

VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL TIES AFTER MARITAL SEPARATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON A SAMPLE OF SEPARATED PARENTS IN ITALY

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Separations and divorces are nonnormative life events, which may have negative consequences on ex-partners' social ties and social participation. The latter, however, may be protective resources in the post-separation adjustment. The present study focused on the role of volunteering and social ties for ex-partners' well-being. In a sample of separated parents, we explored whether differences existed between volunteers and nonvolunteers in social ties characteristics (network size, frequency of contacts, and social support), and whether these characteristics mediated the association of volunteering with different dimensions of well-being (satisfaction with life, depressive symptoms, generativity). Results showed that volunteers reported more frequent contacts with friends and higher levels of given and received social support to/from relatives and friends than nonvolunteers. Mediation analyses revealed that frequency of contacts with friends explained the link between volunteering and satisfaction with life and depressive symptoms, while social support mediated the association between volunteering and generativity. A complex picture emerges about the pathways linking volunteering to separated parents' well-being.

Key words: Separation; Divorce; Volunteering; Social ties; Well-being.

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Despite Italy still displays one of the lowest rates of marriage dissolution in Europe, separations and divorces have become common experiences for an increasing number of Italian couples. According to the more recent national statistics (National Institute of Statistics [ISTAT], 2016), there are 311 separations and 174 divorces per 1,000 marriages. Divorces, in particular, have been dramatically rising in the last four years, as an effect of the introduction of the “fast divorce law,” which has cut the time that partners have to wait for a divorce to six months in uncontested cases and a year in contested ones. Moreover, 73.3% of separations and 66.2% of divorces involve couples with children, with 48.7% having a child under 18 years of age. Marital breakdown is recognized as an especially stressful experience that challenges all family members (Amato, 2000, 2010, 2014; Bertoni, Iafate, Carrà, & Valls-Vidal, 2015; Ranieri, Bertoni, et al., 2016). Separated people, and especially those who are parents (Leopold & Kalmijn, 2016), are exposed to stress and strain and most of them report declines in well-being and health (Amato, 2014). Also, separation negatively impacts social ties: Separation is a possible cause of loss of some ties within one's own social networks (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007) and may reduce social participation and en-

gagement (Dury et al., 2014; Lancee & Radl, 2014). Social ties and social participation, however, at the same time are important resources that can help couples and families to recover from separation. The present study focused on the role of volunteering for separated parents' well-being. In particular, we analyzed whether volunteering is associated with some characteristics of social ties (network size, frequency of contacts, and social support), and whether these characteristics favored different dimensions of individual well-being.

SEPARATION AND SOCIAL TIES

Separation is a nonnormative life event, which may have important consequences on ex-partners (Amato, 2010; Bertoni, Iafrate, et al., 2015), regardless of the reasons behind it (Bodenmann et al., 2006) and the partner who initiated the process (Charvoz, Bodenmann, Bertoni, Iafrate, & Giuliani, 2009). Separating from a spouse, in fact, is not a discrete event but a process unfolding over time characterized by cumulative changes in different areas of life, which can bring stress into a person's life and consequently affect health and well-being (Amato, 2010, 2014; Amato & James, 2010). Separation, for instance, involves adjustments on the logistical and the financial side, such as moving to another house, changing family routines, revising the employment situation, or facing with threats to economic security. On a psychological side, individuals experience several challenges due to the identity shift from being in a couple to being single: This involves grieving the end of the relationship, dealing with feelings of loss, managing conflict with the ex-partner, and changing roles and identities (e.g., Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). The presence of children, moreover, intensifies the negative effects of separation (Leopold & Kalmijn, 2016): Separated parents have to deal with additional sources of stress such as concerns about children's well-being (e.g., Amato, 2010; Parmiani, Iafrate, & Giuliani, 2012; Valls-Vidal, Garriga, Pérez-Testor, Guàrdia-Olmos, & Iafrate, 2016) or contact with the ex-partner with regard to parenting tasks (coparenting; Ranieri, Molgora, Tamanza, & Emery, 2016). In addition, separated persons face significant changes in their social ties both in terms of structure, that is, the size of social networks and the frequency of contacts with the members of these networks, and content, that is, the perception of social support (Symoens, Bastaits, Mortelmans, & Bracke, 2013).

Separation and divorce reshape social networks, breaking off, deteriorating, or weakening the ties with entire groups of people (shared friends, acquaintances, neighbors, relatives; e.g., Milardo, 1987; Sprecher, Felmlee, Schmeekle, & Shu, 2006; Terhell, 2004; Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Marital breakdown generally reduces the number of network members through the partial loss of in-laws, friends (common or of the spouse), and neighbors, but also through a focus on close relationships at the cost of more peripheral relationships (Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2013). In fact, many people lose contact with members of their social network during and after separation, and their social networks are likely to become smaller and less dense (Rands, 1988). Moreover, divorced individuals report lower levels of social support and, consequently, experience lower psychological health and well-being if compared with their married counterparts (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015). A separation can deteriorate social support as it may trigger feelings of disapproval or stigmatization in one's social network (Cohen, 1992). For instance, separated people often face the lack of acceptance by their relatives and friends, feeling less supported and isolated (Kalmijn, 2014). In addition, the members of the social network — family, friends, acquaintances, neighbors — that are attached to both spouses face loyalty conflicts and prefer to remain uninvolved in the divorce dynamics (Terhell, 2004).

However, to compensate the support previously received from the spouse, separated people may look for alternative sources of support and increase contact with selected friends and relatives (Broese van

Groenou, & van Tilburg, 1996). In particular, after separation, both men and women may intensify contacts with their own kin, friends, and acquaintances or develop new friendships, and men, in particular, look for support by friends, colleagues, and club members (Kalmijn, 2012; Kalmijn, & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Miller, Smeglia, Gaudet, & Kitson, 1998).

Frequency of contact and quality of contact, that is, support, with the members of one's social network appear to be crucial variables for post-separation adjustment (e.g., Amato, 2000; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Demo & Fine, 2010; Krumrei et al., 2007; Pinguart, 2003), but the quality of contact seems more important for well-being than the quantity (Pietromonaco & Rook, 1987). Social support is an exchange of emotional, informational, or practical assistance with significant others aimed at enhancing the well-being of the recipient (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). The psychosocial literature, in general, has highlighted the consequences for well-being of being the recipient of supportive acts (e.g., Alfieri, Marzana, & Cipresso, 2019; Bertoni, Donato, Graffigna, Barello, & Parise, 2015; Donato, Pagani, Parise, Bertoni, & Iafrate, 2018; Donato & Parise, 2015; Hilpert et al., 2016; Pagani, Parise, Donato, Gable, & Schoebi, 2019). The literature on divorce, in particular, has demonstrated that, if the support received from a new partner is a resource against stressful situations which allows for quicker adjustment to divorce (Amato, 2000; Demo & Fine, 2010), emotional and practical support received from parents, relatives, or friends contributes to better psychological functioning and fewer health problems as well (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). The greatest benefits for separated persons derive from emotional-informational support, such as experiencing care and closeness, receiving advice, or having the opportunity of being heard, but also practical support such as financial help, ensured housing, or assistance in taking care of children is important (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). It should be noted, however, that receiving support is not always beneficial: Support is more effective when it is invisible, that is, when it is unnoticed by the recipient, while the awareness of being a target of support may entail an emotional cost, making salient to the recipient that he/she is not succeeding in coping effectively with a stressor (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Girme, Overall, & Simpson, 2013).

Moreover, recently, although not specifically focusing on separated individuals, the literature has started to highlight the beneficial effects of providing support (e.g., Alfieri & Lanz, 2015; Gosnell & Gable, 2015; Inagaki & Orehek, 2017; Parise, Pagani, Donato, & Sedikides, 2019). To this regard, Inagaki and Orehek (2017) have suggested that giving support may be rewarding and stress reducing for the provider. Also in the case of given support, however, there may be boundary conditions that influence these benefits. In fact, social support may have different consequences on the well-being of who gives it, depending on the type of support given, on whether it is freely chosen, or on whether it is perceived as effective by the support provider. For instance, enacting acts of companionship, such as showing care to people, building feelings of happiness, pride, and belonging, is associated with better mental health, whereas giving help, such as assisting with feelings of distress, anger, and conflict, is more stressful for support providers (Strazdins & Broom, 2007). In addition, when providers choose to give support and perceive that their support is effective for recipients, support has positive effects, while, when these two conditions are not met, giving support may be more costly for providers (Inagaki & Orehek, 2017). In sum, social ties undergo profound changes in the aftermath of a separation, but, at the same time and under some conditions, may be a resource, which may protect from stress and enhance the process of adjustment to a new life condition.

SEPARATION AND VOLUNTEERING

The literature has highlighted that the negative outcomes deriving from separation can be moderated by some characteristics of social ties such as frequency and quality of social contacts. Volunteering

could be another social activity that may act as a protective factor for separated people's well-being. Volunteering, in fact, is positively associated with indicators of good psychological functioning: In general, volunteers report higher levels of satisfaction with life and happiness, and less symptoms of anxiety and depression (e.g., Borgonovi, 2008; Jenkinson et al., 2013; Pozzi, Marta, Marzana, Gozzoli, & Ruggieri, 2014; Pozzi, Meneghini, & Marta, 2019). Moreover, volunteers display higher levels of generativity (Frensch, Pratt, & Norris, 2007), an indicator of adult maturity, which reflects the ability to move away from a narcissistic self-concern to take care of the following generations (Bertoni, Parise, & Iafrate, 2012; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998; McAdams & Logan, 2004; Parise, Gatti, & Iafrate, 2017; Pozzi, Pistoni, & Alfieri, 2017).

Limited attention has been given to the role of volunteering in the separation process. The literature has primarily addressed the consequences of separation on volunteering behavior, focusing on those people who were volunteers before separation (Dury et al., 2014; Lancee & Radl, 2014; Nesbit, 2012), while the role of volunteering as a protective resource in the separation process, irrespective of the fact that people were volunteers or not before separation, has been overlooked. Some evidence, however, suggests that volunteering may assist in protecting or enhancing the well-being of separated people. For instance, it has been demonstrated that volunteering is particularly beneficial for those who have a role-identity absence in major life domains (e.g., partner, employment, and parental) from decreases in well-being (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). Moreover, volunteering significantly reduces the occurrence of depressive symptoms during another stressful transition such as widowhood (Li, 2007) and is predictive of well-being during important moments of life change such as migration (Marzana, Alfieri, & Marta, 2016; Marzana, Damia, Alfieri, & Marta, 2018; Taurini, Paloma, García-Ramírez, Marzana, & Marta, 2017). On this basis, it could be expected that engaging in a voluntary activity is a protective factor for separated individuals as well.

The mechanisms that could explain the association between volunteering and well-being are less clear (Jenkinson et al., 2013). One possible explanation is that volunteering creates an occasion of contact and exchange of support with other people. Some research showed that volunteering is positively associated with frequency of social contacts (Wilson & Musick, 2003; Van Willigen, 2000), number of social ties (Rook & Sorkin, 2003; Tang, Choi, & Morrow-Howell, 2010), and availability of social support (Van Ingen & Kalmijn, 2010). One study tested specifically the mediating role of some characteristics of social ties (i.e., availability of social support from friends, relatives and neighbors, and quality of social exchanges) in the association between volunteering and subjective well-being (Pilkington, Windsor, & Crisp, 2012). Results showed that positive social exchanges and greater availability of social support from friends and family explained the link between volunteering and life satisfaction and positive affect, with perceived available social support from friends being the most powerful mediator. Despite the relationship between volunteering and social ties is likely to be bidirectional (i.e., volunteering may promote opportunities for forming new friendships, but people with preexisting supportive social networks could also be more likely to become volunteers), these results are informative as they help clarify potential pathways linking volunteering to well-being. To our knowledge, no study to date has analyzed such pathways in the context of separation and studies are needed to explore which resources ex-partners can count on to adjust more successfully to separation or divorce.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study examines the relationships among volunteering, social ties characteristics, and aspects of individual well-being in a sample of Italian separated parents. As for social ties, in line with pre-

vious literature (e.g., Kalmijn, 2012), we focused on both structural and quality aspects, analyzing network size, frequency of social contacts, and perceived social support. With regard to social support, we assessed both practical and informational-emotional support; in addition, we focused not only on received support but also on given social support. Recent studies, in fact, have highlighted the potential benefits of serving as a support provider (Inagaki & Orehek, 2017). As for individual well-being, we investigated both traditional indicators, such as satisfaction with life and presence of depressive symptoms, and generativity. In fact, as suggested by Erikson (1963), for the adult individual the mere well-being is not his/her own most developed outcome, rather it is his/her capacity of being generative. Generativity is orientated to the good of the next generation (e.g., children), and thus is linked in part with parental status, but embraces also concerns about the security and welfare of valued institutions and practices, that is, those institutions and practices that the person sees as a legacy for future generations (Fleeson, 2001).

In a first step, we examined any differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers in social ties characteristics. In a second step, we analyzed the role of these characteristics in mediating the relationships between volunteering and the different dimensions of individual well-being. We hypothesized that volunteers, if compared to nonvolunteers, presented larger social networks, had more frequent social contacts, and displayed higher levels of social support. With regard to mediation, we expected that at least one characteristic of social ties (i.e., network size, frequency of social contacts, received social support, given social support) mediated the relationship between volunteering and well-being. In line with the literature, which has identified differences in how individuals experience social ties after divorce (e.g., Amato, 2000; Demo & Fine, 2010; Kalmijn, 2012; Williams & Umberson 2004), in our analyses we controlled for gender, age, and partner status (re-partnered or single).¹

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

This study was based on data from an online survey involving 318 separated or divorced parents (73.3% men; 26.7% women). All participants were recruited through several associations targeting separated parents. These associations have the primary aim of supporting separated parents in the tasks connected with parenthood and safeguarding their well-being (Bertoni, Carrà, Iafrate, Zanchettin, & Parise, 2018). The associations involved in this study were all formal associations targeting both fathers and mothers. Participants took part voluntarily in the research, completed a self-report questionnaire through the Qualtrics platform, and provided informed consent. The study protocol was not reviewed by the ethics committee, since it was not required at the time of data collection as per University's guidelines and national regulations. However, it complied with the Ethical Guidelines of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP) and with the Ethical Guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Men's age ranged from 29 to 69 years ($M = 53.72$; $SD = 6.90$), while women's age ranged from 23 to 73 years ($M = 54.12$; $SD = 8.78$). Participants had different types of relationship before the separation: 69.8% had a religious marriage, 14.5% were cohabitants, 13.5% had a civil marriage and only the 2.2% were living apart together (LAT). They had a minimum of one child and a maximum of six children with their ex-partner ($M = 1.61$; $SD = 0.72$), and the 56.6% ($N = 180$) of parents lived with their child/children ($N = 100$ men and $N = 80$ women). Sixty-six point seven percent of participants declared that they had to provide alimony or child support. Among these participants, 65.7% were men. Forty-six point five percent of participants had a new couple relationship ($N = 148$) and, among these, 27.7% ($N = 88$) co-

habited with the partner. If compared with the Italian school system, 8.8% of participants had a low level (< 8 years) of education, 50.6 % a medium level (9-13 years), and 40.6% a high level of education (> 14 years). With regard to the modal working position, the 61.3% participants had a permanent job. With regard to volunteer status, 41.2% ($N = 131$) of participants were volunteers. They volunteered in the association for separated parents to which they belonged (39.7%) or in other types of organizations (33.6%: groups or associations that provide social or health assistance to people in need; 18.3%: groups that provide educational, artistic, musical or cultural activities; 10.7%: groups interested in human rights, racial equality, peace, and women's rights; 13.0%: sport or recreational groups; 19.8%: parish groups; 16.0%: religious associations; 6.9%: associations devoted to the protection of nature, environment, and animal rights; 6.9%: political groups; 3.1%: local or neighborhood committees and civil protection groups; 9.2%: professional associations; 15.3%: other groups or associations). Fifty-one point five volunteered in more than one association.

Measures

Volunteering. Volunteer status was assessed with a single item asking respondents “Are you involved in any voluntary work (inside the association for separated parents or in other types of association)?” (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Individual well-being:

Satisfaction with life. We measured satisfaction with life through the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). It is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Items use a 7-point scale (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*); item example: “In most ways my life is close to my ideal.” Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Depressive symptoms. We measured depressive symptoms with the 15-item subscale for depression of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL; Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974). Each item scored on a 4-point scale (from 0 = *not at all* to 4 = *extremely*). Examples of items are: “Lack of sexual interest or pleasure,” “Poor appetite,” “Feel alone.” Cronbach's alpha was .92.

Generativity. We measured generativity with the Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). It is composed of 19 items assessed on a 4-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 4 = *very often*). Items examples are: “I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences,” “If I were unable to have children of my own, I would like to adopt children,” “I have a responsibility to improve the neighbourhood in which I live.” Cronbach's alpha was .83.

Social ties:

Network size. Participants were asked to indicate the number of significant others (relatives, friends, neighbors) that they considered as members of their social network.

Frequency of contacts. Participants were asked to indicate how frequent their contacts were (in terms of both paying and receiving a visit or hearing by phone) with relatives, friends, and neighbors on a 6-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 6 = *every day*).

Social support (given and received). Participants were asked to indicate, on a 4-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often*), how often they had given and received practical (in terms of assistance) and informational/emotional (in terms of advice or emotional closeness) support to/from relatives and friends in the last 12 months.

Data Analyses

Data were analyzed through the software SPSS v. 21. In order to examine any differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers in social ties characteristics, we ran a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) controlling for gender, age, and partner status. In a second step, to analyze the role of these characteristics in mediating the relationships between volunteering and the different dimensions of well-being, we used the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2018, Version 3, Model 4), with 10,000 bootstrapped samples, which allows to test mediation with multiple mediators.

RESULTS

Differences in Social Ties Characteristics by Volunteer Status

There was a statistically significant difference between volunteers and nonvolunteers on the combined dependent variables after controlling for gender, age, and partner status, $F(1, 313) = 2.75, p = .001$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .89$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$.

As shown in Table 1, significant differences were found for volunteering on frequency of contact with friends, $F(1, 313) = 7.33, p = .007$: volunteers had more frequent contacts with friends ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.00$) than those who did not volunteer ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.30$). Significant differences were also found for *practical support given* to relatives, $F(1, 313) = 7.65, p = .006$, and friends, $F(1, 313) = 6.22, p = .013$, with volunteers reporting to provide more practical support (relatives: $M = 2.53, SD = 1.03$; friends: $M = 2.76, SD = 0.95$) than nonvolunteers (relatives: $M = 2.21, SD = 0.94$; friends: $M = 2.49, SD = 0.94$). As for *practical support received* from relatives and friends, we found that volunteers received more practical support from relatives, $F(1, 313) = 4.37, p = .037$; $M = 2.39, SD = 0.95$, and friends, $F(1, 313) = 11.58, p = .001$; $M = 2.64, SD = 1.02$, than those who did not volunteer (relatives: $M = 2.16, SD = 0.94$; friends: $M = 2.25, SD = 0.95$). With regard to *given informational/emotional support*, volunteers provided more emotional social support to relatives, $F(1, 318) = 4.08, p = .044$; $M = 2.49, SD = .96$, than those who did not volunteer ($M = 2.26, SD = 0.98$). Finally, for *received informational/emotional support* from relatives and friends, results showed that volunteers received more informational/emotional support from relatives, $F(1, 313) = 6.73, p = .010$; $M = 2.48, SD = 0.95$, and friends, $F(1, 313) = 6.84, p = .009$; $M = 2.61, SD = 1.02$ than those who did not volunteer (relatives: $M = 2.19, SD = 0.94$; friends: $M = 2.32, SD = 0.95$). No other differences were found.

Associations Between Volunteering, Social Ties Characteristics, and Individual Well-Being

In a first step, in order to test whether volunteering was associated with social ties characteristics and indicators of individual well-being, we conducted a series of Pearson's linear correlations. In these analyses, on the basis of the results of the previous analyses, for social ties characteristics we did not include network size measures and frequency of contacts with relatives and neighbors. In addition, we used composite indices of given social support (then aggregating practical and emotional support to friends and relatives) and received social support (again aggregating practical and emotional support from friends and relatives).

TABLE 1
Significant univariate effects for volunteering

Dependent variables	df	df error	F	p	Volunteering	Means	95% CI	
							Lower bound	Upper bound
Network size: Number of relatives	1	313	2.59	.109	Volunteer	5.35	3.97	6.72
					Nonvolunteer	3.87	2.73	5.02
Network size: Number of friends	1	313	0.01	.942	Volunteer	9.45	6.82	12.08
					Nonvolunteer	9.32	7.13	11.52
Network size: Number of colleagues	1	313	0.33	.565	Volunteer	4.47	2.56	6.39
					Nonvolunteer	3.74	2.14	5.33
Frequency of contacts: Friends	1	313	7.33	.007	Volunteer	4.28	4.07	4.48
					Nonvolunteer	3.91	3.73	4.08
Frequency of contacts: Relatives	1	313	2.64	.105	Volunteer	3.12	2.87	3.37
					Nonvolunteer	3.39	3.18	3.60
Frequency of contacts: Neighbors	1	313	1.154	.284	Volunteer	2.38	2.17	2.60
					Nonvolunteer	2.23	2.04	2.41
Practical support given to relatives	1	313	7.65	.006	Volunteer	2.53	2.36	2.70
					Nonvolunteer	2.21	2.07	2.36
Practical support given to friends	1	313	6.22	.013	Volunteer	2.76	2.60	2.92
					Nonvolunteer	2.49	2.35	2.63
Practical support received from relatives	1	313	4.37	.037	Volunteer	2.39	2.23	2.56
					Nonvolunteer	2.16	2.02	2.30
Practical support received from friends	1	313	11.58	.001	Volunteer	2.64	2.47	2.81
					Nonvolunteer	2.25	2.11	2.40
Informational/emotional support given to relatives	1	313	4.08	.044	Volunteer	2.49	2.32	2.66
					Nonvolunteer	2.26	2.12	2.40
Informational/emotional support given to friends	1	313	1.23	.269	Volunteer	2.61	2.44	2.78
					Nonvolunteer	2.49	2.35	2.63
Informational/emotional support received from relatives	1	313	6.73	.010	Volunteer	2.48	2.31	2.65
					Nonvolunteer	2.19	2.04	2.33
Informational/emotional support received from friends	1	313	6.84	.009	Volunteer	2.61	2.44	2.77
					Nonvolunteer	2.32	2.18	2.46

Results showed that volunteering was significantly and positively associated with given ($r = .16, p = .004$) and received social support ($r = .19, p = .001$), with frequency of contacts with friends ($r = .15, p = .006$), and with generativity ($r = .18, p = .002$). The correlations between volunteering and satisfaction with life ($r = .09, p = .104$) and depressive symptoms ($r = -.03, p = .545$) were not significant. Moreover, satisfaction with life was significantly and positively associated with given social support ($r = .18, p = .001$), and with the frequency of contacts with friends ($r = .30, p < .001$), while the correlations with received social support ($r = .10, p = .086$) was not significant. Depressive symptoms were significantly and negatively associated with given social support ($r = -.14, p = .016$) and with the frequency of contacts with friends ($r = -.25, p < .001$), while no association was found with received social support ($r = -.09, p = .126$). Finally, generativity was

significantly and positively associated with given and received social support (given: $r = .29, p < .001$; received: $r = .16, p = .006$), and with the frequency of contacts with friends ($r = .22, p < .001$).

Then, on the basis of the results of Pearson’s linear correlations, we tested whether social ties characteristics mediated the relation between volunteering and different indicators of individual well-being. We tested three models, one for each measure of well-being (i.e., satisfaction with life, depressive symptoms, and social generativity) in which volunteering was entered as a predictor and social ties characteristics (i.e., frequency of contacts with friends, given social support, received social support) as mediators (see Figure 1).

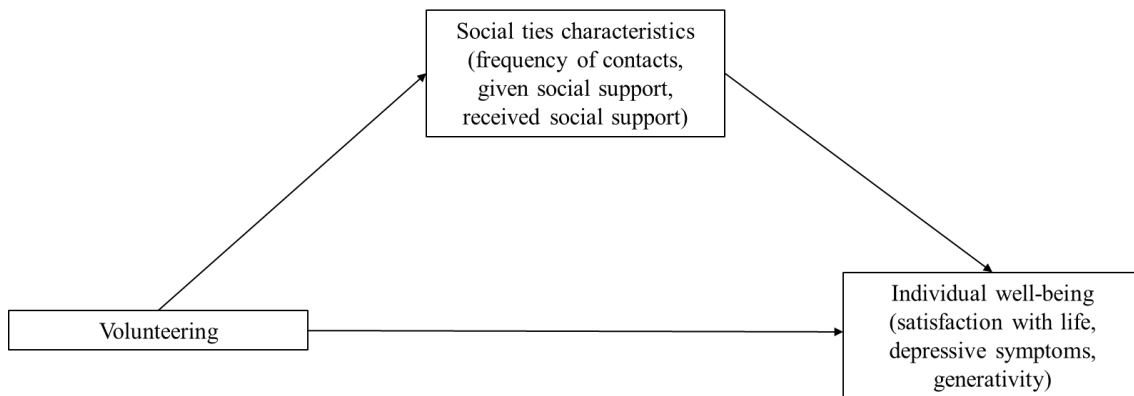


FIGURE 1
 Hypothesized mediational model.

In the model with satisfaction with life as outcome, frequency of contacts with friends and given social support were entered as mediators. Volunteering positively predicted both frequency of contacts with friends ($B = .38, p = .006$) and given social support ($B = .24, p = .004$). Only frequency of contacts with friends predicted (positively) satisfaction with life ($B = .30, p < .001$). When testing for the significance of indirect effects, frequency of contacts proved to be a significant mediator, $B = .11, p = .020, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .20]$. The direct effect was $.11 (p = .476), 95\% \text{ CI } [-.14, .36]$ (see Figure 2). Given social support was not a significant predictor ($B = .14, p = .21$). The model accounted for significant variance in satisfaction with life, $R^2 = .10, F(3, 314) = 11.08, p < .001$.

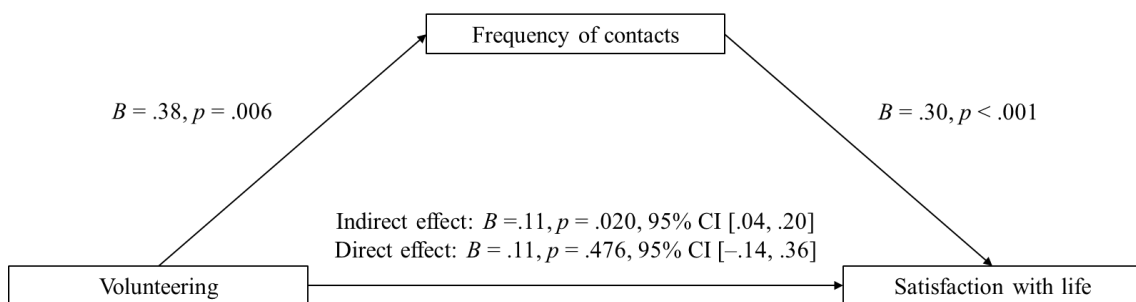


FIGURE 2
 Mediation model for satisfaction with life.

In the model with depressive symptoms as outcome, frequency of contacts with friends and given social support were entered as mediators. Volunteering positively predicted both frequency of contacts with friends ($B = .38, p = .006$) and given social support ($B = .24, p = .004$). Only frequency of contacts ($B = -.13, p < .001$) predicted (negatively) depressive symptoms, producing an indirect effect of $-.05$ ($p = .026$), 95% CI $[-.09, -.02]$. The direct effect was $.01$ ($p = .861$), 95% CI $[-.11, .14]$ (see Figure 3). Given social support ($B = -.04, p = .447$) did not predict depressive symptoms. The model accounted for significant variance in depressive symptoms, $R^2 = .07, F(3, 314) = 7.39, p < .001$.

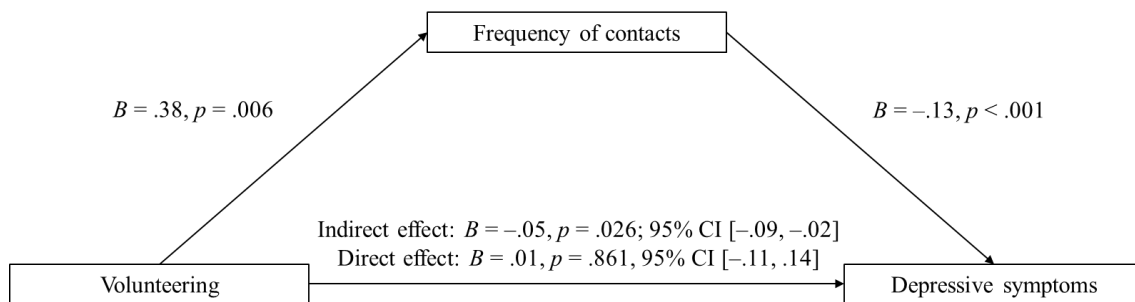


FIGURE 3
 Mediation model for depressive symptoms.

In the model with generativity as outcome, frequency of contacts, given and received social support were entered as mediators. In this model, volunteering positively predicted given social support ($B = .24, p = .004$), received social support ($B = .30, p < .001$), and frequency of contacts with friends ($B = .38, p = .006$). In turn, given social support ($B = .27, p < .001$), received social support ($B = -.17, p = .002$), and frequency of contacts with friends ($B = .05, p = .014$) positively predicted generativity. When testing for the significance of indirect effects, only given and received social support proved to be significant mediators; given social support: $B = .07, p = .014$, 95% CI $[.03, .11]$; received social support: $B = -.05, p = .022$, 95% CI $[-.09, -.02]$, while the indirect effect of frequency of contacts was not significant, $B = .02, p = .074$, 95% CI $[.00, .04]$. The direct effect was $.13$ ($p = .010$), 95% CI $[.05, .21]$ (see Figure 4). The model accounted for significant variance in generativity, $R^2 = .14, F(4, 313) = 12.65, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Marital breakdown negatively affects people's well-being and bring changes in several important life domains (Amato, 2010, 2014; Amato & James, 2010), especially for parents (Leopold & Kalmijn, 2016). Separation is a possible cause of loss of social ties (Krumrei et al., 2007; Symoens et al., 2013) and may also reduce volunteering (Dury et al., 2014; Lancee & Radl, 2014). Social ties and volunteering, however, may be resources in the post-separation adjustment. In the present study, we examined whether and how volunteering may serve as a protective factor for separated parents' relational functioning and individual well-being. In particular, we first explored any differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers in social ties characteristics (i.e., network size, frequency of contacts, social support) and, in a second step, the role

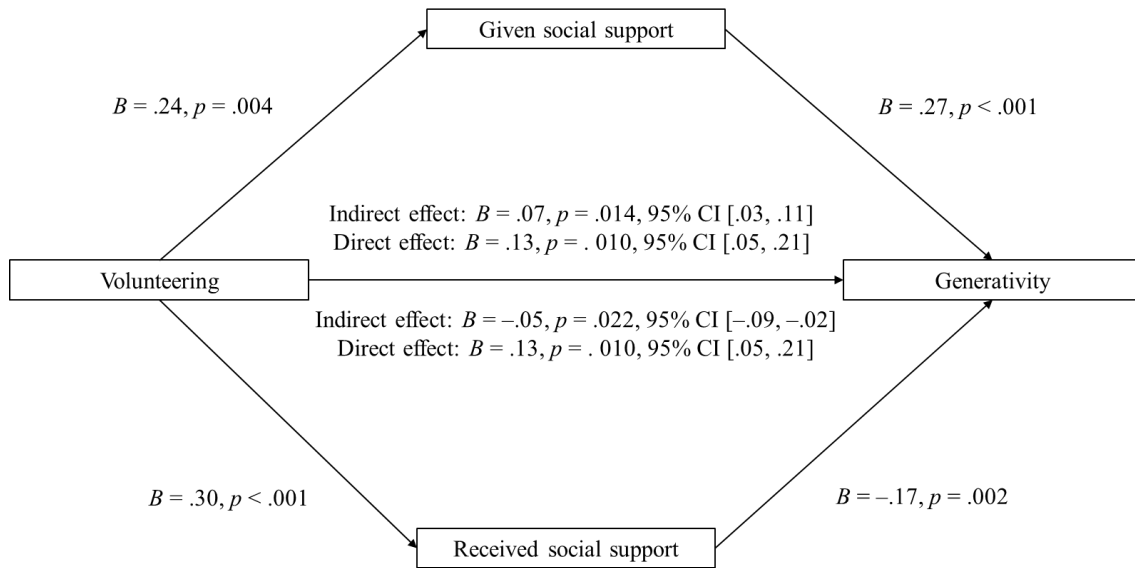


FIGURE 4
 Mediation model for generativity.

of these characteristics in mediating the relationships between volunteering and dimensions of individual well-being (i.e., satisfaction with life, depressive symptoms, and generativity). Few studies have suggested that being a volunteer is associated with well-being because volunteers tend to report better social ties relative to nonvolunteers (Marta, Pozzi, & Marzana, 2010; Pilkington et al., 2012; Van Willigen, 2000; Windsor, Anstey, & Rodgers, 2008). Our study extends previous literature by examining these relations in the context of separation and, in particular, in the context of separated parenting. A better knowledge of those factors related to separated parents' well-being can be used to promote parental efficacy and skills and also to favor, indirectly, children's well-being.

Volunteers reported more frequent contacts with friends and higher levels of given and received social support (both practical and informational-emotional) to/from relatives and friends, if compared to their nonvolunteer counterparts. No differences were found in network size and in frequency of contacts with relatives and neighbors. The difference between volunteers and nonvolunteers did not derive from the quantity of social ties (i.e., network size) but from a higher quality of contacts with friends and relatives (i.e., social support) and from the opportunity to go more in depth in the relationship with friends (i.e., frequency of contacts). These results are partially in contrast with previous evidence demonstrating that volunteering promotes a significant increase in the number of new ties formed (Rook & Sorkin, 2003), while they are in line with those studies showing that voluntary action increases the frequency of social contacts (Wilson & Musick, 2003; Van Willigen, 2000) and is linked with more supportive relationships (Pilkington et al., 2012; Van Ingen & Kalmijn, 2010). Our findings point to the beneficial role of volunteering especially for friendship: Volunteering may help separated parents strengthen the bonds with friends, by favoring more frequent contacts and more supportive relationships. Volunteering is also related to more supportive relationships with relatives: Higher quality social relations with relatives might result from a sense of purpose engendered by volunteering (Pinquart, 2003), thereby promoting a more positive day-to-day social environment. The enhancement of social ties appears particularly crucial for parents, which may be reinforced in their parental identity and assisted in their parenting tasks by a well-functioning social network.

Given the cross-sectional nature of our data, however, it could also be that friendships and family relationships increase the likelihood of becoming a volunteer.

With regard to the link of volunteering with well-being, correlational analyses showed a significant association with generativity but not with satisfaction with life and depressive symptoms. Nonetheless, mediational analyses pointed to an indirect effect of volunteering on all the measures of well-being. In particular, frequency of contacts with friends was the mechanism explaining the link between volunteering and more traditional indicators of individual well-being: Being a volunteer predicted higher frequency of contacts with friends, which in turn predicted higher satisfaction with life and less depressive symptoms. In this perspective, volunteering can be seen as a way of promoting social integration and reducing social isolation (Van Willigen, 2000), which are crucial factors for individuals' psychological health.

Given and received social support mediated the link between volunteering and generativity and were marginally mediators in the link between volunteering and satisfaction with life. It must be noted that, however, if given support was positively related to satisfaction with life and generativity, received support showed the opposite pattern. This may indicate, in line with the literature, that receiving support, besides benefits, may have some downsides. For instance, being dependent on someone else may be highly stressful, lead to tension, or challenge one's sense of competence, agency, and self-esteem (Shrout, Herman, & Bolger, 2006). This could be exacerbated in separation, when parents need to depend on their network for different necessities (both on the emotional and practical side) and asking for support may remind them about their difficult situation. The type of support that appears to benefit more separated parents' well-being is given support. Voluntary action gives the opportunity to separated persons to feel helpful and move away from self-concern and this, in turn, makes them feel more satisfied and more generative. Higher generativity in particular may be beneficial to the exercise of parenthood.

Our results should be interpreted within the context of several limitations. First, the cross-sectional study design prevents us from clarifying the causal direction of relationships among volunteering, social ties characteristics, and well-being. Although our results show that volunteering is a resource for relational and individual well-being, it is plausible that also social ties and well-being inform voluntary action. In fact, it could be that people with preexisting supportive social networks or with higher levels of well-being and generativity are also more likely to become volunteers. Longitudinal studies could help disentangle the direction of effects. Second, we used of a generic measure of volunteer status that does not catch the complexity of volunteering. Volunteering is a multidimensional concept that needs to be measured with a more systematic set of questions (e.g., commitment in volunteering, frequency and hours spent, role in the organization, and type of organization). A multidimensional instrument could offer the possibility of determining which particular aspect of volunteering is associated with social ties and well-being. In addition, we were not able to differentiate between those who started to volunteer before separation and those who started after separation (e.g., those who volunteer in the association). This aspect should deserve more attention in future research. Furthermore, the variance of the different measures of well-being explained by our models is rather low and may indicate that other mechanisms could be at play. Finally, our sample was a convenience sample recruited through associations targeting separated parents and composed mostly by fathers, and this may limit the generalizability of our results.

Despite these limitations, our results show that volunteering is associated with more frequent and more supportive social contacts with relatives and friends. Moreover, these qualities of social ties are associated with higher satisfaction with life and generativity and less depressive symptoms. An increased understanding of the potentially beneficial role of volunteering for separated parents' well-being is a key first step that should be followed by the design and implementation of intervention and policy efforts. In partic-

ular, in light of our findings, we suggest that prevention efforts should be directed to promote positive social ties and social participation as a way of enhancing separated parents' well-being. Working on these aspects could promote parents' better psychological health and the opportunity to re-invest in generative projects, which may be important conditions to overcome separation and have a positive outlook on the future. This, in turn, may protect children's well-being.

NOTE

1. We conducted additional analyses in which we tested whether the effects differed between those who volunteered in the association for separated parents (whose voluntary action started after separation) and those volunteering in other types of organizations (who could have started to volunteer before separation) but the same pattern of results emerged between the two groups.

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