

## Understanding helping behaviour: Gender as a Moderator in the Relationship between Prosocial Behaviour and Empathy

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Current understandings that can show the role of gender in the relationship between Prosocial behaviour and Empathy are still limited though this area has been examined and conceptualized in different ways. Considering the scarcity of published researches in this area the current study examined the moderating role of gender in the relationship between prosocial behaviour and empathy. Conceptual arguments and empirical evidence on each of these variables are thoroughly reviewed as only a few studies have assessed these variables simultaneously or across sources. The present study examined whether higher degrees of empathy correlates with a greater exhibition of prosocial behaviour and the gender differences in prosocial behaviour and empathy. In the study, 120 college-going students (60 Males and 60 Females) from Delhi, NCR between the age of 18 to 23 responded to the Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM) and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The findings of the study show that females display a greater degree of prosocial behaviour and empathy than males. It means gender acts as a moderator in the relationship between prosocial behaviour and empathy. It was also found that there is a strong association between prosocial behaviour and empathy and the gender differences create variability in the demonstration of helping behavior and the level of empathy endured.

**Keywords:** Empathy, Gender, Prosocial behaviour

The present study is set in the context of our society and aims to examine the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship between prosocial behaviour and empathy. This study will help to obtain a deeper level of understanding of the concepts of social psychology. People can spontaneously experience emotional empathy without consciously taking the other person's perspective (Dovidio & Banfield, 2015). Prosocial behaviour was chosen as a topic for the study to dig out the explanations of human behaviour and the role of multiple emotions in carrying out those behaviours in the context of a society. Studying prosocial behaviour is of prime value because psychology inculcates a variety of values with special reference to the concept *dānam* (giving). *Dānam* is a perennial value in our society, thought, and tradition, and therefore, it is necessary to study prosocial behaviour. Many studies focus upon prosocial behaviour, however, its relation with empathy and differences in gender in terms of manifestation of

the behaviour is lacking in the literature. Hence, it is important to study and address the exact nature of this behaviour. Empathy is thought to inspire people to show helpful action and is one of the potential determinants of prosocial conduct. (Van der Graaff, 2018).

There are not many studies that show that men and women differ in the capacity to carry out any prosocial behaviour. boys Since other-oriented concerns (e.g., sympathy) are stereotyped as a female trait, girls may demonstrate higher altruistic and emotional prosocial behaviour than boys (Eisenberg et al., 2001; Skoe, 1995). Thus, it is also of great significance to study these differences in our society. In terms of empathy which is a heavily studied concept in society, this study examines its relation to helping behaviour which is still untouched in the literature.

Prosocial behaviour comprises of a range of behaviours that benefit others such as sharing

and helping. Solidarity and friendship are its key aspects, and it promotes development and positive psychological functioning; it also enhances the atmosphere at school and in classroom (Gallego et al., 2018). Concern for others' rights, feelings, and well-being characterises the generous behaviour (Estrada Hollenbeck & Heatherton, 1998). Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour intended to help another person (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Children who learn such helpful behaviours from a young age tend to display the same in many situations. These important behaviors are not only for an effective and harmonious society, but also for a better classroom. Given the accumulated evidence that the prosocial behavior of young children is an important factor for their long-term school acclimatization, their academic performance and their social and psychological well-being, prosocial development is critical for early childhood education and intervention (Spivak & Durlak, 2016). Therefore, the study has educational implications.

The college students are emerging adults. During these years, different changes occur in the attitude and personality of the individuals. As a result, during mid-adolescence, prosocial behaviour amplifies which can be reconciled with the perception that physical maturity, increased independence and cognitive progress (which occur earlier in girls than in boys) favor propensity to prosocial behavior in adolescents (Carlo et al., 2012; Fabes et al., 1999). Researchers have considered a variety of reasons why prosocial behaviour may have increased prevalence in childhood and adolescence, including development in socio-cognitive functioning (e.g., moral reasoning, perspective-taking, social problem solving) and physical changes, such as strength, that enables for a broader range of prosocial actions. (e.g., Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Increased social competence leads to more frequent peer interactions and interest in personal and romantic relationships (Steinberg and Morris, 2001) which might lead to various directed behaviours in teenagers. (Fabes et al. 1999; Wentzel 2014). Additionally, emotions such as empathy in connection with the helping behaviour are likely to form a prominent aspect

of the individual's personality in these developing years.

Empathy is described in a multifaceted way, emphasising a person's ability to respond to others, taking into account both cognitive and affective components, and emphasising the significance of being able to distinguish one's own self from that of others. (Garaigordobil, 2009). Empathy works on both an emotional and a cognitive level. While some people are uniquely driven to be emotionally involved while helping or in any context, others use more cognitions and rationality to various situations.

The capacity to empathise with another person in distress is a crucial aspect of the kind social relationship and outlook one person has about the society. Empathy can be seen as a crucial motivator of prosocial behaviour. We can not only empathize with someone in distress but also with someone in a positive situation.

Early prosocial behaviour, particularly spontaneous assistance, was found to predict later prosocial dispositions, suggesting that empathy-related reactions may only partially moderate this link. (Eisenberg et al. 1999). This shows that empathy is part of a larger prosocial personality feature that emerges in childhood and promotes helpful action in young adults (Eisenberg et al. 1999). Genetic factors along with the environmental factors are involved in the empathy development process. An individual can be taught through training and he can himself learn empathy through various socialization processes and displaying of empathy can be increased. However, it cannot be built from the scratch. It is easy to magnify of what an individual already processes but making him learn a trait like empathy is rather difficult. Empathy was often thought to be an inborn feature that could not be taught, but research has demonstrated that this crucial human skill can be learned and taught to healthcare practitioners (Riess, 2017).

Evidence from multiple studies and their results, the socialization of the boys and girls and how they are raised makes a vigorous impact on their personalities and exhibition of certain characteristics. In a study conducted by Rehber (2007), empathetic inclinations of secondary school students were examined,

and it was discovered that girl students had stronger empathic tendencies than boys. There was a significant difference in favour of girls in Duru's (2002) study when it came to empathetic inclinations by gender. In a study in which he examined 16 studies regarding individuals' tendency to help by gender, Hoffman (1987) pointed out that women demonstrated more emotional reactions to other people's emotions and helped. Eagly and Crowley (1986) did a meta-analysis of 172 studies conducted on 50,000 people to see whether men and women differed in terms of help behaviour by gender roles and according to the results of the analysis, it was observed that women exhibited more emotional help and protection behaviour than men and that male gender roles were more concerned with situations that involved risks (Gabay & Others, 1998; Oswald, 1996). Displaying high empathy in a variety of situations can be the result of their upbringing where they are taught to be more warm, nurturing and understanding. Moreover, the fact that female students are more empathetic can be explained by their tendency to model themselves after their mothers, whilst boy students' low empathic tendencies can be explained by their incapacity to communicate their feelings owing to their upbringing (Çeliköz, 2009).

In accordance to the gender socialization theories, it has been found that girls are raised in a manner to show more nurturance and care whereas boys are raised to be more tough (Brody, 1999). Gender-specific socialisation pressures are thought to increase during adolescence, and boys and girls may become more conformist to gender stereotypes During puberty, gender-specific socialisation pressures are believed to elevate, and young boys and girls may become more accommodative to gender norms. (Alfieri et al. 1996; Hill and Lynch 1983), leading to gender-specific developmental patterns in prosocial behaviour. Empathy can therefore, be a predictor of prosocial behaviour and there are differences in its fixation among the gender.

Although prosocial behaviour has been studied in detail, insufficient attention has been paid to its relation with empathy and gender

differences among college students in the Indian context. Thus, the current study aims to study gender as a moderator in the manifestation of prosocial behaviour and empathy and to study the relation between prosocial behavior and empathy. In the current study, we hypothesized that Prosocial behavior and Empathy would vary in males and females and there would be a strong relation between prosocial behavior and empathy.

## Method

### Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 120 college students from Delhi University's different colleges. Out of which 60 were males and 60 were females. The students were between the ages of 18 to 23 (Mean = 20.87, SD = 2.91). The data was primarily collected face to face through the paper-pencil test from the college students.

### Measures

*Prosocial Tendencies Measure:* Carlo and Randall gave the PTM in 2002, a 23-point self-report rating various prosocial behaviours. Public, anonymous, compliant, altruistic, emotional, and dire prosocial inclinations are the six subscales of the assessment. Items are rated on a 5-point scale from "Doesn't describe me at all" to "Describes me a lot." The PTM's construct validity and internal consistency are strong (Cronbach's Alpha .86). The scoring for the measure is done by summation of the items. Few items are reverse scored. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

*Interpersonal Reactivity Index:* Mark H. Davis developed a tool for the assessment of empathy in 1983. Davis (1983) describes empathy as "an individual's reactions to the perceived experiences of another." On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "does not describe me well" to "very well characterises me," 28 items were answered. The test is divided into four subscales, each with seven items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from .70 to .78 (Davis, 1980). Scoring is done by addition of the responses and few items are reverse scored. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha was ( $\alpha = .71$ )

### Procedure

Proper instructions and consent was taken. They were assured that their answers would

remain private. The researcher personally administered each questionnaire. The participants were thanked for their cooperation and devotion of time.

### Statistical analysis

The data collected was subjected to a statistical treatment using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. We used Process Procedure for SPSS Release 3.5 by Hayes (2018) and hierarchical regression (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Cohen et al., 2003) to test the hypothesized moderator role of gender between empathy and prosocial behaviour. If a moderation effect existed, to test the significant levels of simple slopes simple effect analyses were conducted. All analysis was performed using SPSS-20.

## Results

### Preliminary analysis

We first assessed the data for normality and homogeneity using appropriate tests. The normality tests showed that the empathy and prosocial behaviour scores' skewness and kurtoses were satisfactory and within the acceptable levels for the proposed analysis. The homogeneity of variance was acceptable and approximately uniform for all combinations of variables.

### Descriptive analysis

Table 1 depicts means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for the study's variables. We used correlation analysis to examine the differential relationships between empathy, prosocial behaviour, and gender. As depicted in Table 1, the relationship between empathy and prosocial behaviour was statistically significant and strong. Gender had a moderate relationship with empathy and a relatively low association with prosocial behaviour. However, all the associations turned positively significant.

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Study Variables**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
Empathy	76	8.30	.87	55**	30**

Prosocial Behaviour	67.89	7.39		.89	.22*
Gender	Na	Na	Na	nz	Na

Note. Gender was coded as Male = 1, Female = 2. \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ . All  $p$ -values were two-tailed.

### Gender as a moderator between Empathy and Prosocial Behaviour

We conducted a hierarchical regression model to examine whether gender moderated the effects of empathy on prosocial behaviour. In step 1, we entered empathy in the first block of regression (see Table 2). The result indicated that empathy accounted for 19% of the variance in prosocial behaviour,  $F(1, 118) = 28.37, p < .001$ . The main effect of empathy was significant. In Step 2, we entered gender in the second block of regression. Gender accounted for .05% of variance in prosocial behaviour,  $F(1, 117) = 8.03, p = .005$ . The main effect of gender was also significant. In step 3, we entered the interaction variables (Empathy  $\times$  Gender) in the third block of regression. Moderation effect was observed because the regression coefficient for the interaction of empathy and gender was significant in predicting prosocial behaviour ( $p = .038$ , see Table 2). In addition, the above two-way interaction substantially added incremental variance in prosocial behaviour over and beyond the main effects,  $\Delta R^2 = .03, \Delta F(1, 116) = 4.40, p = .038$ . This suggests that the relation between empathy and prosocial behaviour was moderated by gender.

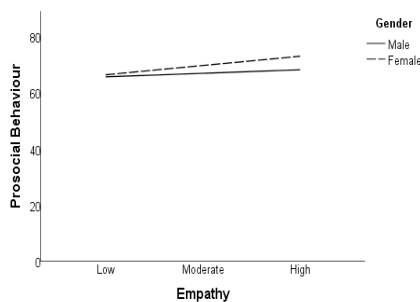
Upon interpreting these interaction effects via visual inspection of the figures, female participants high in empathy reported more prosocial behaviour compared to their male counterparts. These interaction effects were further probed with simple effect analyses (see Aiken & West, 1991). The moderation hypotheses for prosocial behaviour was supported by the results from a simple effect analyses. When the participants happened to be females, empathy significantly predicted more prosocial behaviour  $t(118) = 4.79, p < .001$ . However, for males, the relationship between empathy and prosocial behaviour could not reach statistical significance  $t(118) = 1.83, p = .070$ . These results suggest that the relationship

**Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Models of Empathy Predicting Prosocial Behaviour with Gender as a Moderator**

Step		B	SE B	sr2	t	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	ΔF
Prosocial Behaviour							
1.	Empathy	.35	.07	.19	5.33***	.19	28.37***
2.	Empathy	.31	.07	.15	4.61***	.05	8.03**
	Gender	2.78	.98	.06	2.83**		
3.	Empathy	-.10	.21	.00	-.051	.03	4.40*
	Gender	2.78	.97	.07	2.87**		
	Empathy × Gender	.27	.13	.04	2.10*		
	Gender						

Note. Gender was coded as Male = 1, Female = 2. \*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05. All p-values were two-tailed.

between empathy and prosocial behaviour was significant and stronger for females but non-significant and weaker for males.



**Figure 1. Prosocial behaviour as a function of empathy and gender.**

**Discussion**

The present study investigated the association between prosocial behaviour and empathy between males and females. The results of the study indicate that there are significant differences between the prosocial behaviour and empathic levels of males and females. Female students displayed greater prosocial behaviour than males. These findings go along with the other studies conducted as cited by Abdullahi & Kumar, 2016 who found that females are more likely to help than males. Boys displayed lower levels of prosocial behaviour than girls, which is consistent with earlier researches (e.g., Carlo et al. 2015; Eisenberg et al. 2005). This finding is in accord with the findings of Fiala (1999) who concluded that

despite having the most sympathy for persons in masculine situations, women were more inclined to assist people in gender incongruent situations. Therefore, it can be concluded that the differences are consistent with the gender stereotypes that females are more nurturing, friendly and more empathetic so they offer more help to others. Men tend to be more dominant and competitive, so they focus on themselves more than others. Fitting into these stereotypes are these notions which perceive females to be more comforting and communal than males. While females are there for others emotionally, men are more into themselves.

Also, females had higher empathic levels than males. In the ability for empathy, there were statistically significant gender differences, with girls scoring higher. These findings, which are consistent with those of other studies (Garaigordobil & García de Galdeano, 2006; Litvack et al., 1997) indicate greater empathic disposition in girls. Higher empathic levels in females can be attributed to the kind of socialization they receive in early years. They are taught to be more feminine in their ideas and ways and be more warm and understanding of other people. Hoffman (1987) found that women showed greater emotional reactions to the feelings of others and were more willing to help. Eagly and Crowley (1986) also agreed that women provided more emotional support than men. In accordance to the gender socialization theories, it has been found that girls are more



empathic than boys and display more prosocial behaviour. Empathy can therefore, be a predictor of prosocial behaviour and there are differences in its fixation among the gender.

In general, empathy is believed to have a significantly positive association with prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 2010 & Hoffman, 2008). Empathy is thought to provide the drive to show helpful conduct and is one of the possible determinants of prosocial behaviour. Prosocial behaviour is thought to be influenced by both comprehending others' interior states (i.e. gaining perspective) and experiencing feelings of compassion for others (i.e. empathic concern) (Batson, 1991; Hoffman, 2000, cited by Van der Graaff, 2018). On the contrary, prosocial behavior can also promote the tendency of young people to adopt new perspectives and to be empathetic (Carlo et al. 2015).

The underlying reason of females displaying greater prosocial behaviour and having higher degrees of empathy can be regarded to the socialization practices and the gender roles that are embedded in the society. From a very young age, girls are taught to be more caring while boys are taught to be tougher. Women are brought up in a way so that they are more sensitive to the feelings of others. Due to this, women are more attuned of their own responses, other's responses and take into account the actions of other people. Since they are more responsive to the emotions of others, they understand the pain of the victim and are more likely to offer help. Therefore, the high levels of empathy helps women to exhibit more prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial behavior can be characterized by loads of variables such as empathy, attentiveness, attribution, perception of a circumstance in which someone needs help, the chance to help, assessing the dangers of commitment and the theory of social norms, and plenty of other factors. The important aspect of individual differences must be emphasised, which means that gender differences should not be generalised, even though the data show a gender difference consistent with earlier findings. Men and women's cognitions, emotions, and behaviour intersect in a variety of ways (Katchadourian, 2010, as cited by Torstveit, 2016).

## Conclusion

Our findings signify that the relationship between prosocial behaviour and empathy was significant and strong for females. The same relationship for males was weak and insignificant. While assessing if gender acted as a moderator in the link between prosocial behaviour and empathy by using the hierarchical regression model, our results indicated that the effect of gender was significant and a two-way interaction could be observed. Thus, our results add to the growing body of evidence indicating a gender difference in the association between prosocial behaviour and empathy.

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