

# A Fully Open Systematic Umbrella Review

## Exploring the effects of volunteering on the social, mental, and physical health and wellbeing of volunteers

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**CODE:** [open](#)  
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**NIHR** | National Institute for Health Research

**PROSPERO**  
International prospective register of systematic reviews

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The effect of volunteering on the health and wellbeing of volunteers: protocol for an umbrella review

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**Review question**  
What are the effects of volunteering on the physical, psychological, and social health and wellbeing of the volunteer?

**Searches**  
The search will be conducted via the following databases: EMBASE/EMBASE, Cochrane Database, and PsycINFO. ASEA and the Health Research Promotion Library via ProQuest (Consumer Health Database, Health & Medical Collection, Healthcare Administration Database, MEDLINE, Nursing & Allied Health Database, Psychology Database, and Public Health Database). Searches will be for title and abstract and restricted to peer-reviewed systematic reviews published in English (reviewers are English language speakers and have no limitations services available). The following definition will be used to decide on inclusion of reviews: Peer reviewed systematic reviews and / or meta-analyses involving a documented systematic search of more than one academic database.

Scoping searches helped to build the search strategy. Alerts will be created up until December 2022 for the search

## Background

Volunteering provides unique benefits to organisations (1), recipients (2), and potentially the volunteers themselves (3). A synthesis was needed to examine the vast amount of literature on the benefits of volunteering for volunteers.

**Aims:**

- To examine the existing literature on the social, mental and physical health benefits of volunteering and their potential moderators
- To keep the review process as open as possible

Figure a: PROSPERO pre-registration

## Methods

The protocol was pre-registered via PROSPERO (Figure a). Eleven databases were searched for systematic reviews on the social, mental, physical, or general health benefits of volunteering, published up to July 2022. Study selection took place via Rayyan and made public (Figure b). AMSTAR 2 was used to assess quality and overlap of included primary studies was calculated. Data extraction was carried out using SRDR plus, and the resulting extracted paper made public (Figure c.1 and c.2).

A viewer can see all the articles in the review but cannot add, delete, label or include/exclude any

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| » [Public] 2014-04-15: EMOLLIENTS #984 (4935 articles)   |
| » [Public] 2014-05-22: TINEA UPDATE (14 articles)  |
| » [Public] 2022-07-08: WPBA included (412 articles)  |
| » [Public] 2022-07-28: Benefits of volunteering umbrella review (7116 articles)  |
| » [Public] 2021-12-22: Greenspace and blue space and cognitive functioning in children (2887 articles)   |
| » [Public] 2021-11-21: Factors associated with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and their effects on the mental health of adolescents. (71 articles) |
| » [Public] 2022-06-23: Impact of Audible Pops Associated with Spinal Manipulation on Perceived Pain: A Systematic Review (54 articles)                         |
| » [Public] 2020-03-28: COVID-19 Open Research Dataset (CORD-19) (102288 articles)  |
| » [Public] 2022-08-02: Benefits of volunteering umbrella review full texts (63 articles)   |

Figure b: Publicly available study selection on Rayyan

## Findings

- Twenty-eight reviews were included; participants were mainly older adults based in the US. Although overlap between reviews was low, quality was generally poor.
- Benefits were found in all three domains, particularly reduced mortality, and increased functioning, quality of life, pride, empowerment, motivation, social support, and sense of community.
- Older age, reflection, religious volunteering, and altruistic motivations increased benefits most consistently.

## Discussion

Referral of social prescribing clients to volunteering is recommended. Limitations include the need to align results to research conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic. [The resulting paper was submitted for open access publication in a hybrid journal.](#)



Figure c.1 and c.2: Publicly available data extraction on SRDR plus

**References:** 1. NCVO. What is the economic contribution of the voluntary sector? ; 2021.

2. . Grönlund H, Falk H. Does it Make a Difference? The Effects of Volunteering from the Viewpoint of Recipients—A Literature Review. *Diaconia*. 2019;10(1):7-26.

3. Jenkinson CE, Dickens AP, Jones K, Thompson-Coon J, Taylor RS, Rogers M, et al. Is volunteering a public health intervention? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the health and survival of volunteers. *BMC Public Health*. 2013;13:773.