4 Unemployment and volunteering – previous research revisited

In the following chapter, I shall give an overview of the research which has already been done regarding the interrelation between unemployment and volunteering. By analysing the previous research, I aim at showing from a comparative perspective what we know already about the factors which increase the individual risk of unemployment as well as the factors which increase the chances that a person decides to volunteer. It shall become apparent that similar factors influence both, an unemployed person’s chances of re-employment as well as the likelihood that he or she gets involved in volunteer work.\(^{83}\) In the following part of the chapter, I turn to the central theme of this study: the interrelation between unemployment and volunteering. I follow the transitions from employment to unemployment and back, and report existing findings on the role of volunteering in this process. I start by presenting findings on the effect of unemployment on social networks and volunteering. I then proceed to the opposite causal direction, namely the influence of social networks and volunteering on re-employment chances. Not least, I discuss the possibility of volunteering as an alternative to paid work. I present studies which have discussed the possibility that volunteering contributes to the transition from unemployment to economic inactivity, especially of women. Throughout the chapter, I pay special attention to studies analysing the situation in Germany and Great Britain. This focus is justified by the institutional and cultural differences related to unemployment and volunteering alike, which make it important to understand the phenomena in the social context in which my own study is situated. However, in the cases where there are no studies available in either of the countries, I shall also refer to studies from other countries. Since especially the phenomenon of volunteering has attracted most attention in the United States, this will often be US-American studies.

---

\(^{83}\) This interrelatedness has important methodological consequences which shall be discussed more in depth in the following methodology chapter.
4.1 Risk factors associated with unemployment

In this first part of the chapter, I shall discuss previous research on risk factors associated with unemployment. Since I have already given an overview of national unemployment rates as well as policy approaches in Germany and Great Britain over time in my policy chapter, I shall now focus on individual and (briefly) institutional factors which have been identified to be associated with individual unemployment.

Sociological research based on longitudinal data has shown that the factors associated with job loss are not necessarily the same which influence a person’s remaining in unemployment, i.e. the unemployment duration. Since, however, our understanding of the characteristics of those individuals most at risk of unemployment derives almost exclusively from studies which seek to explain the length of an individual spell of unemployment (Nikolaou and Theodossiou 2003), the focus of the following discussion refers to studies explaining the duration of unemployment. In order to be able to address this time aspect, I shall focus on studies based on longitudinal data, preferably those comparing Germany and Great Britain.

In both countries, similar individual risk factors have been found to be associated with unemployment: Among them are (1) socio-demographic factors such as gender, age and ethnicity or nationality, (2) human capital factors, such as educational attainment, work experience, unemployment experience but also health\(^84\), (3) social network factors, especially family situation, (4) personality factors such as work-role centrality, and finally (5) institutional factors, such as further education and benefit receipt.

4.1.1 Socio-demographic factors

I shall start my description with the influence of socio-demographic factors, namely gender, age and ethnicity or nationality on both, the risk of losing one’s job and the unemployment duration. Labour market chances have been found to be worse for women, the elderly and foreigners or citizens of ethnic minorities in different ways.

\(^84\) As discussed in the theory chapter, a person’s health status can be considered as part of his or her human capital in the sense that good health is associated with a higher (potential) productivity.