

**Volunteering by 12- and 13- year- olds in Canada,
and religious commitment, 1996-1997**

by Frank Jones¹

They polish life by useful arts -- Virgil

Abstract

This analysis of results of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth provides Canada's first nation-wide insight into child volunteering.

Volunteering by children is much more common than volunteering by adults in the sense that a much higher percentage is involved (77% versus 31%). Differences in the survey questions are thought to be partly responsible for the difference.

Children who regularly attended religious services were much more likely than other children to volunteer. This was true of Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church and Presbyterian/Lutheran/Baptist, but not of the "other Christian" group comprising mainly smaller and more conservative faith communities.

The 12-year-olds were more likely to volunteer than the 13-year-olds, and girls more than boys.

Volunteers were more inclined to be involved in organized sports, and arts programs or groups, such as Girl Guides or 4-H clubs. Regular attendees at religious services who volunteered were still more likely to be involved in arts programs and groups, though not in organized sports, perhaps because of the time conflict on Saturday or Sunday mornings.

Finally, it was found that volunteers were more likely to always do their homework, always wear a seat belt in the car, and to help other children having trouble with difficult tasks. Regular attendees at religious services were more likely to have these behaviours than other children.

The study includes some multivariate results on number of volunteer commitments, and number of responsible behaviours, and contains some policy and future research suggestions in the conclusion.

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How many 12- and 13-year-olds volunteer in Canada?
Are the religiously committed more inclined to volunteer?
What other factors are important?
What kind of tasks appeal to child volunteers?
Does their volunteering mean less homework or helping of others, or participation in other informal learning activities such as clubs, music and organized sport?
Is child volunteering associated with responsible behaviours such as wearing seatbelts and completing homework on time?

Children aged 12 and 13, especially the 2,269 who filled out questionnaires in 1996-1997², may not be the only ones interested to know that 77% of them volunteered (Chart 1). Girls were more inclined to volunteer than boys (81% versus 73%). Canada's first national statistics on child volunteering thus reveals that children appear to be far more committed than adults, 31% of whom volunteered in 1997.³ No doubt many parents helped or encouraged their children to volunteer, though this role was not explored in the survey. Also, much of the volunteering may have been of the informal type, not working through organizations, though the services provided, listed in Box 1, do not include helping out in the home. The high volunteer rates for children are good news for the future of volunteering because those who volunteered when young are more inclined to volunteer when older.⁴ The 12- and 13-year-old volunteers number 610,000, a significant addition to the adult volunteer force (7.5 million in 1997), though the differences in the definition of volunteer means that comparisons are not strictly valid. Volunteers of other ages under 15 remain unsurveyed, but would probably add at least as many again to the number of child volunteers.

The influence of religious commitment, gender and age

Children who attended religious services at least monthly in the two years preceding the survey (regular attendees) were more inclined to volunteer than other children.⁵ The difference was most striking for boys: 81% of the regular attendees volunteered compared with 68% of other boys. Regular attendees were not insubstantial in number. In total 42% of girls and boys attended religious services regularly, 46% of the girls and 39% of the boys. The regular attendees comprised 45% of all volunteers (girls, 24%, plus boys, 21%).

Gender, age of child, and regular attendance were found to be significantly related (in the statistical sense) to the number of kinds of volunteer commitments, after the influence of other factors were controlled (Table 1 shows regression results for those familiar with this technique of analysis). The direction of influence was as follows: with the effect of other variables held constant, girls were found to have more volunteer commitments than boys, the number of volunteer commitments was higher for 13-year-olds, and children who were regular attendees at religious services averaged more commitments than other children.

² Statistics Canada, second cycle of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996-1997.

³ Michael Hall, Tamara Knighton, Paul Reed, Patrick Bussi re, Don McRae, *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians*, Statistics Canada, (71-542-XPE), 1998, p. 27.

⁴ Frank Jones, "Community Involvement: The influence of early experience", *Canadian Social Trends*, Summer, 2000, pp. 15-19.

⁵ No data on current attendance is available. An analysis of attendance at religious services by children under 12 appears in Frank Jones, "Do children attend religious services?", *Canadian Social Trends*, Autumn, 1999, pp. 15-18.

Without control for other variables, rates of volunteering were about equal for 12- and 13-year-olds, though only because the higher rate by those who attended religious services regularly offset almost exactly the lower rate by other children (Chart 2). For 13-year-olds, the volunteer rate for the regular attendees was 84%, compared with a rate of 71% for the others – a 13 percentage point difference. The difference was only four points for the 12-year-olds.

Another perspective on the influence of religious commitment on volunteering is given by the denominational affiliation of the children. Overall, the volunteer rate does not vary much by denomination (Chart 3). It is highest, 80%, for the “other Christian” group (smaller denominations including Pentecostal), but almost as high for the Presbyterian/Lutheran/Baptist group (added because of sample size), Roman Catholic, and United Church, and just a little lower for Anglican children (75%). For every group except “other Christian”, the volunteer rates

Box 1. Volunteer services provided by children

Children were asked to check off any of six types of volunteering performed in the previous year. Most of the services provided by children remain unknown: they fall into an “other” category given by about 70% of children. Fundraising was the next most popular form of volunteering, involving 45% of all children. Helping neighbours was almost as common, involving 43%. Helping with school activities was noted by 35% of children. Volunteering for a cause was much less popular (12%), and helping in the community the least common (9%). Children attending religious services at least monthly were more inclined than other children to be involved in every kind of activity except the “other” category. In most cases, though, the differences were small, and only somewhat important in the case of helping neighbours and helping in the community.

were higher for the regular attendees than others: by 12 percentage points or more for Anglican, United and the Presbyterian/Lutheran/Baptist group. Children with no religious affiliation were less inclined to volunteer (72%) than children in each of the denominational groups, though their rate was similar to that of the infrequent or non-attendees in all of the denominations except the “other Christian” group, which had an uncharacteristically high rate.

Volunteering in regions and urban areas

The rates of children volunteering were highest in Atlantic Canada and Quebec (81% each), and lower in Ontario and British Columbia, 74% each (Chart 4). This variation is not too wide; the only surprise is the relatively high rate in Quebec, a province with typically low rates for adult volunteering. Quebec also had the second lowest rate of regular attendance at religious services 31%, compared with 66% in Atlantic Canada, 44% in Ontario and the Prairie region, and 24% in British Columbia. The statistics for Quebec indicate that low attendance does not always imply low volunteer rates. Looking at the difference in volunteer rates between regular attendees and other children, the gaps were widest in Atlantic Canada and British Columbia, 10 and 16 percentage points, respectively, and almost equally wide in Quebec and in the Prairie region, 9 points. In the equation estimating the number of types of volunteer commitments, region was found to be a statistically significant and positive factor for the Atlantic region and Ontario when compared to the reference region, British Columbia (Table 1).

Rates of volunteering vary more by size of the urban area in which one lives, though there is no consistent increase or decrease with size (Chart 5). Children living in the smaller metro areas,

and in the smallest urban areas, those with under 30,000 population in 1996, were most likely to volunteer (81%). Children living in urban areas with a population of 30,000 to 99,999, were the least inclined to volunteer (70%). Rural areas and large metro areas with a population of 500,000 or more had child volunteer rates of 75%. In all size ranges the rates for children attending religious services regularly exceeded those for other children. The difference was widest in rural areas and large metro areas (11 percentage points), and 6 to 8 points in the non-metro urban areas.

Income, household, and parental influences

Three other important influences on the number of types of volunteer commitment by children are revealed by the regression results reported in Table 1: income, education, and parent volunteering in schools. Children in households with incomes less than \$40,000 were found to have fewer commitments than children in higher income households. Children whose mothers had a university degree were found to have more volunteer commitments than children whose mothers had less than high school graduation, though not more than children with mothers who had high school graduation or community college or trade school diplomas. Also, the number of types of school volunteering by the mother was positively correlated with the inclination of the child to volunteer.

Are learning and responsible behaviours associated with volunteering?

Results of an earlier study of the influence of childhood activities on volunteering as adults, and other community involvements, show that those who volunteered when young would be more likely to be active in other personal growth activities and responsible behaviours⁶. Some extra-curricular activities such as involvement in organized sports, Girl Guides or arts programs may require such volunteer activities as fundraising or bottle drives in order to maintain membership or good standing.

In order to explore how learning and responsible behaviours are associated with volunteering, variables for six activities indicative of informal learning and responsible behaviours were developed as follows: weekly (at least) participation in organized sport; weekly involvement in music, drama or arts-related lessons; weekly involvement in clubs such as Girl Guides or 4-H; always wearing a seatbelt; always doing one's home work; and often helping children having difficulty with a task⁷. The intent was to study a variety of different kinds of behaviours that could be considered responsible. When added together for each child, the number of activities and behaviours provide a rough index of the child's commitment to personal growth and responsible behaviours.

One way to explore the relationship of volunteering to this index is to form a regression equation designed to explain the variation among children in this index, using the volunteer and other variables as predictors. The results of such estimation are displayed in Table 2. Whether or not the child was a volunteer was by far the most important predictor of the index: as expected,

⁶ Frank Jones, "Community Involvement: The influence of early experience", *Canadian Social Trends*, Summer, 2000, pp. 15-19.

⁷ In each case a one was assigned to a child who had taken up the activity or behaviour, and a zero otherwise.

volunteers were much more likely than non-volunteers to have more learning experiences and responsible behaviours, 1.5 more. Overall, children had 2.5 learning and responsible behaviours. Attendance at religious services was on the borderline of statistical significance, and a positive relationship was found to be the case. Other findings include the positive influence of the mother's education – those with a university degree, or a college or trade school diploma, were more likely to have children with a higher index than the mothers with less education. The number of parent involvements in the school was also found to be positively associated with the child's index. Girls were more likely to have a higher activity index than boys (half an activity more on average), and 12-year-olds more than 13-year-olds.

The overall index hides significant differences in the relationship of volunteering and regular attendance at religious services to individual growth activities and responsible behaviours. Specifically, while it is generally the case that the volunteers and regular attendees are more involved in the learning activities, only volunteers are associated with responsible behaviours.

Participation in clubs

The best example of the influence of the joint effect of volunteering and attending religious services is weekly participation in clubs (Chart 6). While the overall participation rate in clubs was 16%, that for the volunteers was 23%, and that for the non-volunteers only 7%. The rate for regular attendees was 29%, compared with 13% for the other children. This big difference may be partly the result of many clubs being associated with religious organizations. Children answered the following question: "In the past year how often have you taken part in clubs or groups such as Guides or Scouts, 4-H Clubs, community, church or other religious groups?". The joint effect of both volunteering and attendance at religious services was stronger than the individual effect – only 4% of the non-volunteers who were not regular attendees participated in clubs, compared with 32% of the regular attendees who volunteered as well.

Participation in sports with a coach or instructor, other than in gym class (school teams, swimming lessons etc.)

Volunteers were far more inclined than non-volunteers to participate weekly in organized sport, though the regular attendees at religious services participated more in sport only if they were also volunteers (Chart 7). Overall, 64% of the volunteers participated compared with only 33% of the non-volunteers. And while the regular attendees participated more in sport than the other children, (39% versus 26%), those regular attendees who were non-volunteers actually were less inclined than their less frequently attending counterparts to participate in organized sport (28% versus 35%). It is possible that the conflict of times on Sunday mornings had something to do with this result.

Participation in art, drama, music groups, clubs or lessons outside of class

Volunteers were also much more inclined than non-volunteers to participate in arts programs, (31% versus 12%) though not by as high a margin as that with sport participation (Chart 8). The regular attendees were more likely to participate in arts programs than the other children, (32%

versus 23%). The joint effects were strong in this case as regular attending volunteers were far more likely to participate (36%) compared with their non-volunteering and infrequently attending counterparts (11%).

Responsible behaviours

In the case of three behaviours, always doing homework, always using the seatbelt, and often helping children in difficulty with tasks, a consistent message emerges. The volunteers were much more inclined to behave responsibly than the non-volunteers. Also the regular attendees were more inclined to act responsibly than the other children, but the difference between the two groups was small, only because the regularly attending volunteers were more likely to engage in the responsible behaviour than regularly attending non-volunteers.

Conclusions

The second cycle of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth provides Canada's first nation-wide insight into volunteering (services provided freely outside the home) by children aged 12 and 13. This study provides the first analysis of the data.

The main conclusion is that volunteering by children is much more common than volunteering by adults in the sense that a much higher percentage is involved. The difference may be because the source and questions differ: informal volunteering not within organizations may have been included with formal in the survey of children. The high volunteer rates for children are good news for those in governments and leaders of faith communities and voluntary organizations, because other studies show that those who volunteered when young are also more inclined to volunteer when older.

Children who regularly attended religious services (at least monthly in cycle 1, two years earlier) were much more likely than other children to volunteer. This was true of Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church and Presbyterian/Lutheran/Baptist, but not of the group "other Christian" comprising mainly smaller and more conservative faith communities.

The 12-year-olds were more likely to volunteer than the 13-year-olds, and girls more than boys.

The volunteers did not cut down on participation in organized sports, or arts programs or groups, such as Girl Guides or 4-H clubs; in fact volunteers were more inclined to be involved in such programs. Regular attendees at religious services who volunteered were still more likely to be involved in arts programs and groups, though not in organized sports, perhaps because of the time conflict on Saturday or Sunday mornings.

Finally, it was found that volunteers were more likely to be involved in certain "responsible" behaviours than other children. They were more inclined to always do their homework, always wear a seat belt in the car, and to help other children having trouble with difficult tasks. Regular attendees at religious services were more likely to have the responsible behaviours than other children.

The present research has implications for future research and information gathering. Because there is now clear quantitative evidence of very heavy involvement in volunteering by children, the next step in the measurement sphere should be to ask questions on volunteering that are

similar to those asked of adults in the volunteer surveys. In view of the strong relationship of child volunteering with participation in most faith communities, community leaders and governments interested in promoting volunteering should beware of disincentives or penalties that unintentionally weaken either the faith communities or child volunteering. An unexplored but probably important aspect of child volunteering is the support given by parents in either their roles as parents or as volunteers: new survey questions are needed to yield the information needed to reveal the strength and nature of the parental support role. And finally, as the 12- and 13-year-olds studied in this paper are tracked every two years, the new waves of information will allow studies of the impact of early volunteering experiences on various kinds of success in school, work and life.

Chart 1. Percentage of girls and boys aged 12 and 13 who volunteer, by frequency of attendance at religious services, 1996-1997

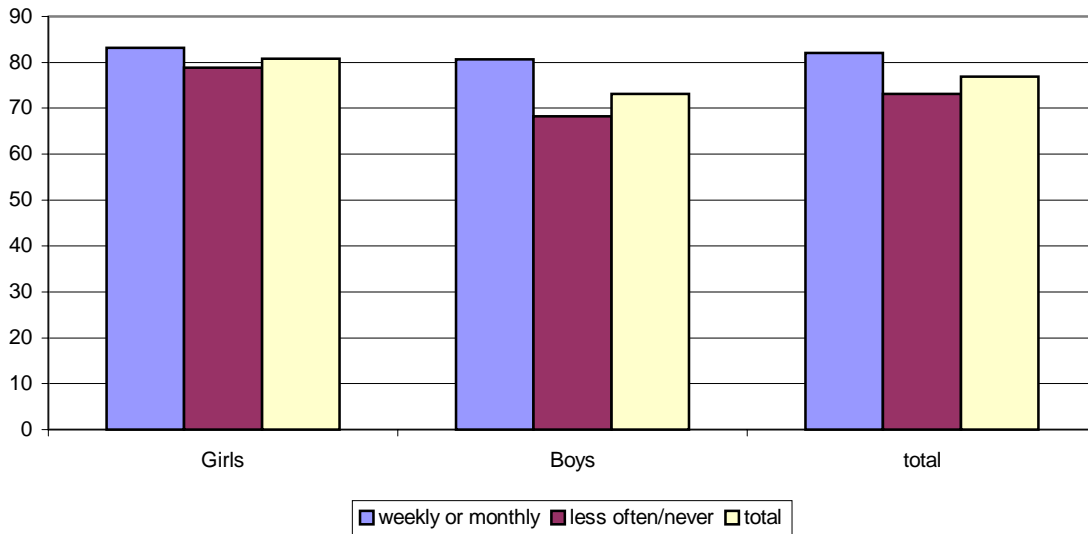


Chart 2. Percentage of girls and boys who volunteer, by frequency of attendance at religious services, 1996-1997

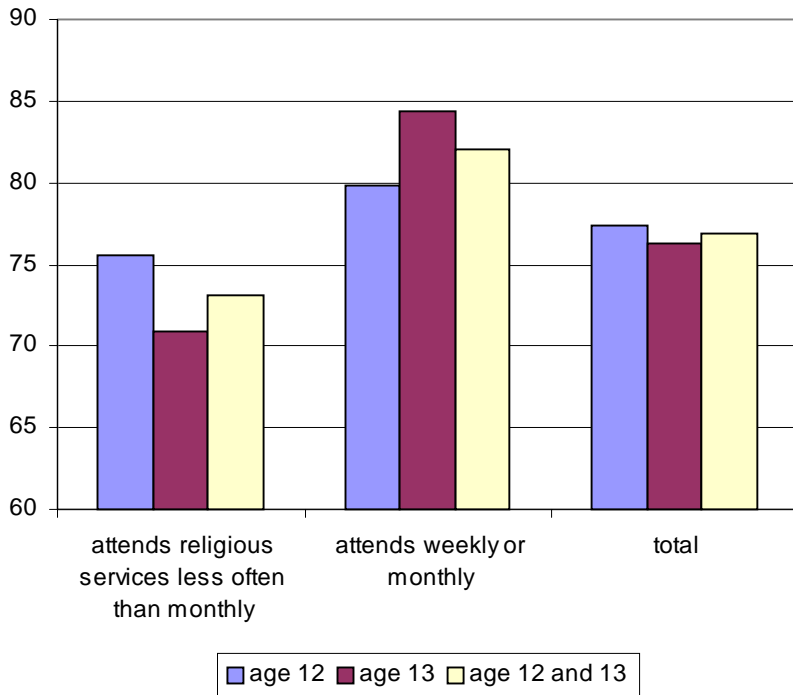


Chart 3. Percentage of children 12 and 13 years of age volunteering in different faith communities, 1996-1997

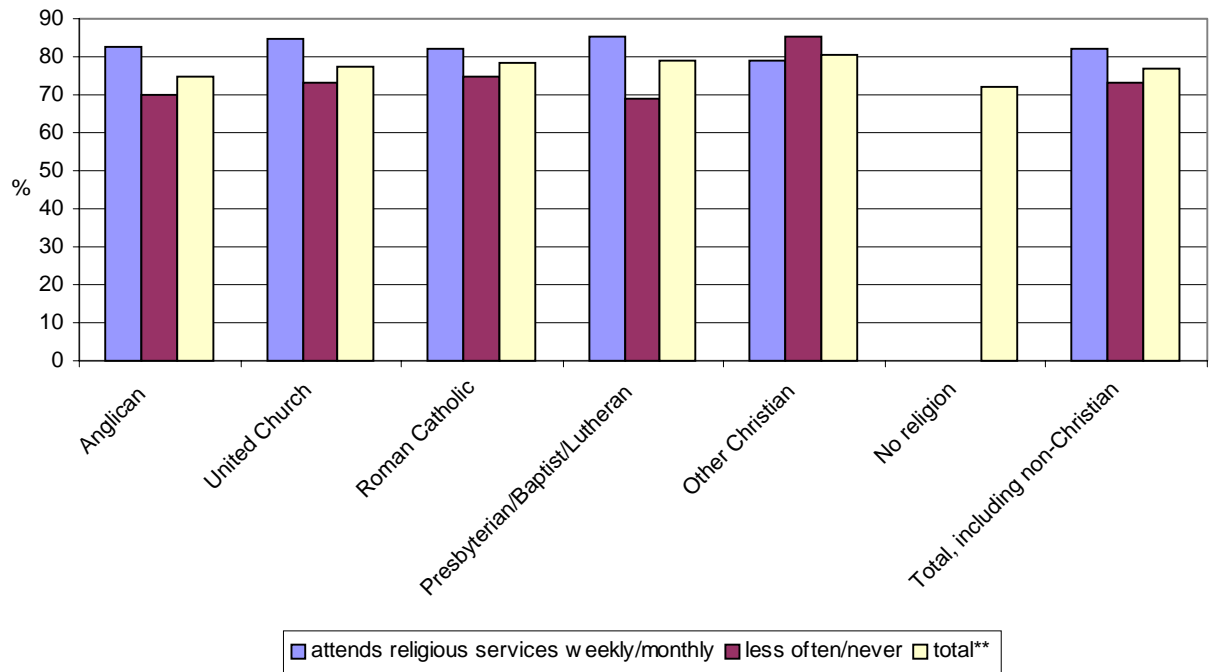


Chart 4. Percentage of children aged 12 and 13 who volunteered in Canada's regions in 1996-1997

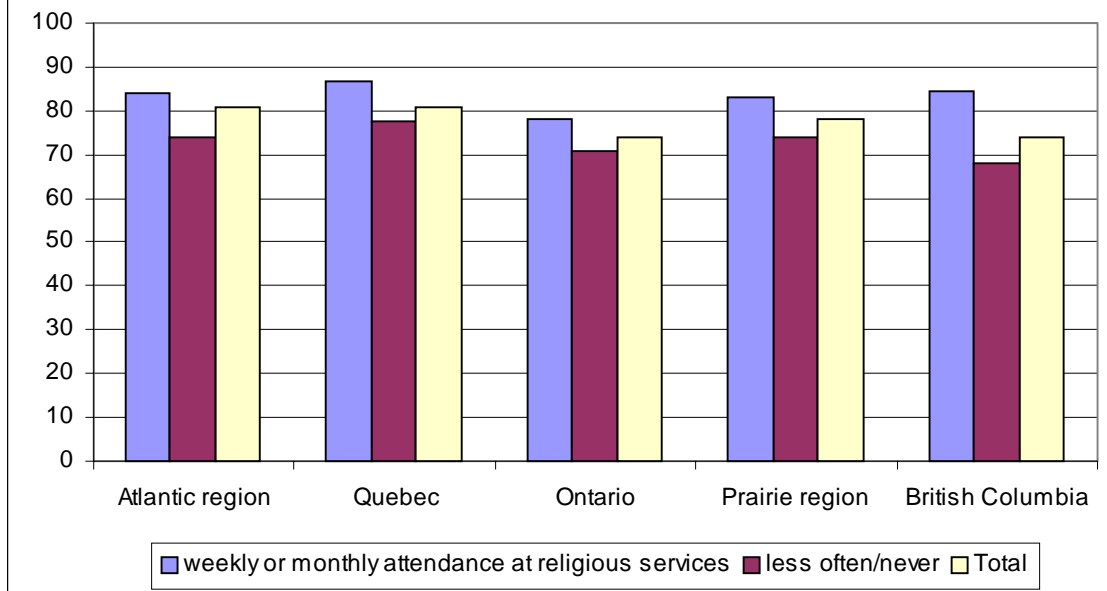


Chart 5. Percentage of children aged 12 and 13 who volunteered in rural and urban areas in 1996-1997

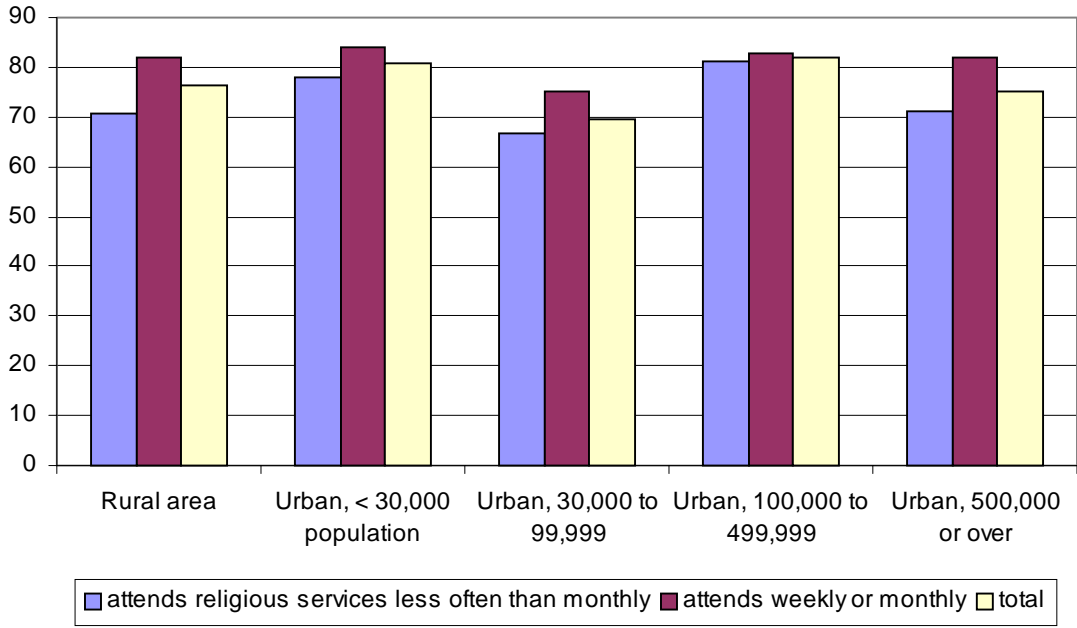


Chart 6. Percentage of children aged 12 and 13 taking part in art, drama, or music groups, at least weekly, 1996-1997

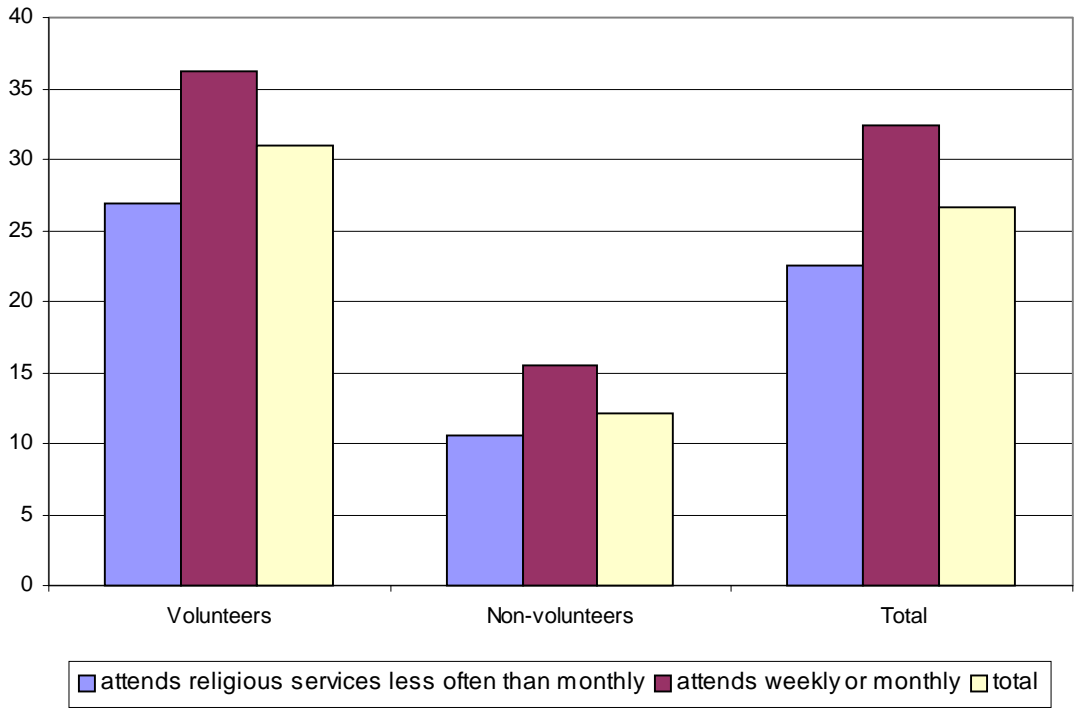


Chart 7. Percentage of children aged 12 and 13 participating in organized sports, at least weekly, 1996-1997

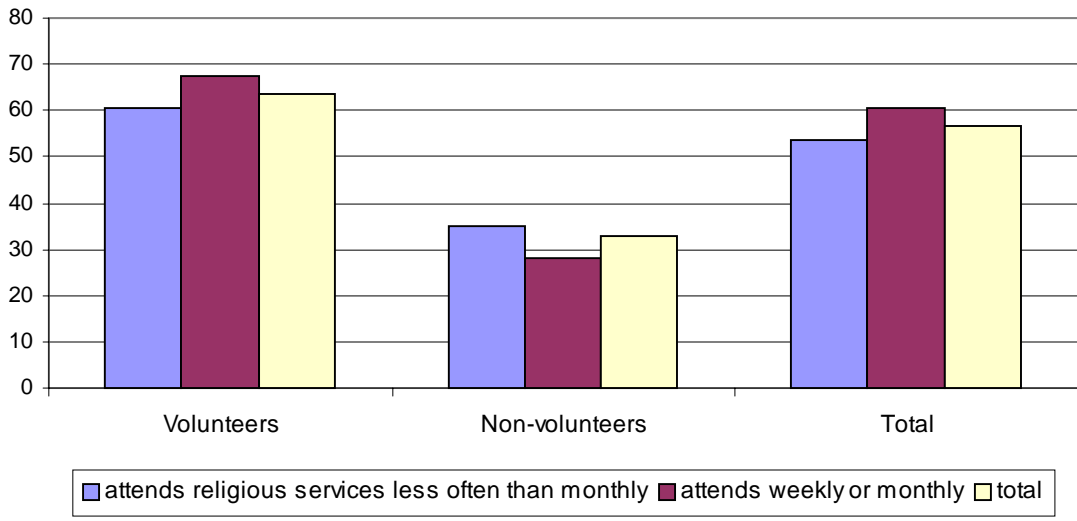


Chart 8. Percentage of children aged 12 and 13 taking part in clubs such as Guides or 4-H Clubs, 1996-1997

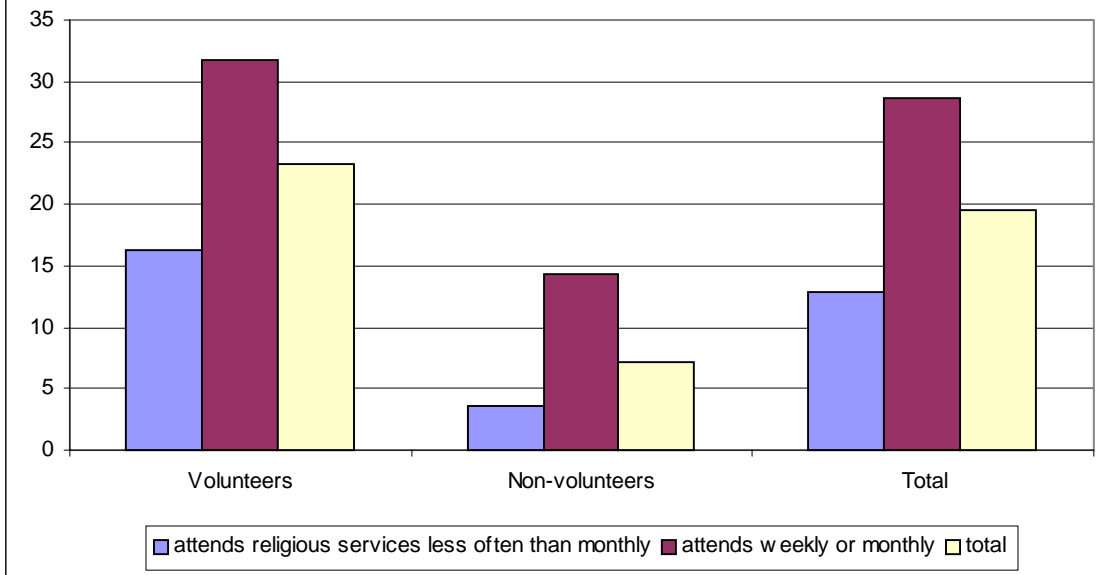


Table 1. Estimation of the number of types of volunteering, if any, by children aged 12 and 13, Canada, 1996-1997

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-0.429	0.717		-0.6	0.550
Attends religious services weekly or monthly	0.230	0.059	0.084	3.9	0.000
Girl = 0, boy = 1.	-0.360	0.057	-0.131	-6.4	0.000
Age of child	0.160	0.057	0.058	2.8	0.005
Atlantic region	0.323	0.116	0.099	2.8	0.005
Quebec	0.182	0.118	0.052	1.5	0.122
Ontario	0.255	0.113	0.080	2.3	0.024
Prairie region	0.250	0.113	0.079	2.2	0.027
Less than \$40,000 household income=1	-0.182	0.061	-0.064	-3.0	0.003
Number of parent involvements in school	0.124	0.038	0.070	3.3	0.001
Parent has less than high school graduation	-0.291	0.110	-0.075	-2.7	0.008
-- high school, possibly more education	-0.102	0.088	-0.033	-1.2	0.246
-- community college or trade school diploma	0.083	0.072	0.025	1.2	0.249

R squared adjusted = 0.047. Number of children = 2269.

The reference group for the region variable is British Columbia; and for the education variable is university degree.

Note: =1 signifies the value of a dummy variable, the other value being 0.

Table 2. Estimation of the number of responsible and personal growth activities* of children aged 12 and 13, Canada, 1996-1997

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.992	0.720		5.5	0.000
Attends religious services weekly or monthly	0.129	0.059	0.042	2.2	0.029
Girl = 0, boy = 1.	-0.521	0.057	-0.168	-9.1	0.000
Age of child	-0.188	0.057	-0.061	-3.3	0.001
Atlantic region	0.247	0.117	0.067	2.1	0.035
Quebec	-0.026	0.118	-0.007	-0.2	0.825
Ontario	0.202	0.113	0.057	1.8	0.073
Prairie region	-0.032	0.113	-0.009	-0.3	0.779
Less than \$40,000 household income=1	-0.042	0.061	-0.013	-0.7	0.495
Number of parent involvements in school	0.099	0.038	0.049	2.6	0.009
Parent has less than high school graduation	-0.545	0.110	-0.124	-4.9	0.000
-- high school, possibly more education	-0.272	0.088	-0.079	-3.1	0.002
-- community college or trade school diploma	0.000	0.072	0.000	0.0	0.997
Volunteer=1	1.542	0.069	0.414	22.3	0.000

R squared adjusted = 0.244. Number of children = 2269.

The reference group for the region variable is British Columbia; and for the education variable is university degree.

Note: =1 signifies the value of a dummy variable, the other value being 0.

* The six possible activities are plays organized sports weekly; takes music, art or drama lessons weekly; belongs to clubs such as Guides or 4-H; always wears seatbelts; always does homework; and often helps other children having difficulty with a task.