

Research Paper

Prosocial Behaviour and Moral Judgement among Adults

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ABSTRACT

Prosocial behaviour refers to voluntary actions intended to benefit others, including helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating. Moral judgement is the cognitive process through which individuals evaluate actions as right or wrong based on ethical principles and social norms. Although previous research has examined these constructs in children and adolescents, limited evidence is available among Indian adults. The present study examined the relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement and investigated whether prosocial behaviour predicts moral judgement among adults. A quantitative correlational research design was employed with a sample of 100 adults. Prosocial behaviour and moral judgement were assessed using standardized psychological measures. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement ($r = .517, p < .001$). Simple linear regression demonstrated that prosocial behaviour significantly predicted moral judgement, explaining 26.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .267, F(1,98) = 35.74, p < .001$). These findings suggest that individuals exhibiting greater prosocial tendencies also demonstrate stronger moral judgement. The study contributes to understanding moral functioning among adults and provides implications for educational, organizational, and community interventions aimed at promoting ethical behaviour and social responsibility.

Keywords: *Prosocial Behaviour, Moral Judgement, Adults, Pearson Correlation, Linear Regression, Moral Development*

Prosocial behaviour is fundamental to the healthy functioning of society because it promotes cooperation, empathy, compassion, helping, and positive interpersonal relationships. It contributes to individual well-being while strengthening communities, workplaces, educational institutions, and families. Prosocial behaviour develops from early childhood and continues across adulthood through social learning, empathy, moral values, and cultural influences.

Moral judgement refers to an individual's evaluation of whether an action is right or wrong based on ethical principles, fairness, justice, and concern for others. Classical theories proposed by Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Turiel describe moral judgement as developing through increasingly sophisticated stages of cognitive and social development. Individuals

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with stronger moral reasoning are generally expected to engage in more socially responsible and prosocial behaviours.

Developmental Stages of Prosocial Behaviour

1. **Early childhood:** The foundation of prosocial behaviour begins in early childhood through parents and caregivers. Children learn kindness, sharing, and helping by observing others.
2. **Middle Childhood:** During school years, children develop a better understanding of fairness, cooperation, and respect. Friendships, teamwork, and group activities encourage sharing and helping behaviours.
3. **Adolescence:** Adolescents develop stronger empathy, emotional understanding, and moral values. They may engage in community service and social causes while forming beliefs about fairness and responsibility.
4. **Early Adulthood:** Expanding social roles such as work, relationships, parenting, and caregiving increase opportunities for helping and supportive behaviour.
5. **Middle Adulthood:** Adults focus more on contributing to society and future generations through mentoring, community support, and charitable activities.
6. **Late Adulthood:** Older adults often express prosocial behaviour through guidance, emotional support, volunteering, and sharing life experiences, showing greater compassion and social concern.

Factors Influencing Prosocial Behaviour

Prosocial behaviour is influenced by various psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape individuals' willingness to help and support others. Empathy is considered one of the strongest predictors, as understanding another person's emotions often encourages helping behaviour. Altruism, or helping without expecting rewards, also promotes prosocial actions through compassion and moral responsibility. Moral values such as honesty, kindness, fairness, and justice, along with social norms encouraging cooperation and care, further influence supportive behaviour.

Parenting style and cultural background play important roles in prosocial development, as children learn helping behaviours through observation, guidance, and social experiences. Additionally, personality traits such as agreeableness and kindness, emotional intelligence, and positive past experiences of helping strengthen prosocial tendencies. Overall, prosocial behaviour develops through the interaction of empathy, altruism, moral values, social influences, personality, and life experiences.

Models of Prosocial behaviour:

1. Social Exchange Model

The Social Exchange Model explains prosocial behaviour from an egoistic perspective, suggesting that individuals help others after evaluating the potential costs and rewards of their actions. According to this model, empathy and helping behaviour influence moral judgement through perceptions of personal benefit, social approval, or emotional satisfaction. Adults may therefore judge helping behaviour differently depending on situational consequences and expected outcomes.

2. Social Learning Model

Albert Bandura proposed the Social Learning Model, which explains prosocial behaviour as learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Individuals acquire helping

behaviours by observing parents, teachers, peers, and media role models. When prosocial actions are rewarded through praise, approval, or acceptance, they are more likely to be repeated and gradually become internalized as stable behavioural patterns.

The model emphasizes observational learning, reinforcement, cognitive processes, and self-regulation. Over time, external rewards are replaced by internal standards such as moral satisfaction or guilt. Empathy develops through modeled emotional responses and increases the likelihood that learned prosocial behaviours will be expressed in real situations. Moral judgement is also shaped through social learning, as individuals learn what is right or wrong by observing social reactions to helping and non-helping behaviour.

3. Arousal: Cost–Reward Model (Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981)

The **Arousal: Cost–Reward Model** explains prosocial behaviour as a decision-making process that occurs when an individual witnesses another person in need or distress. According to the model, observing someone who requires assistance creates a state of emotional arousal, which may include feelings of empathy, discomfort, or personal distress. This emotional arousal motivates the observer to reduce the unpleasant feelings by evaluating the potential costs and rewards associated with helping or not helping. The costs of helping may include time, effort, physical risk, or financial expense, whereas the rewards may involve social approval, personal satisfaction, reduced guilt, or the well-being of the person in need. If the perceived rewards of helping outweigh the associated costs, the individual is more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour. Conversely, when the costs are perceived as greater than the benefits, the individual may choose to avoid the situation or refrain from helping. The model highlights that prosocial behaviour is influenced by both emotional responses and rational evaluation, making it an important framework for understanding helping behaviour and its relationship with moral judgement.

- **Emotional arousal:** Witnessing another person's distress evokes emotional responses such as empathy or personal discomfort.
- **Cost–benefit analysis:** Individuals evaluate the potential costs and rewards of helping versus not helping.
- **Decision to help or avoid:** Helping behaviour is more likely when the perceived benefits outweigh the anticipated costs.

4. Prosocial Moral Reasoning Model (Eisenberg, 1986)

The **Prosocial Moral Reasoning Model**, developed by **Nancy Eisenberg (1986)**, explains prosocial behaviour as a consequence of moral reasoning used in situations where helping another person may involve personal cost or sacrifice. Unlike Kohlberg's theory, which focuses on reasoning about justice, rights, and laws, Eisenberg's model specifically examines how individuals make decisions about helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating with others. According to the model, prosocial behaviour develops alongside cognitive and moral development, progressing from self-centred motives to decisions guided by empathy, concern for others, and internalized moral values. As individuals mature, they become increasingly capable of considering the needs, feelings, and welfare of others, leading to more consistent and altruistic helping behaviours. The model suggests that higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning are associated with greater empathy, stronger moral judgement, and an increased likelihood of engaging in prosocial actions.

5. Empathy–Altruism Model (Batson, 1991)

The Empathy–Altruism Model, proposed by C. Daniel Batson (1991), explains prosocial behaviour by suggesting that genuine helping is primarily motivated by empathic concern for another person rather than by personal gain or self-interest. According to the model, when individuals perceive another person experiencing distress or suffering, they may experience empathy, which involves feelings of compassion, sympathy, warmth, and concern for the individual's well-being. This empathic response generates an altruistic motivation, leading individuals to help solely to improve the other person's welfare, even when helping involves personal cost or offers no external reward. Batson argued that helping behaviour driven by empathy is fundamentally different from helping motivated by the desire to obtain rewards, avoid punishment, or reduce personal distress. Thus, the model emphasizes that empathy is one of the strongest psychological determinants of prosocial behaviour and plays a crucial role in promoting compassionate and morally responsible actions.

Stages of Prosocial Moral Reasoning

1. **Hedonistic or Self-Focused Orientation:** At the earliest stage, individuals make helping decisions based primarily on personal needs, desires, or expected rewards. Helping occurs only when it provides a direct benefit or helps avoid punishment. Little consideration is given to the needs or feelings of others.
2. **Needs-Oriented Orientation:** At this stage, individuals begin to recognize that other people have needs and emotions. They may choose to help because they understand that someone requires assistance, although their decisions are still not strongly influenced by empathy or broader moral principles.
3. **Approval and Interpersonal Orientation:** Helping behaviour becomes influenced by the desire to gain approval from parents, teachers, friends, or society. Individuals engage in prosocial actions because they want to be viewed as kind, responsible, and socially acceptable.
4. **Empathic Orientation:** Individuals increasingly consider the emotional experiences of others and demonstrate genuine empathy and compassion. Helping decisions are guided by concern for another person's well-being rather than by external rewards or social approval. Moral judgement becomes more sensitive to fairness, kindness, and reducing another person's suffering.
5. **Internalized Orientation:** The highest level of prosocial moral reasoning is characterized by decisions based on deeply held moral principles and personal values. Individuals help because they believe it is ethically right and consistent with principles such as justice, compassion, responsibility, and respect for human dignity. Prosocial behaviour at this stage reflects an internal commitment to moral values rather than external expectations or personal gain.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Paciello et al. (2013) demonstrated that although adolescents possessed strong prosocial values and moral reasoning, moral disengagement reduced their willingness to help when personal sacrifice was involved. These findings indicate that moral reasoning alone may not always translate into prosocial action when competing personal interests are present.

Kanngiesser, P., Barrett (2020), explored the role of social norms in shaping prosocial behaviour across eight diverse societies. The findings showed that adults' prosocial behaviour was strongly influenced by the social norms accepted within their society. The study also found that children across cultures develop responsiveness to social norms in a

similar way, and that culturally specific prosocial behaviours emerge alongside this development during middle childhood. These results suggest that prosocial behaviour is guided by a universal psychological tendency to respond to social norms, while cultural differences influence how such behaviours are expressed.

Bailey, R. House et.al. (2020), cross-cultural study across eight societies found that adults' prosocial behaviour was strongly influenced by prevailing social norms, while children's responsiveness to social norms developed similarly across cultures. The findings suggest that the development and variation of prosocial behaviour are shaped by universally developing sensitivity to normative information.

Bocian and Myslinska Szarek (2021) reported that children considered an individual's previous moral behaviour when judging harmful actions but not when evaluating helping behaviour, suggesting that moral evaluations become increasingly sophisticated during development.

Söldner and Paulus (2024) similarly demonstrated that moral self-concept develops alongside helping, sharing, and comforting behaviours, indicating reciprocal relationships between individuals' moral self-perceptions and their prosocial actions. Computational approaches to moral decision-making have also highlighted the influence of cognitive biases on ethical decision-making, suggesting that moral behaviour results from interactions between reasoning processes and contextual influences.

A study among Malaysian adolescents reported that moral identity was positively associated with both moral judgement and prosocial behaviour, while moral judgement mediated the relationship between moral emotions and helping behaviour. These findings indicate that moral reasoning serves as an important psychological mechanism linking emotional processes with prosocial actions. Similarly, Mohd Yusoff et al. (2022) found that religiosity, moral reasoning, and internalization of moral values significantly promoted prosocial behaviour among secondary school students, emphasizing the role of ethical values in encouraging helping behaviour.

Tiwari, P. et al. (2022) reported that prosocial motivation mediated the relationships between empathy, moral judgement, and social entrepreneurial intentions, highlighting the broader societal importance of moral values in promoting socially beneficial behaviour beyond interpersonal interactions.

Olmos-Gómez (2023), examined the human values that predict prosocial behaviour in relation to transcendental beliefs, cultural development, and interpersonal relationships. Using a sample of 1,712 individuals from the multicultural Spanish city of Melilla, the researchers found that prosocial behaviour differed based on gender and participation in volunteering. Regression analyses showed that transcendental values, cultural and affective development, gender, and volunteering significantly predicted prosocial behaviour. The findings particularly emphasized the importance of transcendental values and the strong role of women as socializing agents in promoting prosocial actions.

Paulus, M. (2024), investigated the relationship between children's moral self-concept (MSC) and prosocial behaviours such as helping, sharing, and comforting from ages 4 to 6 years. Results showed that a clear three-dimensional moral self-concept developed by ages 5 and 6 and different types of prosocial behaviour developed differently over time. The study

also found links between self-concept and helping behaviour, particularly in comforting behaviours.

Chunuha P., et.al. researched on 3–5-year-old children and found that positive moral emotions significantly enhanced helping, sharing, and comforting behaviours. Although prosocial behaviour varied with age, the positive effects of moral emotions were consistent across age and gender, highlighting the importance of fostering positive moral emotions to promote early prosocial development.

Maier, M. (2025), examined moral and prosocial decision-making in modern challenges such as climate change using data from over 25 million individuals. Findings showed that moral decisions are influenced by behavioural biases despite the use of reasonable moral strategies. The study also highlighted the importance of computational modelling and bias-adjusted analysis in understanding moral and prosocial behaviour.

Zhang, H. (2025), investigated why highly altruistic individuals may sometimes be viewed as less moral by others. Results showed that people who gave away all their resources were seen as less predictable and were judged more negatively than those who shared moderately. The study also found that honesty-humility reduced these negative perceptions, suggesting that extreme altruism may appear unusual or unpredictable to others.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement among adults.
2. To determine whether prosocial behaviour significantly predicts moral judgement.

Hypothesis

- **Hypothesis H1:** Prosocial behaviour will be positively associated with moral judgement among adults.
- **Hypothesis H2:** Prosocial behaviour will significantly predict moral judgement among adults.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative correlational research design. Data were collected from 100 adults using standardized psychological measures of prosocial behaviour and moral judgement. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and simple linear regression to evaluate the proposed relationship and predictive effect.

Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM-R): This scale is developed by Gusto Carlo and B.A. Randall in year 2002. It is 5 point likert scale. It's reliability ranges from 0.70 to 0.85.

Moral Identity Scale (MIS): This scale is developed by Karl Aquino and Americus Reed in 2002. It is 5 point likert scale. 0.77 to 0.83.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Prosocial behaviour Mean	100	2.863	0.512	1.0 – 5.0
Moral judgement Mean	100	3.031	0.520	1.0 – 5.0

*Range is (Min - Max)

The mean score for Prosocial Behaviour was **2.86** ($SD = 0.51$), while the mean score for Moral Judgement was **3.03** ($SD = 0.52$), indicating moderate average scores on both variables.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement, $r(98) = .517$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that higher levels of prosocial behaviour were associated with higher levels of moral judgement.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation

Variables	r	p	Interpretation
Prosocial behaviour Mean vs Moral judgement Mean	0.517	< .001	Moderate positive, statistically significant

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between Prosocial behaviour and Moral judgement ($r = .517$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Regression Summary

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
R^2	0.267	26.7% variance explained
Adjusted R^2	0.260	
F Statistic	35.74	
Model p-value	3.67E-08 (<.001)	Significant model
Observations / Sample Size	100	

Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression was performed to determine whether prosocial behaviour predicts moral judgement. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1,98) = 35.74$, $p < .001$, explaining **26.7%** of the variance in moral judgement ($R^2 = .267$, Adjusted $R^2 = .260$). Prosocial behaviour emerged as a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.525$, $SE = 0.088$, $t = 5.978$, $p < .001$). Thus, proving research hypothesis (H1).

Table 4. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	1.527	0.256	5.975	<.001	1.020–2.034
Prosocial Behaviour	0.525	0.088	5.978	<.001	0.351–0.700

Regression coefficient analysis showed that prosocial behaviour was a statistically significant positive predictor of moral judgement ($B = 0.525$, $SE = 0.088$, $t = 5.978$, $p < .001$).

.001). Specifically, for every one-unit increase in prosocial behaviour, moral judgement increased by approximately 0.525 units. The 95% confidence interval did not include zero, further supporting the statistical significance of the predictor.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7.155	1	7.155	35.738	< .001
Residual	19.619	98	0.200		
Total	26.774	99			

The ANOVA results indicated that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1,98) = 35.738$, $p < .001$. These findings support the research hypothesis (H2) by demonstrating that prosocial behaviour significantly predicts moral judgement among adults.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement among adults. The findings revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between the two constructs, indicating that individuals with higher levels of prosocial behaviour tend to exhibit stronger moral judgement. This finding is consistent with the literature summarized in the manuscript, which reports positive links among empathy, moral reasoning, moral identity, and prosocial behaviour across different populations.

Regression analysis further demonstrated that prosocial behaviour significantly predicted moral judgement, accounting for approximately 26.7% of the variance. Although this indicates that other psychological and social factors also influence moral judgement, the findings suggest that prosocial tendencies represent an important contributor to ethical decision-making among adults. These results align with the theoretical perspectives discussed in the manuscript, including Social Learning Theory and the Social Exchange Model, which emphasize that helping behaviour and moral evaluations are shaped through social experiences, reinforcement, and internalized values.

Overall, the study contributes evidence from an adult sample and addresses the research gap identified in the manuscript regarding the limited focus on Indian adults.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between prosocial behaviour and moral judgement, indicating that individuals with higher levels of prosocial behaviour are more likely to demonstrate stronger moral judgement. Furthermore, the regression analysis confirmed that prosocial behaviour significantly predicts moral judgement, explaining 26.7% of the variance in moral judgement scores. These findings support the study hypotheses and reinforce the theoretical perspective that prosocial behaviour plays an important role in shaping ethical reasoning and moral decision-making. The findings are consistent with previous literature suggesting that helping behaviour, cooperation, sharing, and concern for others contribute to moral sensitivity and socially responsible behaviour. Although prosocial behaviour emerged as a significant predictor, moral judgement is influenced by multiple psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Future research should therefore examine additional predictors to develop a more comprehensive understanding of moral judgement among adults. Overall, the study

highlights the importance of promoting prosocial behaviour through educational institutions, workplaces, and community programmes to strengthen ethical decision-making and responsible citizenship.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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