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From Me to You? A Comparative Analysis of Reciprocal Helping and Civic Society

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We use data from the European Social Survey and the UK Citizenship Survey to consider the expectation of reciprocity and how it varies in relation to age and gender, income, country, the type of area where a person lives, and the extent to which a person thinks that other people living locally to them are willing to help.

Our analysis shows that people who see helping others as important and those who help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attending local events) are less likely to expect help in return when compared to those people who don't see helping others as important and/or who don't help that often in practice. There are considerable differences in rates of reciprocity across different European countries. Women and older people are less likely to expect help in return. In the UK people on relatively lower incomes are more likely to expect help in return when compared with those on higher incomes. The complex dynamics of reciprocity in relation to helping have far reaching implications for the development of civic society.

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1. Introduction

The term reciprocity describes a process where something is done or given in return i.e. a conditional response or action. In this paper we are specifically interested in reciprocity with respect to the help people provide to others, and what help, if any, is expected in return.

Reciprocity is more complex than a simple exchange. Reciprocity can be a norm in the sense of being an expected behaviour and response in a particular situation. Gouldner (1960) argues that "reciprocity is one of the universal, principal components of moral codes". A key aspect of this is that people should help those who have helped them. Reciprocity has underpinned societies from primitive to modern though the actual nature of reciprocity can vary considerably in relation to the individual, the issue and the nature of any prior help and context. Whilst reciprocity might well be seen as a norm in practice it is variously manifested and may be more of an ideal than a reality. See Blau (1964) and Shalins (1972) and also Lebra (1975) for an outline of different perspectives on reciprocity including exchange in anthropological research.

Help and helping can be understood as a contribution to the success or achievement of something, to assist and to contribute to. Help and helping covers such activities as: helping organise an event, the emotional support given to a family member, the spontaneous assistance a bystander may give to someone who asks for directions or is in danger, helping others in an emergency, for example, someone who is unwell or following an accident or natural disaster and the raising money for a charity.

In this paper 'helping in practice' is defined as '*helping to organise, or attending, local events*' which is clearly an important aspect of civic participation. In a general sense,

some underlying notion of help underpins all civic participation whether in literal terms such as formal voluntary work in the form of being a school governor, or in more lateral terms, such as voting or contacting a local politician. Research by Purdam and Tranmer (2009) has shown that those people stating that they see helping others as important and those who actually help in practice are more likely to be involved in other civic activities such as contacting a politician, voting and signing a petition. A culture of help and helping is vital to the functioning of civil society. It is part of the infrastructure of community, not only in terms of how relationships are built but also how they are maintained. Helping in the form of voluntary activity is also increasingly being seen as a vehicle for developing citizenship, renewing democracy and delivering services. Governments are increasingly focussing on the voluntary sector and the role of voluntary activity of citizens as a key aspect of the restructuring of the welfare state (Milligan and Conradson 2007; Macmillan and Townsend 2007).

In this paper we consider general measures of both reciprocity and of helping in practice, so that we can limit the impact of other factors that may be associated with people giving a specific form of help. Here we are primarily concerned with people's general approach to helping others and what they expect in return.

We consider the following research questions: *Do expectations of reciprocity vary by age, gender, income, country, type of area and the local context of help? Do people who see helping others as important expect help in return? Are people who help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attending a local activity) more likely to expect people to help in return compared to those who do not help in practice?*

Methodology

In this paper we analyse data from the European Social Survey (ESS) 2006 and the UK Citizenship Survey (CS). The ESS collects a range of data on the changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of Europe's diverse populations. The 2006 wave includes data on 23 European countries. The CS is a government household survey covering a representative core sample of almost 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. It covers issues of civic participation, social attitudes and volunteering.

We use descriptive analysis and statistical modelling techniques including ordinal logistic regression to examine the patterns of helping and reciprocity and how they vary by key socio-demographics such as age, gender, relative income, peoples attitudes towards helping, and in relation to the type of area where people live.

2. Background

Help and helping are part of the set of human values. The value of help is something that can motivate action as well as being something that is dependent on people's individual circumstances and experience. See Dovidio *et al.* (2006) and Inglehart *et al.* (2004). Research by Zahn-Waxler *et al.* (1996) has highlighted the development of concern for others amongst young children. Dovidio *et al.* (2006) argue that there appears to be a natural predisposition to empathize with and help others but that this is affected by learned experiences and also context. Amato's (1990) research suggests that people are most likely to help friends and family members and that the characteristics of individuals are more closely associated with planned helping.

Helping is not a value that is held or acted upon similarly by all people. Research by Purdam and Tranmer (2009) analysing ESS data has shown that people are much more likely to state that helping others is important than actually help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attending a local activity). Women were found to be

more likely than men to state that helping others was important though they were equally as likely as men to state that they help in practice.

Reciprocity is also a recognised aspect of human behaviour and one that is thought to underpin a number of other different human characteristics including social responsibility, cooperation, attraction and systems such as international relations, law and trade (Keohane 1986). Sheffelin (1980) argues, informed by anthropological research in Papua New Guinea, that reciprocity has an important symbolic value, it is embedded in a societies structure of cultural thought and that it also contributes to the social construction of reality (see Komorita *et al.* 1991). Gouldner (1960) argues that it is the social norm aspect of reciprocity that motivates people to help people who have helped them, or someone very close to them, such as their family. As such, reciprocity is intrinsically linked with issues of morality, trust and shared values.

The normative qualities of helping others contributes to people not exploiting others, though research by Berkowitz (1972) concludes that the helpfulness norm is only a weak determinant of help giving of most people in many situations. Other factors need to be taken into account to understand the likelihood of someone helping. Batson (1998) points to the differences between situational and disposition factors (i.e. the immediate context and the individual person's orientation). For example, the likelihood of helping a stranger in an emergency has been found to depend on a number of factors including: self concern, the appearance of the person in need, similarity of the person in need with the potential helper, location, number of bystanders, perceived risk of helping, self confidence, emotional need, mood, and the person's generalised view of reciprocity (i.e. has the person been helped in the past and so feels they are indebted in a general way to society). The learning aspect of helping is seen as important. Intelligence and religion were not seen as strong predictors of whether a person would help a stranger (Batson 1998).

Whilst there may be a norm of having a concern for the welfare of others there is also the widely accepted view that humans follow a universal egoism such that everyone does what is in their own interests. Community and society itself is based on a network of associations, relationships, exchanges and dependencies and interdependencies. As such, it can be characterised as a set of expected and general reciprocities. Though there is some debate about how such explanations cover all aspects of personality (Berkowitz 1972). It may be that helping and reciprocity fulfils both the underlying norms of self-interest and helping others. Someone may help under the expectation that they will in a direct, or indirect, way receive the help back i.e. it is in their short or long term self interest. Or there may be some help they actually or anticipate needing and this could be driving their initial help. As such helping others takes the form of a cost benefit decision. However such analyses presume that people only help as a result of an individual decision. Whereas it could be that people just help as a consequence of a sense of empathy without incentive. Batson (1998) highlights how the motivation to help can also be down to self interest not only in terms of anticipating some future help if ever in need but also directly in terms of people feeling better about themselves and perhaps rewarding themselves for helping and increasing their own sense of well being. Not helping someone may be associated with feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

It is notable that experimental research by Goranson and Berkowitz (1966) found some evidence that those who had received help in the past were more likely to state that they should help someone and actually would help someone than those people who had not received help in the past. In addition, people were more likely to help if they knew the help they had received was given voluntarily compared to those who were 'required' to give help such as, for example, as part of their job. Research by Deckop *et al.* (2003) in the work place has shown that an individual's likelihood of

helping others in the workplace is affected by the extent to which they have been helped by other colleagues. Gouldner (1960) refers to this as the reciprocity principle. Trivers (1971) has described what is termed reciprocal altruism - where a person is altruistic because they are likely to be the recipient of similar altruistic acts in the future.

3. Data and Definitions

The European Social Survey (ESS) collects a range of data on the changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of Europe's diverse populations. The 2006 wave includes data on 23 European countries. The sample is designed to allow comparable country-by-country analyses, based on full coverage of the eligible residential populations aged 15+. The minimum required sample size is usually 1,500, or 800 in countries with populations less than 2 million. The response rate varies between countries (the target response rate is 70%) (ESS 2006). We use the whole data set to compare countries and also look at the UK in more detail.

Table 1. Definitions and Measures

| Variable | ESS Questions and Recoding |
|--|---|
| 1. Help as a value | <i>It is very important to help the people around you and care for others' well being? Very much like me/Like me/Somewhat like me/A little like me/Not like me/Not like me at all. Recoded: those who see helping the people around them as "Very much like them" and "Like them" are coded as having the <u>Value of help</u>.</i> |
| 2. Help in practice – (local activities) | <i>In the past 12 months, how often did you help with or attend activities organised in your local area? At least once a week/ At least once a month/At least once every three months/At least once every six months/Less often/Never/Don't Know. Recoded: those who help or attend activities "At least once every six months" or more often are coded as a <u>Helper in practice – local activities</u>.</i> |
| 3. Expect help in return | <i>If I help someone I expect some help in return? Agree strongly/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Disagree strongly/Don't Know</i> |
| 4. Voluntary work | <i>In the past 12 months, how often did you get involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations? At least once a week/At least once a month/At least once every three months/At least once every six months/Less often/Never/ Don't Know</i> |
| 5. Help - local context | <i>Please tell me the extent you feel people in your local area help one another? (0-6) Not at all - A great deal.</i> |

As shown above, reciprocity in relation to helping is conceptualised and measured in terms of the response to the question "If I help someone I expect some help in return?". Whilst a general measure, its simplicity is indicative of a person's general orientation. The phrasing of the question by implication relates the expectation of help in return for an act of help. We could assume that this is a direct expectation between individuals so it is a specific form of reciprocity. However, the question may also be capturing a more general expectation of reciprocity from society in general or another person. We are not presuming an equivalence here though there maybe some expectation of equivalence and in fact this can be an important factor in maintaining relationships.

Whilst we are conscious of the over use of the term reciprocity, here reciprocity is used quite transparently as a way of understanding people’s attitudes towards helping others and to receiving help themselves. We note that the we are using one cohort of the ESS in our analysis and that although we can assess associations with expectations of reciprocal help, we cannot investigate this in any causal way

In terms of measuring helping it is clear that “*helping out with or attending activities in*” is only one aspect of help and helping, but it is a quite low cost form of helping in terms of time and commitment. As such, we feel it is a good general indicator of what we term ‘help in practice – local activities’.

The local context of help measure “*the extent to which respondents feel people in their local area help one another*” is on an ordinal 7-point scale, and was thus added as six additional indicator variables, leaving as a reference category the view that there is no help from other people locally. This local context variable is interesting as it is clearly closely related to the help in practice variable.

For the UK analysis we also consider the impact of relative income resources and examine the barriers to volunteering. In the ESS respondents are asked to state their household income with respect to a particular income band. For the analysis in relation to income only the working age population are included. The income bands are categorized into quartiles. We also draw on evidence from the 2007 Citizenship Survey (CS). The CS is a household survey of adults aged 16. It has a core sample of almost 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. It also includes a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000. It asks for views on a range of topics, including participation in voluntary activity and barriers to volunteering.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Exploratory Analysis

We begin by looking at the levels of reciprocity in relation to help and helping. As Table 2 highlights, over a quarter of people who help someone state that they expect help in return. Just under half of people state they do not expect help in return.

Table 2. Expectation of help in return (ESS 2006)

| If I help someone I expect some help in return? | Percent |
|---|---------|
| Agree strongly | 5% |
| Agree | 24% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 23% |
| Disagree | 34% |
| Disagree strongly | 13% |
| Total | 100% |

ESS 2006. N=48,592

One interpretation of this would be that there are lots of unconditional helpers in the countries in the ESS. However, at the same time one can ask what amount of unconditional help is desirable or required for a civil society to function effectively. As Purdam and Crisp (2009) have argued in relation to levels of community engagement, there is no agreed measure of what constitutes a lot of community engagement either at the individual or the aggregate level.

In relation to gender there were only very small differences in the levels of expectation of help in return. 31% of men stated that they expected help in return compared to 28% of women. In the UK the actual levels of expecting help in return

are much lower than the average across the countries in the ESS, but a gender difference of 5% is evident with men more likely to expect help in return than women.

In relation to age substantial differences are apparent with an almost monotonic relationship. The expectation of help in return is substantially higher amongst young people aged 16-24 (40% agree/strongly agree) compared to people aged 66-100 (26% agree/strongly agree).

Table 3. Expectation of help in return by age (ESS 2006)

| If I help someone I expect some help in return? | | | | | |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Age | Agree strongly | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Disagree strongly |
| 16-24 | 7% | 33% | 26% | 27% | 8% |
| 25-30 | 5% | 28% | 24% | 33% | 11% |
| 31-40 | 5% | 23% | 25% | 35% | 12% |
| 41-50 | 5% | 21% | 24% | 35% | 15% |
| 51-65 | 5% | 22% | 22% | 37% | 15% |
| 66-100 | 4% | 22% | 20% | 36% | 18% |

ESS 2006. N=48,592

The differences in terms of age could suggest a shift in the nature of helping. Helping by younger people seems more likely to be conditional. Though further analysis would be required to distinguish if this was an age or cohort effect. The changing age composition of the UK is also important to consider due to an increasing proportion of older people in the population (especially at the oldest old ages) and the likelihood of dependency amongst people in these groups. The differences may also reflect the type of help given or expected which may vary by age but here we are focused on a person's general orientation.

It is notable that research by Arber *et al.* (2002) using the General Household Survey has shown that older men more often chat to neighbours, whereas older women are more likely to give and receive favours. This may reflect the different time spent in and around the home. If conditional helping is going to become a more common form of helping is likely to have important implications for our understanding of the nature of civil society. Though as we discuss below conditional helping is not necessarily entirely negative.

In order to explore the issue of reciprocity further we compare people in terms of their views on whether they see helping others as important and in relation to the extent to which they help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attending a local activity).

Table 4. Expectation of help in return and the people who see helping others as important (value of help) (ESS 2006)

| If I help someone I expect some help in return? | Yes expect help in return | Neither agree nor disagree | Don't expect help in return |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| See helping others as important (Value helper) | 28% | 21% | 52% |
| Do not see helping others as important | 32% | 27% | 41% |

ESS 2006. N=48,592

Here it is clear that there is a difference in terms of attitudes towards reciprocity amongst those who see helping others as important and those who don't. Those who

are value helpers are less likely to expect help in return (52%) compared to those who don't see helping others as important (41%). There are also higher levels of ambivalence amongst those who do not see helping others as important. The issue of ambivalence may itself be revealing and we return to this later.

Table 5 shows the differences in reciprocity comparing people who state that they help in practice and those who don't.

Table 5. Expectation of help in return and people who help in practice (ESS 2006)

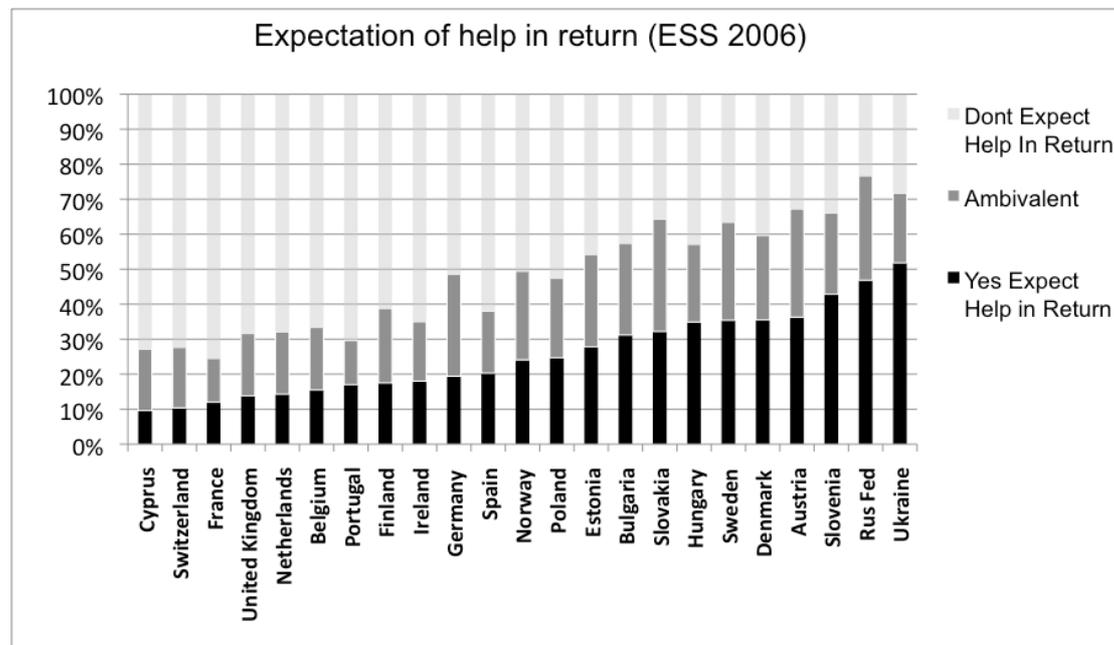
| If I help someone I expect some help in return? | Yes expect help in return | Neither agree nor disagree | Don't expect help in return |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Frequent helper in practice – local activities | 26% | 20% | 55% |
| Occasional helper in practice – local activities | 24% | 24% | 52% |
| Not a helper in practice - local activities | 31% | 24% | 46% |

ESS 2006. N=48,592

Those people who frequently help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attending a local event) are more likely to state that they don't expect help in return (55%) when compared to those who do not help in practice (46%).

We now consider the country level differences in helping and reciprocity across Europe. Below Figure 1 provides an overview across the twenty-three countries included in the ESS 2006.

Figure 1. Expectation of Help in Return for Helping Someone Across Europe (ESS 2006)



ESS 2006. N=48,592

It is important to consider whether the striking differences in the expectation of help in return reflect a different kind of culture in relation to helping, and to examine the role that the state may play in this. Context clearly seems to be important. Whilst the

pattern is varied, it is possible to suggest that there is some clustering by country type with certain Post Communist Eastern European countries having the highest levels of expectation of help in return. Though such claims can of course lead to oversimplification and would need to be followed up with detailed examination of context

Research using the ESS by Purdam and Tranmer (2009) found that whilst overall nearly two thirds of people state that they feel helping others is important (the value of help) there were considerable differences between countries (highest in Cyprus, Spain, Slovenia Switzerland; lowest in Ukraine, Russian Federation, Estonia). In relation to helping in practice the overall levels were found to be much lower with just over a quarter of people stating that they help others in practice. The country level differences were again found to be striking (highest - Denmark, Norway, Switzerland; lowest - Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal).

It is notable that some of the countries with the highest rates of people seeing helping others as important have the lowest rates of expecting help in return. Switzerland and Cyprus are particular examples. These two countries have the lowest rates of expecting help in return but have also been shown to have relatively high levels of people stating helping others is important. Such patterns are likely to be in part explained by the specific cultural context and traditions and how such behaviour is viewed by the populations. Switzerland is a country where, relatively speaking, the population is amongst the most likely to see helping other people as important and actually help in practice according to the measure used here and is also one of the countries where people are least likely to expect help in return. It is notable however that Purdam and Tranmer (2009) found that Cyprus was amongst the countries with the lowest rates of people stating they actually help in practice. This, it was hypothesized, could relate to the particular measure of helping in practice that was being examined and distinctions between public and private participation and the role of formal bodies in organising local events in Cyprus compared to the role played by communal family life (Theocharous 2009).

When examining the impact of context, it is important to look at the perception of helping others in each country. The table below gives the mean scores, in each country, for the extent to which respondents think people mostly look out for themselves or try to help others on a scale of 0 - *Mostly people look after themselves*; 10 - *People mostly try to be helpful*.

Table 6. Extent to which people look out for themselves or try to help others (ESS 2006)

| Most of the time people looking out for themselves (0) or mostly try to be helpful (10) | | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| Country | Mean | SD |
| Bulgaria | 3.2 | 2.5 |
| Poland | 3.6 | 2.3 |
| Ukraine | 3.6 | 2.6 |
| Russian Federation | 3.9 | 2.7 |
| Portugal | 4.0 | 2.2 |
| Cyprus | 4.1 | 2.0 |
| Slovakia | 4.1 | 2.4 |
| Hungary | 4.4 | 2.5 |
| Spain | 4.4 | 2.0 |
| France | 4.5 | 2.2 |
| Slovenia | 4.6 | 2.5 |
| Estonia | 4.6 | 2.4 |
| Belgium | 4.6 | 2.1 |
| Germany | 5.0 | 2.1 |
| Netherlands | 5.3 | 1.9 |
| Austria | 5.4 | 2.3 |
| Switzerland | 5.6 | 2.0 |
| United Kingdom | 5.7 | 2.0 |
| Ireland | 5.9 | 2.3 |
| Finland | 5.9 | 1.9 |
| Sweden | 6.0 | 2.0 |
| Norway | 6.1 | 1.9 |
| Denmark | 6.2 | 2.0 |
| Average | 4.5 | 2.4 |

ESS 2006. N=48,764

In relation to people's general perception of how helpful other people are in their country, there is again evidence of clustering by type of country with a number of Post Communist East European countries at one end of the range and Scandinavian countries at the other. This may be more to do with how people perceive their fellow citizens rather than the extent to which fellow citizens are helpful, though it is notable that the clustering of the countries is comparable to the clustering of countries apparent in terms of the levels of helping in practice (see Purdam and Tranmer (2009).

In terms of the type of area in which people live, across the 23 countries in the ESS people who lived in suburban areas were the least likely to expect help in return (22%), and those in rural areas the most likely to expect help in return (33%). This may relate to the type of communal support required to survive in rural areas. Other related research has highlighted that population size and density are important factors associated with the levels of community involvement and political engagement. Research by Verba and Nie (1972) and Oliver (2000) highlights that civic participation and particularly community involvement declines as communities grow and as the communities lose their distinct boundaries that separate them from other areas.

In order to explore the impact of context further in relation to helping and reciprocity we examined where people lived and what might be termed the local culture of help. Respondents are asked “*To what extent they felt people in your local area help one another?*” ((0-6) *Not at all - A great deal.*). The local context of help where a person lives has been shown to be an important indicator of the likelihood of someone helping in practice (Purdam and Tranmer 2009).

Overall across the countries in the ESS 5% of people stated that they lived in an area where there was no culture of local help whilst only 10% of people stated they lived in areas where there was a great deal of help. Just over 25% of people gave a value below the middle value suggesting that they lived in areas where the culture of local help was low. Those respondents who stated that people in their local area helped one another were less likely to state that they expected help in return but there was only limited evidence of a relationship.

Modelling Results

To explore the differences in reciprocity in more detail in terms of age, gender and the type of area where people live, we conducted ordinal logistic regression modelling using the ESS.

In terms of results the lower the coefficient (including negative) the more the particular characteristic is associated with reciprocity i.e. the expectation of help in return.

Table 7. Expectation of help in return – reciprocity by demographics and context (ESS 2006)

| | Estimate | Std. Error | Wald | df | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|--|----------|------------|---------|----|-------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Expect help in return - cut off points | | | | | | | |
| <i>1. Strongly agree expect help in return</i> | -2.687 | | | | | | |
| <i>2. Agree expect help in return</i> | -0.66 | | | | | | |
| <i>3. Disagree</i> | 0.342 | | | | | | |
| <i>4. Strongly disagree</i> | 2.143 | | | | | | |
| Age (years) | 0.011 | 0.000 | 566.281 | 1 | <0.01 | 0.01 | 0.012 |
| Men (compared to women) | -0.131 | 0.017 | 59.141 | 1 | <0.01 | -0.164 | -0.098 |
| Extent to which local people are helpful | 0.003 | 0.017 | 0.04 | 1 | 0.80 | -0.03 | 0.037 |
| Don't see helping others as important | -0.305 | 0.018 | 300.886 | 1 | <0.01 | -0.339 | -0.271 |
| Don't help in practice – local activities | -0.271 | 0.019 | 195.619 | 1 | <0.01 | -0.309 | -0.233 |
| Urban compared to rural | 0.14 | 0.018 | 57.802 | 1 | <0.01 | 0.104 | 0.176 |
| Suburban compared to rural | 0.374 | 0.03 | 159.46 | 1 | <0.01 | 0.316 | 0.432 |

As the results highlight, men are more likely than women to expect help in return. Those people who do not see helping others as important are more likely to expect help in return compared to those who do see helping others as important. Similarly those people who state that they do not help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attend a local activity) are more likely to expect help in return if they ever did help someone compared to those who state that they do help people in practice. The modelling results also suggest that there is a weak association with age such that as age increases people are less likely to expect help in return.

As discussed above in relation to place and where people live, it is important to consider possible differences between types of area. Rural areas are associated with people expecting helping in return if they help someone. These results support the descriptive analysis above and perhaps relate to the established relationships, networks and dependencies between people living in rural areas.

4.2 UK Case Study

In order to explore the differences in reciprocity and helping in more detail we now focus specifically on the UK and in particular England and Wales. Here we draw on data from the ESS and also the Citizenship Survey which in 2007 included a number of detailed questions on civic engagement and volunteering.

Compared with other European countries, the UK has relatively high levels of people stating that helping other people is important and also relatively high levels of helping people in practice (Purdam and Tranmer 2009). In terms of helping in the form of volunteering evidence from the Citizenship Survey (CLG 2007) has shown that around 73 per cent of all adults had volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in the last 12 months, with 48 per cent having volunteered at least once a month. The overall levels of volunteering have not changed since 2001. However, levels of formal volunteering have risen over this period, whilst informal volunteering has declined¹. Women are more likely to volunteer regularly than men, with 53 per cent of women volunteering at least once a month compared to 42 per cent of men.

In order to develop our understanding of attitudes towards reciprocity and the issue of whether certain people may be more in need of help we look at the relationship between relative income on people's attitudes towards reciprocity. We consider the proxy of relative income in order to capture people's relative resources. The population is limited to those of working age.

We begin by examining variations in help and helping in relation to relative income using data from the ESS for the UK only. As the table below highlights, there are some differences in relation to the importance people give to helping others and the extent to which they help in practice (in terms of helping organise or attend a local activity) by relative income.

Table 8. Value helpers, helping in practice and relative income in the UK (Age 16-65) (ESS, UK 2006)

| Relative income quartile | See helping other people as important - Value Helper | Don't see helping other people as important | Frequent helper in practice – local activities | Occasional helper in practice – local activities | Not helper in practice – local activities |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Low | 82% | 18% | 13% | 13% | 74% |
| Medium | 76% | 24% | 14% | 17% | 69% |
| High | 71% | 29% | 15% | 27% | 58% |
| Very High | 72% | 28% | 20% | 28% | 52% |

ESS 2006, UK N = 1,325 Age 16-65

¹ Formal volunteering - giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment. Informal volunteering - giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives.

Those people on relatively low incomes are more likely to state that helping others is important (82%) than people on higher incomes (72%). However, people on relatively low incomes are less likely to be a frequent or occasional helper in practice (in terms of helping organise or attend a local activity) (26%) particularly compared to those on high incomes (48%). This may relate to the barriers people face and the lack of opportunities certain people have in relation to helping others. For example, people living in deprived areas which may have comparatively higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour may be less inclined to spontaneously help a stranger or join a community group because of a lack of trust, disengagement and a fear for their personal safety. At the same time it is also important to bear in mind here, as research in the UK by Williams (2003) suggests, more affluent people are more likely to recall and report participation in voluntary groups whilst the neighbourliness and mutual support in lower income areas are not always captured in many surveys.

Unravelling the differences in reciprocity clearly requires further investigation and here we look more closely at helping and in particular volunteering. The 2007 Citizenship Survey includes a series of questions on what prevents people from volunteering in the form of whether helping groups, clubs or organisations. The question is limited to people who do "little or no volunteering".

Amongst those people who do not volunteer or do very little volunteering the main barriers identified were: work commitments, looking after children and home, prefer to do something else with their spare time and not heard of any opportunities to help. Many respondents identified more than one of these factors. Other factors identified included: not heard of any groups in the area, being new to an area, poor health and other caring responsibilities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly women were more likely than men to state that the barrier they faced in relation to volunteering was having a caring role such as looking after children and the home (men 37%; women 64%). Men were more likely to state that work commitments were a barrier to volunteering, but the difference in terms of gender is less compared to having a caring role (men 53%; women 47%). Men were more likely than women to state that they had never thought of volunteering. The most commonly stated factor that would help people become volunteers would be if they were invited directly or knew a person who already volunteered.

Amongst those who state that they prefer to do other things with their free time, who may perhaps have no interest in volunteering, there was a difference in terms of gender with men being more likely than women to state that they preferred to do something else with their free time (men 60%; women 40%). A substantial proportion of people stated that there was nothing that would make it easier for them to volunteer. Amongst the sub population of people who do little or no volunteering, only a third stated that they felt that they would like to spend more/any time helping groups, clubs or organisations. There was no difference between men and women.

As shown above, the UK has one of the lowest rates of reciprocity i.e. the expectation of help in return across all the countries in the ESS and the levels of people stating that they strongly agree that they should get help in return are low. However, there are some differences in relation to reciprocity and relative income in the UK.

Table 9. Reciprocity and relative income in the UK (Age 16-65). (ESS, UK 2006)

| If I help someone I expect some help in return | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Income quartile | Yes expect help in return | Neither agree nor disagree | Don't expect help in return |
| Low | 26% | 15% | 59% |
| Medium | 17% | 19% | 64% |
| High | 13% | 21% | 66% |
| Very High | 12% | 19% | 69% |

ESS 2006, N=1,339 Aged 16-65

Those people on relatively low incomes are more than twice as likely to state that if they help someone they expect help in return (26%) compared to those on relatively high incomes (12%). It could be hypothesised that those on relatively low incomes are more likely to be in need of help in return compared to those on higher incomes. This could also be combined with a greater sense of obligation and dependency amongst people on relatively low incomes.

People with more resources are not so reliant on having the help they give being returned and are not so reliant themselves on voluntary help. Experimental research in the 1960s found that young working class men exhibited a strong reciprocity orientation when compared to those from more middle class backgrounds and that their help giving was affected by the extent of help, if any, they had received in the past (Berkowitz 1968). At the same time people who are middle class have, it has been argued, a stronger internalised set of ideals prescribing that they help people in need without the expectation of help in return (Berkowitz 1968). Such claims and hypotheses are clearly controversial.

The extent to which a person thinks that other local people are helpful - the 'local context of help' - may also be a factor in explaining the differences we have observed. However, no differences were found in terms of relative income in terms of the local context of help. This may suggest that it is at the individual level and an individual's circumstances and experiences of helping others that determines their attitude in relation to expecting help in return particularly also perhaps the extent to which they are in need of help. In the UK there are only small differences in relation to expectations of help in return in relation to the type of area in which a person lived.

Modelling Results

As above, here we conducted ordinal logistic modelling to explore in more detail the correlates of reciprocity in the UK. We also consider the issue of resources in the form of a proxy measure, relative income. In the table below, the lower the coefficient (including negative) then the more the particular characteristic is associated with expecting help in return.

Table 10. Reciprocity in the UK Modelling Outputs (ESS, UK 2006)

| UK | Estimate | Std. Error | Wald | df | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|--|----------|------------|--------|----|-------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Expect help in return – cut off points | | | | | | | |
| <i>1. Strongly agree expect help in return</i> | -3.678 | | | | | | |
| <i>2. Agree expect help in return</i> | -1.147 | | | | | | |
| <i>3. Disagree</i> | 0.062 | | | | | | |
| <i>4. Strongly disagree</i> | 2.733 | | | | | | |
| Age (in years) | 0.025 | 0.003 | 77.472 | 1 | <0.01 | 0.02 | 0.031 |
| Men (compared to women) | -0.234 | 0.093 | 6.385 | 1 | 0.012 | -0.416 | -0.052 |
| No culture of local help | -0.287 | 0.097 | 8.741 | 1 | 0.003 | -0.478 | -0.097 |
| Don't see helping others as important | -0.173 | 0.104 | 2.765 | 1 | 0.096 | -0.376 | 0.031 |
| Don't help in practice – local activities | -0.161 | 0.097 | 2.774 | 1 | 0.096 | -0.35 | 0.028 |
| Urban compared to rural | 0.19 | 0.114 | 2.794 | 1 | 0.095 | -0.033 | 0.414 |
| Suburban compared to rural | 0.298 | 0.129 | 5.302 | 1 | 0.021 | 0.044 | 0.551 |
| Low income compared to very high | -0.225 | 0.259 | 0.757 | 1 | 0.384 | -0.732 | 0.282 |
| Medium income compared to very high | -0.212 | 0.131 | 2.609 | 1 | 0.106 | -0.469 | 0.045 |
| High income compared to very high | -0.118 | 0.117 | 1.014 | 1 | 0.314 | -0.348 | 0.112 |

For the UK the results indicate that men are more likely than women to expect help in return. Those people who do not see helping others as important are more likely to expect help in return compared to those who see helping others as important. Similarly those that do not help in practice are more likely to expect help in return if they ever did help someone compared to those who state that they do help people in practice (in terms of helping organise or attend a local activity). The modelling results also suggest that there is a weak association with age such that as age increases people are less likely to expect help in return. In relation to resources and relative income those on low incomes are more likely to expect help in return compared to those on higher incomes. As person's relative income increases, their expectation of reciprocity declines. As discussed above, this may relate to a sense of obligation but also dependency on the help of others. It may also be that people on low incomes can only give help if they can secure some help in return, though it should be noted that these differences are not significant in the model when looking only at the UK. In areas where there is little or no culture of local help there is an increased level of expectation of help in return.

5. Conclusions and Policy Implications

Reciprocity is a key factor in understanding people's attitudes towards helping other people. Reciprocity or the expectation of help in return for helping is not necessarily negative. It could be a reflection of someone being dependent or having an expectation of need and also a sense of community and mutual support. This may in itself create a culture of help and helping.

Participating in reciprocal relationships has been shown to have positive outcomes on the sense of well being (particularly self esteem and morale) of all those involved (Walker *et al.* 199; McMunn 2009). However, it is also important to consider how helping with the expectation of help in return is a specific form of helping. The dependency of such helping may be a less stable altruism as it is given with a

condition. Moreover such helping may be sensitive to negative feedback. People may be more willing to help others if they feel they receive something in return. A person who helps someone under the expectation of being helped in return but does not get the help may then become less likely to help in the future.

Our analysis has shown that over a quarter of people who help someone state that they expect help in return. The expectation of help in return is substantially higher amongst young people when compared to older people. Differences in terms of gender were found to be limited though men are more likely than women to expect help in return. We have consistently found that those people who see helping others as important and those who help others in practice (in terms of helping organise or attend a local activity) are less likely to expect help in return compared to those who don't see helping others as important and who don't help in practice. As such it is possible to differentiate what can be termed conditional and unconditional helpers, though of course reciprocity is only one aspect of helping behaviour.

There are considerable differences in the aggregate levels of expecting help in return across the countries in the ESS. Whilst the pattern is varied it is possible to suggest that there is some clustering by country type with certain post Communist Eastern European countries having the highest levels of expectation of help in return. Though of course such claims may be an oversimplification and would require further research, as it is clear the context of helping is an important factor.

In the UK the actual levels of expecting help in return are much lower than across the countries in the ESS. In the UK there are differences in the expectation of help in return by age and relative income. Younger people and those on lower incomes are more likely to expect help in return compared to those on higher incomes. It can be hypothesised that those on relatively low incomes and young people are more likely to be in need of help in return. This could also be combined with a greater sense of obligation and dependency amongst these populations. It also should be noted that research has shown that neighbourliness and mutual support in lower income areas are not always captured in surveys.

In relation to the issue of differences in the extent to which people may be in need of help it is important to consider the role of the state and reciprocity both between individuals and between individuals and the state. If people feel let down by the state then this could serve to break any prior reciprocity norms. For further discussion see Moroney (1986) and Pinker (1973). At the same time if the state has a wide reaching remit this could create a dependency where the individual receives help but cannot reciprocate thus again affecting the relationship and the social norm of reciprocation. Such dependencies could lead people to perceive that it is the state that should help and therefore people may not have the resources or be reluctant to help others as they defer the responsibility.

In relation to the stated attitudes and behaviour of young people it can be argued that the nature of help and helping in the UK is changing. Perhaps a new culture of conditional help and helping is beginning to characterise attitudes and behaviour. This does not necessarily mean that there will be less helping over all, in fact the dependency may actually contribute to increased helping. Putnam (2000) postulates that there may be a new generation of volunteers with young Americans in the 1990s showing a commitment to volunteering "without parallel among their immediate predecessors" (Putnam 2000:133). See also Dalton (2008) who highlights an increase in participation in voluntary groups and community activities.

If the reciprocal culture of help and actual helping is low then this could lead to people increasingly being reluctant to help. Moreover, those people who have helped

others in the past but then not received help when they needed it may be taking a more conditional position. One of the limitations of the data is that we don't know if someone has been the recipient of help; that is, whether they have had prior help. If the culture of reciprocity is highly specific (i.e. a particular return for a particular act) then people may be less inclined to offer help in a spontaneous way (Keohane 1986). Reciprocity in a very specific form could serve to weaken links between communities and different populations. Moreover people may only help those who they feel can reciprocate. It is notable that recent research by McMunn *et al.* (2009) using the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing has shown that carers and volunteers (aged above the British state pension age) who felt they were appreciated for their activities had better wellbeing than those who were not participating in those activities, while those who did not feel appreciated did not differ from non-participants in terms of their well being.

A person's attitude toward help and their likelihood of helping is the result of a complex set of factors. In relation to helping in the form of volunteering a person's work and caring responsibilities are a barrier to people helping in other ways. As such it is unlikely that general policy encouragements to help other people and to become involved in voluntary activity would have an affect without providing such populations with support to cover their existing responsibilities and time commitments. There are also a considerable proportion of people who state that they prefer to do other things with their own time than volunteer. This population, it is possible to suggest, have no interest in volunteering. Therefore a specific type of targeted policy intervention would be required here.

It is important to consider the issue of ambivalence. As our descriptive analysis has shown, in relation to the expectation of help in return, around a quarter of people neither agree nor disagree. This ambivalence is relatively consistent across age groups. Ambivalence in this context is interesting as it may in fact have a specific quality in relation to reciprocity. The ambivalent people may actually respond to a positive or negative helping experience and become conditional or unconditional helpers. However, it could be that the survey question is picking up a measurement problem where people who really do expect help in return feel that it was not socially acceptable to state this in a survey.

Whilst we are reliant on general measures of reciprocity and helping in this analysis the results provide a number of insights into people's general orientations. We do not know what sort of help people are giving but we do know whether when they help someone they expect help in return. As such, we know people's general disposition. We have only looked at cross-sectional secondary data and whilst this has highlighted particular patterns of reciprocal helping a longitudinal study may be a valuable way to gain more insight into these patterns where the profiles of providing and receiving help can be tracked across time.

Despite the considerable government initiatives in the UK aimed at increasing the levels of volunteering in recent years, survey evidence suggests the proportion of people involved in voluntary activities has remained fairly constant. A focus on reciprocity and in particular on those who feel they have never been helped and those who have helped but did not receive the help they expected in return could prove to be a valuable tool for policy makers for engendering a more helpful and civic society. If people are increasingly only going to help in a reciprocal way then it is important that a social norm of helping is widely shared.

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