6. Believing, Belonging and Volunteerism in Adolescence. Predictive Factors from Childhood and Confirmation Time in a Multi-Level Framework

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6.1 Introduction

Previous research has repeatedly shown that parents' religiosity has significant effects on children's religiosity and there is a strong tendency that people's religious beliefs and practices formed within their family persist from childhood into adulthood. Other factors, including various meso and macro level influences from religious groups, school, peers, the media and wider society are seen as secondary to family influences (see, e. g., Bengtson et al. 2013; Bengtson et al. 2009; Beit-Hallamy/Argyle 1997, 99; Hood et al. 1996, 74; McIntosh/Spilka 1995; Chatters/Taylor 2005). Recent studies suggest that also non-religious orientation is increasingly a matter of continuity and the transmission of non-religion from parents to their children can be seen to a far greater degree than in the past (Bengtson et al. 2013, 151-164, see also Zuckerman 2011, 2; Pasquale 2010). Also the earlier international study on confirmands showed that family is a key factor in explaining youth's religious attitudes both in the beginning and at the end of confirmation time. However, confirmation experiences were also important in explaining the relationship to church and to faith at the end of confirmation time (see Schweitzer et al. 2015a; Schweitzer et al. 2009). But do the influences of confirmation time persist? The expectations (from church leaders, from workers in confirmation work, or from families) go far beyond those short-term effects: it is hoped that confirmation time and experiences of encountering the Church shape their attitudes and behaviour for a longer time, especially during the phase when they turn into young adults. However, the previous research raises the question, if and to what extent confirmation time can have an influence on young people in a longer run. Is the confirmation experience producing lasting effects or are there mostly other factors which tend to be meaningful in determining young people's later relation to church and faith?

In practise, for many church members, confirmation time is the most intensive encounter with the Church during their entire life span. A 10-year-longitudinal study among Finnish confirmands suggests that confirmation time can also be a very meaningful factor in determining young people's later relation to church and faith, at least according to their own estimation. The study showed that as young adults they rated confirmation experience as the most meaning-

ful factor in influencing their religious thinking both 5 years and still 10 years after confirmation time; meaning that they regarded it as more important than influences from their own family or as more important than any other church activity (Niemelä 2008; Tervo-Niemelä [in press]).

The chapter on church commitment and changes and trends in it showed that the development after confirmation time may take various patterns (see p. 61 ff.). While some are clearly distancing themselves from the Church, other adolescents are highly strengthened in their commitment after confirmation time. The chapter also shows that differences among the young people are amplified after confirmation time: those distant seem to become increasingly distant while some of those committed become increasingly committed (see p. 68 ff.). A similar trend was visible in the 10-year longitudinal study among Finnish confirmands (Niemelä 2015).

In the present chapter the aim is to distinguish factors that explain differences in commitment to the Church two years after confirmation. One special focus is the question of in what way volunteerism can be predicted. The aim is finding out which factors explain the relationship to church, faith and volunteerism two years after confirmation. Are confirmation time experiences still meaningful in determining young people's commitment to the Church? What about background factors: gender and home religious background, are they still equally meaningful? Are the childhood influences so determining that experiences during confirmation time can hardly change these presuppositions?

6.2 Methodology

The analysis is based on data from all seven countries of this research project (see p. 246 ff. for background information and a description of the sample).

The investigation of predictive factors is based on multi-level analysis, a method suitable to investigate relationships within nested data often used in empirical education research: in a 3-level data structure students are nested within classes, and classes are nested within schools. In the context of confirmation work confirmands located on the micro-level, confirmation groups located on the meso-level and churches on the macro-level are the units of investigation (for an introduction into multi-level methodology in the field of confirmation research: Ilg/Schweitzer 2010). Within the 3-level framework of confirmation work, the multi-level analysis investigates first what proportion of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by differences between churches on a macro-level, by differences between groups on a meso-level and by differences between the single confirmands on the micro-level. Then it can be asked which predictors that can be located on all three levels (e. g., predictors

measuring the social climate on the macro- or meso-level, pedagogical measures on the meso-level, personal characteristics of the confirmands like religious socialisation on the micro-level) have an effect in explaining the respective variance proportions of the dependent variable (e. g., attitudes and beliefs of the confirmands) that is always located on the micro-level (for detailed methodological background information see Heck et al. 2012 and 2014).

The most influencing factors predicting such personal convictions are expected within the individuals (micro-level). As groups of confirmands share the same experiences and also the same social climate, it can also be expected that the group-level is of relevant influence (meso-level). The uppermost level attributed with predicting factors is the macro-level, consisting of the respective church.

For a multi-level analysis typically only such cases can be used that have valid answers to all of the respective variables. Altogether 3073 adolescents from 784 groups (usually every parish has one group) in 43 Churches could be used for the analysis. The size of the Churches differs very much. Some countries only have one Church (as it is the case for the Scandinavian countries in the study), whereas Germany and Switzerland each have 19 Churches. The analytical level for the Churches is not the country, but the respective Church, this leads to the number of 43 Churches in 7 countries.

A set of altogether 22 variables (2 on macro-level, 12 on meso-level, 8 on micro-level) have been tested for their predictive power. The following variables yielded significant results and are thus part of the result tables below:
Confirmands' background factors (t_1):

- Gender (reference category 0: male) (micro-level)
- CP07: How many people working in the Church as voluntary workers do you know (for example, in youth work or in the parish)? (micro-level)
- CJ01: How interested are your parents in religion? (micro-, meso- and macro-level)
- CM11/CM12: Have you previously (more than three times) participated in any group activity offered by the Church (Sunday school, children's group, youth group etc.)? (micro-level)

Confirmands' evaluations about their confirmation time (t_2):

- KK57: I was given the chance to try out voluntary work. (micro-level)
- Satisfaction with confirmation time: Index iKN3 (t_2): Satisfaction with confirmation time (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88). The index is computed as the mean value of the following t_2-items:
  To what extent are you satisfied with … ? (micro-level)
  - KN01: the whole confirmation time
  - KN03: content/topics of lessons in confirmation work

- KN07: minister/person primarily responsible for confirmation work
- KN08: other teachers/workers
- KN10: church services
- KN11: camp(s)
- KN14: music, songs and singing
- KN20: working methods (for example, working with biblical texts, group work, etc.)

Workers' reports about the setting and the aims of confirmation work in their parish (t_2):

- VQ05: Number of overnight events in the context of trips/outings/camps (meso-level)
- VC17: The confirmands were encouraged to do voluntary work within the Church (youth work, confirmation work, etc.). (meso-level)
- VL01: In our parish there are youth groups that are suitable for newly confirmed adolescents. (meso-level)

In addition to the listed variables, the following variables were tested for their predictive power, but were considered not relevant for the analysis due to the statistical outcomes: Index WB1: Faith related aims (t_1, meso-level), Index WB2: Aim of focusing services (t_1, meso-level), Index WP1: Encouraging voluntary work (t_1, meso-level), WC06: get to know what the youth work of the Church offers to them (t_1, meso-level), VL02: If a confirmand wants to become a volunteer in our parish after confirmation, there are opportunities to do so (t_2, meso-level), VC18: were encouraged for voluntary work outside of the Church (sport clubs, music, etc.) (t_2, meso-level), VU04_05: number of volunteers (t_2, meso-level), CP17: civic engagement of parents (t_1, micro-level), KK58: we discussed the importance of voluntary work for church and society (t_2, micro-level). Details on the measurement scales and the exact wordings can be found in the appendix (p. 262 ff).

The dependent variables come from the questionnaire t_3 which was administered two years after confirmation. There are various ways to measure commitment to religion. Following the same model as in other chapters (cf. p. 61 ff.), the commitment to the church is measured by concentrating on belief and belonging aspects of commitment among the young people two years after confirmation time (see also Niemelä et al. 2015). The belief-aspect is measured by young people's commitment to various statements about Christian faith. Belonging is operationalized by their sense of belonging (importance of membership) and by their practical commitment to volunteering in the church.

6.3 Factors Predicting Christian Beliefs

In the first analysis, the aim is to find out which factors explain young people's commitment to the Church when measured in terms of their relation to Christian beliefs. The dependent variable is the Christian belief-index iQE1, which measures the approval on the 7-point Likert scale to six basic Christian beliefs (Alpha = 0.90):

- QE01: God created the world.
- QE02: There is life after death.
- QE03: God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.
- QE04: Jesus has risen from the dead.
- QE08: Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.
- QE09: I believe in God.

The aim is to find out which are meaningful factors in explaining young peoples' Christian beliefs two years after confirmation: to what extent it can still be explained by various micro-, meso- and macro-level influences. These include, for example, religious background in micro-level (religiosity of the parents of the respondent), in meso-level (religiosity of the parents of the confirmation group in general) and macro-level (the general level of religiosity among parents in the church/the social climate supporting religious socialisation). Furthermore, they include, for example, items like gender and satisfaction with confirmation experiences. Table 24 presents the results (only relevant influence factors are printed).

Altogether, 7 % of the variance can be attributed to the macro-level, 29 % to the meso-level and 64 % to the micro-level. It is remarkable that on all the three levels the religiosity of the parents (as stated by the adolescent at the age of about 13 years) is a significant predictor for the religiosity of the adolescent at the age of about 16. Parents' religiosity on an individual level is an indicator for the religiosity of family background. The mean value of parents' religiosity for all parents of one parish group/church is taken as an indicator of the religiosity of the respective parish/church setting. The results show that not only the individual religious sphere at home is shaping the individual trajectories concerning personal beliefs, but also the living environment (parish) and even the broader church context in the country/region. The setting in which one is raised does make a big difference concerning the development of Christian attitudes. This hints to the importance of plausibility structures in maintaining beliefs: all religious traditions require specific communities of believers for their continuing plausibility (Berger 1967, 46). If one is surrounded by others who believe similarly, it strengthens the ability of individuals to believe (McGuire 2002, 37). The results show that if the young people are surrounded

Table 24: Predictors of Christian beliefs (iQE1)

	Standardised effects
Macro-level (ICC = 7 %)	
Social context	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents (church means)/social climate supporting religious socialisation	0.20**
Meso-level (ICC = 29 %)	
Social context	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents (parish/group means)/social climate supporting religious socialisation	0.20**
Micro-level (ICC = 64 %)	
Socio-demographic & biographic background	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents	0.28**
CM11/CM12: Church contact before confirmation time	0.12**
Experiences during confirmation time	
iKN3: Satisfaction with confirmation time	0.11**

Multi-level linear model. Estimation method: REML. Random intercepts are computed. Meso-level predictors are church-centered; micro-level predictors are group-centered. Predictors and dependent variable are z-standardised on the respective levels. Levels of significance: 5 % (* = $0.01 > p \leq 0.05$) or 1 % (** = $p \leq 0.01$). N = 3073.

by others who belief similarly, not only in their homes, but in their broader surroundings, they are more likely to believe and maintain their beliefs than those who are surrounded by people who do not share the same worldview.

There are only two other variables with a significant predictive effect: the church contact before confirmation time and the satisfaction with confirmation time. This result suggests that both, participating in Christian children's programs before confirmation time as well as a positive confirmation time contribute to a positive attitude towards Christianity in the later course of adolescence. This means that church contact has predictive power independent from parents' religiosity in micro-, meso- and macro-level, although parents' religiosity has clearly a stronger influence. Therefore, church contact will hardly be able to fully compensate for a non-religious family background.

Table 25: Predictors of the importance of belonging to the church (QG01)

	Standardised effects
Macro-level (ICC = 5 %)	
Social context	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents (church means)/social climate supporting religious socialisation	0.18**
Meso-level (ICC = 27 %)	
Social context	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents (parish/group means)/social climate supporting religious socialisation	0.16**
Micro-level (ICC = 68 %)	
Socio-demographic & biographic background	
CJ01: Religiosity of parents	0.20**
CM11/CM12: Church contact before confirmation time	0.16**
Experiences during confirmation time	
iKN3: Satisfaction with confirmation time	0.14**

Multi-level linear model. Estimation method: REML. Random intercepts are computed. Meso-level predictors are church-centered; micro-level predictors are group-centered. Predictors and dependent variable are z-standardised on the respective levels. Levels of significance: 5 % (* = $0.01 > p \leq 0.05$) or 1 % (** = $p \leq 0.01$). N = 3073.

6.4 Factors Predicting Sense of Belonging

A similar multi-level analysis was conducted for the dependent variable QG01: »It is important for me to belong to the Church« with which the sense of belonging to the Church was measured.

The picture looks quite similar as in the analysis above. The proportions of variance assigned to the three levels are close to those in the multi-level analysis for Christian beliefs. Again the religiosity of the parents is a significant predictor on all three levels, again suggesting the importance of plausibility structures. As before, church contact before confirmation time and the satisfaction with confirmation time also have a significant predicting power. When comparing the standardised effects, it becomes visible that these church-related experiences are of greater influence concerning the importance of belonging to the

Church than they were concerning Christian beliefs. In other words: a good experience with the Church in childhood and adolescence can shape the long-term development of personal religiousness, but it can shape even more the loyalty towards the Church.

6.5 What Predicts Becoming a Volunteer in the Church?

After confirmation time some adolescents find their way into volunteerism in the Church, others do not. Are there predictors from the time before or during the confirmation time that make it more or less probable that an adolescent two years after confirmation time will commit her-/himself to voluntary work? The analysis is based on the answers to the question QP51: »Are you active as a volunteer in church or Christian youth work?« as dependent variable. 17 % of all confirmands who filled in a t_3-questionnaire ticked the box »yes«, 9 % ticked »not anymore«, the other 74 % answered »no«. In the dichotomised version of QP51, the answer category »not anymore« is treated as a positive answer so that the question if the adolescents had been engaged in voluntary work after confirmation regardless of if they had quit or not until t_3 is the focus of interest. The following analysis also comes back to some of the questions raised in the chapter on volunteers (see p. 84 ff.).

The model of multi-level analysis has a reduced number of respondents as not all participants in the study gave valid answers to the respective questions. The multi-level analysis in Table 26 is based on 2576 cases. In this reduced sample the baseline probability for a positive answer to QP51 is 18 %. As the dependent variable is dichotomous, a special variant of multi-level analysis with binary logistic regression was used (see explanations under Table 26).

Table 26 can be read as follows: if one assumes that an adolescent shows the mean values on all predictors, then the baseline probability that she/he will be active as a volunteer after confirmation is represented by the indexed value 1. If, for example, the predictor »CP07: Contacts with people working in the Church as volunteers (church means)/social climate supporting volunteerism« is increased by 1 standardised unit on the macro-level, the probability of volunteerism increases by factor 1.46 or increases by 46 % compared with the baseline probability (indexed value 1); if predictor »CP07: Contacts with people working in the Church as volunteers« is increased by 1 standardised unit on the micro-level then the probability of volunteerism increases by the factor 1.36 compared with the baseline probability (value 1).

According to the intraclass correlation (ICC), measuring the variance proportions between the analysis levels, 4 % of the overall variance of QP51 go back to the differences between Churches on the macro-level; 16 % of the overall

Table 26: Predictors of volunteer commitment in the church after confirmation (QP51; dichotomised)

	Change in probability of volunteer commitment
Macro-level (ICC = 4%)	
Social context	
CP07: Contacts with people working in the Church as volunteers (church means)/social climate supporting engagement	1.46**
Meso-level (ICC = 16%)	
Social context	
CP07: Contacts with people working in the Church as volunteers (Parish/ group means)/social climate supporting engagement	1.22**
Pedagogical measures & settings	
VC17: were encouraged for voluntary work within the Church.	1.27**
VQ05: Overnight events in the context of trips/outings/camps; ln [N +1])	1.13*
VL01: In our parish there are youth groups that are suitable for newly confirmed adolescents.	1.12*
Micro-level (ICC = 80%)	
Socio-demographic & biographic background	
CP07: Contacts with people working in the Church as volunteers	1.36**
Gender: female	1.21**
CJ01: Religiosity of parents	1.20**
Experiences during confirmation time	
KK57: I was given the chance to try out voluntary work.	1.20**
iKN3: Satisfaction with confirmation time	1.11*

The table reports the change in probability of later volunteerism if increasing the predicting variable by one standardised unit and simultaneously holding all other predictors constant. Results are based on a Generalised Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) method: binary logistic regression. Random intercepts are computed. Meso-level predictors are church-centered; micro-level predictors are group-centered. All predictors are z-standardised on the respective levels.

Levels of significance: 5% (* = $0.01 > p \leq 0.05$) or 1% (** = $p \leq 0.01$). N = 2576. For the methodological background of the analysis see Heck et al. 2012.

variance go back to differences between groups on the meso-level; 80 % of the overall variance go back to differences between adolescents on the micro-level.

The religiosity of the parents again is an important influencing factor on the micro-level. But there is one exceptionally important predictor on all three levels: the number of contacts with people who are active as volunteers, as it was estimated by the confirmands in the beginning of their confirmation time, has by far the most predicting power on all the three levels. It seems that a surrounding of volunteers is highly stimulating for a later involvement in volunteerism by the respective adolescents. In addition, there are more interesting predictors to discover in this analysis.

The predictors on the micro-level are worth a closer look: girls are more prevalent in volunteerism than boys, which is hardly surprising. Again, the satisfaction with confirmation time (iKN3) predicts later voluntary work. In addition to this, an important predictor on the micro-level is the question to what extent confirmands were given the chance to try out voluntary work during their confirmation time (KK57). It can be assumed that many confirmands have no real idea what voluntary work in the church feels like. By trying this out, the probability of later being involved in it oneself is significantly rising.

On the meso-level, there are three variables connected to the conceptual frame of confirmation work that yield a significant contribution towards volunteer activation.

First, the length of confirmation camp (VQ05) has a positive influence. A reason for this probably is the fact that camps are a perfect opportunity for confirmands to see young volunteers »in action«. The longer they observe the fun these workers have with the camp, the more they can imagine becoming one of them later.

Second, the workers' estimation in how far the confirmands »were encouraged for voluntary work within the church« (VC17) is highly connected to the probability that the confirmands will become active later. This underlines the assumption that workers' aims are of predicting value for the »outcomes« of a pedagogical setting like confirmation work (for a broader explanation of the underlying theory see Ilg/Lüdtke 2011).

Thirdly, the workers' report about the existence of suitable youth groups for adolescents right after confirmation (VL01). This underlines the importance of a broader field of youth work for the aim of activating adolescents for voluntary work.

6.6 Becoming a Long-Time or Short-Time Volunteer: A Comparison of Contrasting Groups

As the method of binary logistic regression yields rather abstract numbers, the following presentation shows a more lucid way of comparing different subgroups. Figure 23 compares sets of two contrasting groups and their respective share of later volunteers. In addition to the dichotomous presentation of volunteerism in the multi-level analysis above, the figure divides volunteers into those who are still active two years after confirmation and those who had started a volunteer activity but were no longer active when asked for it in t_3.

The first set of comparisons shows how the answers of boys and girls differ: while 19% of the girls are active as a church-related volunteer two years after confirmation, and another 10% had at least started to do so, the respective share of the boys is only 14% and 7%. The bars at the top of Figure 23 show the average levels for the whole t_3-sample: 17% yes, 9% not anymore. It must be kept in mind that for some of the analyses only the »extreme« ends of contrast groups are part of the analysis (see the description in the figure for details of how groups were defined).

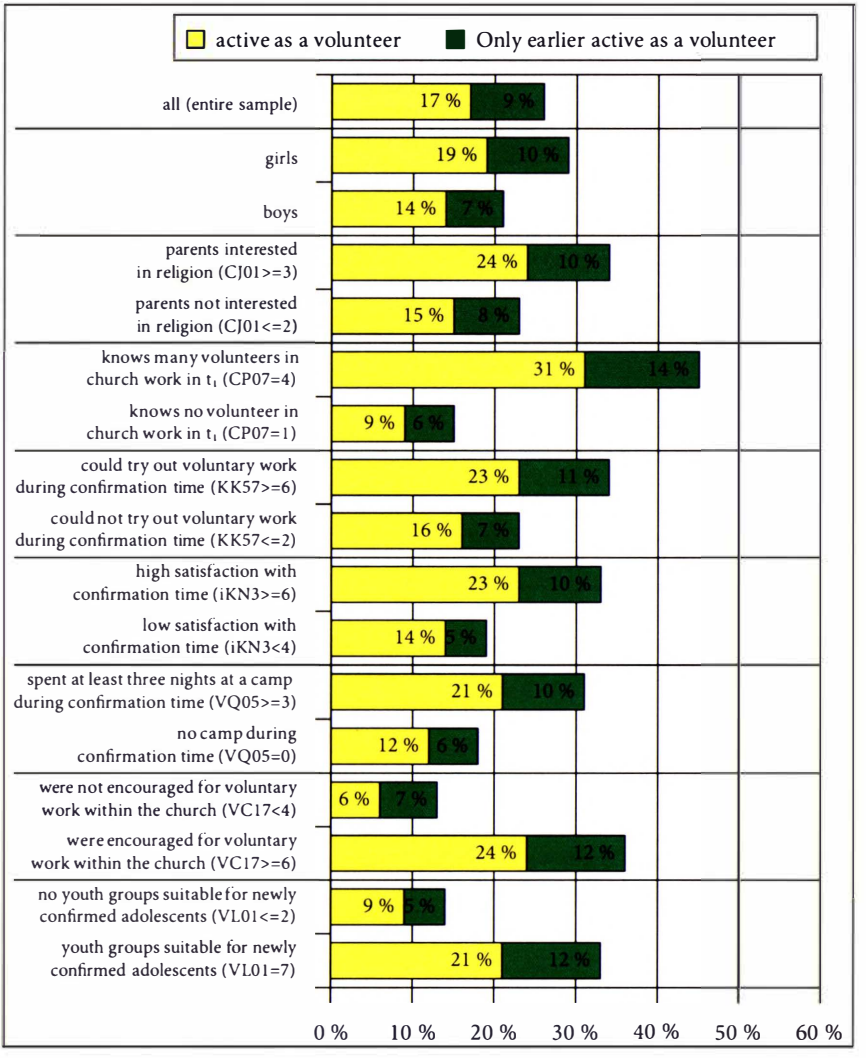
6.7 Short-Time Volunteers

The green bars in Figure 23 display the share of confirmands who started volunteering in the church after confirmation, but stopped before t_3 (which is two years after confirmation). It becomes clear that it is a relevant amount of the volunteers that only remain for a relatively short time. By comparing the proportion of »short-time volunteers« among those who started volunteering after confirmation, it can be seen which factors predict the termination of volunteerism. Figure 24 displays the respective proportions.

The figure shows that the differences are low for most contrast groups. Two markable differences refer to the social setting: those adolescents who come from families with low religious interest and from backgrounds not used to volunteerism are more likely to end their voluntary work soon after they started it (for this question also cf. above, p. 105 ff.). With other words: it is not only unlikely that these adolescents start voluntary activities – their risk of dropping it is also higher than that of adolescents who come from backgrounds that are typically more related with later volunteerism.

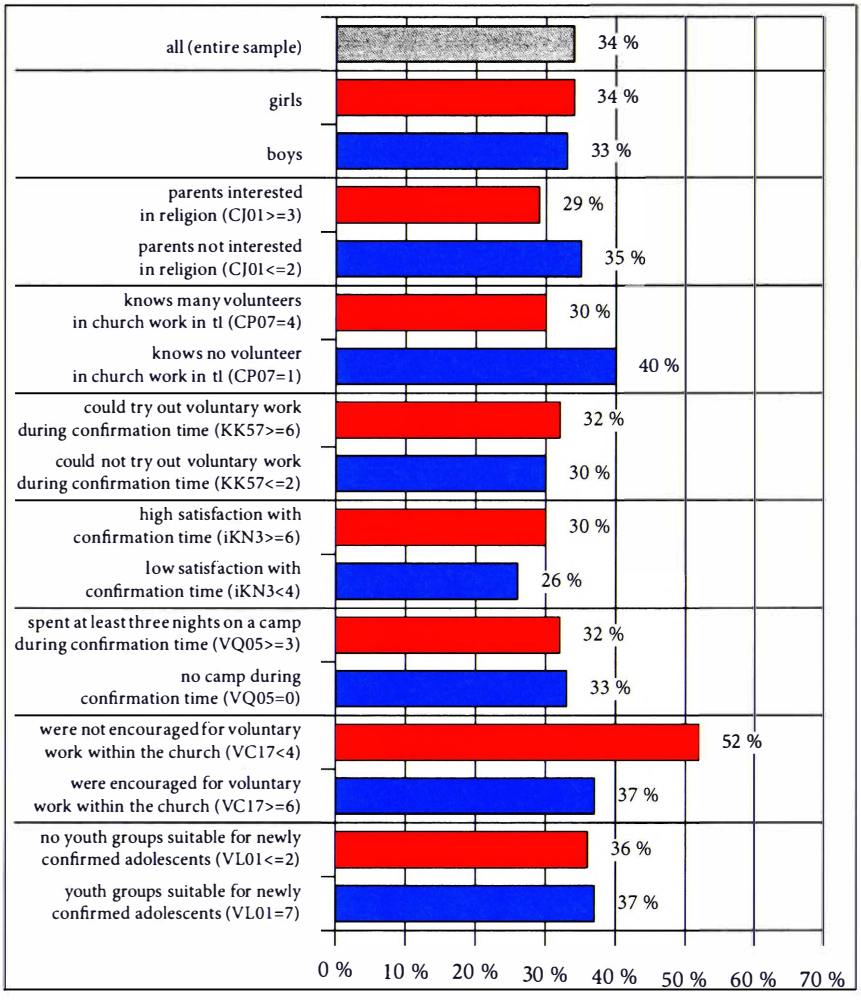
A strong predictive power can be seen in the item VC17: confirmands in groups, where workers perceived that only a small amount of encouragement for voluntary work has taken place during confirmation time are much more likely to end their voluntary work soon after beginning it.

Figure 23: Share of confirmands that are active in volunteer work after confirmation time (QP51), depending on various predictors



N = 517 (still active = yes), N = 261 (only earlier), N = 2246 (not active). Note that this figure has a slightly different database than Table 24 and Table 25: all cases were included that had valid answers for the respective item. In order to highlight the differences, the contrast groups were not always defined by a split-half procedure. Sometimes only the »extreme groups« were used – see the definitions in the brackets. The N in the respective comparisons differs due to these extreme groups.

Figure 24: Share of »short-time volunteers« of all volunteers who started volunteering after confirmation



N = 517 (still active), N = 261 (only earlier). See remarks under Figure 23.

6.8 Conclusion

The results of this study support the notions of earlier research of the importance of family background. However, the research also points out the importance of broader religious and social surroundings. The research showed that the religiosity of parents had an influence both on young people's beliefs and

on how important church membership was for them two years after confirmation on all three measured levels, meaning that not only the individual context, but also the religious climate in the parish and even the larger context of society and the respective church matter. All of these were more important in explaining later attitudes than confirmation experiences which, however, also showed significant importance. This supports the earlier notions of the importance of plausibility structures in maintaining beliefs. If one is surrounded by others with similar beliefs and worldviews in general, one is much more likely to maintain his/her meaning systems. The influences from the primary socialisers are of most importance. However, also the general religious climate both at a group level (religiosity of confirmands' families in general) and at a broader societal or church level (religiosity of parents in this church in general) are important. However, this also raises questions for the future. If parents' religiosity is continuously decreasing as some recent studies suggest (for example Germany: Bedford-Strohm/Jung 2015; Bucher 2009; Voas/Doebler 2011), it is highly probable that this will affect future religiosity of the adolescents in the next decades.

However, there is more to say than just reflecting the high dependency of the parents' formative role. In all three analyses, satisfaction with confirmation time had a significant impact on the effects two years after confirmation. Confirmands who enjoy their confirmation time are more likely to maintain their attachment to Christian faith, regard church membership as important and have a higher probability of starting into a volunteer activity.

Especially concerning the stimulation of volunteerism, the analysis shows the important role of experiences during confirmation time. A confirmation time that aims at encouraging confirmands to do voluntary work is in fact a good predictor for this result, especially when confirmands have the chance to try out voluntary work and if youth groups are available for the time after confirmation. The number of nights in camps is an additional predictor for volunteerism – camps can be regarded as the »observatory for volunteerism« in which confirmands see what volunteering means in practice and become motivated to get active themselves.

The analyses show that it is difficult to gain confirmands from »untypical backgrounds« (i.e., unreligious families, no church volunteers in their surrounding). It is also likely that those few who do start a voluntary activity will drop it within the first two years. For church leaders this means that it takes a lot of effort to guide these young people not only into becoming volunteers but also during their time as volunteers. And as the number of adolescents without strong prior church background might increase in the coming years due to changes in society, it seems very advisable to strengthen the forces in confirmation work and youth work that are willing and able to foster voluntary work among young people.