

Civic Engagement, Health, and Community: A Nationally Representative Study on the Long-Term Impacts of Civic Engagement during Emerging Adulthood

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Background

Phase I of this study investigated whether civic engagement during emerging adulthood impacts a broad array of health outcomes in middle adulthood, and if associations vary across demographic groups. Phase II of this study will investigate whether AmeriCorps service during emerging adulthood leads to similar health outcomes, and if so, what mediating mechanisms are associated in with this relationship.

This study used two sources of information: (1) a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 respondents surveyed multiple times over 22 years; and (2) primary data collection from AmeriCorps members to examine the relationship between AmeriCorps service and positive health outcomes throughout the life course.

Research Questions

Phase I- National Study:

1. Does civic engagement during emerging adulthood predict physical, mental, and behavioral health outcomes in middle adulthood?
2. Are these associations moderated by race, gender, or other demographic factors?
3. Does civic engagement during emerging adulthood promote higher levels of empathy, which in turn promote positive health outcomes?

Phase II- AmeriCorps Member Study:

1. Does AmeriCorps service during emerging adulthood predict positive physical, mental, and behavioral health outcomes?
2. Are these associations moderated by race, gender, and other demographic factors?
3. What are the mediating mechanisms that allow AmeriCorps service to promote positive health outcomes?



In a nationally representative longitudinal study, **volunteering** during emerging adulthood led to **improved physical health, mental health, and healthy behaviors** in middle adulthood.

Does **AmeriCorps service** also lead to **improved health outcomes**? Find out in Phase II of our study!



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Research design and data

Phase I of this study used restricted data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 respondents surveyed five times over a period of 22 years. Researchers found that volunteering during emerging adulthood was associated with positive health outcomes 15 years later.

Results- Volunteering vs. Not Volunteering

	Volunteers (n = 1,820)	Non-Volunteers (n = 7,163)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Depression	2.07 (2.28)	2.50 (2.66)
Healthy Behaviors	4.36 (1.49)	3.91 (1.52)
Substance Use	0.76 (0.97)	1.07 (1.08)
Criminal Behavior	0.60 (0.89)	0.88 (1.09)

For Phase 2 of the study, researchers are conducting a 3-year longitudinal study of 500 AmeriCorps members examining health outcomes at the beginning, end, and one-year after AmeriCorps service.

What are the potential opportunities to apply the study fundings?

Phase I- National Study: Results support evidence that volunteering is associated with positive health outcomes. Communities may wish to promote volunteerism among emerging adults, and volunteer programs should consider viewing their programs and funding requests through a public health promotion lens.

Phase II- AmeriCorps Study: Results will identify if AmeriCorps service is associated with positive health outcomes and may identify programmatic interventions which can support member health.