

# Expectations of Immigrant Women and Older Adults on Encountering each other in Volunteer Work

*Volunteer work is popular in Finland, but immigrants are underrepresented in volunteer organizations, as in other European countries. Volunteer work is known to have many benefits for both immigrants and older adults. However, the researchers could not find previous studies on the expectations of these two vulnerable groups for encountering each other in volunteer work. The purpose of this study was to describe the thoughts of immigrant women (n=19) and older adults (n=19) on volunteer work with older adults. The data were collected through individual interviews in 2019 and 2020. The data were analyzed through inductive content analysis. The results show that both groups had fears and prejudice towards both each other and volunteer work, but both also saw benefits in it. The immigrant women's descriptions emphasized limits caused by their culture and the lack of financial incentives. The older adults' descriptions did not mention these perspectives. The study produced valuable information on both groups' expectations on encountering each other in volunteer work. Both are beneficiaries, who must be trained in encountering each other. Training can be used to dispel prejudice, plan ways to spend time together and build trust between different parties. The responsibility for organizing training should be with the volunteer organization in charge of the project.*

**Keywords:** immigrants, older adults, volunteer work, research

## Study Background

The Finnish population is ageing more rapidly than expected during the current decade, resulting in a disadvantageous dependency ratio. Increased immigration has been suggested as a solution (Kotamäki 2020). While net immigration to Finland has approximately tripled since the 1990s, there is still little immigration to Finland compared to other European countries (Kotamäki 2020). From the perspective of sustainable population development, Finland needs immigrants and their participation in work and society. A functioning multicultural society will not come into existence on its own but requires active deeds and conscious decisions from both decision-makers and regular citizens (Säävälä 2020).

One attempt to meet this challenge was a 2019-2022 project executed by a Finnish university of applied sciences and funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union. Its goal was to strengthen immigrant women's participation in social activities and to improve their integration by developing a training model for volunteer work with them and for them. The training model was created based on experience gained in three workshops and six months of training. The project sought to advance cooperation between immigrant women and organizations providing services for older adults and provided an opportunity to learn more about Finnish volunteer work,

organization work and the everyday lives of older adults. (Source would compromise anonymity and will be provided later).

The Family Federation of Finland (Sorsa 2020) has set a welfare goal where each Finn has at least one close relationship. As people age, close and meaningful relationships are particularly important, as they have a significant effect on health and wellbeing. Loneliness and discrimination are harmful to all people (Sorsa 2020).

There is no single commonly accepted legal definition of volunteer work. There are many definitions, which have in common the keywords unpaid activity and activity done for others out of free will (GHK 2010). According to a survey (GHK 2010), Europe has different traditions of volunteer work and differently developed volunteer sectors, which can be seen in the statistics on participation in volunteer work. Finland was among the European countries with the second most active populations along with Luxembourg, Denmark, and Germany, in which 30-39% of the adult population performs volunteer work. The Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are at the top of the list, as more than 40% of their adult populations perform volunteer work (GHK 2010). While volunteer work is popular in Finland, immigrants are underrepresented, particularly in the well-known volunteer organizations (Berhanu 2018). Immigrants are less active in volunteer work than the main population everywhere in Europe (Voicu 2013).

Studies show that participating in volunteer work has many health benefits to older adults in particular, such as slowing down cognitive impairment (Infurna et al. 2016) and lowering mortality risk (Okun et al. 2013). According to researchers, volunteer work has such significant health benefits that doctors should write “volunteer work prescriptions” to older adults (Infurna et al. 2016).

Older adults perform many kinds of volunteer work, such as instructing in peer sport groups, playing music at retirement homes and aiding in using the Internet. They participate in volunteer work based on their own interests and available time. Volunteers must be trained in their tasks, given support, guidance and instruction on the background organization. Advancing the wellbeing of volunteers and continuing the programs are significant factors (Toivoniemi-Matsinen & Harinen 2018).

A Norwegian study examined older adults’ experiences of the health-improving benefits of volunteer work. The volunteer center is an important place, in which older adults feel connected to the community of volunteer workers. It offers a chance for personal growth and adjusting oneself to old age. The context of volunteer work and its organization were also important as experiences (Berg & Johansen 2017).

A systematic literature review by Posselt’s research group (2018) identified eight enablers of immigrants’ psychological welfare, which are 1) social support, 2) faith, religion and spirituality, 3) cognitive strategies, 4) educational and training opportunities, 5) employment and economic activities, 6) behavioral strategies, 7) political activity and 8) environmental conditions. A future-oriented way of thinking and finding purpose and meaning in life improve immigrants’ welfare (Posselt et al. 2018).

Participating in volunteer work is an important way of increasing immigrants' social inclusion and integration into their new society (Berhanu 2018, Voicu 2013, Kim et al. 2016, Røgeberg 2016, Khvorostianov & Remennick 2017), as they have few contacts with the main population created outside of employment and education (Avenarius 2012, Gupta & Sullivan 2013). Highly educated immigrant women in particular seek self-fulfillment in volunteer work, as their experience shows that the education and work experience they received in their countries of origins is not valued in their new country. Volunteer work allows them to help new immigrants in particular by offering them the chance to build and act in common support networks. Their work improves everyone's welfare and prevents social exclusion in particular (Khvorostianov & Remennick 2017).

Even though studies show volunteer work's undeniable advantages to all parties, everywhere in Europe immigrants are less involved in volunteer work than the main population, aside from religious organizations (Voicu & Seban 2012). Citizens of developing countries in particular participate the least in volunteer organizations on average (Valentova & Alieva 2018). As the time they have spent in the new country increases, so does their participation in volunteer work, while second generation immigrants' participation levels are similar to the rest of society (Voicu & Seban 2012).

There has been a great deal of study into immigrants' participation in leisure activities (Cerber et al. 2012, O'Driscoll et al. 2013, Koca & Lapa 2014, Kim et al. 2016, Lenneis & Pfister 2017, Salin et al. 2021). However, there is little research into their participation in volunteer work (Barhanu 2018). On immigrants' volunteer work with older adults, the topic of this study, only a few project reports could be found.

The Finnish (Vehkasalo 2016) and Austrian (Loferer-Lainer 2019) project reports describe the experiences of people at senior centers on immigrants' volunteer work. According to both reports, both parties saw the experience as positive. Working as volunteers gave immigrants everyday activities to do and supported their learning the new language. They would tell the older adults about their own country and culture. Downsides included the short duration of their volunteer work, as immigrants' personal situations changed rapidly (Vehkasalo 2016).

This article uses the general term immigrant, which generally refers to people born abroad. They are people who have moved to Finland for various reasons such as family, work, education or being forced to leave their country of origin as refugees (THL 2021).

This study seeks to fill a research gap by gathering more information on immigrants and older adults' experiences of encountering each other as part of volunteer work.

## **Purpose and Research Tasks**

The purpose of this study is to describe immigrant women and older adults' thoughts on volunteer work among older adults in Finnish society before the piloting stage.

The research tasks are the following:

1. How do immigrant women describe themselves as volunteer helpers of older adults?
2. How do Finnish older adults describe immigrant women as their volunteer helpers?

## **Data and Methods**

### *Data Collection*

The data consist of individual interviews with women who have immigrated to Finland (N=19) and older Finnish adults (N=19), conducted prior to their participation in training related to the project. The structured interviews with immigrant women were conducted as phone interviews in Spring 2020 (n=10) and finished in connection with the third and last workshop in early Fall 2020 (n=9). The interviews proceeded along two themes: I as a helper to an older adult and the advantages and challenges of participating in volunteer work. The following questions were formed: How good are you at encountering older adults? What interests you in encountering them? In your opinion, how do people encounter older adults in Finnish culture? What information do you need in encountering Finnish older adults? What factors could prevent you from participating in volunteer work with older adults? What benefits will you receive from participating in volunteer work with older adults? The final research data consist of fifteen pages of text written on a font size of 12 and a line spacing of 1.5. The immigrant women who participated in the workshop wrote their own replies to the above-mentioned questions. The replies were copied word-for-word to a Microsoft Word file that ran seven pages. In total, the data for the immigrant women consisted of 22 pages. The interviews were conducted by three researchers working on the project.

The immigrant women had arrived in Finland as refugees or for other reasons in 2006-2019 from different countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America. All had at least a residence permit and their age range was 20-48. Three of the interviewees lived with their parents while all the others were married and, aside from two, had children. Sixteen of them were either studying Finnish or learning a trade, five were employed and a few were stay-at-home mothers.

The structured interviews with the older adults were conducted in their homes in different parts of Finland in late 2019 and early 2020. The interview questions were: How would you feel if an immigrant woman came to your home to help you with everyday tasks? What kinds of tasks could she help you with? In what ways could you help her? The interviewers were healthcare students at a university of applied sciences interviewing their acquaintances or grandparents. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word-by-word. The data consisted of 94 pages of text on a font size of 12 and a line spacing of 1.5.

Fifteen of the older adults were women and four men. Their age range was 70-96. Fifteen lived at home either alone or with a spouse, and four lived alone at senior houses. The interviewees were in good condition and independent aside

from two interviewees, one of whom had a mild memory disorder and one a mobility-limiting disease.

#### Data Analysis

Table 1. An example of the analysis of the immigrant women's data.

Original expression	Condensed expression	Subcategory	Main category
"in my culture, we are taught to behave politely towards old people"	• In my culture... polite behavior towards old people	Appreciative encounter	Dialogic and activity-based encountering
"I let the elder have a chance to tell their story"	• I let...tell their story	Listening	
"I'm good at reading newspapers, doing hair, painting nails, I can give them food"	• Good at reading • Good at doing hair and nails • Can give food	Activities	

Both sets of data were analyzed using data-driven content analysis (Kyngäs et al. 2020). The analysis was initiated by reading the immigrant women's data set, after which the text was condensed and grouped into subcategories. The subcategories were further grouped into main categories, which formed the immigrant women's descriptions of voluntary work with older adults. Table 1 contains an example of the analysis and its process.

#### Ethics of the Study

The research project and the related research topic are based on two vulnerable groups' experiences of living in Finnish society. The results can be used directly in advancing the wellbeing and social participation of both immigrant women and older adults.

The immigrant women who participated in the phone interviews (n=10) had previously voluntarily participated in the first two workshops of the project, during which they had been asked for their willingness to participate in later data collection. Their interviews were originally meant to be conducted in person but were instead conducted via phone due to the corona virus pandemic. As the pandemic eased in late Summer 2020, the third workshop was conducted in-person after a six-month delay.

The permission to conduct the study in connection with the immigrant women's (n=9) third workshop was obtained from the organization participating in the project, following their research permission protocol. The older adults who participated in the study were private individuals in charge of their own lives, so their conscious permission to participate in the study was sufficient.

The study was conducted following good scientific practice and the ethical principles of human subject research (TENK 2019). The interviewees participated in the study voluntarily and were informed of the study's purpose and the use of

their data both orally and in writing. The covering letter emphasized the voluntary nature of their participation, the interview's confidentiality and the anonymity of the analysis. The name and contact information of the person in charge of the study was provided in the covering letter, which gave the immigrant women and older adults the option of discussing the study with the researcher.

## Results

### *Immigrant Women's Description of Volunteer Work with Older Adults*

The immigrant women's (n=19) descriptions formed five main categories of their views on volunteer work with older adults. (Table 2.)

Table 2. Immigrant women's (n=19) description of volunteer work with older adults.

Example of condensed expression	Subcategory	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Own cultural background</li> <li>• Experience working with elders</li> <li>• Caring attitude</li> </ul>	Appreciative encountering	Dialogic and activity-based encountering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill to create a connection</li> <li>• Skill to be present</li> <li>• Listening</li> </ul>	Listening	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household skills</li> <li>• Cooking skills</li> <li>• Beauty skills</li> <li>• Doing together</li> </ul>	Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding old person speech is hard</li> <li>• Weak Finnish skills</li> </ul>	Fears related to understanding speech	Fears related to encountering and being understood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not knowing the person before</li> <li>• Allowed topics</li> <li>• Problems caused by age</li> </ul>	Fear of encountering	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of family receiving publicity</li> <li>• Fear of being accused</li> </ul>	Fear of publicity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrants' prejudice about Finns</li> <li>• Finn's prejudice about immigrants</li> </ul>	Broadening cultural competence	Cultural learning and integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about the social system</li> <li>• Learning Finnish</li> <li>• Learning about work culture</li> </ul>	Learning about Finnish culture and society	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about ageing</li> <li>• Learning about managing life</li> </ul>	Learning from the life stories of older adults	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining a Finnish friend</li> <li>• Strengthening social network</li> </ul>	Broadening social relationships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits related to gender</li> <li>• Conditions related to actions</li> </ul>	Limiting cultural rules	Limits caused by one's own culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time management challenges</li> <li>• Lack of compensation in volunteer work</li> </ul>	Lack of payment in volunteer work	Lack of financial incentives

### Dialogic and Activity-based Encountering

Appreciative encountering, listening and activity-based encountering emerged as the immigrant women's areas of expertise. Appreciative respect for older adults was rooted in their own cultural background, in which older adults were appreciated and respected. From a young age, children are taught to treat older adults with respect. The interviewees also had personal experience in helping older

adults in their countries of origin, in which caring for the wellbeing of older adults was expected.

*"in my culture, the family cares for its elders well"*

The immigrant women described their good intercommunication skills as their strengths. They were social and had the ability to create a connection with an older adult. Genuine presence, listening and discussion were their methods for successful intercommunication. They were genuinely interested in the stories of older adults.

*"I am good at face-to-face meetings, I give the elderly a chance to tell their story"*

The immigrant women described their skills as one of their strengths as helpers of older adults. They were skilled at tasks related to cooking and housekeeping, which they hoped they could do together with older adults. They were also skilled at beauty-related tasks.

*"I'm good at reading newspapers, doing hair, painting nails, I can give them food"*

#### Fears related to encountering and being understood

In interviews with the immigrant women, fears related to understanding speech, encountering older adults and publicity emerged. The immigrant women named communication problems as their weaknesses as helpers of older adults. Their ability to speak Finnish was not yet sufficient. They felt that it was difficult to understand the speech of older adults because of e.g., dialect words and a quick speech tempo. They were afraid of mutual misunderstanding, particularly if the older adult only spoke Finnish. The interviewees saw language skills as paramount so they could share their own emotions and knowledge with older adults.

*"hard to communicate, if the old person only speaks their native tongue"*

The immigrant women also felt that it was difficult to encounter an older person, as they did not know each other previously. The interviewees considered age-related problems such as potential illnesses, particularly ones related to memory and questions related to functionality. It was also difficult to know which topics were allowed and which forbidden in discussions.

*"we need information about how they feel about foreigners, I don't know any Finnish elders"*

The immigrant women described their skepticism for the ultimate purpose of volunteer work. They feared that participating might bring publicity to their family, which they did not want. The fear of being photographed secretly and being interrogated and charged by officials made them suspicious of volunteer work.

*"there may be suspicions that by joining you may end up in front of a judge"*

## Cultural Learning and Integration

The immigrant women described broadening their cultural competence and social relationships and learning about Finnish culture and society as opportunities provided by volunteer work. They also felt that it was important to learn from the life stories of older adults.

The immigrant women described volunteer work with older adults as a way of dispelling prejudice on both sides. They themselves had preconceived ideas of Finnish older adults and knew that older adults had ones about them. Volunteer work would be a good way of removing prejudice, as it offers a chance of becoming acquainted with a person different from oneself and broadening one's cultural competence.

*"chance to break immigrants' prejudice about Finnish elders, fixing elders' prejudice"*

The interviewees also mentioned learning about Finnish culture and society. The immigrant women described older adults as teachers who would teach them about Finnish history, service system, social systems and work culture. Being able to practice Finnish was another benefit.

*"to learn from old people how to manage in Finnish circumstances"*

The immigrant women felt that by doing volunteer work they could learn from older adults' life experience in many ways. Aside from learning about old age as such, they would learn about being an older adult in Finnish society. They would also learn about adulthood from older adults. The immigrant women felt that older adults' stories of survival could teach them a great deal.

*"elders teach you what it's like to be old"*

A significant benefit of volunteer work was the chance of making a Finnish friend, who could show what it is like to spend time with a Finn. Making a Finnish friend would mean broadening and strengthening one's social network, as volunteer work could also serve as a way of becoming acquainted with an older adult's family and the organizers of the volunteer work. The interviewees felt that volunteer work would also give their children a good way to become acquainted with an older adult, whom they would learn to respect and even help. A mother said the following:

*"if the place was good for a child, they too could spend time with the elder"*

## Limits caused by one's own culture

The immigrant women described their own culture as causing limits to their volunteer work and that rules related to gender could prevent some activities. For instance, swimming involves cultural norms that would prevent volunteer work. Regulations related to religion also had to be considered. The immigrant women



suspected that older adults might not receive them because of their headscarves and the color of their skin.

*"if the activity involved swimming, I could not participate"*  
*"old people are scared of the headscarf!"*

### Lack of Financial Incentives

The immigrant women also described their commitment to volunteer work. Challenges related to time management, such as taking care of their children, studying and other plans for the future made them question their ability to commit to volunteer work. The lack of payment could even prevent their participation. The interviewees found it hard to understand the nature of volunteer work as non-paying work.

*"the lack of pay can be an obstacle for volunteering"*

### *Finnish Older Adults' Description of Immigrant Women as their Voluntary Helpers*

Three main categories emerged from the older adults' (n=19) descriptions of immigrant women as their voluntary helpers: the multiformity of volunteer work, ambivalent attitude towards immigrants and the requirements for successful

Table 3. Finnish older adults' (N=19) description of immigrant women as their voluntary helpers.

Example of condensed expression	Subcategory	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercising together</li> <li>Going to theater</li> <li>As friend and company, discussion partner</li> <li>Being a substitute grandpa</li> </ul>	Being and doing together	Multiformity of volunteer work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping with food</li> <li>Helping in sauna</li> <li>Helping with changing sheets</li> <li>Helping maintain home</li> </ul>	Helping with everyday household tasks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can explain the Finnish social system</li> <li>Teaching Finnish customs</li> <li>Teaching Finnish</li> <li>Teaching Swedish</li> </ul>	Acting as a teacher and advisor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They're people just like us</li> <li>Positive idea of immigrants</li> <li>Need to agree to their customs and understand</li> <li>Doesn't matter who does it, as long as it gets done</li> </ul>	Accepting	Ambivalent attitude towards immigrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finn must be allowed to maintain their own culture</li> <li>Keeping own faith</li> <li>We don't need to accommodate foreign customs</li> </ul>	Skeptical	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being someone's trusted person is demanding</li> <li>Observing before trusting</li> <li>Supervisor with initially to explain and answer questions</li> <li>Trust in shopping with receipt and money</li> </ul>	Building trust	Requirements for successful volunteer work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finn is grumpy</li> <li>Bad language skills, need to be patient</li> <li>Am I naive</li> <li>Must be a nice person</li> </ul>	Both parties' personalities	

volunteer work. (Table 3)

# Multiformity of Volunteer Work

The older adults described the multiformity of volunteer work as spending time and doing things together. They could go to shops, theaters, cafes and outdoor activities together. They could make dishes from both cultures together. In the ideal scenario spending time together leads to friendship. In such scenarios, the older adults described themselves as functioning as substitute grandparents.

*"if we get along well, we could do all sorts of things together, I see no reasons she couldn't come with me to the theater or to a concert, for instance."*

Helping with everyday tasks was a significant form of volunteer work. They wished for help with maintaining their home and personal hygiene. Cooking and shopping were also mentioned as important factors they needed help with. They also mentioned needing help with visiting doctors and other services.

The older adults also thought of themselves as teachers and advisors to the immigrant women. Their own background and interests defined what they could teach to the immigrant women. They saw the Finnish social system, its functioning and work culture as important topics to teach. Volunteer work would also offer an excellent chance of teaching the immigrant women Finnish or Swedish, the two official languages in Finland. They saw faster integration into Finnish society and opportunities of entering the workforce as benefits. One interviewee presented the following as a condition:

*"you can't push advice on someone if they don't want it".*

## Ambivalent attitude towards immigrants

The older adults' positive attitudes towards immigrants could be seen in positive descriptions of immigrants. They were seen as ordinary people like any other. They also wished for more immigration to Finland, as they were worried about population decline. They did not care about nationality, as long as they were eager to perform volunteer work. The interviewees thought that Finns should also be interested in immigrants' concerns and respect must be mutual. They did not care who handled necessary tasks, as long as they were done.

*"every person can do their job, I have nothing against anyone. Everyone is welcome. We're all the same on the inside..."*

A skeptical attitude towards immigrants could be seen in worries about the preservation of one's own culture, in case they must adjust to foreign cultures or religion. The interviewees were also afraid of the immigrant volunteers stealing from them. They did not wish to have to watch over their property. The skeptical attitude was enforced by negative newspaper articles about immigrants.

*"I don't like that we should start acting according to their customs. And I want that we can keep our own culture, that we don't have to adjust to others. I want us to be what we are and sing our old songs."*

## Requirements for successful Volunteer Work

According to the older adults, building trust was a requirement for successful volunteer work, as they would be letting a new person into their home. Trust could not be built instantly but would require time. Trust requires a great deal from both parties. According to the interviewees, the Finnish habit of observing first is a good way of building trust. In the context of volunteer work, they said it would mean initially having a supervisor from the volunteer organization participating in the visit. Their task would be to explain the system and answer questions from both parties.

*"safety is important to me, and I probably wouldn't let an unknown immigrant woman into my home easily, if we were meeting for the first time. The first meeting could be somewhere else, and if we got along, why couldn't we be friends?"*

*"I wouldn't want an unknown person to come to my home to help, because she's a stranger. What if they want to take advantage of me somehow"*

Personalities of both parties were important requirements for successful volunteer work. The older adults considered Finns "grumps" who do not know how to give anything to the immigrant unless specifically asked. The older adults considered the communication problems caused by the lack of a common language. They considered misunderstandings inevitable. A pleasant personality could, however, compensate for a lack of language skills.

## **Discussion**

### *Analysis of the Results*

Based on the results of the study, immigrant women and older adults' descriptions of encountering each other in volunteer work were in many ways similar. Both parties had prejudices towards both each other and volunteer work. Both also emphasized the mutually beneficial potential of volunteer work. The immigrant women also assessed volunteer work from the perspective of limitations caused by their own culture and a lack of financial incentives. These perspectives were not present in the descriptions of the older adults.

Based on earlier research literature, voluntary work is a significant factor in immigrants' integration into their new society (Voicu 2013, Kim et al. 2016, Røgeberg 2016, Khvorostianov & Remennick 2017, Berhanu 2018). Säävälä (2020) points out that integration is not only something done by immigrants, but something that must be built by strengthening receptivity and equality on both the social and individual level. This requires flexibility, learning and the ability to change from all parties. Many of the older adults participating in this study recognized this demand by naming their own tasks in helping to integrate the volunteer worker. They understood the benefits of immigration both to the incomers and to themselves (Säävälä 2020).

Immigrant women and older adults encountering each other in volunteer work offers a good chance for mutual learning (Vehkasalo 2017). The results of this study are partially similar, as the immigrant women saw themselves as learners

rather than teachers. Volunteer work with older adults would offer them a view of Finnish culture and society from the inside. The immigrant women wished to learn about society, ageing and ways of managing life. Experiential knowledge is irreplaceable alongside other sources of knowledge. The older adults in this study were prepared to meet this wish.

According to earlier studies, immigrant women, particularly those from developing countries, often become stay-at-home mothers, which limits their encounters with the main population (Avenarius 2012, Gupta & Sullivan 2013). However, research shows that work, education and learning the local language are the best ways of integrating into the new society (Gupta & Sullivan 2013, Calzada et al. 2016). If these are lacking, particularly from immigrant women's lives, integration is difficult. Immigrant women must be offered activities that are culturally acceptable. One such activity is volunteer work with older adults, as it is work in a familiar context. The women in this study came from cultures where older adults were cared for within the family until the end of their lives, so helping and caring for older adults was familiar to them since childhood.

The older adults in this study saw building trust as a requirement for successful volunteer work. This requires an opportunity to get to know each other. Volunteer organizations should thus have people responsible for guiding participants in both their organization's practices as well as interpersonal encounters. Organizations should develop their practice as an important way of integrating and including them in society (Berg & Johansen 2017, Toivoniemi-Matsinen & Harinen 2018). Older adults, who often suffer from loneliness, and immigrant women, who often lack contact with the main population, are both beneficiaries. In the ideal case, both gain a friend and a significant relationship.

### *Reliability*

The reliability of the study is examined from the perspective of the entire research process and assessed for its believability, transferability, dependency and confirmability (Kyngäs et al. 2020).

The data reported in this study were gathered as part of XXXXX project. The purpose of the project is to strengthen immigrant women's participation in society and advance their integration by forming a model for volunteer work with them and for them. The model is aimed for volunteer work with older adults.

The interviews with the older adults were conducted by students in higher education as part of their project studies. The conductors of this study trained the students for the interviews by going through the questions carefully and emphasizing that they must not ask questions other than the ones provided by the researchers. They were also instructed on the interview technique and recording and transcribing the interview. The interviews provided answers to the pre-determined questions, but the answers were not deepened through follow-up questions. As there is little research on the topic, the descriptions provided by the interviews are a valuable introduction to understanding the phenomenon. After the first 13 interviews, six more were conducted to achieve data saturation (Kyngäs et al. 2020).

The interviews with the immigrant women were conducted by three experienced researchers either in Finnish or English. They were sent the questions in advance to allow them to prepare for the interview. Despite this, some of the interviews remained superficial due to a language barrier. The data collection was continued in Fall 2020 as part of a workshop organized for the target group. The immigrant women responded to the open questionnaire independently. The questions were the same as in the phone interview. The respondents' Finnish skill level was fairly high, and they were able to express their thoughts decently well.

In analyzing the two data sets, the researchers avoided interpreting the data beyond their stated meaning. This was done to avoid the researchers' own assumptions influencing the analysis. The results of this study are only partially confirmed by previous studies, as the topic has received little scholarly attention. To increase confirmability, the researchers sought to report the different phases of the study diligently to enable the reader to assess the researchers' analysis (Kyngäs et al. 2020).

The data for this study consist of two data corpora, which are as such not comparable. However, both discuss multicultural encounters in the Finnish welfare society from the perspective of age and gender. Some of the immigrant women's low Finnish skills resulted in their answers being brief and occasionally cryptic. Their answers may also have been affected by their position. It is possible they gave answers they assumed the researchers would want.

Analysis of the data yielded valuable information on how immigrant women describe themselves as actors and the benefits and challenges of volunteer work. The interviews with Finnish older adults yielded a description of their understanding of both themselves and immigrant women as actors and participants in Finnish society.

## Conclusions and Further Research

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results:

There is little research on immigrant women and older adults encountering each other as part of volunteer work. Both parties are beneficiaries, who require training for encountering each other. Training can be used to dispel prejudice, plan common activities and build trust between parties. The responsibility for the training should ideally be with the volunteer organization.

Further research should examine both parties' experiences of volunteer work that has happened. It is also necessary to chart volunteer organizations' attitudes towards immigrant work and to examine volunteer work's effectiveness as an important factor in the wellbeing of both immigrants and older adults.

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