



Ambiguous Situations and Pro- Social Behavior Across Different Age Groups & Genders

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that the multi dimensional dilemma has been prevailing in the country for the last two decades in the field of economy, social development and politics which have caused scary reactions in the society in general and to youth in particular. As a result, a pro-social behavior in the society is hardly witnessed. This paper investigates the pro-social behavior of society in terms of age and gender with an objective evaluation of the present scenario. Findings confirmed that elderly people are more pro-social as compared to younger ones while females are more inclined towards helping behavior as compared to males.

Keywords: Pro-social behavior, Self report Altruism Scale, Personal Norms of Helping Behavior scale

JEL Classification: M12, A13, A14

Introduction

Human nature is equipped with “need based” programmed behavioral patterns which are commonly known as genotypic behaviors. Love, care, nurturance, happiness, achievement, struggle for the basic needs and an urge for betterment, socialization, aggression etc. are the few examples. Pro-social behavior refers to "voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals" and it includes different behaviors like sharing, comforting, rescuing, and helping (Eisenberg & Paul, 1989). Batson (1998) argued that the word was made by social scientists as an opposite to antisocial. Different theorists have argued for the concept of motivation leading towards this behavior, like empathy familiarity or closeness, nature of relationship and social cognitive skills (Sanstock, 2007; Hoffman, 1982).

The pattern of *pro-social* behavior can be considered as a convention, tradition, social need, personal or family value, and sometime genetic influence, but basically it is innate. As there are evidences which show that *pro-social* or helping behavior is also present in the insects and animals as well (Wilson, 2000). In addition, it is genotype as well as phenotypic behaviors.

One can say that the history of helping behavior is as early as the human being's history is or more specifically when man started with the process of socialization. If we see the practices, the shapes were different but it was always there as a communal, social or group

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norm like behavior. Historical evidences support the presence of helping behavior among the Hopi, North American culture, northwestern Indian culture etc (Burlingame, 1993).

The mentioned review of the literature has shown the significance of the issue and by keeping this into consideration many researchers have attempted to find out the relationship of *pro-social behavior* with different kind of theoretical notions. *Pro-social behavior* is also being influenced by some variables like age, socioeconomic class, perceived ability to help others, personal sense of responsibility, potential situations, need assistance, familiarity and closeness at one end and by its very nature of the other (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2004; Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007).

An important variable “age” that may have its effects on *pro-social behavior* like in the age of 12 to 18 months, the child is showing pro-social behavior by sharing toys and food items with other children even without having any reinforcing agent. The notion that, with the increasing age, the *pro-social behavior* tends to decline or improve, is quite controversial. Kohlberg (1973) said that human beings become more inclined towards helping behavior as they grow older in age as it can be referred to moral stages. People become more socially responsible and cognitively more developed and as such engage themselves in the helping activities as compared to young ones. Yet on the deeper analysis of Kohlberg’s (1973) moral developmental theories it is also evident that adolescents are more focused on the theme “first me”, which propel them towards their own safety in the situation which demands help but full of danger. So the lacking of *pro-social behavior* in young people may be because of their analysis of the situation in which if the cost is more than the benefit then maybe they will not show very willing helping deeds as this is a growing ability with age to evaluate cost of an event (Lourenco, 1997; Perry, Perry, & Weiss, 1986; Black, Weinstein, & Tanur, 1980).

Now a days this type of analysis or thinking on loss and benefit with reference to any particular event can push a person towards general apathy or negativity as people’s experiences or other observations create some ambiguities between the moral or religious practices as people have got to experience more negative consequences of extending help, for example if an individual has seen a person lying on the road in an unconscious state may become afraid of even to stay for a while to see him as he believes that lying on the road may be a fraud or a robber attempting to befool others. So people are saving their lives rather thinking to help him out.

Eisenberg, et al. (1998); Jacobs, Vernon, and Eccles (2004) suggested that *Pro-social behavior* increases in adolescence as compared to younger children and in experimental structured studies a turn down in concern toward parents among fifth and ninth grades has also been found (Eberly, Montemayor, & Flannery, 1993). It is seen that as the person grows and becomes elderly, more need based evaluation of the situation can push people more into pro social behaviors and it can be referred to Kohlberg’s (1973) moral development of the 5th and 6th stage in which people may become more concerned about community ethics and morals more than their personal loss and gains.

As far as the gender discrimination is concerned studies by Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, and Rosenkrantz, (1972); Parsons and Bales, (1955); Spence and Halmreich (1978) showed that females are more empathetic and caring as compared to males and strong predictors of pro social behaviors that are care and empathy can be the source of helping inclination is more among women as compared to man.

A variety of literature evidence types of pro-social trends in males and females, depending on age, type of situation and the type of activity in which the help is to be sought or provided. Becker and Eagly (2004) found that males are more *pro-social* for the instrumental and more heroic type of activities, which are dangerous and have high level of risk. Whereas, in other heroic activities like organ donations, peace corps volunteers, holocaust rescuers, females are better or equal to man. Hence, females are more effective in altruistic and more emotional *pro-social* behaviors (Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003).

The overlapping findings motivate to conduct more comprehensive study as the current scenario in which different uncertainties, insecure environment and ambiguous learning patterns are making the pro-social behavior rare in action. This was attributed to the negative consequences of *pro-social* behaviors and lack of reinforcement of the family, society, and state, which are undesirable for this study.

The present research aims to study the *pro-social* behavior and its differences across young and old age and across both genders. It is believed that the ambiguous situations prevailing in the country have produced markedly different reactions in the society in general and to youth in particular. People comparatively find it difficult to tolerate ambiguities, inconsistencies and unconventional behaviors. As a result of this, the *pro-social behavior* in the society is hardly witnessed. Here *pro-social behavior* is considered as an absolutely voluntary positive action that is intended to help or benefit others without having a desire of personal gain and it is mostly prompted by moral values, a sense of responsibility and empathy.

Based on these presumptions, a study of *pro-social behavior* was carried out with an objective to understand the impact of the prevailing social situations on the *pro-social behavior* and suggest certain interventions for the betterment of the society.

The hypotheses of the study are:

H1: Elderly people are more *pro-social* as compared to the younger ones.

H2: Females are more inclined to helping behavior as compared to males.

Research Methods

Sample

200 participants, 120 university students in the age group of 20+ (60 males and 60 females); and 80 participants (40 males and 40 females) in the age group of 50+ were randomly selected.

Instruments

Demographics

It consisted of information regarding age, year of marriage, number of children, family system (nuclear, joint or extended), education and work status.

Scales

The two scales *Personal Norms of Helping Behavior scale* by Schwartz (1977) and *Self Report Altruism Scale* by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) were finalized with a view to cater the various modes of pro-social behavior.

Adapted version of the *Personal Norms of Helping Behavior scale* Schwartz (1977) has been used to keep Pakistani society into consideration. To check its validity it was correlated with another scale named as *Self Report Altruism Scale* (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981). Adaptations were based on various Urdu translations done by the professionals and a common language was finalized.

Procedure

The students of the University of Karachi represent the diverse population from the ethnic, socioeconomic and locality backgrounds. The young participants had been approached in the Karachi University campus. Whereas, the elderly people from various localities of Karachi

were asked to fill the demographics sheet, and questionnaires of *Personal Norms of Helping Behaviors*.

Schwartz (1977) and *Self Report Altruism Scale* (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981). It was assured that all items were attempted by the participants.

Results

Statistical Analysis

Since it was a comparative study, the un-related t-test was used to statistically analyze the differences between young and elderly people as well as between males and females in terms of their level of pro-social behavior.

Result Outputs and Interpretations

Table 1: (Showing the Independent Samples Tests results and the level of difference of elderly and young participants)

	Mean	t-value	df	Critical value	Level of Significance
Elderly participants (aging 50+)	69.8	0.03	198	1.65	P> 0.05
Young participants (aging 20+)	70.08				

Interpretation

T-value with the degree of freedom of 198 suggested that there is no major difference in the responses among elderly and young participants in terms of their level of pro social behavior. The level of significance shows that $p > 0.05$ level therefore the null hypothesis has been accepted.

Table 2: (Showing the Independent Samples Tests and the level of difference of elderly and the young participants)

	Mean	t-value	df	Critical value	Level of significance
Male participants	69.97	0.74	198	1.65	P> 0.05
Female Participants	68.46				

Interpretation

T value with the degree of freedom of 198 suggests that there is no significant difference between male and female participants in terms of their level of pro social behavior. The level of significance shows that $p > 0.05$ level so the null hypothesis has been accepted.

Discussions

Statistical results showed that null hypotheses were accepted for all the assumptions, that means no significant difference was found between the pro-social behavior of elderly and young ones as well as no significant gender difference was also found between the groups.

It has also been observed that High positive correlation was found between the two scales used in the study.

Keeping Pakistani society in consideration, the adapted version of the *Personal Norms of Helping Behavior Scale*” Schwartz (1977) was used. For criterion validity another scale “*Self Report Altruism Scale*” Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) were used. At the end, scores of each participant on both of the scales were correlated. Though weak, but a significant positive correlation was found in the scales indicating that both the scales are measuring the pro-social behavior in the same direction.

As far as the findings against the formulated hypotheses are concerned, no significant difference across age was found i.e. elderly and young ones portrayed the same thinking processes for pro-social behaviors. As displayed by the elderly slightly lower level of *pro-social* behavior may not be attributed to their physical inadequacies, strengths or disability and rather attributed more to the conditions of global as well as regional insecurities. It may also be attributed to social psychological pressures, stresses and strains faced by them in the 21st century.

Today no matter what the age or the sex differences are, everybody is spending a life with similar level of stress, ambiguities and insecurities. As a result a generalized type of decline is obvious in the personal or social life especially in the fields of economy, politics, education and socio-cultural development ultimately affecting an individual and the society in general. These kinds of ambiguities might produce lack of power to identify or involve with the society, profession, community and culture. These socio cultural, economical and political ambiguities are prompted by a fairly large number of factors today. For example the environment of terror, economical disasters and increasing inflation, poor state of law and order, extreme sense of insecurity and uncertainty has turned people to be more vulnerable to social isolation. Consequently, people at large feel better to be staying home than to be outgoing. Obviously they are becoming more reserved and are not much into the helping behaviors outside.

Another important factor to have a decline or indifference among different groups of society in context with pro-social behavior might be, that in the 18th and 19th century, women generally were not supposed to be heroic in the external conditions or high risk situations but nowadays regardless of gender and age, people are not willing to take part in the pro-social activities, the reason may be strongly associated with the negative consequences of the event as a result of the law of effect. Thorndike effect, which was established in 1932 stated that living beings repeat those behaviors, which are associated with positive consequences and those activities or actions which have been faced by negative consequences are not being repeated, “The Law of Effect”. Thorndike’s theory makes it easier to understand that why people have a restrained attitude at the marginal trend of pro-social behavior. Concurrently people are not only facing immense negative consequences for their helping behavior but also the lack or absence of any positivity in general also turns them to be more apathetic. People who are willing to help others but have experienced by themselves or saw anybody else who suffered, exploited or tortured physically, emotionally, socially or financially after doing the helping act may stop doing it again and might teach others as well not to do so (Britannica, 2012).

Interventions or suggestion to improve the pro-social behavior

- Intensive Community-based interventions are required that have a theoretical congruence yet with an innovative flavor in accordance with the relative community and social cultural perspectives. It should also be based on multi-level participatory involvement and from the related authorities to the common man; all should be involved in these programs.
- An important factor which can play a leading role in any kind of human development is family and its involvement to enhance the individual's capacity of helping behavior by increasing family cohesion, empathy, and positive family relationships. As family is a primary source of learning so the major influence in terms of moral values especially empathy and helping attitude is being developed and flourished through family support and reinforcement to participate in the pro-social activities.
- Reinforcement for helping behavior from parents and teachers plays an important role in the human moral development as many of the developmental theorist believe that moral development is based on early childhood experiences in which how parents rear a child and how school training is there to be the part of *pro-social* activities. So parents and teachers should encourage a child to be participating and sharing in *pro-social* activities and should provide them a chance to be proactive indeed to help other people.
- Another important area which requires a change is 'Socio-cultural aspect' culture. It is different significantly in what each supports is as pro-social behavior (Eisenberg, Fabes, Spinrad, 2006). So if some cultures are higher in pro-social behaviors and some are low that means culture and social values are playing important role. As such there may be a need to promote those values among the cultures which ultimately increase the pro-social behavior. For example if we talk about Islamic or Pakistani culture it is evidenced by a big support of pro-sociality and altruism as the system of Zakat is one of the best example. Also the concept of heaven is the big reinforcement for the Muslim society if the helping behaviors are going to be appreciated on the family, community and state level it can enhance the pro-sociality among the people.
- Another important point is more related to situational analysis of previously experienced incidents, as people get cognitive maturity with their increasing age (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). By having a critical analysis of the past situations where the help was needed people can get the idea that which strategy was not appreciated and which one had been effective. This type of activity can surely enhance the ability to make appropriate help for the others. That can also be done by vicarious learning as well in which one seeks motivation from the other communities, groups or role models. In Azad Kashmir earth quake of 8th October 2005 in Pakistan the people like Fakhr-e Alam (singer), Abdul Sattar Edhi (social worker) and others set the examples that how we can approach the effected people and help them out.
- Another systematic and more structured step is to involve and train teachers, parents, psychologists, social workers to make it more systematic from an awareness level to implementation level.

- Another important source of having a social change toward pro-sociality can be the media.
- To promote helping behavior we can have a more structured approach that is a community engagement model according to which first of all we can hold the community meetings in which people from different domains can come and identify the problems or lacks, which cause the hindrances in promoting pro social behaviors. When the areas would be identified we can have rigorous environmental assessment of the resources and solutions available on which we can work upon. We can also have focus groups, key level interviews to have the feasibility of the programs designed to improve pro-social activities. But yet it's not a matter of one group or individual but a matter of community involvement with a thorough support of government, law enforcing agencies, social workers, professionals especially teachers and people from the social sciences.

Conclusion

Comprehensive nationwide strategies and grass root level changes in multiple environments reinforced by policies that ensuring the development of positive attitude and pro social behaviors among the people of Pakistan, are a viable and necessary direction for the future.

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