



Relationship Between Prosocialness, Affect, and Mental Wellbeing

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Abstract : The aim of the present study was to assess the relationship between prosocialness, affect and mental wellbeing. A total of 184 young adults studying in various colleges of Delhi were recruited for the study. The sample consisted of 92 males and 92 females in the age range of 18-24 years (Mean age=20.9, SD=1.45) selected using a purposive sampling method. Measures to assess prosocialness, affects and mental wellbeing were administered on all the participants. Prosocialness was found to have a significant positive correlation with positive affect and mental well-being, while no significant correlation was found between prosocialness and negative affect. The study demonstrates that increase in prosocial behaviour is associated with increase in both positive affect and mental wellbeing. The results of this study contribute to a growing literature supporting the benefits of indulging in prosocial behaviour in different aspects of life. It highlights the significance of educating the masses about the benefits of prosocial behaviour to ourselves in addition to development of a more benevolent and compassionate society.

Keyword: Negative Affect, Positive affect, Pro-socialness, Well Being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kindness is rewarding. One does not become poor by giving away to charity. The above statements may seem like sweet words to tempt someone into indulging in charity but in fact nothing is more true than these proverbs. Being kind to fellow beings not just does good to others but also augments our own wellbeing. An act of kindness, no matter how trivial or big it may seem, goes a big way in promoting happiness and brotherhood in the society. It positively impacts on the lives of both the good Samaritan and the person receiving the good act, and encourages both to perform similar acts of kindness to more people. Acts of kindness are rewarding for the giver, especially so when these acts are performed without the intent of receiving anything in return. Baron, Branscombe, and Bhardwaj (2013) defined prosocial behaviour as an action by an individual with the intent to help another person, often with no immediate benefit to the helper. Such behaviour develops as a reaction of complex psychological processes involving attentional, evaluative processes, moral reasoning, social competence and self-regulatory capacities. We are more likely to indulge in prosocial acts when we feel empathy, a sense of similarity with ourselves and when we know that the other person is not responsible for his own problems etc.

A growing body of evidence suggests prosocial action can promote positive affect and emotion. Positive affect refers to enthusiasm, activeness and alertness while negative affect is a dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable mood. Both positive and negative effects are related to corresponding affective trait dimensions of positive and negative emotionality (Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Supporting this claim Nelson, Layous, Cole, and Lyubomirsky (2016) conducted a longitudinal study in which adults were assigned to commit either kind acts for others or kind acts for themselves for the 6 week period. It was observed that kindness directed towards others led to greater positive affect than self-oriented kindness. Similar study done by Aknin, Broesch, Hamlin & Vondervoort (2017) showed that helping others led to emotional satisfaction. It was seen that adults purchasing goods for others reported greater positive emotion than adults receiving goods for themselves. These findings indicate that the emotional rewards of giving are noticeable in people and support the likelihood that the hedonic benefits of generosity are universal. A particular theory of pro social behaviour is that empathic joy or state of happiness arises whenever we do a kind or charitable thing for another person. Research has proven that pro social behaviour leads to positive feelings, and positive feelings in turn lead to the increase in pro social behaviour. Carlson, Charlin and Miller (1988) discussed several theoretical rationales for the relationship between positive moods and prosocial behaviour. The simplest way to explain the relation may be that people in a good mood tend to perceive stimuli with a more positive and enhanced social outlook, thus having more yearning to extend help.

Being mentally healthy is not just the mere absence of mental illnesses. Mental well-being relates to a person's psychological functioning and ability to maintain mutually beneficial relationships. It includes the ability to sustain a sense of autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life and personal growth. A recent meta-analysis of 201 independent researches by Hui, Berzaghi, Cunningham-Amos and Kogan, (2020) suggested that prosocial behaviour was strongly related to psychological wellbeing. In

another study by Layouts et al (2012) on promoting prosocial behaviors, 9- to 11-year olds pre-adolescents were divided into 2 groups; one was instructed to perform three acts of kindness per week for 4 weeks and the other was asked to visit three places in a week for 4 weeks. It was seen that doing good for others benefited the givers, earning them not only improved well-being but also experiencing greater amount of peer acceptance than those who visited different places. Weinstein and Ryan (2010) tested the impact of autonomous and controlled motivation for helping others on well-being and found that autonomous motivation for helping others yielded benefits for both helper and recipient through greater need satisfaction.

Literature available today has shown prosocial behaviour as a valuable human attribute. Numerous studies have been done in the western population showing the beneficial effect of prosocialness on personal and social well being. However only few studies have been done on this topic in the Indian population. Each society has its own peculiarities and it needs to be seen how the sense of being socially helpful affects our people in terms of self and those receiving the help. Thus, a need was felt to study the relationship between prosocialness, affect and mental well-being.

Objectives:

To study the relationship between prosocialness, affect and mental well-being.

Hypotheses:

- 1) There will be a significant relationship between prosocialness and well- being.
- 2) There will be a significant relationship between prosocialness and positive affect.
- 3) There will be a significant relationship between prosocialness and negative affect.

II. METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted on 184 young adults studying in various colleges of Delhi. The sample consisted of 92 males and 92 females. The age of the participants ranged from 18-24 years (Mean age=20.9, SD=1.45). The participants were chosen using a purposive sampling method. The first step was to build a good rapport with all the participants to make them feel at ease. Informed consent was taken from all participants before administering the questionnaires and they were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Each questionnaire took about 15 minutes to get filled. The scoring was done for all the responses and the final scores were put into SPSS for further statistical analysis. Correlations among these four variables were computed on SPSS.

Tools used

- 1) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): The PANAS scale was developed by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988). It is one of the most widely used scales to assess the mood or emotion of an individual in various contexts. The scale comprises 20 items, with 10 items measuring positive affect and remaining 10 items measuring negative affect. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '1'= 'Very Slightly at all' to '5'= 'extremely. It has high alpha reliabilities ranging from .86 to .90 for positive affect and from .84 to .87 for negative affect.
- 2) Werwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS): WEMWBS was developed by Steward-Brown & Jan Mohamed (2008). It consists of 14 items of mental wellbeing covering subjective well-being and psychological functioning of a person. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale is scored by summing responses on all the items. The test-retest reliability after one week is 0.83 and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.89.
- 3) Pro-socialness Scale: Pro-socialness scale was developed by Caprara, Steca & Capanna (2005). It is a self-reported scale for assessing individual differences in adult pro-socialness. It consists of 16 items, rated on 1 to 5 Likert scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.91.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Variable

SCALE	N	MEAN	SD
Prosocial Behaviour	184	60.68	8.56
Mental Well Being	184	47.41	7.77
Positive Affect	184	33.07	7.21
Negative Affect	184	23.83	7.67

Table 2: Relationship between Pro-socialness, Affect and Mental Wellbeing.

Variables	Pro-socialness	Mental wellbeing	Positive affect	Negative affect
Pro-socialness	1	0.33**	0.28*	-0.03
Mental Well-Being	0.33**	1	0.65**	-0.24
Positive Affect	0.28*	0.65**	1	-0.16
Negative Affect	-0.03	-0.28*	-0.16	1

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

As shown in Table 2, the result of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation depicted a significant positive correlation between pro-socialness and mental well-being, $r(183) = 0.33$, $p < .01$, and between pro-socialness and positive affect, $r(183) = 0.28$, $p < .05$. However, no significant correlation was found between pro-socialness and negative affect, $r(-0.03) = p > .05$. Thus, proving the first and second hypothesis however, the third hypothesis is rejected.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted with the aim of assessing the relationship of pro-socialness with mental well-being and affect. A total of 184 participants (82 males and 92 females) from the age group 18-24 years were taken for this purpose. A correlational design (Pearson's product moment correlation) was used to find out the relationship of pro-socialness with mental well-being and positive and negative affect.

The results of correlation analysis depicted that prosocial behaviour had a significant positive correlation with mental wellbeing. This indicated that increase in prosocial behaviour would lead to increment in mental wellbeing and vice versa. The result of the study is in agreement with the results of various similar studies; one such study done by Layous et al., (2012) on 9-11 years olds found that those who performed acts of kindness showed significant increase in positive affect, life satisfaction, happiness and well-being. Similarly, Helliwell et al., (2017), showed prosocial behaviour to be a robust predictor of well-being in both correlational and experimental contexts. Prosocialness had the most impact on mental well-being and affect when it was done without any compulsion or intent of personal gain and was aimed at improving social capital. It may be inferred that the deep links between pro social acts and well-being may have an evolutionary benefit in maintaining the quality of social capital and thereby delivering cooperative human responses in times of crisis.

The present study also revealed a significant positive relationship between prosocial behaviour and positive affect. Pro-socialness could lead to positive affect; however positive affect leading to pro socialness too could be possible. Research suggests that people become more willing to help a stranger when their mood has been elevated by some recent experience, for instance, spending time outdoors on a pleasant day (Cunningham, 1979) or receiving a surprise payment (Isen, 1972). Akin, Vondervoort, and Hamlin (2017) suggested the existence of a virtuous cycle between prosocial behaviour and positive motion. They stated that performing prosocial actions led to positive emotion; this positive emotion made a person more receptive to the needs of others and made them more likely to indulge in more prosocial acts.

Many studies have demonstrated the relationship between prosocial behaviour and negative affect. Negative mood was associated with increase in altruistic action. Contrary to the previous research, the present findings do not indicate a significant relationship between prosocial behaviour and affect. Sadness, whether deriving from an unhappy experience or from failure may lead to a decrease in helpful behaviour. Morris and Kanfer (1983) believe that sadness reduces altruism because it compels one to be more preoccupied with self and show less concern about others. Thompson, Cowan and Rosenhan (1980) showed similar findings by inducing sadness in ways that promoted attention to the subject's own thoughts and feelings or to the thoughts and feelings of another person. Self-focused sad subjects helped as little as the neutrals while other focused sadness facilitated subsequent helping. This finding differs from the widely accepted negative state relief model given by Cialdini, Kenrick & Baumann (1982) which says that we indulge in helpful acts in order to relieve ourselves from negative emotions and affect, and find relief from doing something good. A negative mood or emotion is most likely to increase prosocial behaviour if the negative feelings are not too intense.

Limitations and Implications

The present study is not free from limitations. Being a correlational study, it merely gives an association between variables, cause and effect relationship cannot be determine. Further researches can be consider to see the causal effect between the variables studies. The study was limited to age group 18-24 years putting a limit to the generalization of results individual belonging to different age group. The results of this study contribute to a growing literature supporting the benefits of prosocial behavior. The emotional benefits of indulging in prosocial acts suggest that promoting the same can be used in interventions to improve mental wellbeing. Given the available literature on the virtuous cycle of kind acts and positive emotion, and the social benefits of these kind acts, promoting prosocialness will go a long way in promoting mental wellbeing and social harmony. Creating the right intervention tool to promote prosocial behaviour is the spark that we need at the hour.

Conclusion

A positive correlation exists between prosocialness and positive affect. There also exists a positive correlation between prosocial behaviour and mental wellbeing. It may be inferred that a positive feedback loop causes prosocial behaviour to lead to better mental wellbeing and increased wellbeing to in turn lead to more prosocial behaviour. Educating the masses about the benefits of prosocial behaviour on self can help contribute to the development of a more benevolent and compassionate society. Promoting ways to enhance pro-socialness, an inexpensive investment with invaluable benefits, is a change society needs at priority.

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