Study

On the motivation and satisfaction of voluntary work at the Berliner Tafel

Analysis of people and their needs at the Berlin Food Bank

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Editorial

Dear readers,



When I founded the Berliner Tafel as the first of its kind 30 years ago, I did not know that it would develop into one of the largest social movements in Germany. But even then I was well aware that Tafel work can only function if many volunteers get engaged.

Since 1993, thousands of people have supported us on a voluntary basis, which is great. They give us their time, their energy and their passion. They are the mainstay of the Berliner Tafel; without them we would not be able to redistribute around 660 tonnes of food a month, nor would we be able to support around 180,000 people affected by poverty every month.

We are all the more pleased that this study comes to the conclusion that volunteering at the Berliner Tafel provides a

feeling of satisfaction and a sense of purpose. We are also very impressed by the finding that many volunteers have a strong intrinsic motivation to support us. This makes us grateful and humble.

We take the results published here as a mission and an obligation to ensure that our volunteers continue to feel comfortable with us.

The Berliner Tafel team and I would like to thank all our volunteers very much. It is an honour for us to be able to work with them.

Sabine Werth

Founder and Chairwoman of Berliner Tafel e.V.

Key messages

- For those engaged in the Berliner Tafel, it is very important to talk about their voluntary work. 73.03% like to or very much like to talk about their commitment with people in their immediate environment, as well as frequently or very frequently.
- Volunteering at the Berliner Tafel makes people happy. People who are engaged feel enriched, they have the feeling that they are doing good and they do it with all their heart. 68.37% feel strongly and very strongly that what they do "makes a difference" and "improves the quality of life".
- Ethical values such as responsibility and justice play a major role in engagement to the Berliner Tafel. The activity is done of one's own volition. The time invested is spent in a way that feels meaningful. It is particularly important to improve the quality of life of other people. 94.02 % strongly and very strongly recognise "helping" and 62.79 % strongly and very strongly recognise "giving something back" as important values.
- Volunteering at the Berliner Tafel is perceived as a successful activity and makes people satisfied because they do well what they like to do. The volunteers feel useful and valued. Volunteering is an intrinsic incentive.

Keywords

Volunteering, satisfaction, motivation, voluntary engagement

1. Introduction

1.1.Motivation

As a cornerstone of sustainable activities, the Berliner Tafel makes a significant contribution to supporting the people of Berlin and at the same time to preventing food waste. It was founded in 1993 and was the first food bank in Germany. In 2022, about 180,000 needy people were supported every month. In addition to the permanent employees who have made this work the focus of their lives, many volunteers are also engaged in the Berliner Tafel. It can only be guessed what drives these people and what they receive. In principle, ethical approaches such as goodwill and a sense of duty (Kant 2015), responsibility (Jonas 2020), justice (Rawls 2003) as well as integrative approaches (Ulrich 2016) and hybrid approaches (Ruggie 2013) can be considered here, but also questions about social and subjective dimensions of rational choice, cognitive systems (Kahneman 2013) and content theory considerations (Herzberg 1988; Miron and McClelland 1979; Schneider 2001) on current observations on job satisfaction (Herzberg 1988; Miron and McClelland 1979; Schneider 2001; De Neve 2018; Schräpler et al. 2022; Park 2019; Helfritz et al. 2022; Personio 2022; Badura et al. 2022). But saving food as an ecologically sustainable dimension could also be important in this context (Lutter et al. 2022; Liquete et al. 2022).

1.2.Goal of the study

The goal of the study is to make the motivation of the volunteers of the Berliner Tafel visible, to show and describe their characteristics of motivation and to develop categories that allow a comparability with other systems of work as well as providing an approach to explain voluntary activities. The following two questions are addressed:

- What motivational characteristics of volunteers at the Berliner Tafel exist?
- How satisfied are these committed people in relation to the first question asked? This survey is the first to date conducted on this topic at the Berliner Tafel.

1.3.Initial situation

There are already some explanatory approaches to volunteering and its motivation in Germany (Moschner 2002; Redmann 2015; Haumann 2014; Wegner 2013; Arriagada and Karnick 2022; Burkhardt and Schupp 2019), which have emerged both empirically, but also meta-analytical condensations of existing perspectives. So far, it has been assumed that personal needs are the focus and that financial compensation could not play a significant role among people who volunteer, which is why this study also initially assumes this. The motives given by the volunteers at the Berliner Tafel are recorded.

1.4. Scientific approach, data basis and representativeness

The data basis was collected with volunteers of the Berliner Tafel in October 2022. 293 people aged 18 and over were interviewed (n=293). The survey was voluntary. In order to maintain the necessary sceptical attitude of the survey, the method of quantitative, structured interviews without open questions was used on the one hand, and strict

application of anonymisation of the collected data on the other.

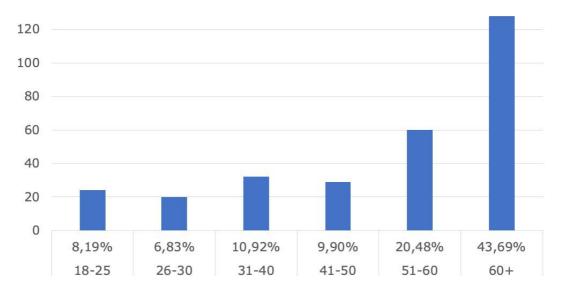


Figure 1: Proportion of engaged people by age

The interviews were internet-based and conducted in German. The gender and age of the persons were asked. There was an option to choose "diverse" as the gender (one person) or to refuse to give this information (seven persons). All participants were engaged in the Berliner Tafel at the time of the survey.

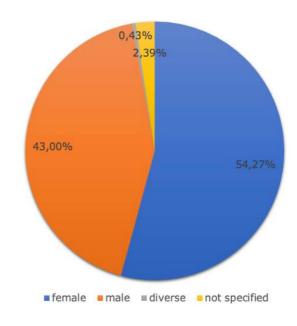


Figure 2: Proportion of committed persons by gender

The underlying null hypothesis H_0 on age and gender in Berlin (Demografieportal Bund-Länder 2022) assumes equal distributions in the age structure; in fact, however, these differ in some cases significantly in the defined age groups (18-25, 26-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 60+ years). Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is assumed for the age distribution; H_1 is 22 percent lower for the age group 18-30, 47 percent lower for the age group 31-40, 34 percent lower for the age group 41-50, 22 percent higher for the age group 51-60 and 53 percent higher for the age group 60+. The older the residents of Berlin are, the more likely they are to volunteer at the Berliner Tafel, this finding is in line with

that of the Volunteer Survey 2019 (Arriagada and Karnick 2022). The data collected also deviates from the data for the state of Berlin when it comes to gender. In addition to mentions of diverse gender and no information, which accounted for a total of 2.73 per cent (or eight people) of n=293, there are on average just under twelve per cent fewer male participants volunteering at the Berliner Tafel than in the Berlin population as a whole, but about six per cent more female participants. Overall, 26 per cent more female participants volunteer at the Berliner Tafel than male participants.

The results presented below are for primarily in utility scales with values from 0 to 10 and from 0 to 5. Results based primarily on possible YES answers are presented as percentages. In addition, logarithmic trend lines were inserted into the representations.

The core results of a population-representative survey published in 2014 by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth BMFSFJ (Haumann 2014) are used as the basis for compiling the questionnaire to determine the motives for civic engagement and compared with the results of (Arriagada and Karnick 2022) from the German Volunteer Survey 2019. From this, a question catalogue with 14 content-related questions, which were divided into 38 sub-questions, was developed.

2. Motives for engagement

2.1.Do good and talk about it

The volunteers at the Berliner Tafel like to talk about their engagement. A good three quarters talk about it often or very often, especially people over 60. It can be seen that the willingness to talk about it often or very often changes positively with increasing age, from 55.97% to 64.34%. Female participants also talk about their engagement an average of 5% more often than male participants.

Participants like to talk about their involvement – the older the better.

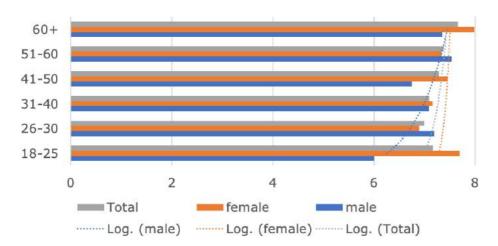


Figure 3: Do you like to talk to friends and people you know about your work at the Berliner Tafel? (max. benefit=10)

2.2.Satisfaction through engagement

More than half of the participants are very satisfied with their engagement to the Berliner Tafel, a good third are satisfied. Doing good is slightly more important for participants than for women, especially in the groups of 26-40 year olds and 51-60 year olds.

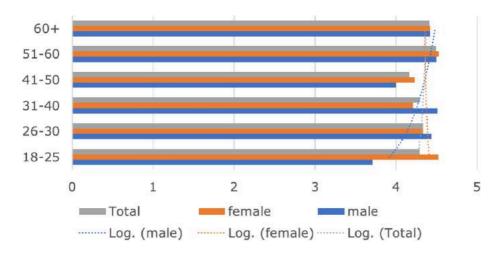


Figure 4: What thoughts do you have when you think of the Berliner Tafel (max. benefit=5)

Female participants are much more likely to say they are wholeheartedly engaged, which

is also more pronounced with increasing age. Among female participants, the motive to do good is very important in the 18-25 age group and exceeds the average value of all participants by more than 50%.

The engagement to the Berliner Tafel makes all participants happy, in all age groups and with hardly any difference between the sexes.

2.3. Improving the quality of life of others

For the participants, it is important to improve and make a difference, especially to improve the quality of life of others. Although male and female participants have almost the same need, there are differences between them. For the participants, the need increases with age, for the female participants it decreases with age. For the participants, the focus is on moving something, especially for the group of 18-25 year olds and 31-40 year olds; for the group of 41-50 year olds, this need is comparatively less pronounced. It is particularly important for the participants to change what they do not like; this is especially visible in the group of 18-26 year olds.

Change and improvement is important to the participants – with clear differences between the genders in the life stages.

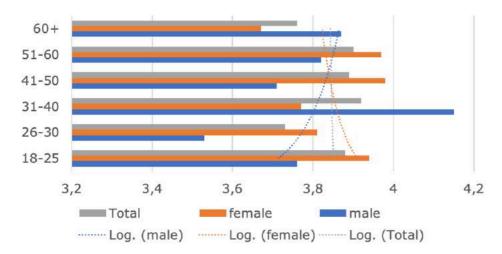


Figure 5: I get engaged to improve things and make things happen (max. benefit=5)

2.4. Ethical values

Ethical values such as responsibility and justice are important to the participants, especially when it comes to helping others and giving something back. Religion plays a subordinate role here; 34.13% act out of strong or very strong religious conviction with similar values in all age groups; however, there are clear differences in the question of who does not do it at all out of religious conviction, this value is 45.39% overall and is significantly higher in younger groups than in older ones. Moreover, the importance of religion is even lower among participants under 50 years of age than among participants in the same group. Ethical motives decrease with increasing age, with the exception of male participants, for whom a slight increase in importance is discernible. Among participants, the need to want to do something for other people is slightly less pronounced than among female participants, especially in the groups of 18-25-year-old and 31-40-year-old participants. Among female participants, on the other hand, this need is particularly strong in the 18-

40 age group. Overall, participants have a higher sense of duty out of moral obligation than female participants.

The younger, the more strongly driven by ethical motives.

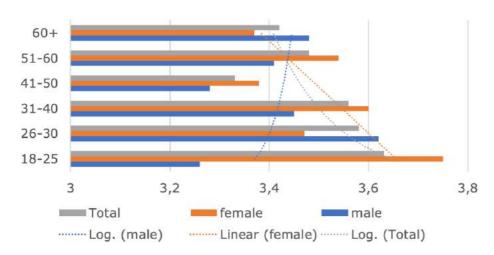


Figure 6: I get engaged because it corresponds to my values (max. benefit=5)

2.5. Meaningfulness of one's own engagement

The importance of meaning in engagement is important, but the importance varies greatly in the age groups; the great importance in the group of 18-25 year-olds is striking, which collapses in the following groups and only builds up again with increasing age, but does not reach the initial level again. For the participants, it is important to be needed and to be able to spend their free time meaningfully. Comparatively less important are recognition and the search for new tasks. The genders differ in this respect. Being needed and doing something meaningful is more important for participants than for women, especially in the group of participants over 60.

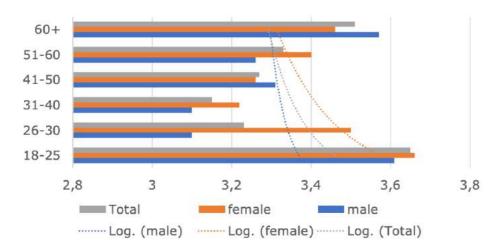


Figure 7: I get engaged because it gives me meaning through meaningful tasks and recognition (max. benefit=5)

It is particularly important for the group of 18-30 year old participants to be needed. For female participants, on the other hand, appreciation, recognition and new tasks are more important than for male participants, especially in the group of 18-30 year olds. For female

participants over 60, meaningful tasks are also more important than for male participants. Meaningful engagement is particularly important for very young people, and the importance only builds up again in later stages of life.

2.6. Enrichment of one's own life through engagement

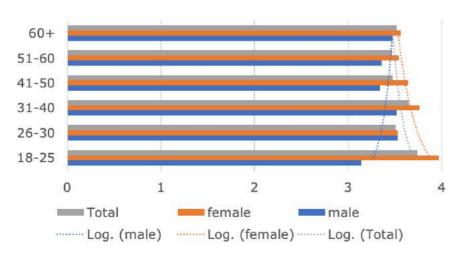


Figure 8: I get engaged because it enriches my own life (max. benefit=5)

The enrichment of their own lives through their engagement is important to the participants. In particular, involvement makes them more satisfied. The enrichment, however, differs between age groups and genders. Satisfaction is lower among participants in the under-31 age group. Learning, however, is rated as more important among all male groups up to 40 years of age. Among the female groups, variety, getting contacts and learning are more important than among the male groups. Overall, enrichment and satisfaction are especially important for the female group of 18-25 year olds.

Volunteering at the Berliner Tafel makes people happy, especially young female participants.

2.7. Self-realisation through engagement

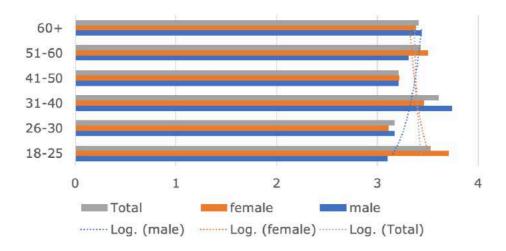


Figure 9: I get engaged because I can develop my abilities and inclinations (\max benefit=5)

The participants assume that they are good at what they do as volunteers at the Berliner Tafel, which is why they also enjoy it. There are differences between the genders. Participants are more likely to think that they are engaged because this is where their strengths lie (43.75 % to 40.86 % among female participants), while female participants are more likely to think that they are engaged because they enjoy it (85.35 % to 82.04 % among male participants). Self-realisation is also recognised in particular by the group of 18-25 year old female participants, which differs by about 20% from the group of participants of the same age.

Self-realisation through volunteering is particularly important for young female participants.

2.8. Freedom of one's own decision in engagement

Rather less important is the need to be able to help shape things. The need increases with age, which is particularly evident in the group of participants. The need for participation is more pronounced among participants in the 18-25 age group, but then decreases significantly in the following age groups, only to increase again from the age of 40. Young female participants as well as male participants in the middle years tend to strive for freedom of choice in their voluntary activities.

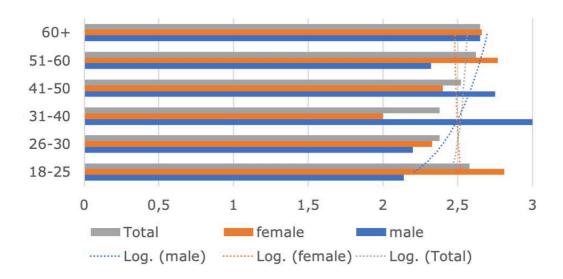


Figure 10: I get engaged in order to have freedom of choice (max. benefit=5)

2.9.Own motivation for engagement

Basically, it can be seen that the participants are intrinsically motivated to do voluntary work at the Berliner Tafel. There are hardly any implications from the private environment such as friends and family. Nevertheless, differences can be seen between the sexes and the age groups. The extrinsic impulse is comparatively greater among the participants than among the female participants. In addition, role models from the family are more important for 18-25 year old participants and friends for 26-30 year olds than for female participants. Young male participants need more role models in volunteering.

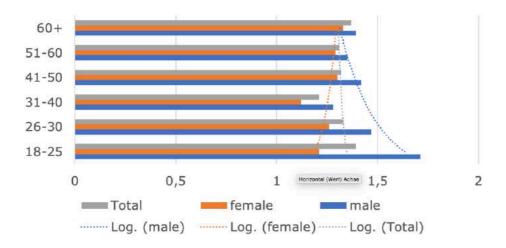


Figure 11: I get engaged because others have suggested it (max. benefit=5)

2.10. Career incentives as a reason for engagement

The need to use the engagement for one's own advancement is weak overall. It is noticeable that the groups of 18-30 year old participants in particular expect comparatively greater benefits than the participants of the same age. Among the participants, on the other hand, the group of 41-50 year-olds stands out as expecting greater benefits.

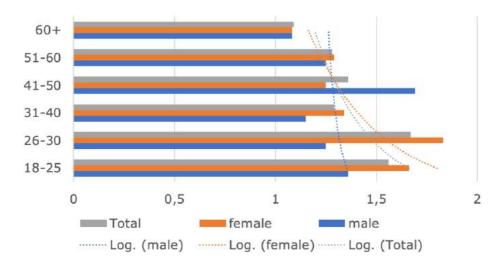


Figure 12: I get engaged because it benefits me (max. benefit=5)

Young female participants and middle-aged male participants promise themselves above-average benefits for their own advancement.

2.11. Stress through engagement

On average, the participants invest a lot of time in their voluntary work at the Berliner Tafel. Nevertheless, rarely do participants feel unappreciated or even exploited and want to end the activity or are thinking about it. There are differences in the data according to gender and age. Participants between 18 and 25 as well as between 41 and 50 years of age tend to view their time engagement negatively and think more about ending their involvement. Female participants invest somewhat more time that they lack elsewhere and

think more often about a reduction than male participants. Furthermore, more female participants than male participants feel that their engagement is not really appreciated (71.34% to 74.22%).

The engagement is predominantly not perceived as exhausting.

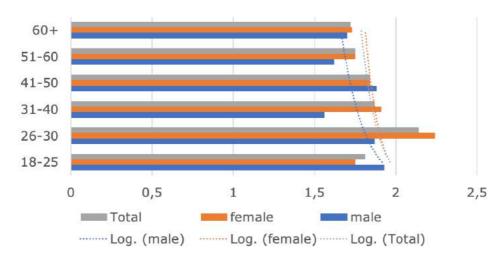


Figure 13: Is your engagement to the Berliner Tafel exhausting? (max. benefit=5)

2.12. Continuation of the engagement

63.36% of the participants said that they would like to continue volunteering at the Berliner Tafel for years to come. There are differences in gender and age. The groups of 18-30 year old participants are more sceptical about the duration of their engagement. Overall, it can also be seen that there is a greater willingness to continue among female participants than among male participants (68.10% to 60.16%), although there are visible doubts in the groups of 26-50 year old female participants.

Continuing is the trump card!

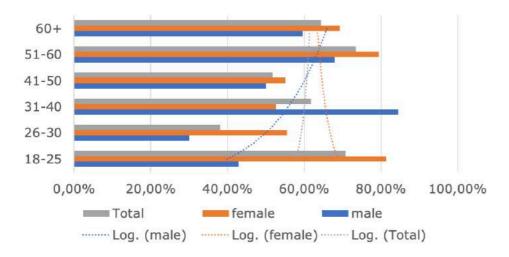


Figure 14: Is your work for Berliner Tafel something you would like to do for years to come? (YES answers)

2.13. Other voluntary engagements

Overall, 43.34% of the participants state that they are also active in other voluntary work. Here, female participants (46.34%) are more engaged than male participants (40.63%). However, female participants are less engaged in the age groups 18-30 years and more engaged in the groups above 50 years. Among participants, there is a noticeable drop in willingness to take on further voluntary work in the 26-40 age group.

Further voluntary engagements depend on the phase of life of the participants.

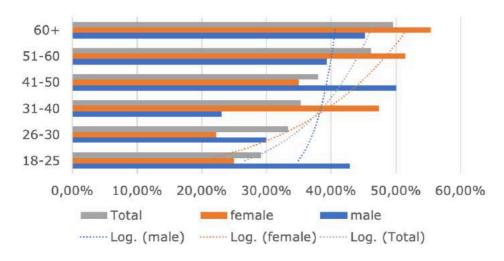


Figure 15: Do you volunteer elsewhere? (YES answers)

2.14. Relationship with other volunteers at the Berliner Tafel

Only 22.18% of the participants perceive the colleagues among the volunteers as having the same ideas. However, two thirds of the participants also state that this is at least partly the case. In terms of gender, participants (19.53 %) are more sceptical than female participants (23.17 %). The group of 26-30 year old participants (10.00 %) and female participants (11.11 %) as well as participants between 41-50 years (12.50 %) are particularly sceptical.

There are doubts about the sense of unity among a percentage of participants.

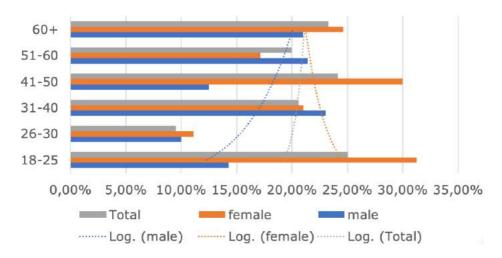


Figure 16: Do you think that other colleagues think the same as you? (YES answers)

3. Discourse and conclusion

Volunteering is living democracy through committed democrats. Here, people who take responsibility and exercise human rights for the good of the community become visible. These people have courage, respect and tolerance. Their actions and thoughts are based on the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, they not only enrich the community, but also themselves by gaining knowledge and skills, by gaining experience and thus (further) developing values and attitudes. The success of their engagement supports their self-esteem and suggests that they become role models for others (Council of Europe 2022). This study shows individual motives of people for their volunteer work at the Berliner Tafel. The research could therefore serve as a basis for strengthening volunteer engagement and understanding the needs of volunteers as a demand that should be met.

The volunteers at the Berliner Tafel are satisfied with their engagement and like to talk about it. Their work gives them pleasure, enriches their lives and provides them with recognition, appreciation and psychological security (ManpowerGroup 2019; Thomas et al. 2022); they become aware of their social responsibility; satisfaction and health can develop (Badura et al. 2022; Porath 2016). It becomes visible that these are reflective, ethically acting personalities who engage on their own initiative and take a very transformational approach by compassionately caring for people, understanding that it is hard, small-scale, laborious work, but not perceived as stressful and exhausting (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund 2022), and communicating about the activity continuously and willingly. Compassion in particular represents an essential description of the central personality dimension of agreeableness (Furtner 2016), which also allows conclusions to be drawn about an increased ecological awareness of food rescue (Soutter et al. 2020; Liquete et al. 2022; Lutter et al. 2022).

If one also considers that many of these people are active in further honorary offices, the political debate about a duty of social engagement, as suggested for example by the German Federal President (Der Bundespräsident 2022), seems questionable because it could render the ethical process obsolete. However, the community needs people who act with integrity and responsibility and not out of pure fulfilment of duty or even order. In particular, the youth affected by such regulation is the group most driven by ethical motives in this study. What is needed here are role models, not norms. And the question may also be asked how to deal with those unwilling to commit despite a duty to do so.

Belonging and self-realisation play important roles. Especially in the case of self-realisation, the study shows that the mixture of meaning, value, freedom and joy makes people trust in their own abilities and skills, especially when they have to find their way into their own roles, like young people who are especially looking for a fulfilling work experience, suitable to their lifestyle, their personal happiness, their own – also social and ecological – values (Randstad 2022). Because the activities are to a large extent typically to be completed individually, the participants' assessments of their colleagues could be explained with regard to the cohesion and the convergence of a feeling of togetherness criticised in the study due to the relatively low density and complexity of the interactions (Pentland 2015; Edmondson und Lei 2014). A lot is achieved together, but the participants are not as aware of this as they might be (van der Vegt und Bunderson 2005; Bachmann und Quispe Bravo 2021).

It is also clear that extrinsic motivation, such as personal benefits in terms of career advancement, is of secondary importance, at least among the volunteers at the Berliner Tafel. This also correlates with the statements that they do not feel exploited or demotivated despite their great personal time engagement, but on the contrary maintain their engagement over the years.

Speaking of time, volunteering at the Berliner Tafel is also linked to the stage of life. Older people get engaged more often than younger people, which certainly also goes hand in hand with the fact that older people – and here especially the group of over 60s under consideration – are able to spend more private time when they retire.

The difference in engagement between the sexes is certainly interesting. The proportion of female volunteers for the Berliner Tafel is 26% higher than that of male volunteers. However, it becomes apparent that female volunteers find their engagement more strenuous than male volunteers in the phase of life when starting a family becomes important, which could certainly also be related to the imbalance in care work (Hobler et al. 2017; Thomas et al. 2022).

All in all, it can be said that those who volunteer at the Berliner Tafel think, feel and act responsibly by looking at consequences in a sustainable way, justly by doing good and contentedly by feeling meaning and appreciation. Volunteering is an intrinsic incentive.

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