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A study on Gratitude and Prosocial behavior among Middle Adolescents in school belonging to Chennai Corporation

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Abstract

The present study is guided by positive psychology, this study has used the correlational research design to explore the relationships between Gratitude and Prosocial behavior in a sample of 60 middle adolescents in school. Two tools viz: Prosocial Tendencies Measure – PTM which measures 6 types of prosocial behaviors: altruistic, compliant, emotional, dire, public, and anonymous and Gratitude [Child Trends for the Flourishing Children Project] was used for data collection. The tools were distributed to the participants and filled on the spot. Data from 60 participants 13-16 years of age was collected from a High school belonging to Chennai Corporation, India. The study has shown that there exists positive correlation among the different types of prosocial behaviours, but it is also seen that both boys and girls gratitude behavior was not related to prosocial behaviours. The present study has meaningful implications for school psychology practice and future directions for adolescent research.

Keywords: Adolescents, Age, Gender, Gratitude, Prosocial Behaviour.

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Introduction

The current focus on adolescents' mental health has shown that there is a need to emphasize on promotion of adolescent well-being, beyond the existing focus on symptom reduction. Mental health professionals should consider complementing existing practices by identifying and augmenting strengths, like gratitude. Several theorists, believe that gratitude functions to nurture social relationships through its encouragement of reciprocal, prosocial behavior between a benefactor and recipient (Algoe and Haidt, 2004; Emmons and McCullough, 2004)

Prosocial behavior represents a broad category of acts that are defined by some significant segment of society and/or one's social group as generally beneficial to other people (Zeldin, Savin-Williams, and Small, -1984).

Significance of the current study

Much of the knowledge of prosocial behaviour is limited to the study of children (Zeldin, Savin-Williams, and Small, 1984) relatively little is known about how these behaviours are seen in adolescents.

Several investigators have demonstrated that high levels of moral reasoning (reasoning that often depicts internalized norms, principles, or empathic-based concerns) are related to prosocial behaviors (Blasi, 1980; Colby and Kohlberg, 1987; Eisenberg *et al.*, 1995). In addition, a number of investigators have shown that altruistic prosocial behaviors are associated with social responsibility (an obligation or duty to act in a manner that benefits society) and ascription of responsibility

(a duty or obligation towards the needs and welfare of others) (Batson *et al.*, 1986; Carlo *et al.*, 1991a; Schroeder *et al.*, 1995; Schwartz and Howard, 1984; Staub, 1978). Thus, adolescents who ascribe responsibility to themselves and who believe they have an obligation to act responsibly towards society were expected to be more likely to endorse altruistic prosocial behaviors.

Parents themselves model behaviours of prosocial in nature, not only in relation to their children but also toward other family members and neighbours (Oliner and Oliner, 1988).

Recent experimental research has demonstrated that gratitude causes prosocial behavior, demonstrating its function as a moral motive (McCullough *et al.*, 2001). Gratitude often causes direct reciprocity, leading individuals to respond prosocially to a benefactor (Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006, 2007); and it can cause upstream reciprocity, leading them to act prosocially toward others (Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006). Grateful individuals may act prosocially as a way of expressing their gratitude; however, over time these actions can enhance social relationships (Emmons and Shelton, 2002; Harpham, 2004; Komter, 2004). Indeed, gratitude helps build trust in social relationships (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, gratitude may maintain and build resources of social support (Fredrickson, 2004).

In spite of the importance of both prosocial behavior and gratitude in the promotion of adolescents positive functioning, very few studies especially in Indian context remains unexplored.

Review of literature

Characteristics of both the individual and the social context contribute to the expression of prosocial behaviour, Eisenberg et al., (1991) reported that several modes of higher level reasoning such as self-reflective and other-oriented perspective-taking emerged in late childhood and adolescence. In addition adolescents' helping behaviour was positively related to high scores on moral reasoning. Similarly Carlo et al. (1996) found that internalized or empathetic reasoning was positively related to prosocial behaviour. In particular, individuals who preferred another-oriented mode of moral reasoning were viewed by others as generous and helpful. Needs-oriented reasoning was positively related to prosocial behaviour for boys. Contrary to their hypothesis that prosocial behaviour would be positively related to care-oriented moral reasoning, Sochting, Skoe, and Marcia (1994) found no significant relationship between care-oriented or other-oriented moral reasoning and their measure of prosocial behaviour.

Aim

The aim of the present study was to study the relationship between gratitude and prosocial behavior among middle adolescents'.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between gratitude and prosocial behavior among adolescents.
2. To examine if there exists any gender differences between gratitude and prosocial behavior among adolescents.
3. To examine if birth order was associated with gratitude and prosocial behavior.

Hypotheses

1. There exists a positive correlation between gratitude and prosocial behavior among middle adolescents.
2. Adolescents' girls differ in their gratitude behavior in regard to their male counter parts.
3. Gender differences are there among middle adolescents with regard to their prosocial behavior.

Research Design

This study employs a correlational study where adolescents belonging to the age group of 14 to 16 years from St. Patrick's Higher Secondary school, belonging to Chennai Corporation were identified for the present study. A total of 62 adolescents both males and females equally were chosen for the present study using purposive sampling. The adolescents were chosen who had shown at least one helping behavior in the past month and also had felt that they were thankful for some aspects in their life. Questionnaires related to Gratitude and Prosocial Tendencies were distributed to the adolescents. The participants were given sufficient time to go through the questionnaire and answer it. The data was collected to draw up and analyse the correlation.

Procedure

All participants were given a briefing about the purpose and information about the study by researcher. All subjects participated on a voluntary basis and a consent form to participate in the study was signed by the students or their parents/guardians. The participants completed the questionnaire under the supervision of the researcher, and most participants completed it within 20 min.

Tools of Data collection

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6)-(McCullough M., E. 2013)

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6) is a six-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life. Cronbach's alpha estimates for the six-item totals have ranged from .76 to .84. Scores on the GQ-6 correlate substantially with other measures hypothesized to assess the extent to which people experience gratitude in daily life. McCullough et al., (2002) correlated the GQ-6 with a self-report measure that instructed participants to indicate how well each of three gratitude-related words (i.e., grateful, thankful, appreciative) described them. Scores on the GQ-6 also correlated with peers' ratings of targets' amounts of dispositional gratitude at $r = .33$, $p < .01$. Earlier research reports that people with high scores on the GQ-6 report feeling more "grateful," "thankful," and "appreciative" for benefits or gifts they have received than do people who score below the median on the GQ-6

(Gray et al., 2002). In the present study the researchers have used only four items of the GQ-6 and the responses were marked on a five point likert type scale.

Prosocial Tendencies Measure(Carlo & Randall, 2002)

The PTM assesses six prosocial tendencies emphasizing the contexts in which they are performed: emotional (emotionally evocative situations), dire (emergency situations), compliant (when requested or demanded), altruism (primarily for the benefit of others), public (in front of an audience), and anonymous (without others knowing). Responses are made on a five-point scale, where 1 = "does not describe me at all" and 5 = "describes me greatly". Prior research demonstrates adequate reliability and validity for college student samples, including support for a six factor model (Carlo et al., 2011).

Data analysis

The collected data was coded and entered in The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 programme. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to calculate the correlation between gratitude and prosocialbehaviour among the adolescents. To compare the differences that exists between males and females independent sample 't'tests was conducted for the study variables.

Ethics

The concerned participants were informed about the purpose of the research and due consent was obtained by the researcher to administer the research questionnaires to the students. The students were briefed about the confidentiality of

data to be collected. They were also assured about the not revealing their identity without obtaining their prior consent and also about their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Findings of the study

Table 1: Demographic details

CATEGORY	N= 62		Percent
Gender	Female	31	50
	Male	31	50
Age	14	22	35.5
	15	29	46.8
	16	11	17.7
Leisure activities	Yes	50	80.6
	No	11	17.7
Physical activity	Yes	57	91.9
	No	5	8.1
Economic status	Below 30,000	38	61.3
	30,000 and above	24	38.7
Birth order	Only	5	8.1
	First	26	41.9
	Second	27	43.5
	Third	3	4.8
	Fourth	1	1.6

The above table shows the demographic characteristics of the adolescents. It is seen that the sample represented an equal number of males and females. The adolescents were belonging to the age 14 consisted of 22 per cent of the sample whilst those where 15 and 16 constituted 29 percent and 11 per cent respectively. Almost majority around 80 percent of the adolescent reported that they were involved in leisure time activities like coin collection, reading books, listening to music and doing art work. It is seen that a majority (91.9 percent) of the adolescents both male and female were engaged in some form of physical activity. Adolescents for the study show that around 61.3 per cent of them came from a household who had monthly income below 30,000 rupees. The sample shows that 8.1 per cent of the adolescent were only child, 41.9 per cent

were firstborn, 43.5 were second born and 4.8 percent were third born.

Table:2 Means, Standard Deviation of the Prosocial Tendencies Measure separately for females and males

PTM		Mean	Std. Deviation
Anonymo us	Female	12.9355	2.78011
	Male	15.1613	3.72466
Public	Female	13.8065	3.42947
	Male	13.1613	2.73370
Altruism	Female	14.7419	3.56808
	Male	15.8065	3.07050
Emotional	Female	12.8710	3.23256
	Male	11.8710	3.11707
Compliant	Female	5.9032	2.45431
	Male	6.3548	2.24423
Dire	Female	8.8387	2.69687
	Male	9.3871	3.84428
Gratitude	Female	15.7419	2.92082
	Male	14.1290	2.97480

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the gratitude and prosocial behaviors among females and males. There was significant difference in the scores for gratitude between females ($M=15.7$, $SD=2.92$) and males ($M=14.1$, $SD=2.97$); $t(60)=2.15$, $p = 0.03$. These results suggest that having or showing gratitude really differs significantly for females and males. Females tend to show higher gratitude than their male counterparts. The study also showed that when it comes to prosocial behavior there was no significant differences seen among males and females, $t(60)= 0.91$, $p=0.36$. Hence it is seen that adolescents irrespective of their gender are involved in prosocially behavior.

Table 3: Interrelations among the Prosocial Tendencies Measures subscales and Gratitude

PTM	Anonymous	Public	Altruism	Emotional	Compliant	Dire	Gratitude
Anonymous	1						
Public	-.058	1					
Altruism	.225	.222	1				
Emotional	.043	.400**	.419**	1			
Compliant	.172	.199	.445**	.336**	1		
Dire	.099	.193	.272*	.365**	.402**	1	
Gratitude	-.163	.124	-.069	.321*	.158	.311*	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlations were computed to examine the interrelations among the PTM subscales (Table 3), it is seen that among the subscales for prosocial tendencies measure there existed a positive correlation. The table also shows that gratitude was negatively correlated with anonymous subscale and altruism behavior among the adolescents.

Table 4: Correlation among the Prosocial Tendencies Measures and Gratitude separately for females and males

PTM	Gender	Anonymous	Public	Altruism	Emotional	Compliant	Dire	Gratitude
Anonymous	Female	1						
	Male							
Public	Female	-.253	1					
	Male	.187						
Altruism	Female	.244	.293	1				
	Male	.143	.171					
Emotional	Female	-.012	.638**	.618**	1			
	Male	.191	.073	.262				
Compliant	Female	.219	.144	.461**	.419*	1		
	Male	.097	.305	.407*	.288			
Dire	Female	-.188	.440*	.349	.414*	.300	1	
	Male	.214	.013	.207	.374*	.490**		
Gratitude	Female	-.199	.128	-.048	.134	.103	.325	1
	Male	.001	.067	-.004	.455**	.287	.371*	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows the comparison of the Prosocial Tendencies Measure and Gratitude for females and males. It is seen that female adolescents had a significantly higher correlation

between emotional prosocial behavior with public helping and altruism than their male counterparts. It is interesting to see that both males and females have significant correlation between compliant and altruism tendencies. Females showed a positive significant correlation than their male peers when it came the compliant and emotional subscale of prosocial behavior, whereas it is seen that males had significant correlation between compliant and dire situations. Also with Gratitude behavior it is seen that male adolescents showed a significant correlation with emotional and dire prosocial behaviours.

Discussion:-

The present study has shown that among the prosocial behaviours seen among the adolescents the altruistic form of prosocial measure was significantly correlated with other forms of prosocial behavior measures viz; emotional(0.419**), compliant (0.445**) and dire (0.272*). This tendency among adolescents could be the primary motive associated with altruistic responding as seen as internalized norms or principles concerning helping. Adolescents who ascribe responsibility to themselves and who believe they have an obligation to act responsibly towards society were expected to be more likely to endorse altruistic prosocial behaviors.

Compliant prosocial behaviors were defined as helping others in response to a verbal or nonverbal request (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1981). It is seen from the present study that there was significant correlation (0.336**) seen with emotional helping behavior.

The study has also shown that adolescents have dire prosocial behaviours significantly related to highly emotionally evocative situations (0.365**) and also compliant helping behaviours (0.402**). This is supported by earlier research evidence showing strong association with sympathy responding and other-oriented personal tendencies.

The study also has revealed in the current sample of adolescents that there exists no significant relationship with total prosocial tendencies measure scores and gratitude measure. But within the sub scales of prosocial tendencies measures it is seen that there exists negative correlations when it comes to females showing prosocial behavior forms to help anonymous individuals. Maybe there are some cultural underpinnings seen in relation to the negative relationships seen in the sample among girls which can be further looked into.

Another finding from the study has thrown light that there exists a negative relationship for both boys and girls between Gratitude behavior and altruistic form of prosocial behavior, this is a finding goes against the earlier research findings which show that Gratitude enhances altruistic behavior. The reason could be the link between gratitude and prosocial behavior may not be as straightforward as Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2008) found out in their research as attachment insecurities may play a role for adolescents in trying to engage in helping behaviours to anonymous individuals.

Implications:-

The presence of character strengths (e.g., hope, kindness, optimism, self-control) in youth not only promotes well-being but also protects against psychological distress in the face of stress, trauma, and other risk factors (Park, 2004). The positive psychology movement specifically emphasizes the importance of the identification and cultivation of human character strengths so that individuals, and society as a whole, can enjoy a good and fulfilling life (Park and Peterson, 2009). Thus, studying character strengths in youth is a worthy pursuit. The study throws light on adolescents' health seen as important public-health objective which can be used in the future wellbeing of the adolescents.

Future directions

Prosocial behavior could also be looked at in the perspective of evolutionary psychology. Why have humans evolved to prosocial beings and in what ways has it been beneficial to their survival? Finally, research could examine prosocial behavior in the context of social exchange theory. This theory is the idea that humans operate according to a cost and benefit analysis of behavior. Does prosocial behavior fit into this

theory? Overall, these are just a few ideas for the possible future research of prosocial behavior.

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