

Effects of Gender and Stress on Altruism

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ABSTRACT

Lending a helping hand to the person in need with or without expecting something in return is known as pro-social behavior and one of the motivation of pro-social behavior is helping others without any expectations of what you might get in return is Altruism. The present study attempt to determine a relation between an individual's sex and display of altruistic behavior. Many studies have shown that male and female display different behavioral patterns these are influenced by the societal norms, stereotypes, culture and difference in upbringing. These factors also effect the altruistic behavior displayed by individuals of different sex. With the help of the present study the researcher tries to evaluate which sex is more prone to show altruism in their surroundings. The study also evaluates the effect of stress on altruism using Perceived Stress Scale. For the present study a sample size of 120 under-graduate college students (N=120; 60=males, 60=females) were drawn belonging to the age group of 19years- 23years which were evaluated through the Altruistic Personality Scale. The results highlight that altruistic behavior is more likely to be higher in females than males and people tend to show more altruistic behavior gestures while expressing stress in their lives to decrease the impact of negative emotions caused by it.

Keywords: *Altruism, Gender, Stress.*

To a greater extent than any other species, human beings help their closely related as well as unrelated individuals. Prosocial behavior or the helping behavior is any voluntary action of the individual intended to help or benefit other individuals or a group of individuals. Altruism is an important motivation for prosocial behaviour, altruism is our conscious desire to help others with no self-interest or any expectation of reward. Altruism involves true selflessness towards the recipient. When we make the effort to give without the expectations of reciprocity, we feel fulfilled and recognized.

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The helping behavior is mostly promoted by many religions in the world as a moral value. *Buddhism* encourages us to focus on love and compassion which are components of all forms of Buddhism, it can be characterized as “altruistic”. As Dalai Lama said that Buddhism is a religion which shows kindness towards others, he also recites that our own sense of well-being becomes greater as we go on caring about the happiness of others (Speech by Dalai Lama; refer to Bettian Bock von Wulfingen, 2013). Altruism was one of the central teachings by Jesus found in Gospel (Christ’s teachings), especially in the Sermon on the Mount which is the first sermon of Jesus in Gospel of Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Gospel of Luke in *Christianity*. In *Islam*, “referring others to oneself” is the notion of ‘iṭhār’ (إيثار) (altruism). Islam says that it’s a demand by Allah himself that one has to care selflessly for the well-being of others for humans are the property of Allah, man was made by Allah and Allah is within every man so caring for another person basically suggests caring for Allah (M (2004). Key concepts in the Practice of Sufism: Emerald Hills of the Heart). For *Sikhism*, altruism is one of the most essential components and it suggests that one of the greatest things anyone can do in their lifetime is to imbibe and live the godly qualities such as love, affection, sacrifice, patience, harmony and truthfulness. Guru Tegh Bahadur, sacrificed his head to protect the weak people who couldn’t defend themselves against atrocity. Altruistic acts are well received and are central to Hindu morality in *Hinduism* as quoted in Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8 “One should not behave towards others in a way that is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish nature”.

Giving is more of a blessing than receiving. In the Indian literature there have been acts of altruism which were always an inspiration as India being a democratic and secular country has always been focused on working towards the welfare of the society as a whole. Mother Teresa also called as the Angel of Mercy in 1950 established a Missionaries of Charity, an order dedicated towards caring for the sick, homeless and helpless. In the same line of reference, Azim Premji, considered to be the most philanthropic person as far as the donations are concerned is believed to have donated \$2 billion towards education in India out of his total worth of \$18 billion. Anil Agarwal, chairman of Vedanta group has pledged to give away 75 per cent of his wealth which is around Rs 16,200 crore (Rs 162 billion) to charity, which has now made him corporate India’s biggest donor. Sindhutai Sapkal is a great example proving that helping not necessarily means providing money, but also to give love, care and affection to the ones in need. She is known for raising orphan children and has been named the ‘Mother of Orphans’. Till date, she has provided home and motherly care to more than 1000 children and some of these orphans have also grown up to be doctors and lawyers giving new directions to their careers. Her work was acknowledged after a movie was released on her story in 2010. She has been honored several times since then.

Male and Female

Gender is the most common and important social category (Weatherall and Gallois, 487). Gender differences are exclusively studied and a lot of information has been collected on the typical behaviors of male and female. Sex of an individual is defined since birth and ever

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since their birth they are expected to behave and look accordingly (Cameron 2007, Tannen 1990, 43). Altruism gets affected by the gender differences in many ways. Various researchers studied the effect of gender differences on the helping behavior. According to The National Altruistic Study the interrelation of sex with the helping behavior is found to be in strong association with each other. Men might be more helping, altruistic and chivalrous in some situations but most social science evidences points out in the opposite direction. Females engage themselves in pro-social behavior more than the male population (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998; Fabes and Eisenberg, 1998) like females are more sensitive, kind, considerate, willing to do more charity, more comforting and more empathetic than males (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, 2004; Eisenberg and Lenon, 1983; meta analytic $d = -0.27$). There are neurological studies which further suggest that a woman's empathetic concerns are more than that of a man (Christove-Moore et al., 2004; Schulte-Ruther et al., 2008). As an example, men use more reflective brain areas, whereas, more emotional brain areas appear to be used by women when engaging themselves in empathy, perspective taking, affective responsiveness and emotion recognition (Derntl et al., 2010). Schulte-Ruther et al.'s neurological studies show a typical female brain has higher systemizing than capabilities. Eagly (1987) also suggested that women show more pro-social behavior than men. Women comparatively happen to provide more emotional support and counselling towards those in need of help. Schulte-Ruther et al. (2008) support this statement by verifying that women get higher scores in empathy tests and also tend to perform better in emotional tasks. Women are therefore considered more inclined into nurturing and empathetic helping behavior while men are more into chivalrous and heroic helping deeds.

Stress

Even though stress is an important psychological mechanism without which we could not survive, it is becoming the most common phenomena experienced by individuals of all age groups in everyday living. Formally, stress is the response of the body to pressure or threat which disturbs the homeostatic balance of the body. Both metabolic and behavioral changes are included in the adaptive response of the stressful behavior (Pfaff, 2005). The source through which the stress arises is known as the stressor which activates the body's flight-flight response helping the body to cope up with the stress either by facing the challenge or by flee. The General Adaptation Syndrome (Hans Selye, 1936) is based on physiology and psychobiology factors which explains the reaction of any organism during a stressful event. According to this model, any stressor leads to a three-stage bodily response. The first being the Alarm stage (fight-flight response), then the organism undergoes the Resistance stage (while body focuses resources against the stressor, the Parasympathetic nervous system returns many physiological functions to normal levels) and the last stage is known as the Exhaustion stage (If the stressor persists, the resources become exhausted and the body is susceptible to disease and death) .

Pro-social behavior like empathy and altruism is promoted stress as suggested by different researches (Taylor et al., 2000; de Waal and Suchak, 2010). To feel lighter during the stressful days human beings engage themselves in activities which makes them feel better in

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spite of the strain and pressure they have been experiencing lately. Activities like taking a walk in the fresh air, going for a holiday, making plans or strategies to deal with the stressor, spending time with our loved ones to name a few help us coping with our daily stress. Along with these activities altruistic behavior is also said to dampen the effect of everyday stress. Females across many species may be characterized by a more pro-social “tend and befriend” response when faced with stressful situations (Taylor et al., 2000; Preston, 2013). Tending refers to caring for offspring, and befriending referring to connecting with conspecifics, protects an organism’s offspring and may help social groups collaborate under stressful conditions (Taylor et al., 2000). Stress can lead to pro-social behavior in males as well as females and evidences for the same are supported by several recent studies (Takahashi et al., 2007; von Dawans et al., 2012; Vinkers et al., 2013). It has also been observed that male and female do not experience similar level of stress. Brougham et al. (2009) conducted a study of college students to assess the sex differences, stress and coping strategies. It revealed that large amount of stress was felt by female college students than college men (Brougham et al., 2009). According to a study Women are exposed to more daily stress associated activities with their routine role functioning (Kessler & McLeod, 1984), men have been found to have less chronic stress than women (McDonough & Walters, 2001; Turner et al., 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999).

According to a research published in The Journal of the Association for Psychological Science providing help to people around us be it strangers can diminish the impact of everyday hazardous stressors on our emotional and mental health. If we take part in doing small things for others like helping with school home-work, holding a door for someone, giving food to the beggar, giving directions to someone on the road, etc. it impacts in the decrease of negative emotions making us feel better. In some laboratory experiments observations were made that an inclination in positive emotions of a person is seen which helps in coping with stress when they provide support to the needy ones. Another study to be quoted as a evidence found that pro-social and altruistic behavior leads to increases in positive emotions (Aknin et al., 2013). Thereby decreasing the negative emotions an individual faces due to stress.

Altruistic deeds Boosts a person’s self-esteem and confidence. It Increases resilience and longevity. Therefore when an individual is in a stressful situation they often show altruistic behavior as it decreases the negative emotions of helplessness, low confidence and thoughts of giving up. Altruistic behavior acts like a coping strategy when an individual faces stress and helps them to deal with the situation.

METHOD

The objective of the study was to see the effect of gender on altruism and to examine the relationship between stress and altruism. Past researches show that females exhibit more altruistic behavior than males. The researchers also show that stress has a positive impact on the altruistic behavior of an individual i.e when in stress individual’s tend to indulge themselves in more altruistic acts.

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Sample:

Quantitative research was done, where the data was collected from under-graduate Delhi University students by proportionate stratified random sampling to study the relationship. The sample size included 120 participants (120=male, 120=female). The mean age and standard deviation of participant's was 19.39 and 0.87 respectively. Participants were assured of confidentiality and upon their agreement data was collected through questionnaire.

Tools:

1. **Altruistic personality scale:** Rushton, J.P., Chrisjohn, R.D., & Fekken, G.C. in 1981 developed the Altruistic Personality Scale. The scale has 20 item designed to measure the altruistic tendencies by evaluating the frequency one engage in altruistic acts toward strangers. Participants answer on a 5 point scale ranging from Never (0) to Very Often (4).

2. **Perceived stress scale:** Sheldon Cohen (1983) developed the Perceived stress scale. It is a measure of the degree to which an individual appraised different situations in his/her life as stressful. Participants answer on a 4 point rating scale ranging from Never (1) to Very Often (4).

RESULT

Independent samples t-test was calculated among the variables in order to examine the contribution of gender on altruism and stress.

Table 1:- Descriptive statistics

Measures	Male		Female		t-value (df=118)
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Stress	19.23	6.85	22.18	5.50	2.59
Altruism	49.61	10.04	56.58	12.75	3.32

Table 1 shows that the mean of females (56.58) having a standard deviation of 12.75 is higher than the mean value of males (49.61) having a standard deviation of 10.04 for altruism. Similarly, the mean of females (22.18) having a standard deviation of 5.50 is high for stress than the mean of males (19.23) and standard deviation 6.85.

Table 2:- Correlation between stress and altruism

Measures	Stress	Altruism
Stress	1	.235**
Altruism	.235**	1

**p<0.01 (2 tailed)

A scrutiny of table 2 shows that there is a positive relationship between altruism and stress. The correlation between altruism and stress is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was to study the association between altruism and gender and also examine the impact of stress on altruistic behavior. 120 undergraduate students of Delhi picked by stratified random sampling were assessed through questionnaires. Results were analyzed using t tests and Pearson's coefficient of correlation. The results of the study are deliberated as following according to the result tables:

The first objective of the research was to examine the effect of gender on altruism. Table 1 results clearly highlight that both males and females show altruistic behavior but the female population indulge in it more than the male population. Sex has been found to be strongly related to the altruistic deeds. This association of the altruistic behavior with gender makes both male and female behave differently in different situations. Women happen to be more empathetic and sensitive while male population behaves more with gentlemanliness and chivalry. Many studies show that women are more empathetic than males (Schieman & Van Gundy, 2000;Gault & Sabini, 2000; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987; Batson et al., 1996;Macaskill et al., 2002). Experimental Studies also gave evidences for women, on average, to be more altruist than men (Bolton and Katok (1995); Eckel and Grossman (1998); Andreoni and Vesterlund (2001); Dufwenberg and Muren (2006); Houser and Schunk (2009); Dreber et al. (2014); Capraro and Marcelletti (2014); Capraro (2015)). Rand et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis, promoting intuition versus reflection increases altruistic behavior among women, suggesting that women have internalized altruism as their spontaneous reaction.

The second objective of the research focused on how stress influences altruism. The findings of table 2 suggest that there is a positive correlation between stress and altruism which is significant at 0.01 level suggesting that when the amount of daily stress increases in an individual's life the altruistic behavior also increases due to which the human being is able to deal with the negative emotions of the day to day life making themselves feel better about the small helpful things they do for others like helping a friend out with a problem, helping your mother in the kitchen, etc. Researchers suggest that stress promotes pro-social behavior like empathy and altruism (Taylor et al., 2000; de Waal and Suchak, 2010). Aknin et al., 2013 in his study found that prosocial and altruistic behavior leads to increases in positive emotions. In another study young men were exposed to a stressful task (The trier social stress test), and then the prosocial and antisocial behaviors were measured. The stress condition increased subsequent trust, trustworthiness, and sharing promoting more positive behavior (Von Dawans et al., 2012). Research also suggests that people also display risky prosocial behaviour when faced with highly stressful situations (Preston, 2013;Preston and de Waal, 2011)

Various studies were proposed indicating the difference between a female and a male when it comes to altruistic behavior and also providing evidences for positive correlation between stress and altruism. These studies support the notion of female population being more altruistic than the male population and proves that when stress increases so does the helping behavior.

CONCLUSION

The study examined that females experience more helping behavior than males and are also more prone to stress than the male population of India. If the level of stress in an individual's life increases with a significant amount then there's a significant amount of increment in their altruistic behavior too.

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