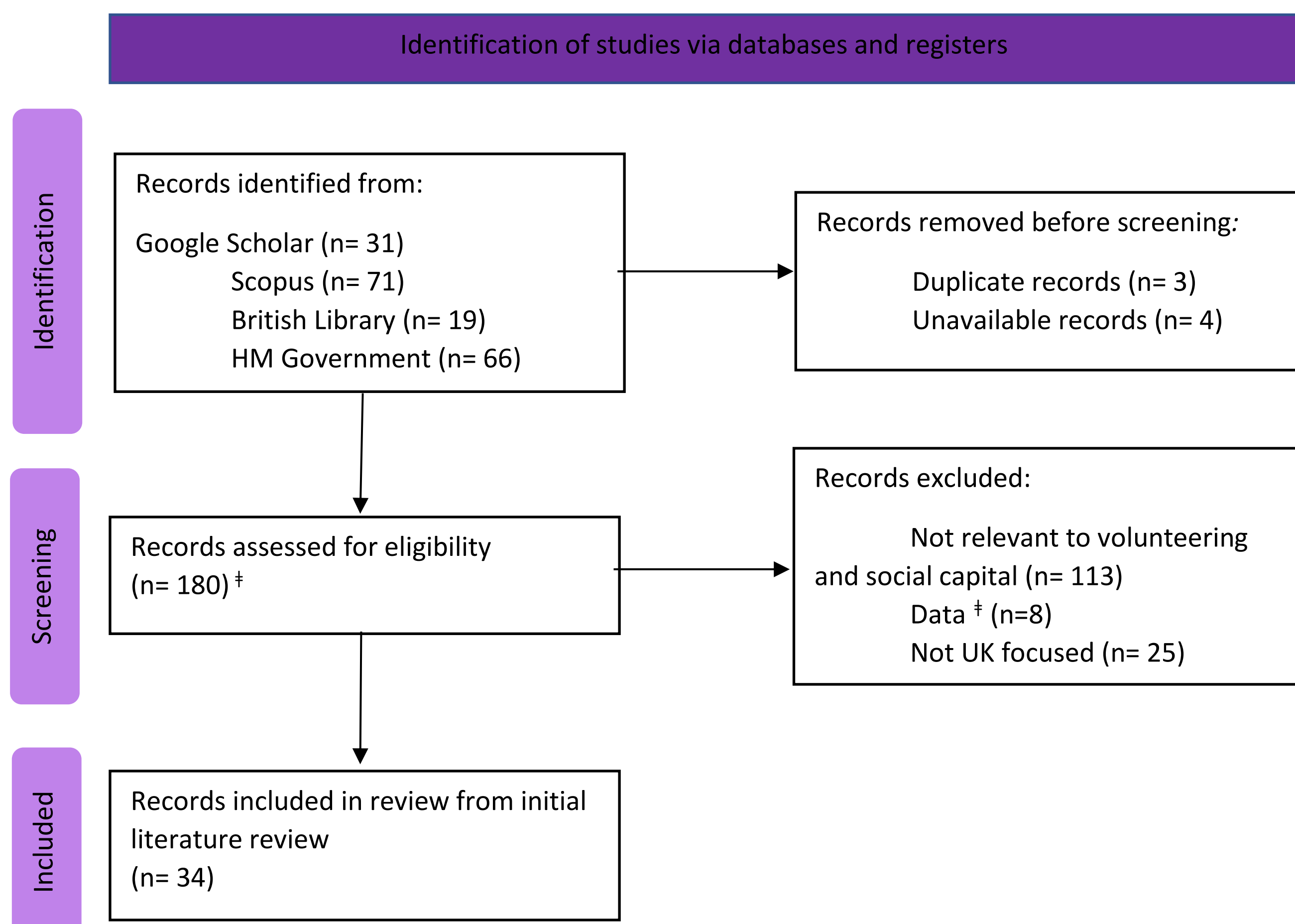
ǂ Includes low sample sizes and lack of quantitative data

ˆ Does not include papers located through citations in these studies

Finally, we conducted a scoping search of academic literature and grey literature pertaining to social capital and volunteering. We limited our academic search to articles which focused on data from the UK and were published no earlier than 2010 (in line with the introduction of David Cameron's 'Big Society' campaign), though grey literature extended to that published before 2000. This yielded a total of 187 results, of which 34 were identified as relevant.

Figure 2 outlines the process by which grey and academic literature was identified relating to volunteering and social capital.

Figure 2. *Identification of studies procedure and outcomes for academic and grey literature on volunteering and social capital.*



ǂ *Includes low sample sizes and lack of quantitative data*

In total, our review draws from 222 sources identified from our initial literature reviews, and an additional 16 sources located outside of these reviews by the research team, considered relevant to the research questions. Consequently, the review draws from a total of 238 sources.

Social cohesion

Defining social cohesion

Social cohesion is a ubiquitous concept. Interest in the study of social cohesion first arose during the 19th Century in Emile Durkheim's sociological studies of consensus and conflict (Burns et al., 2018). Yet, despite its centrality for theory and practice, social cohesion lacks consensual definition (Bottoni, 2018a; Burns et al., 2018; Chan et al., 2006; Dickes et al., 2010; Hulse and Stone, 2007). Academics have explored empirical conceptualisations of social cohesion, whereas politically its use tends to arise when describing upturns or downturns in cohesion in response to national and international problems. Policymakers have also largely driven attempts to operationalise and measure the construct.

A variety of definitions of social cohesion have been offered across the fields of sociology, political science, and psychology (Chan et al, 2006; Lalot et al., 2022; Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017). Some

have suggested that there is not, and perhaps should not be, a single way of defining social cohesion (Jenson, 1998). Maxwell (1996) defined social cohesion as "building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and that they are members of the same community" (p.3). Chan et al. (2006) provided a more complex and comprehensive definition of social cohesion; "a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of a society, as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations".

An additional challenge to conceptualisations of social cohesion, identified by the British Academy Cohesive Societies programme[1] (e.g., Baylis et al., 2019) was that they vary in their level of analysis, ranging from supra-national levels to community levels. There is also a wide range of definitions within policy discourse, which is largely driven by a focus on domains in which the definition is to be applied (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017). Consequently, the term tends to be used as a "catchword" (Chan et al., 2006, p. 277) to encompass any of several challenges faced by a particular society. Although this review focuses on the UK and US, it is also important to recognise that there are international differences in policy-related conceptualisations of social cohesion. Hulse and Stone (2007) observed that in liberal welfare countries such as the US, social solidarity is regarded as a bottom-up process which derives from voluntary involvement in social networks. Conversely, in the EU, social cohesion is perceived as a top-down process which is driven by the capacity of institutional structures to address issues surrounding inequality. Even within European institutions, there are significant variations.

In the following section, we explore how social cohesion has been conceptualised within the UK context.

Policy frameworks for social cohesion within the UK

Within the UK, governments of different complexions have all alluded in some form or other to the importance of social cohesion, albeit in different ways. Tony Blair (1997) aspired to "*A nation united. With common purpose, shared values, with no one shut out, no one excluded, no one told that they do not matter. In that society, tolerance and respect will be the order of the day*"[2]. This image is echoed in subsequent concepts such as the 'Big Society' (David Cameron) or 'Shared Society' (Theresa May), and Boris Johnson's focus on 'levelling up'. In more concrete terms, the focus has centred on either integration or '*community cohesion'*, emanating in part from the need to address civil unrest in Northern England in 2001 (Hickman et al., 2012). For the purposes of our review, we offer a brief introduction into the community cohesion movement in the UK. A more detailed overview of the history of this movement and the community policies which have been put in place in the UK can be found from the British Academy (Donoghue and Bourke, 2019).

Social cohesion has been addressed in the UK largely within a context of cultural diversification (Cheong et al., 2007) following the paradigm of "parallel lives", suggesting that particular ethnic and religious groups failed to move beyond their homogeneous subgroups and integrate themselves into wider society. This led to assumptions that the UK consisted of "socially cohesive but divided neighbourhoods" (Flint and Robinson, 2008, p. 1). Consequently, interest in encouraging integration

[1] see https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/cohesive-societies/
[2] Also https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/201704/sri_blairs_britain_the_social_and_cultural_legacy_2008.pdf

through both formal and informal interactions across ethnic and religious communities to increase bridging social capital became prevalent in policies driven by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit (Aldridge et al., 2003; Cheong et al., 2007).

As noted by the Institute for Volunteering Research's review of social cohesion and volunteering (Ramsey, 2012), the first official policy definition of community cohesion did not appear until 2002 in a guidance document for local authorities (LGA, 2002). This defined a cohesive community as one possessing four key characteristics; (i) common vision and sense of belonging, (ii) positive value for people's diverse backgrounds and circumstances, (iii) similar life opportunities amongst those from different backgrounds, and (iv) strong and positive relationships developing between those from different backgrounds, in workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods. This definition highlights the focus of community cohesion on crossing group boundaries to establish positive intergroup relationships.

In 2005, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion was set up with the purpose of developing practical recommendations for maximising the benefits of diversity and responding to tensions it may cause (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007; Ramsey, 2012). Drawing on this, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) produced a revised Cohesion Delivery Framework which moved away from the "problematic" concept of parallel lives (Ramsey, 2012, p. 22) and instead emphasised the importance of integration, "adjust[ing] to one another" and enabling "different groups of people to get on well together" (DCLG, 2008, p. 6). This shift saw an increased emphasis on the potential 'dark side' of cohesive communities, where homogeneous, seemingly cohesive communities may lack tolerance towards diversity and social change (Ramsey, 2012). This is of critical interest given the discussions which have arisen in both academic and political literature surrounding the detrimental effects of heterogeneity on social cohesion (e.g. Fonseca et al., 2019; Larsen, 2013; Putnam, 2003, 2007; van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014; Wetherell, et al., 2007, see also Cheong et al., 2007).

Critically, this community cohesion agenda lessened the supposed impacts of economic factors such as equality on cohesion, instead shifting responsibility towards individuals and local communities, and thereby attracting significant criticism (Baylis et al., 2019; Phipps, 2014). As an example, it was proposed that integration at the local level should be driven through engagement of individuals in volunteering activities in their local communities (DCLG, 2012; UK Government, 2018; Zimmeck, 2009), such as community-based English language programmes supported by the government (Donoghue and Bourke, 2019). This shift in focus, along with other movements towards the 'Big Society' framework, placed growing emphasis on local civic engagement over and above top-down social policy initiatives seeking to increase social contact (Ramsey, 2012). Consequently, changes in the UK definitions moved towards the bottom-up perception and away from the top-down perspective described by Hulse and Stone (2007).

This focus has persisted during the past two decades, as seen in recent reports from UK governments relating to social cohesion which have focused on supporting the development of integrated communities, driving policies to promote equality and integration, and tackling segregation (UK Government, 2018, 2019). This is not to say that social cohesion has been addressed in a unified manner across the nation; some geographical differences have emerged (Lalot et al., 2022), with initiatives in Scotland focusing on poverty reduction (Scottish Government, 2020) and those in Wales also focusing on this in addition to hate crime and violence (Welsh Government, 2014, 2015, 2016). Integration and diversity management are continuing themes within social cohesion policies within the UK. We consider however, that whilst integration is clearly a central issue for cohesion it does not complete, even the majority of, the picture. Consequently, it is critical

to consider other components of social cohesion if we are to develop an extensive understanding of its relationship with civic engagement.

In the next section, we consider the different ways in which social cohesion has been conceptualised, focusing largely on academic literature.

Conceptualising social cohesion for research purposes

We outline how academic researchers have developed their approaches to conceptualising and measuring cohesion in the 21st century and how it has been gradually elaborated and refined. Readers preferring to cut to the case may wish to jump to the end of this section.

Jenson (1998) was one of the first to attempt to conceptualise social cohesion, based on five key dimensions. She proposed that social cohesion is dependent on levels of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy. Bernard (1999) then devised a typology of social cohesion based on two facets: the domain of human activity, and the character of the social relations. The five dimensions proposed by Jenson (1998) were characterised by Bernard (1999) as operating in either the economic, political, or socio-cultural sphere, and based either in attitudinal or behavioural relations (termed formal and substantial respectively). Bernard (1999) also proposed a sixth dimension of social cohesion- equality.

In a similar manner, Chan et al. (2006) offered a 2x2 taxonomy in which the first dimension captures social cohesion into subjective and objective components, aligning closely with the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions proposed by Bernard (1999). The second dimension distinguishes between horizontal forms (cohesion amongst citizens) and vertical forms (cohesion between citizens and the state). Their conceptualisation of social cohesion removed socioeconomic factors on the basis that they consider economic situation to be a precondition more than a constituent of social cohesion. They also remove tolerance from taxonomy, which previous definitions and conceptualisations had included, arguing that highly homogenous societies can experience high levels of social cohesion in the absence of respect for diversity and tolerance of others. This argument echoes claims made in the political sphere around the same time (see Ramsey, 2012).

Dickes et al. (2010) and Dickes and Valentova (2012) combined the frameworks of Bernard (1999) and Chan et al. (2006) to suggest four main dimensions of social cohesion. Using data from the European Value Studies of 2008 and 1999 from 47 European countries and regions, they devised a measure involving four dimensions: Legitimacy, acceptance, political participation, and sociocultural participation. Notably, they observed that different countries or regions are characterised by different “profiles” (Dickes and Valentova, 2012, p. 828) of social cohesion. Southern European countries are more likely to elevate aspects within the formal dimension proposed by Bernard (1999), relating to confidence in institutions, and less likely to display aspects within the substantial dimension, relating to participation in social and political activities. These geographical differences have also been found by Acket et al. (2011).

More recently, Schiefer and van der Noll’s (2017) review of the literature identified three crucial components of social cohesion from academic and social policy research. These are: (i) the quality of social relations (including social networks, trust, acceptance of diversity and participation) (ii) identification with the social entity (including a focus on British values and citizenship) and (iii) orientation towards the common good (including a sense of responsibility, solidarity and compliance to the social order).

Bottoni (2018a, 2018b) then offered a three-level multidimensional model of social cohesion that could be used for empirical research exploring antecedents and outcomes of cohesion. Building

upon earlier work by Whelan and Maitre (2005), Bottoni accommodated Chan et al.'s (2006) distinction between subjective and objective perspectives, and further distinguished three levels of cohesion: *macro* (relating to broader society and relations within institutions); *meso* (relating to larger groups within a society from which social identities may stem); and *micro* (relating to interpersonal connections within small groups such as families) levels of social cohesion). The resultant model incorporates seven key dimensions of social cohesion: (i) institutional trust (macro/subjective), (ii) legitimacy of institutions (macro/objective), (iii) openness (meso/subjective), (iv) participation (meso/objective), (v) interpersonal trust (micro/subjective), (vi) social support (micro/subjective) and (vii) density of social relations (micro/objective).

In 2019, the British Academy conducted a scoping analysis as part of its Cohesive Societies programme (The British Academy, 2019), identifying five key themes of social cohesion in the UK context. These are (i) cultural memory and tradition, (ii) the social economy, (iii) meaning and mechanisms of social responsibility (iv) identity and belonging and (v) care for the future. It then commissioned a landscape review of social cohesion literature (Baylis et al., 2019). In a similar vein to Schiefer and van der Noll (2017), Baylis et al. identified 8 key components based on a range of definitions of social cohesion in the literature. The first three components, regarded as 'social components' include (i) sense of belonging, (ii) homogeneity of values and (iii) attitudes and regard for diversity. Components four and five are considered 'political dimensions' of social cohesion and are (iv) participation or collaboration, and (v) rules and institutions which rely on consensus. Components six and seven are equality based and include (vi) wealth/income equality and (vii) equal access to resources. The final component is (viii) personal and collective autonomy, which links closely to component three 'regard for diversity'.

The Baylis et al (2019) review extends Bottoni's framework by including homogeneity of values. Bottoni et al. (2018b) follow Durkheim (1983) in contending that cohesion in the form of homogeneity is based on "archaic societies in which social cohesion is kept through similarities between individuals, sharing values and a sense of belonging to the same community" (p. 10). Baylis et al. (2019) also diverge from Bottoni's approach by including economic factors whereas Bottoni et al. (2018b) argue, in a similar vein to Chan et al. (2006), that such factors are consequences of social cohesion as opposed to constituents.

Social capital

Social capital is clearly a critical component of social cohesion, although, like cohesion, there are a variety of definitions of the concept in social scientific literature (Cook, 2022). Putnam's (1993) well known description of social capital was "features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits" (p. 36). However, many researchers have noted the challenge in a lack of clear definition, which has resulted in many adopting their own definitions of the concept. Bourdieu (1986) had earlier defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or […] to membership in a group that provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital" (p. 248). More recent definitions have been simpler, such as Lin's (1999) definition, "Investment in social relations with expected returns". In general, however, despite continuing criticism (e.g. Cook, 2005), it is Putnam's conceptualisation of the concept that remains most used.

A unifying element across definitions of social capital is social connections within groups and networks, and the resources (e.g. information, influence and collective) arising from them. These

resources benefit both individuals and the wider social group (Cook, 2022) and are a part of the horizontal subjective component of social cohesion proposed by Chan et al. (2006).

A key difference between cohesion and capital is that whilst the former operates on a societal level, the latter is focused at individual and group levels (Chan et al., 2006). Social capital does not necessarily result in social cohesion; a society can consist of many groups with strong social capital within them, but no inter-group inclusion (akin to the 'dark side' of social cohesion mentioned in Ramsey, 2012). Thus, whilst certainly a *constituent* of social cohesion, social capital in isolation is not a sufficient indication of social cohesion within a community.

Putnam (1994, 1995) argues that civic engagement behaviours, including participation in volunteer organisations, voting, and religious participation, are critical to the formation of generalised trust and norms of reciprocity. The decline of such activities has been claimed to be detrimental to social networks and institutions. As such, social capital has been considered to be in decline (Putnam, 2000, though see Paxton, 1999). Countries differ in their levels of social capital (e.g. Stolle and Hooghe, 2005), and these differences have been attributed to factors such as political stability, corruption, inequality, and economic growth (Cook, 2022). For example, Halpern (2005) reported that societies such as the UK and US were showing a reduction in civic engagement, whilst other European countries such as Sweden were showing the opposite.

Within the general concept of social capital, different types of capital have been identified. Granovetter (1973) identified two different forms of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. We now discuss these in more detail.

Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital describes the connections within a group or community. A critical feature underpinning bonding is the community's degree of homogeneity - members having similar characteristics, attitudes, and resources (Claridge, 2018). Members of groups characterised by high bonding capital will typically be highly interconnected and frequently interact. Common examples include relatives, neighbours, and close friends.

Bonding capital is thought to confer several benefits, including emotional support and the fostering of reciprocal norms associated with trust (Claridge, 2018). Despite this, bonding capital is also generally associated with negative outcomes due to its high levels of exclusivity. Networks with excessive levels of bonding capital may develop higher levels of prejudice and discrimination, intergroup conflict and competition and consequently, this can be detrimental to social cohesion (Claridge, 2018; What Works Wellbeing, 2022).

Bridging social capital

Bridging social capital describes the connections between communities which are separated by divisions such as race, class, or religion. (Claridge, 2018). People experiencing high levels of bridging capital are said to possess high levels of shared interests or goals despite stark differences in their social identity (Pelling and High, 2005). The notion of bridging capital is strongly tied to the UK's concepts of community integration and cohesion, and various policies introduced since the early 2000s have aimed to increase bridging cohesion between communities within the UK.

The benefits of bridging capital are generally considered far greater than those of bonding capital (Putnam, 2000), helping individuals gain social mobility, power, and new opportunities (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Stone and Hughes, 2002). Bridging capital is said to increase tolerance for diversity through increased intergroup contact (Paxton, 2002), a tenet supported by the myriad of psychological research showing positive effects of intergroup contact on intergroup trust

(Lundåsen, 2022; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Schmid et al., 2014), emotions (Pettigrew et al., 2011) and perceptions (Brown et al., 2007). There are thought to be few, if any, negative effects of bridging capital (Claridge, 2018) which perhaps explains why this is the avenue prioritised in addressing weaknesses in social cohesion in the UK. Nonetheless, contact is not necessarily equally beneficial for all parties (Dovidio et al. 2016; Hässler et al., 2020; Tausch et al., 2015), and must be carefully navigated if it is to produce lasting and positive relationships. Consequently, there is a need for communities to have a balance of bonding and bridging capital to maximise community development and social cohesion (Kearney, 2003).

What connects bridging and bonding social capital is that both are generally regarded as being horizontal forms of social capital (Woolcock and Naryan, 2000), by laterally connecting people of similar status and power.

Vertical social capital is also an important constituent of social cohesion, akin to the vertical subjective dimension of social cohesion proposed by Chan et al. (2006). Whist bridging capital may include vertical aspects (Claridge, 2018), vertical connections are more commonly termed 'linking capital'.

Linking capital

Linking social capital describes the connections between individuals who are interacting across power gradients within their society (Szreter and Woolock, 2004). An example of linking social capital would be the relationships that develop between community-based volunteer organisations and funding partners. Linking capital is critical to the development of communities (Flora, 1998), though in high levels can be linked to nepotism and corruption (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Linking capital may also extend bridging capital by involving networks and connections between individuals or groups in public agencies, businesses, legal institutions, or political groups (Healy, 2002). The vertical bridging between minority and majority groups of differing levels of power, becomes 'linking' when these power differences are more explicit (Claridge, 2018). Linking social capital can then offer similar benefits to bridging capital by enabling the acquisition of resources (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004; Stone and Hughes, 2002).

Volunteering

Volunteering has been explored in both social policy and academic literature. Volunteering is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2011) as "Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organisation or directly for others outside their own household" (p.13). In the academic literature Omoto and Packard (2016) define volunteering as "An active and intentional process in which individuals and groups seek out opportunities to assist others. These actions, intended to be helpful, are undertaken by choice, on the basis of free will, and often in the service of personal values, needs and motives" (p. 272).

Snyder and Omoto (2008) propose six defining features of volunteerism. First, the actions must be performed at free will, in the total absence of obligation or coercion. Second, the act must involve some form of deliberation (i.e. the action is not classified as 'emergency helping'). Third, the act must occur on multiple occasions over an extended period (i.e. the action must not be a one-off event). Fourth, the activity must be undertaken in the absence of expectation of reward or punishment. Fifth, the action serves people or causes who desire help, as opposed to being imposed on a target group. Finally, the action must be performed on behalf of people or causes, most

commonly through agencies or organisations. This distinguishes volunteering from simple acts of 'helping', which the authors explicitly label as informal volunteerism.

Although Snyder and Omoto's model is specific and comprehensive, it lacks two important features. Firstly, by treating volunteering entirely as an individual activity it does not consider how levels of volunteering across communities as a whole might be increased or decreased. For example, during public emergencies many more people engage in single acts of volunteering than would otherwise be the case. Although these acts contribute substantially to community well-being, they would not be classed as volunteering according to Snyder and Omoto's third criterion. Secondly, it adheres to the 'civil society paradigm' (Lyons et al., 1998), which has several pitfalls which we will now discuss.

The 'civil society paradigm' (Lyons et al., 1998; Paine et al., 2010; Rochester, 2006; UK Government, 2018), which focuses on organisation-based volunteering, dominates much of the literature. In this paradigm, volunteers are characterised as possessing altruistic drives to improve their local communities and/or environments. However, the ways in which volunteering is enacted in the UK appears to be changing. As noted by the Institute for Volunteering Research (Ramsey, 2012), policy changes in the UK are not only increasing the necessity of volunteering (e.g. the Work Programme and the National Citizenship Service), but also developing new ways to reward volunteering (e.g. university degree modules and corporate sponsorship initiatives). These additional routes into volunteering are not captured well by definitions and measures that only address altruism and intrinsic motivations. Moreover, the civil society paradigm also overlooks the importance of informal volunteering behaviours. As noted by Thomson (2002; p. 23):

'Volunteering needs to move beyond its connotation of work for organisations; it needs to reclaim the informal mosaic of tasks that we believe were once the invisible glue holding the community together, and which were delivered by individuals to individuals. This is often styled 'informal volunteering' and is still widespread, although it has often been seen as the poor relation of formal volunteering and is not counted by many as volunteering at all.'

If we are to understand how each type of volunteering may impact social cohesion within and outside of the UK, it is necessary to include the roles of both formal and informal volunteering and their relationship with one another.

Formal and informal volunteering

According to Pearce and Kristjansson (2019), formal volunteering is conducted on behalf of an organisation. Informal volunteering includes more general helping behaviours and may be directed towards friends and neighbours and occur outside of an organisational context (Snyder and Omoto, 2008).

The exclusion of informal volunteering from many definitions of volunteering in the literature has been considered by some to be frustrating and unhelpful (e.g., Thomson, 2002). Disregarding informal volunteering excludes micro-volunteering and episodic volunteering (Saxton et al., 2007; Paine et al., 2010), and means research may easily underestimate the community impacts of volunteering activity (Rochester, 2006). Informal volunteering is also more common than formal volunteering. The Home Office (2003) and Volunteer Development Agency (2001) find rates of informal volunteering in the UK and Northern Ireland are almost twice that of formal volunteering. The Community Life Survey 2020/2021 (DCMS, 2021) revealed that whilst formal volunteering rates were at their lowest since the survey commenced in 2013, informal volunteering rates were at their highest, with 33% of respondents taking part in informal volunteering at least once a month. These

changes in volunteering rates are relatively unsurprising in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to formal volunteering opportunities were reduced (Dederichs, 2022).

Another reason for underestimation in volunteering rates is differences in people's perceptions of what counts as volunteering. Many who engage in volunteering behaviours, such as coaching a local sports team, report that they do not volunteer (Rooney et al., 2004), meaning informal volunteering rates may be under-reported. Many community groups also feel that the term 'volunteering' does not reflect the work that they do (Briggs et al., 2013). Consequently, it is clearly important to consider both formal and informal volunteering when examining the impacts and antecedents of volunteering in the UK.

A broader definition of volunteering which does not emphasise the binary of formal and informal volunteering types is offered by Vision for Volunteering, which defines volunteering as "*an active deliberate pursuit*" which is "*designed to improve the world, a part of it, or community in it*", by "*your own free choice as an individual*" and is done "*without payment*" (Vision for Volunteering, 2022). Importantly, they emphasise that volunteering can include more generalised helping behaviours such as helping a neighbour or coaching a sports team, and that it may occur on a one-off basis. This broader type of definition seems more useful when considering the impacts of volunteering on social cohesion, including integration and social contact.

What is the relationship between formal and informal volunteering?

In fact, although the two forms are conceptually distinct, they do tend to be positively correlated; those who engage in one type of volunteering are also likely to engage in the other (Wilson and Musick, 1997). This positive relationship between formal and informal volunteering has been observed in both the US (Choi et al., 2007; Lee and Brundey, 2012) and the UK (Zischka, 2019). Zischka (2019) argues that it is driven by individuals' underlying level of prosocial motivation.

Johnson et al. (2018) conducted a study on formal volunteering amongst senior American citizens using data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a longitudinal panel study of Americans over the age of 50. A logistic regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between helping and formal volunteering amongst senior Americans; those who had helped friends or neighbours in the past year were 78% more likely to engage in moderate levels of volunteering and 132% more likely to engage in high levels of volunteering. Johnson et al. also found that people's engagement in informal volunteering was predictive of the intensity of their formal volunteering. Relative to engaging in moderate levels of volunteering, helping friends or neighbours in the past year was associated with a 33% increase in the likelihood of engaging in high levels of volunteering. Similarly, Nakamura et al. (2022) found that senior American citizens who spent at least 200 hours per year helping friends, neighbours or relatives at baseline were 30% more likely to formally volunteer at a four year follow up. Interestingly however, in Germany, Helms and McKenzie (2014) found that women were more likely to volunteer formally if they also volunteered informally, but the relationship between formal and informal volunteering did not hold for men. Thus, the relationship between different forms of volunteering may be influenced somewhat by other demographic factors.

Implications for research

Whether or not the distinction between informal and formal volunteering is helpful, it is clear that research exploring the impacts of volunteering on community-level factors such as social cohesion must consider both aspects of volunteering. Not only will this embrace a more holistic assessment, but it also helps to address the potential underreporting in surveys and national reports due to an overly narrow scope in measuring volunteering.

A further distinction, that emerges from the research, is between the presence of volunteering (whether or not people do), and its intensity, breadth or frequency. Unless specified otherwise, the majority of evidence speaks to the presence of volunteering, henceforth termed *engagement*, and this may reflect the challenges researchers face in measuring intensity or using it as a statistical indicator in their analyses.

The social cohesion-volunteering relationship

In this section we assess what is known about the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion. We first discuss some of the challenges in exploring this relationship before turning to existing evidence of the three ways this relationship may be manifested; 'correlation', 'cohesion drives' and 'volunteering drives'.

Challenges in exploring the cohesion-volunteering relationship

One of the challenges of research on the antecedents and effects of social cohesion is that the term is often conceptualised in ways that are confounded with its causes or effects (Green et al., 2009). While this review considers how volunteering may be an antecedent or consequence of social cohesion, some previous conceptualisations of social cohesion have included volunteering as one of its features, either implicitly (e.g. Dickes and Valentova, 2012) or explicitly (e.g. Chan et al., 2006). Consequently, it is often difficult to disentangle the two, particularly when measures of social cohesion may include some elements of volunteering (e.g. Dragolov et al., 2013; Tolsma et al., 2009). Woolley (2003) notes that research often uses volunteering as a proxy for social cohesion. Jennings (2019) argues that it is because volunteering activity is linked to reciprocity and trust that is a popular indicator of social cohesion. Examples of such research include but are not limited to Fernando et al., 2003, Rajulton et al., 2007 and Schmeets and te Riele (2014).

Consequently, there is a surprisingly limited pool of research that has explicitly assessed the relationship between social cohesion and volunteering. Of that which does, the vast majority is correlational rather than longitudinal or experimental (Hill and Stevens, 2010; Miller, 2010). Consequently, while there is consistent evidence about the presence of a connection between volunteering and cohesion, the direction of causality in the relationship cannot easily be inferred, and the evidence does not shed light on whether engagement in volunteering is an antecedent or consequence of social cohesion, or both.

There is also a body of research that specifically focuses on social capital and volunteering, and it poses the same difficulties of interpretation, described by Fox (2019) as the 'causality conundrum' (p. 71). Many factors noted as benefits of volunteering, including social capital are also known drivers of volunteering behaviour. As explored by Dawson et al. (2019), the increased social capital and social ties resulting from volunteering at an individual level can increase volunteering because of the higher levels of trust and reciprocity. It can be hard to distinguish whether a volunteer's level of social capital is high due to their volunteering behaviour, or due to their background, which makes them more likely to volunteer (Fox, 2019). Furthermore, many measurements of social capital include volunteering engagement (e.g., Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022), making it more challenging to distinguish between the two factors.

Which forms of volunteering most impact social cohesion?

Zischka (2019) investigated the relationship between social welfare and giving behaviours in England and Wales. They found that compared to formal volunteering, engagement in informal volunteering had a much less significant impact on numerous factors of social welfare such as trust, wellbeing,

and deprivation- all factors which are proposed to encapsulate social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017). Zischka argues that this is due to the motivation behind the volunteering, which is discussed in more detail in the next section. Another potential explanation for the lesser impact of informal volunteering on social cohesion comes from Wiertz (2015), who argues that informal volunteering occurs most typically on an individual basis and is most commonly directed towards those with whom we have pre-existing connections, such as friends and family members. This is particularly relevant to social cohesion within the UK as it suggests that informal volunteering may also have a smaller impact on integration, as it is less likely to involve the intergroup contact necessary for community cohesion (see Putnam, 2000).

Informal volunteering may even have potentially negative impacts on social cohesion. Because more advantaged individuals are more likely to engage in formal volunteering (DCMS, 2023; Johnson et al., 2018), its positive effects on social cohesion and social capital are most likely to arise in already advantaged communities. Consequently, this increased reliance on informal volunteering in less advantaged communities may exacerbate inequalities between different groups and diminishing any potentially positive effects of volunteering on social cohesion.

What are the conditions in which volunteering is more likely to lead to better connections and trust at a local level?

Zischka (2019) argues that the main determinant of whether volunteering creates benefits is the volunteers' motivation. In England and Wales, Zischka's analysis suggests that informal volunteering is less strongly associated with aspects of social cohesion including trust and deprivation on a communal level as compared to formal volunteering. Zischka proposes that those who engage in informal volunteering may be more likely to do so because of social pressure, whilst those who engage in formal volunteering are less likely to be pressured to do so, instead actively seeking opportunities to volunteer. Consequently, volunteering is most likely to lead to higher levels of trust and more cohesive communities when it is driven by intrinsic prosocial motivation as opposed to social pressure. This interesting suggestion does, however, create a potentially false dichotomy between truly altruistic formal volunteering on the one hand and self-serving informal volunteering on the other. It is not clear that such a distinction is wholly valid given that both types of volunteering can clearly bring benefits in terms of both reputation and social exchanges.

Which comes first, local volunteering infrastructure or high levels of volunteering, and what is the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion?

Whilst relatively little literature exists exploring the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion, that which does generally concludes the two have a positive relationship. Latham and Clarke (2018) conducted research on volunteering amongst senior American individuals and found that those with moderate levels of volunteering (less than 100 hours in the last year) had significantly higher perceptions of social cohesion compared to those who did not volunteer. Johnson et al. (2018) found in the US that the likelihood of engaging in both moderate (less than or equal to 100 hours in the past year) and high levels (more than 100 hours in the past year) of volunteering were positively related to perceived social cohesion. Pearce and Kristjansson (2019) found in a sample of Canadian undergraduate students that social cohesion was a predictor of both formal and informal volunteering frequency. Taking a different approach, Chetty et al. (2022) studied social cohesion and volunteering behaviours in the US using Facebook friendship and

volunteer group membership data, also supporting a positive relationship between cohesiveness and volunteering membership.

These studies described above were conducted with non-UK samples, so the findings may not generalise to UK populations. Nonetheless, Zischka (2019) found that in England and Wales, higher generalised levels of giving (more money donations, more time commitment (i.e. volunteering)) to persons other than oneself was found to be associated with better welfare outcomes, including life satisfaction, trust and reduced crime and deprivation. Furthermore, Lalot et al. (2022) found that those who engaged in volunteering in the UK had higher levels of both horizontal cohesion (measured as sense of neighbourliness) and vertical cohesion (measured as trust in the government). Importantly, they also found that levels of volunteering were twice as high in regions of the UK that had invested in social cohesion. A longitudinal analysis conducted by Fox (2019) in the UK also found support for a positive relationship between volunteering and social cohesion. Thus, research consistently supports a positive relationship between contexts that have greater social cohesion and the likelihood of engaging in volunteering.

However, the relationship between social cohesion and the intensity of volunteering (i.e. the number of hours spent volunteering) may not be so strong. Latham and Clarke (2018) found that perceptions of social cohesion did not significantly differ between those who volunteered at a moderate level and those who volunteered at a higher level (100 hours or more in the past year) in the US. Johnson et al. (2018) also found that social cohesion did not influence the number of hours spent volunteering, only whether the individual did or did not engage in any form of volunteering. Similarly, in the UK, Zischka (2019) found that although the presence of volunteering was related to factors associated with social cohesion, such as trust and deprivation, the intensity of volunteering was not. Fox (2019) found that the relationship between volunteering intensity and perceived neighbourhood cohesion is nonlinear and determined that the frequency of volunteering appears to have little association with perceived cohesion. Zischka (2019) argues that this lack of relationship may be explained by high levels of volunteering replacing formal employment. We explore the relationship between employment level and volunteering behaviours in more depth in the following sections of this review.

Zischka (2019) argues that prosocial behaviours, such as giving, both add to and are stimulated by social cohesion, suggesting a bidirectional relationship. If cohesion within a social environment is reflected in general trust levels it follows that an individual who perceives those around them to be prosocial (i.e. experiences a high level of trust) is likely to become more prosocially motivated themselves. Their prosocial actions then feed back into levels of trust within the community and thus the cycle is reinforced. To explore this further, we will examine evidence for a causal impact in each direction between cohesion and volunteering.

Volunteering as a driver of social cohesion- the 'volunteer drives' route

Policymakers possess a strong belief that civic engagements such as volunteering improve social cohesion through increased inter-group contact (D'Oliveira et al., 2001; Kearney, 2003; Ramsey, 2012; Wiertz, 2015) and by increasing inclusivity (Dingle, 2001). Volunteering was seen as central to the aims of the 'Big Society' agenda in the UK (Kisby, 2010), which as previously discussed, largely emphasised the role of community-driven cohesion. The policies which resulted such as the Localism Act programmes (e.g. the National Citizen Service) were intended to encourage individuals to take an active role in their community through promoting volunteering, emphasising empowerment at a local level through participation (Ramsey, 2012)[3]. The approach aimed to put volunteering at the

forefront of citizen action in order to empower communities at a local level and redistribute power (Kisby, 2010).

Volunteering is proposed to foster social integration and cohesion (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, it is claimed to increase social capital (Kearney, 2003), which is linked to cohesive communities (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2003). The key mechanism is assumed to be the greater number of connections to individuals from different backgrounds (Birdwell et al., 2013; Morrow, 2001). According to Kearney (2003), when linking capital is weak and trust and engagement with formal political institutions is low, volunteering may be a particularly effective tool for increasing community engagement by strengthening local community democracy (Davis Smith, 2001). However, some have argued that these claims are overstated, and further empirical investigation is needed (e.g. Eliasoph, 2013).

The Institute for Volunteering Research notes that evidence for the impacts of volunteering on social cohesion is limited. However, some preliminary evidence does exist (Ramsey, 2012). An important source of evidence is the Citizenship Survey Community Cohesion Topic report, which found that both formal and informal volunteering involve similar levels of intergroup contact (17-19%; DCLG, 2009). A survey conducted by the Royal Voluntary Service in the UK provided further evidence, demonstrating that volunteers show higher levels of socialisation, talk with their neighbours more frequently and have higher levels of general wellbeing than their non-volunteering counterparts (Smith & Smith, 2021), which is indicative of increased social cohesion and social capital.

Whilst not an exact measure of social cohesion, neighbourhood belonging is identified as an important component of social cohesion by the British Academy cohesive societies programme (Baylis, 2019) and thus may be considered an indicative measure. Dolan et al.'s (2021) analysis of the NHS Volunteer Responders programme survey data compared those who had completed volunteering tasks to those who had not been assigned volunteering tasks. They found a U-shaped distribution between the number of volunteering tasks completed and feelings of neighbourhood belonging. Responders who had completed an intermediate number of volunteering tasks reported the highest levels of belonging. However, Dolan et al. (2021) note that they cannot statistically rule out diminishing returns, suggesting a potential positive correlation between the number of volunteering tasks completed and neighbourhood belonging.

Challenging these findings, evidence from the National Citizenship Service suggests mixed impacts of volunteering on social cohesion (Dokal et al., 2020; Panayiotou et al., 2017). As such, it seems that volunteering engagement is not always a sufficient driver of social cohesion.

A more nuanced picture emerges from Institute for Volunteering Research data on the impacts of volunteering in a London borough (Thomas, 2006). There was wide variation amongst volunteers' perceptions of the impacts of their volunteering on trust, friendship, contacts, and group identity. A key finding was that older people perceived a lower impact of their engagement than did younger people. Thomas (2006) argues that this may be due to the length of time in the role, although more research is needed to understand why some individuals may perceive greater social benefits from their volunteering engagement than others.

Case studies also support the argument that volunteering improves social cohesion. For example, an impact assessment of the Three Rivers volunteer centre, which aims to increase volunteering opportunities in the UK, involved interviews and surveys with volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers (Donahue, 2012). These revealed positive impacts of volunteering on the community through enhancement of local services and amenities, building community networks and increasing social capital and community cohesion. Volunteering also increased social contact amongst

volunteers and provided opportunities to network and develop new contacts. In a case study of the Volunteer Police Cadets programme in England and Wales, volunteers reported that they had developed new social networks and cooperated with a diverse range of peers who they otherwise would not have interacted with (Demarco and Bifulco, 2021).

Millora (2020) explored a range of case studies globally which highlight the potential for volunteering to foster cohesion through increased tolerance for diversity and increased helping behaviours within the community. A review from the Youth Action Network (Boeck et al., 2009) found that 60% of youth volunteers perceived their volunteering as having a positive impact on their community. Many also reported how the volunteering opportunities fostered a sense of belonging with their group and with other groups outside their usual social circles. While not necessarily generalisable, these case studies do converge in showing that volunteering may drive social cohesion by increasing opportunities for intergroup contact.

More quantitative findings from the United Kingdom Longitudinal Household Survey reveal that volunteering is associated with a minor increase in perceived social cohesion compared to non-volunteers at later time points, providing further support for the causal impacts of volunteering on social cohesion, albeit relatively small (Fox, 2019). Thus, despite a rather limited volume of evidence on the impacts of volunteering on social cohesion, there is at least consistent support for the proposition that volunteering can be a driver of social cohesion.

Volunteering as a driver of social capital

When we consider evidence on the causal path from volunteering to social capital (rather than cohesion as a whole) the picture is similar. The 'Big Society' agenda proposed that civic engagement opportunities such as volunteering would serve to increase social capital at an individual level through increasing involvement in the local community (Scott, 2011; Davis Smith, 2000). However, this notion remains relatively underexplored (Morgan, 2013) and there is little evidence for the efficacy of a bottom-up approach to social capital generation (Koutrou and Downard, 2016; McCulloch et al., 2012).

Case studies from the UK appear to support the proposition that volunteering can generate both bonding and bridging social capital (Bradford et al., 2016; Hayton, 2016; Hayton and Blundell, 2021; Martikke et al., 2019; Muirhead, 2011; O'Brien et al., 2011; Storr and Spaaij, 2017; Webb et al., 2017), with cross-sectional survey evidence providing further support (Boeck et al., 2009; Davis Smith et al., 2002; Donahue & Russell, 2009; Smith et al., 2018, c.f. Locke et al., 2001). In Fox's (2019) longitudinal study of volunteering engagement, those who volunteered, irrespective of their initial levels of social capital, showed elevated levels of social capital over time.

However, engagement in volunteering does not guarantee an increase in social capital (Kay and Bradbury, 2009). It has been argued that passive forms of engagement in formal volunteering are not likely to promote social bonds critical to social capital development (Putnam, 2000). Rather, it is the ways in which volunteers interact and the activities they engage in that affect social capital (Martikke et al., 2019). Morgan (2013) argues that volunteering may only increase social capital when it consists of "far reaching or altruistic intentions" as opposed to "short-term personal interest" (p. 384). This echoes Zischka's (2019) claims that social cohesion will only arise from altruistic volunteering engagement. However, the contextual conditions that enable social capital to accrue from volunteering engagement have not been explored in depth, and more research is needed to understand these.

Social cohesion as a driver of volunteering- the 'cohesion drives' route

Evidence for the impacts of social cohesion on volunteering rates is also relatively limited. Omoto and Packard (2016) note that individuals who perceive their neighbourhoods as having high levels of social cohesion are more likely to volunteer due to their perceived connection to the community. Research by Johnson et al. (2018) provides some tentative evidence for this link. They found amongst senior Americans that those who saw friends or family at least once a week were 14% more likely to engage in moderate levels of volunteering and 29% more likely to engage in high levels of volunteering. However, these findings are correlational and as such we cannot exclude the possibility that it is engagement in volunteering which drove increased social contact amongst these individuals. Promisingly, Nakamura et al. (2022) provide support for the longitudinal effects of social contact on volunteering amongst a similar sample. Senior American individuals who reported having higher levels of contact with friends (three or more times per week) were 46% more likely to be volunteering four years later. As social contact is considered an important aspect of social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017), these findings do support the proposition that cohesion drives volunteering.

A systematic review by Lu et al. (2020) highlighted multiple elements of social cohesion as incentive factors towards volunteering amongst older individuals. These include the presence of a strong social network, sense of community and community environment (including resource availability). A meta-analysis by Neibuur et al. (2018) exploring impacts of social cohesion on a more general sample suggests that social ties predict volunteering rates. People with larger social networks are more likely to volunteer. This trend remains stable for both weak and strong social ties (Browning et al., 2004; Ajrouch et al., 2016). Taken together, the Lu et al. and Neibuur et al. 's analyses indicate that the connections between social capital and volunteering generalise across age groups. Adding further nuance to this conclusion, Tucker and Gearhart (2022) found that it is the perception that members of a community have strong bonds with one another which increases the likelihood of volunteering engagement. The role of personal perception and experience is important because it means that regardless of the objective strength of ties within a community, those who do not personally experience those ties are no more likely to volunteer than if they were living in a community with weak social bonds.

Social capital as a driver of volunteering

Does social capital (rather than cohesion as a whole) drive volunteering? In theory the answer is yes. For example, case studies of volunteering suggest that social engagement and loneliness prevention are catalysts in volunteer engagement (Briggs et al., 2013; Jones and Heley, 2016). Many case studies from both the UK (e.g. Boeck et al., 2009; Hayton, 2016; Martikke et al., 2019) and US (e.g., Lee & Brundey, 2008; Peachey et al., 2011) highlight the positive impacts of volunteering on bridging capital through increased social contact and development of more positive attitudes and awareness of outgroups. Survey data from Hickman and Manning (2012) using larger sample sizes provides further support for this notion, finding those higher in trust towards their volunteering organisation partnership and local authority and in perceptions of being part of their community were significantly more likely to volunteer. This suggests that linking and bonding capital are significant predictors of volunteer engagement, though the correlational nature of this study means causality cannot be determined.

According to Lee and Brundey (2012), social capital influences volunteering behaviour via three routes. First, those who are more socially connected to their local communities perceive greater benefits from volunteering, making it a more cost-effective behaviour for those with greater social capital. Second, volunteering allows an individual to express their identity (Musick et al., 2000) and

maintain positive connections within their ingroup. This is regarded as a strong motivator for altruistic behaviour within group settings (Simon, 1993). Finally, those with greater social capital are more likely to be affiliated with organisations who invite them to volunteer. Indeed, research suggests that being directly asked to volunteer is a significant determinant of whether an individual volunteers (Musick et al., 2000).

Those who are more capable of utilising and accumulating social capital are more able to use this in order to access opportunities for volunteering (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Koutrou and Downward, 2016; Morgan, 2013; Storr and Spaaij, 2017). This notion has been termed the 'dominant status model' (Hustinx et al., 2010) or a 'resource model' (Wilson and Musick, 1997). In this sense, social capital can be considered a driver of volunteering behaviour.

At a community level, those with higher levels of social capital and connections between groups of individuals are better able to organise volunteering and social action opportunities (Kisby, 2010). For example, Fox's (2019) analysis of UK Household Longitudinal Study found that those who chose to volunteer had higher levels of social capital on average. Yet, as we observe later, those with higher socio-economic status and education are also more likely to volunteer, raising the question of whether social capital may also confer different benefits and different levels of volunteering in different demographic groups.

Evidence from the UK suggests that different forms of social capital may influence social participation (including volunteering) to different extents (Gilbertson and Manning, 2006). Specifically, bonding social capital appears to have greater influence on social participation than linking capital. Different forms of capital also appear to influence the types of organisations individuals participate in. Bonding capital is more strongly associated with participation in sports, children's and community organisations. Bridging capital is more associated with participation in adult education and religious engagement. However, these measures are correlational and also consider non-volunteering forms of engagement and so it is not clear to what extent these factors drive volunteering behaviour directly.

The dark side of social capital

Fox's (2019) longitudinal analysis indicates that volunteering can increase social capital regardless of an individual's previous background. This fits with other research indicating that volunteering may improve social capital beyond initial levels even though those with higher social capital are more likely to engage in volunteering (McFarland and Thomas, 2006). However, this analysis also suggests that volunteering may potentially entrench inequality by further increasing opportunities for those with higher social capital.

Fox (2019) found that the differences in social capital between those who volunteered and those who did not volunteer were always larger than any change in social capital linked to the presence of volunteering. Furthermore, those with higher levels of social capital initially experienced the greatest increases in social capital following their engagement in volunteering. Citizenship Survey data showed that the positive relationship between social capital and levels of formal and informal volunteering disappeared when area deprivation was controlled for, leading McCulloch et al. (2012) to conclude that volunteering may not be able to change the social characteristics of more deprived areas. Overall, therefore, even if volunteering can increase social capital, it may not alleviate inequalities in social capital found in the absence of additional governmental support for more deprived areas (Kisby, 2010; Koutrou and Downward, 2016). Consequently, we infer, gains in social capital should not always be equated with improvements in social cohesion. Social capital is one aspect of cohesion but not the whole picture.

Social capital may drive individuals to volunteer not through choice, but through perceived obligation. This 'dark side' of social capital (Jones and Heley, 2016, p. 187) leads individuals to feel pressured to behave in ways which benefit collective wellbeing at cost to themselves. Research by Jones and Heley (2016) and Boneham and Sixsmith (2006) suggests that is more likely in relatively deprived areas, where individuals feel pressured to continue volunteering because there are no alternative resources to replace them. This may potentially explain why those with lower socioeconomic status experience lesser increases in social capital when engaging in volunteering (Fox, 2019; McCulloch et al., 2012), however more research is needed to explore this.

Coote (2011) argues that 'Big Society' reliance on volunteering to increase community cohesion and social capital seeks to only benefit those with the greatest resources to offer (Williams, 2003) and thus exacerbates already existing social inequalities both within and between communities. Increased competition for resources amongst these groups may further polarise areas of the community and increase social dissonance. Greater bureaucracy surrounding management of volunteering organisations and accessing funding may also put private organisations at a greater advantage than "more value-driven and altruistic" local organisations (p. 388). Finally, private sector organisations with more resources to dedicate to longer-term objectives enjoy greater levels of sustainability. Consequently, the push to drive social capital through volunteering may benefit the private sector over the voluntary sector and widen current inequalities within and between communities, leading to overall reductions in social capital and cohesion.

Further complicating the relationship, volunteering may create selective advantages in social capital. Volunteer groups are typically highly homogenous (Hayton, 2016; Nichols et al., 2004) and their snowballing approach to recruitment directly or indirectly prevents those outside the network from joining (Hayton and Blundell, 2021). The high levels of ingroup trust which form within these narrow groups can lead to high levels of outgroup distrust (Hayton, 2016) and prevent contact with non-members. Thus, whilst volunteering may increase bonding capital this may be selective and it may have no, or a detrimental effect on, bridging capital. More encouragingly, recent evidence suggests that many volunteer organizations are experiencing an increase in diversity of volunteer pools since the pandemic, partly owing to more flexible opportunities for digital and micro volunteering (NCVO, 2021). Consequently, if this trend continues, volunteer groups may become more heterogenous, and formal volunteering may provide more opportunities for bridging capital.

How Do Age, Life Stage, Ethnicity, Faith, Disability and Personal Circumstances Influence the Kind of Volunteering People Do?

Age

Johnson et al. (2018) found that, amongst American seniors over 50, each year of increase in age was associated with a 1% reduction in likelihood of engaging in moderate levels of formal volunteering. However, age did not significantly influence the likelihood of engaging in high levels of volunteering. This suggests that, amongst those who already volunteer intensely, age may not influence engagement. Across a much more diverse age range, Lee and Brundey (2012) found that age was not a determinant of formal volunteering in the US.

In the UK, Low et al. (2007) observed a curvilinear relationship between age and volunteering. The proportion of volunteers was highest amongst people aged 35-44 and 55-64, whilst lower proportions were found amongst those aged less than 34, and lowest amongst those aged 65 or over. This pattern is partially supported by the Community Life Survey 2020/21, which shows

volunteering rates increase between 25-74 years and decrease for those 75 years and over (DCMS, 2021).

Age also influences the *uptake* of volunteering. Niebuur et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis found that age was negatively associated with the likelihood of future volunteering and that this negative association was greater amongst current non-volunteers than volunteers. Thus, age appears to have a more significant impact on tendencies to start volunteering than on continuing existing volunteering, and age may be considered a barrier towards volunteering among those who are not currently volunteering.

Different age groups also volunteer in different forms. Data from the 2007 Helping Out survey showed that whilst the highest numbers of volunteers were between 35-44 and 55-64 years old, these volunteers mostly engaged in one-off or episodic volunteering. In contrast, regular volunteering was most prevalent amongst younger (16-24) and older (55+) volunteers (Locke, 2008; Low et al., 2007). Given that informal and casual forms of volunteering tend to be underreported, this may go some way to explain the complex relationships observed between age and volunteering.

Ethnicity

The connection between ethnicity and volunteering seems to differ depending on the cultural or national context. In the US, white individuals are more likely to volunteer than African Americans, even when controlling for class. Hispanic and Asian individuals are the least likely to engage in volunteering (Foster-Bey, 2008 and similarly Rotolo et al., 2010). However, Niebuur et al. 's (2018) meta-analysis of evidence across a range of developed countries found that the impacts of ethnicity on volunteering were unclear. Differences in volunteering rates across ethnic groups may be less prominent outside of the US, where racial segregation and inequality is less prevalent (Wilson, 2012). For example, in the UK ethnicity appears to play a much smaller role in influencing volunteering behaviour, where there are similar levels of volunteering behaviour amongst different ethnic groups (Laurence, 2011; Low et al., 2007; Rochester, 2006). Where differences between racial groups have been found in the UK, this may be linked to lower participation rates amongst those born outside the UK, as observed in the 2005 Citizenship survey (Kitchen et al., 2006).

More recent data suggests ethnic differences in volunteering rates may even be reversing, with the Community Life survey 2020/21 showing a higher rate of volunteering amongst black individuals (23%) than among white individuals (18%). Data from the Helping Out survey showed that a higher proportion of newcomers to volunteering came from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Butt, 2008; Locke, 2008; Low et al., 2007). Consequently, ethnicity does not seem to have a consistent relationship with volunteering rates in the UK.

Ethnicity may be relevant for the types of volunteering that individuals engage in. In the US, Jo et al. (2002) found that black individuals were significantly more likely than white individuals to volunteer in religious organisations, but less likely to volunteer for club organisations. Hispanic individuals were as likely to volunteer in either type of organisation as white individuals but were less likely to volunteer for collective organisations (i.e. organisations which aim to benefit the larger community, e.g. community service groups, civic organisations (Rehberg, 2005)) than White or Black individuals, between which there was no difference.

In the UK, data from the Helping Out Survey (Butt, 2008; Low et al., 2007) found that BME individuals were more likely to volunteer in religious organisations and were less likely to be involved in sports, education, and conservation. They were however twice as likely to engage in overseas aid and disaster relief volunteering. The types of roles ethnic minority individuals had also

differed; they were less likely to volunteer in roles requiring managerial or organisational skills. More research is needed to uncover the motivations and barriers to minority ethnic groups volunteering in particular sectors and roles.

With regards to cultural and national contexts, some propose that an individual's ethnicity does not influence their volunteering behaviour in isolation, but rather that volunteering behaviour is a function of one's ethnicity relative to the majority in the community (Gilster et al., 2020; Nesbit et al., 2020). Whilst research in the US and the UK has found that ingroup representation has little effect on volunteering participation rates (Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2010), research from the Current Population Survey in the US between 2002 to 2014 found that racial composition of a community influenced where people of colour chose to volunteer (Jo et al., 2002). Specifically, as the percentage of Hispanics in the county increases, Hispanic individuals shift their volunteering engagement from almost exclusively religious organisations to secular volunteering for collective-type organisations. This is important, as the benefits of their volunteer work extend beyond the immediate group and into the wider community. However, it is evident that more research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between ethnicity and volunteering behaviour.

Faith

Research in the US consistently supports a positive relationship between religiosity and volunteering engagement. Johnson et al. (2018) that senior Americans who perceived religion as somewhat important or very important were approximately twice as likely to engage in moderate levels of formal volunteering, and even more so to engage in high levels of formal volunteering. Similarly, Einolf and Chambre (2011) found using the 1995 midlife in the US dataset that attendance at religious services and meetings were both highly positively related to volunteering engagement. In Neiburr et al.'s (2018) cross national meta-analysis, both church attendance and religious identification were positively related to formal volunteering engagement. Nakamura et al. (2022) showed longitudinally that those who attended religious services at least once per week in the US at baseline were 130% more likely to volunteer at a four-year follow up.

UK trends appear largely similar. Those who are active in their faith volunteer more than those who identify with a religion but are not active (Locke, 2008; Low et al., 2007). The Evangelical Alliance suggests that as many as 99% of evangelical Christians do some type of volunteering each year, with 81% volunteering monthly (Smith, 2011). Largely similar volunteering rates have been identified across different faiths, though people of Muslim faith have been found to have a slightly lower volunteering rate than those of Hindu and Christian faith (Locke, 2008).

Faith may bear differently on formal and informal volunteering. For example, in the Netherlands, van Tienen et al. (2010) found that spirituality increases the likelihood of informal volunteering, whilst religious attendance is positively related to formal volunteering, including religious and secular volunteering. In the US, Lee and Brundey (2012) found that membership in religious and secular organisations increased likelihood of general volunteering, but that it is a better predictor of formal than informal volunteering. In the UK Low et al. (2007) observed that actively practising religious individuals were more likely to engage in formal volunteering. Interestingly, these findings oppose those from van Tienen et al. (2010) who found that having a more religious worldview was associated with a reduced likelihood of formal volunteering.

Religion may also affect the types of organisations that individuals choose to volunteer for. Longitudinal data from the Netherlands, revealed that religiosity only consistently promoted volunteering in religious associations (Wiertz, 2015). The Evangelical Alliance states that 43% of evangelical Christians in the UK volunteer for their church at least once a fortnight, suggesting

religious volunteering forms a substantial bulk of volunteering engagement amongst this group (Smith, 2011). Previous research suggested that religiosity stimulates volunteering for a diverse range of organisations (e.g., Putnam et al., 2010; Ruiter and de Graaf, 2006). However, the influence of religiosity on secular volunteering was much weaker than religious volunteering, supporting the notion that religiosity may have a far greater influence on volunteering in religious organisations than secular ones. To put this another way, volunteering is more likely to be associated with bonding than bridging capital within religious communities.

Office for National Statistics Census data show a significant rise in the number of individuals identifying as non-religious, with less than 50% of those in the UK identifying as Christian for the first time in 2021 and those identifying as non-religious being the second largest group at 37.2% (ONS, 2021). Despite this, the faith charity sector appears to be growing faster than the charity sector overall, with church volunteer hours rising by almost 60% from 2010 to 2014 and a quarter of all charities in the UK being faith-based, showing a significant upwards trend between 2014 and 2016. As such, it appears that faith-driven volunteering is reaching new levels within the UK even as faith itself is declining.

The connection between religion and volunteering behaviour also interacts with other demographic factors such as age and social class as well as showing cohort effects. Data from the 1990s suggested religion is more weakly related to volunteering engagement amongst younger individuals (e.g. Davis Smith, 1998), whereas more recent data suggests religion has the strongest relationship with volunteering amongst 16-24 year olds and over 65s (Low et al., 2007). Smith (2011) also demonstrates, via a complex logistic regression analysis, that the impacts of religiosity on volunteering may be accounted for by differences in class, age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as more social factors such as neighbourhood integration. Even so, those who consider their religious identity to be important are significantly more likely to report formal volunteering engagement (Smith, 2011). These complex relationships across demographic and social factors echo previous claims regarding the complexity of the relationship between faith and volunteering behaviour (see Lukka and Locke, 2000).

Disability and long-term health issues

Baines and Hardill (2008) argue that volunteering enables those with disabilities or ill health to escape stigmas associated with a lack of employment. Volunteering may also be used by some as a stepping stone towards paid employment for those currently unable to work (Corden, 2002). Citizenship Survey data in the UK suggests that those with long term health difficulties are actually more likely to engage in more intense levels of volunteering than those without health issues (Zischka, 2019). In the US, Johnson et al. (2018) found amongst senior Americans that those with one or more daily living limitations were no less likely to engage in moderate volunteering but were 32% less likely to engage in high levels of volunteering.

Disability also affects the type of volunteering that people engage in. Data from the Helping Out Survey show that people with long term health conditions were more likely to volunteer in local community groups (Low et al., 2007), possibly because these individuals are involved in self-help groups related to their condition (Butt, 2008). They were less likely to volunteer in the sports sector, educational groups and conservation, or in organisational/management positions (Butt, 2008). Some evidence suggests that individuals with disabilities or long-term illnesses are less likely to engage in informal volunteering (Low et al., 2017; Neiburr et al., 2018). However, data from the Community Life Survey 2020/21 show that informal volunteering rates were higher amongst those with long

term illness or disabilities whereas formal volunteering rates did not differ between those with and without long term illness or disabilities (DCMS, 2021).

Overall, therefore, the picture is rather mixed and suggests that perhaps there is not a general impact of disability or health conditions on volunteering, but that the impacts might depend on the specific type of condition and the particular volunteering opportunities available.

Gender

There is consistent evidence that women tend to volunteer formally more than men (Mesch et al., 2006; Sundeen et al., 2007; Gilbertson and Manning, 2006). Mesch et al. (2006) suggested that this may be attributed to feminine traits such as being more charitable, caring and altruistic (Mesch et al., 2006), or due to women's higher levels of prosocial motivation (Einolf, 2011). In the US, Johnson et al. (2018) found American older women were 30% more likely than men to engage in moderate levels of volunteering and 22% more likely to engage in high levels of volunteering. However, gender did not affect the intensity of volunteering. Einolf and Chambre (2011) found middle aged men were also less likely to volunteer than middle aged women. In the UK, Low et al. (2007) found that women are more likely to volunteer than men, both in general and on a regular basis. However, Fox's (2019) analysis of UK Longitudinal Household Survey data suggests that the gender gap may be closing, as women were only marginally more likely to volunteer than men on a regular basis, and the UK Community Life Survey 2020/21 (DCMS, 2021) revealed no gender difference in formal volunteering. These findings reinforce those of Neiburr et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis across multiple developed countries which found no association between gender and formal volunteering.

Evidence for the impact of gender on informal volunteering is weak. Lee and Brundey (2012) found that, once differences in education and other sociodemographic characteristics had been accounted for, there were no gender differences in informal volunteering rates. The more recent Community Life Survey 2020/21 showed that 37% of women and 28% of men engaged in informal volunteering at least once per month (DCMS, 2021). Overall, gender may play a slightly larger role in formal volunteering than informal volunteering, but the evidence does not seem conclusive.

Aside from levels and intensity of volunteering, gender may affect which types of organisations individuals volunteer for. Using longitudinal data from the Netherlands, Wiertz (2015) found that women were significantly more likely to volunteer for school organisations than men, but significantly less likely to volunteer for most other types of organisations. Data from the UK finds that women are more likely to participate in community, health, religious and community organisations (Gilbertson and Manning, 2006). However, since this data does not differentiate voluntary from non-voluntary participation, one must be careful in drawing conclusions.

We would speculate that some forms of volunteering might be more consistent with traditional female gender roles, in which case there might also be age or cultural differences in the size of the gender gap. In any case, the link between gender and volunteering seems to be variable and changing, so further research is needed to explore the implications of this (such as increased or reduced availability of volunteers in particular sectors or roles).

Education

Gesthuizen et al. (2008) propose a 'uniform educational effect hypothesis' that socialisation processes during educational attainment foster social capital which encapsulates volunteering for organisations. Consistent with this idea, in the UK, people holding any qualifications are more likely to engage in formal volunteering Low et al., 2007; Gilbertson and Manning, 2006). Level of

qualification also influences likelihood of formal volunteering. Yang and Hoskins (2020) found that those pursuing or with a HE degree in the UK showed higher intentions to volunteer.[4.]

In the US, those having education beyond high school level are more likely to volunteer and to volunteer at higher levels (Johnson et al., 2018). Having a bachelor's degree or higher is also positively related to formal volunteering in the US (Lee and Brundey, 2012; Rotolo and Wilson, 2014). Neibuur et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis also revealed a positive association between educational attainment and formal volunteering. However, various other factors may be confounded with this relationship. For example, in the US, Schnittker and Behrman (2012) found that the relationship between schooling and civic engagement diminished when controlling for socioeconomic factors.

The impact of education on informal volunteering is less clear and there is not a great deal of research evidence. In the US, Lee and Brundey (2012) found that having a bachelor's degree was unrelated to engagement in informal volunteering. Such analyses are inevitably complex because with more advanced education come different types of work which may make particular types of volunteering more or less feasible. Therefore, differences may be based on occupational role as much as educational level, and this remains a fruitful avenue for future research.

Overall, whilst educational level is generally associated with formal volunteering, it is not clear that it is education itself that is responsible for this connection.

Socioeconomic status (SES)

Human capital (the resources available to an individual) plays an important role in influencing whether or not an individual volunteers (Sundeen et al., 2007, 2009). Additionally, volunteer organisations may selectively recruit those with higher human capital as they may appear more attractive candidates (Wilson, 2000).

Supporting this, in the US, Pho (2008) found a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and propensity to volunteer (i.e. higher wage earners are more likely to volunteer). Johnson et al. (2018) found that compared to those in quartile 1 (annual income less than $40,000) those in socioeconomic quartiles 3 and 4 (annual income greater than $180,000) were 22% and 54% more likely to engage in moderate and high levels of volunteering respectively). In the UK, the Community Life Survey 2020/21 showed that those in the least deprived areas had a volunteering rate almost twice that of those in the most deprived areas (23% vs 12% for volunteering at least once a month (DCMS, 2021)).

However, the relationship between income and volunteering seems neither linear nor simple. In the US, Lee and Brundey (2009) refer to a curvilinear relationship, with volunteering being most common amongst middle rather than higher income households. Yet Gilster (2014) suggests that a contrary pattern may flow from neighbourhood level (rather than individual) SES. People from neighbourhoods with high and low levels of SES were more likely to volunteer, whilst those in neighbourhoods with moderate levels were the least likely to engage in volunteering. Consequently, the effects of SES appear to operate differently at different levels of analysis.

Further complications arise from interactions between SES and other variables. In Neiburr et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis people with a higher income were more likely to engage in formal volunteering only if they were also over 55 years of age. There were also differences between countries, with a positive relationship between income and volunteering in the US but not in other populations. Koutrou and Downward (2016) also highlight how different types of volunteering may attract individuals from different backgrounds, with those who volunteer in sports having SES than those

who volunteer in other sectors (DCMS, 2011). Consequently, the relationship between SES and formal volunteering remains unclear, and is likely confounded by numerous additional factors.

We did not encounter clear evidence that socioeconomic status plays a substantial role in the intensity of volunteering. For example, Johnson et al. (2018) found that being in quartiles 2, 3 or 4 (i.e. annual income greater than $40,000) had no bearing on whether people engaged in high rather than moderate levels of volunteering. Consequently, it seems socioeconomic status is more likely to influence an individual's propensity to volunteer rather than the amount of time they dedicate to volunteering.

Employment

Research suggests that being in employment is a significant predictor of whether people volunteer. In the US, those in employment are generally more likely to volunteer than those who are not (Einolf, 2011; Johnson et al., 2018). However, level of employment is also relevant, as full-time employment is associated with a reduction in volunteering (Einolf, 2011; Einolf and Chambre, 2011). Moreover, those in employment are less likely to volunteer at high levels (Johnson et al., 2018).

However, other research challenges this notion. A longitudinal study by Nakamura et al. (2022) found amongst senior American citizens that employment status at baseline did not predict volunteering tendencies four years later.

In the UK, data from the Community Life 2020/21 survey (DCMS, 2021) showed similar rates of volunteering between employed (18%) and unemployed (21%) individuals, consistent with Neibuur et al.'s (2018) meta-analytic conclusion that across an array of developed countries, there was no relationship between employment status and formal volunteering.

As with SES and education, it seems that employment alone does not explain levels of volunteering, and rather it is the combination of factors that is important. For example, in the US, Lee and Brundey (2012) found that employed college graduates were less likely to participate in both formal and informal volunteering than were those who were not employed. Specific reasons for not working may also affect volunteering. In the UK, Low et al. (2007) found that stay at home partners engaged in high levels of volunteering, whereas those with disabilities or limiting long term illnesses engaged in lower levels.

Finally, data on informal volunteering from the Community Life Survey 2020/21 suggests those who are unemployed engage in higher levels than those who are employed, despite an increase in informal volunteering rates of employed individuals between 2019 and 2020 (DCMS, 2021). Therefore, it seems that employment may have differing impacts on rates of informal and formal volunteering.

Physical geography

There has been debate surrounding how volunteering may be influenced by living in urban or rural environments (Fox, 2019). Some have argued that those in urban areas are more likely to volunteer due to their greater access to volunteer organisations. However, it is also feasible that the tight-knit communities found in rural areas support greater levels of volunteering. Preliminary evidence suggests that higher rates of social cohesion are found in rural areas in England. Data from the Statistical Digest of Rural England (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2022) indicates those in rural areas have greater levels of trust, perceived helpfulness of others, social contact, and sense of belonging, as well as lower levels of conflict. Furthermore, it has been argued that smaller sizes of, and higher rates of face-to-face interactions within, rural communities provide

greater rewards for engaging in cooperative behaviour and increase social pressures to conform to cooperative norms (Paarlberg et al., 2022).

In the US those living in rural areas are more likely to volunteer at least once a month than those in urban areas (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2022). Paarlberg et al.'s (2022) analysis of data from the US population survey from 2002 to 2015 revealed that the greater propensities towards volunteering reported by rural-based individuals stem from both individual and place-based characteristics, including homogeneity, religiosity and income.

Similar trends have been found in the UK. Data from the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (Fox, 2019) show that 43% of individuals in rural areas and 37% in urban areas had engaged in some form of volunteering across at least one of the four timepoints. The rural-urban gap was larger in England and Scotland than in Wales and Northern Ireland. This difference was attributed to lower overall volunteering rates in rural areas in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Data from the Helping Out survey also points to differences in volunteering behaviours across regions of England, those in the West Midlands having the highest volunteering rates (64%) and those in the North East having the lowest rates (41%) (Locke, 2008; Low et al., 2007).

In conclusion, it appears that despite urban areas having greater infrastructure and resources to support volunteering, such as a greater density of organisations and better transport links, those living in rural areas appear to make greater use of the resources available to them to volunteer. Yet, it is not just living in rural or urban areas but also other regional factors that may impact volunteering rates. Overall, it is clear that both place and type of place makes a difference.

What Are the Cohesion-Related Barriers to Volunteering: Which Groups Are More or Less Likely to Volunteer, and What Stops Different Groups from Volunteering?

We now turn to the wider set of issues about how to support volunteering in the light of the evidence that cohesion and volunteering are positively related. There is much that can be said about methods of encouraging and overcoming barriers to volunteering, and the following sections concentrate primarily on aspects that are most likely to be related to cohesion.

Diversity and contact in communities

Conflict theory holds that race heterogeneity undermines social solidarity, generalised trust, and norms of reciprocity in areas with high income inequality. Putnam's (2007) exploration of the relationship between heterogeneity and social capital in the US appeared to show that people living in areas of greater diversity demonstrated lower levels of civic engagement behaviours including volunteering, expectations of cooperation from others, confidence in local government and smaller social networks. Consequently, it was argued that as diversity (heterogeneity) increases, many components of social cohesion may decline, and this may impact volunteering behaviours.

The generality of this argument has been contested. International comparisons suggest that the negative relationship between diversity and social capital may be far stronger in the US than other Western countries, potentially due to the more negative reactions towards diversity in America (van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014). In fact, Sturgis et al. (2013) suggest that diversity may increase perceived social cohesion in the UK. Furthermore, Neymotin (2014) observes that the negative effects of diversity on social cohesion in European studies are mitigated once income inequality is accounted for (e.g. Becares et al., 2011; Gesthuizen et al., 2009). Consequently, it seems that in the

UK and other European contexts, heterogeneity is not as detrimental to social cohesion as might be anticipated from US evidence.

Furthermore, conflict theory is not the only theoretical lens with which to explore the relationship between diversity and social cohesion. For example, the 'contact' hypothesis (Allport, 1954) proposes that the increased cross-group contact made possible through higher levels of diversity within a community may reduce stereotypes, increase intergroup trust, and improve levels of cohesion (Lymperopoulou, 2019; van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014). For example, McKenna et al. (2018) found that ethnic diversity in Australia was related to positive intergroup contact, which positively influenced social cohesion both directly and indirectly via reduced perceived threat. In the UK, Lymperopoulou (2019) found that perceptions of social cohesion are higher in ethnically diverse areas such as London, and these areas also had higher levels of intergroup contact. However, they also note that the relationship between diversity and social cohesion is complex and may be affected by other factors such as economic deprivation, which drives resource-based conflict. As such, it appears that neither conflict theory nor the contact hypothesis can fully explain the complex relationship between diversity and cohesion in isolation.

The relationship between diversity and volunteering appears to show similar trends between countries to that of cohesion, however research evidence is more limited. US data generally suggest a negative correlation between race heterogeneity and voluntary association (Neymotin, 2014; Rotolo, 2000; Rotolo and Wilson, 2014). This contrasts with studies outside of the US, such as Aizlewood and Pendakur (2005)'s study based on Canadian survey data, which shows a positive relationship between diversity and formal participation. However, more research is needed to explore the relationship between diversity and volunteering.

Diversity within volunteering organisations

Diversity within volunteering groups may also affect decisions to engage in volunteering. In the Netherlands, Wiertz' (2015) longitudinal study revealed that homophily (the tendency for people to seek out or be attracted to those who are similar to themselves) strongly affected whether people joined volunteering groups. Individuals were less likely to start volunteering for a particular group if its current volunteers were less like them with respect to educational attainment and religious beliefs (though gender mix made no difference). This presents a challenge to the argument that volunteering may increase social cohesion by increasing bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) and highlights potential complexities in striving for diverse volunteering groups. Overall, Wiertz concluded that dissimilarity between individuals' characteristics and the social composition of voluntary organisations has a greater influence on decisions to start volunteering than on decisions to leave volunteering organisations. In fact, gender heterogeneity was associated with quitting whereas education and religious heterogeneity had little impact.

In a case study of the German Technical Relief Service, Chadderton (2016) explored the problematic elements of ethnic heterogeneity amongst volunteers. Chadderton observed that ethnic minorities experienced exclusion rather than connection when they joined the service, and that racial issues were often suppressed.

In summary, the effects of social diversity on social cohesion and volunteering engagement are clearly dependent on other factors. It seems overly pessimistic to accept the premises of conflict theory, and reasonable to suppose that diversity can be a resource to facilitate cohesion and volunteering rather than an obstacle to either.

Social capital and personal connections

The Community Life Survey 2020/21 (DCMS, 2021) also revealed commonly selected reasons that might arise from absence of community cohesion. These included a lack of opportunities to engage in volunteering and a lack of awareness of groups that may benefit from volunteering. Case studies from the Institute for Volunteering Research (Ockenden, 2008; Russell, 2009), revealed that those without personal connections within volunteering organisations have greater difficulties identifying volunteering opportunities. Data from the Helping Out Survey also showed that word of mouth was the most popular recruitment pathway for volunteers (Butt, 2008; Low, 2007). This seems to mirror the challenges that volunteer organisations themselves report in efforts to publicise their volunteering opportunities (Forsyth et al., 2022; Machin and Malmersjo, 2006; Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004). Taken together, the evidence supports the idea that cohesion, at least in the form of social capital, is an important enabler of volunteering engagement.

Time

Other barriers have been identified, some of which are more obviously connected with social cohesion than others. The most recent Community Life Survey 2020/21 asked individuals who did not volunteer regularly about barriers to doing so (DCMS, 2021). The most common barriers to formal volunteering were lack of time, including work commitments and childcare. Low et al. (2007) found that the most common reason for stopping volunteering or not volunteering at all in the UK was lack of time, as reported by 80% of respondents. Having spare time was also cited as a driver of volunteering by 27% of frequent formal volunteers. Institute for Volunteering Research also suggests time limitations for those in education is a significant barrier to volunteering, being cited by 70% of non-volunteering students from higher education institutions who were surveyed as their reason for having never volunteered (Brewis et al., 2010). This echoes survey research on younger individuals' volunteering, which cites lack of time as a common factor to not engaging in volunteering (Informed, 2007).

Travel costs and feasibility

Travel costs and feasibility further entrench existing inequalities in social capital, social cohesion, and volunteering engagement. Travel costs incurred by volunteers appear to deter volunteering (Informed, 2007; National Centre for Social Research et al., 2011), particularly in organisations where reimbursement for travel is not the norm (Volunteer Scotland, 2022). Even when travel is reimbursed, the UK's current standard fuel reimbursement rate of 45p per mile often creates a shortfall in covering the costs. Recruitment of volunteers is particularly challenging if the work involves delivering services across large areas (National Centre for Volunteering, 2003). Reliance on public transport also impedes volunteering (Southby et al., 2019), with those who drive being more likely to volunteer than those who do not (Neiburr et al., 2018). Consequently the cost and practical challenges of travel may particularly affect service provision to and by individuals and groups with lower social capital such as isolated elderly people who may not be able to rely on help from family and friends for travel, younger individuals who have lower incomes and educational commitments (Informed, 2007; National Centre for Social Research et al., 2011) and unemployed and low-wage individuals, particularly those with disabilities (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004).

Financial feasibility

The cost-of-living crisis is also likely to reduce the scope for volunteering. The Institute for Volunteering Research noting that personal financial hardship is a significant barrier to environmental volunteerism (Russell, 2009). Many volunteers felt that even when they could volunteer at no cost, their spare time would be better spent in paid employment. Formal

volunteering and, to a greater extent, informal volunteering, were both negatively impacted by the 2008-9 recession in the UK, despite claims to the contrary (Hill, 2011). The Citizenship Survey 2009-2010 demonstrated that formal volunteering fell from 43% to 40% between 2007 and 2010, and informal volunteering fell from 64% to 54% in this time. This was more acute in regions with higher unemployment and social and economic disadvantage. Lim and Laurence (2015) argue this arises not just from individual hardship but from weakened community-level factors including organisational infrastructure and norms of trust and engagement. We can infer, therefore, that depleted community resources will generally compound the effects of financial pressures on individuals, further reducing the scope for volunteering.

Stereotypes, intergroup segregation, and lack of common interest

Earlier we identified which demographic groups are more or less likely to volunteer. Each may face different barriers to volunteering. The Institute for Volunteering Research's reports from national survey data on why younger people do not volunteer in the UK suggest that the low levels of volunteering amongst young adults (aged 18-24) began with sharp declines in volunteering rates in 1997 (Kearney, 2003). The lack of young volunteers has been reported as a significant issue in ageing communities of volunteers in Northern England, where volunteer rates are dropping as a result (Mort and Morris, 2020). One explanation is the increasingly negative perception of volunteering amongst younger individuals. Volunteers are typically seen as middle-aged, middle-class philanthropists (Machin, 2005), which limits others' tendencies to identify as volunteers (Brodie et al., 2011).

Kearney (2003) argues that tackling this problem requires reframing volunteering as a mutually beneficial relationship within the community, as opposed to a philanthropic behaviour of people helping the less fortunate. Focussing on the personal benefits for volunteers (e.g., skill development for future careers, a motivating aspect of volunteering amongst gen Z individuals; Cho et al., 2018; Diann, 2001), may encourage more younger individuals to volunteer.

Negative perceptions of volunteering may not be the whole story. Other survey evidence suggests low rates of negative attitudes amongst younger people as well as gender differences whereby young women generally hold more positive perceptions of volunteering than young men (Hill et al., 2009; Informed, 2008; Ireland et al, 2006).

Another possible reason for difficulties in recruiting younger volunteers may be more to do with social cohesion. More specifically, age segregation, as younger, middle and older aged people see themselves as disconnected from one another. Younger people in particular often experience high levels of age discrimination and feel that middle and older generations tend to exploit them (Bratt et al, 2020). Therefore, when volunteering is targeted towards older generations, the difficulties in recruiting younger volunteers may reflect weak bridging capital in the form of weak or absent intergenerational contact and relationships (see also Swift et al., 2017).

In conclusion, several barriers to volunteering are likely to be associated with aspects of low social cohesion. These aspects include varying levels of social heterogeneity within particular communities and volunteering groups, local or role factors that limit people's time and availability, unusually high financial costs and obstructions to awareness of volunteering opportunities. Some barriers appear more significant for particular demographic groups, such as the young, the elderly, those with low-income or disabilities, potentially further entrenching the already existing gaps in volunteering engagement and social capital. Various solutions to tackling barriers to volunteering have been advanced, but none, as far as we are aware, start from the premise that building more cohesive communities might be a fundamental enabler of other strategies.

How Can More Volunteering Be Encouraged Particularly in Those Groups Less Likely to Volunteer?

Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey, Dawson et al (2019) concluded that volunteering can be established as a personal propensity because, once people have developed the skills and understanding of how to do it, they are likely to persist and respond positively when need or opportunities arise. Dawson et al. advocate that schemes such as the National Citizen Service can therefore play a particularly important role in establishing such propensities from a young age. Nevertheless, these strongly top-down options do not necessarily contribute to cohesion within specific places or communities and do not address the role that cohesion might play in promoting volunteering or vice versa.

There are several initiatives in the UK designed to increase volunteering engagement amongst those less likely to participate. Volunteer centres offer support and guidance to prospective volunteers by matching them to roles that fit their interests (NCVO, 2023). Whilst only accounting for a small percentage of new volunteers (Ramsey, 2012), they are particularly effective in engaging underrepresented groups (Howlett, 2008; Unell and Castle, 2012) by increasing access to volunteering opportunities and assisting with formal application processes, which may intimidate those from socially excluded groups (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004). Volunteering brokerage schemes can tailor their recruitment strategies and opportunities to address specific barriers amongst their target audiences. For example, they can address time barriers experienced by those in employment and education (Mort and Morris, 2020) and assist retired individuals who lack the social capital required to make connections with volunteering organisations. Timebanks, which allow individuals to earn labour-time units from their work to redeem for services by others in the bank, have shown success in engaging the elderly and those with lower SES, disabilities and from ethnic minority groups (Seyfang, 2001, 2002). Providing flexible volunteering opportunities can boost engagement amongst those less likely to volunteer (Forsyth et al., 2022; Ockenden, 2008). However, they arguably do not address the underlying cause of disengagement in volunteering (Brodie et al., 2011) and reduce engagement in more structured forms of volunteering, having overall detrimental effects on local communities (Jochum and Paylor, 2013). Ultimately, it is important to consider that barriers and motivations to volunteering will vary across groups (Southby et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2009), and organisations seeking to diversify their volunteering pool must consider how to adapt to meet the needs and interests of different groups.

Conclusions

Evidence consistently supports a positive, bidirectional relationship between social cohesion and volunteering, particularly for formal volunteering. That is, cohesion provides a basis for more volunteering, and volunteering helps to build further cohesion. The relationship between social capital and volunteering is more complex, suggesting that volunteering alone does not necessitate all forms of social capital equally and may not be sufficient to overcome already existing community-level discrepancies in social capital. Several demographic factors are associated with volunteer engagement. Those who are religious, educated, have higher socioeconomic status and women are most consistently found to be more likely to volunteer. These factors have greater impacts on the presence of volunteering engagement than on its intensity. In other words, demographic factors may influence an individuals’ propensity to volunteer, but decisions to engage in high levels of volunteering are driven by more intrinsic factors.

There are numerous cohesion-related barriers to volunteering. Diversity within communities and volunteering organisations may drive feelings of exclusion and reduce levels of cohesion, suggesting initiatives to increase diversity within volunteer groups must be managed carefully. Intergroup segregation and negative stereotypes may also hinder volunteering engagement. Finally, lack of spare time and financial and structural barriers, including travel costs and public transport availability, may impede some groups (such as those with lower social capital) more so than others. This may entrench already existing inequalities in volunteering and social capital.

Taken together, the evidence allows confident inference that investment in cohesion is likely to promote volunteering and that investment in volunteering is likely to improve cohesion. Insofar as policy attempts to improve one, it may well improve the other. However, this virtuous circle seems much more likely to gather momentum if policy strategies explicitly address the connection between the two. Policies that incorporate support for volunteering as part of an overall cohesion strategy are more likely to succeed than those that do not. Similarly, policies that include strategies and objectives that support cohesion in ways that can facilitate volunteering are more likely to succeed than those that do not. In sum there is a sound basis for believing that such investments in cohesion and volunteering can create a virtuous circle that creates tangible strengthening of community resilience.

[1] see https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/cohesive-societies/

[2] see also https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/201704/sri_blairs_britain_the_social_and_cultural_legacy_2008.pdf

[3] Some have argued that the emphasis on volunteering in the Big Society agenda is driven less by an idealistic view of empowered local communities and more by substantial budget cuts resulting in volunteering being viewed as a replacement for once paid labour in the UK, see Ramsey (2012)

[4] The authors suggest that HE reduces volunteering intentions over time, despite those with or currently pursuing degrees still having higher volunteering intentions than those without. However, they argue that this may be due to the increasing financial strain faced by university students. Thus, the positive effects of educational attainment on volunteering behaviour may potentially be buffered by situational factors such as finances.

[5] Though, as demonstrated in this report, the impacts of these factors on volunteering engagement are unclear and may be changing in the UK.

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