

FACTORS AFFECTING ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR AMONG EMERGING ADULTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY- AFRICA.

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Abstract

Altruistic behaviour is characterised by acts that benefit other individuals other than oneself. There are various studies among children and adults on motives of altruism. The current study aimed to investigate the factors influencing altruistic behaviour among emerging adults. A total of 141 participants aged between 18 and 25 years were selected using multistage cluster sampling method among undergraduate and graduate students at the United States International University, Africa (USIU-A). The Self-Report Altruism Scale was used to collect data. A Chi-Square test of independence was carried out using SPSS[®] version 25 to examine the factors influencing altruistic behaviour.

Six factors were examined to investigate if they influenced altruistic behaviour among emerging adults including age, gender, presence of religious belief, number of siblings, year of study and group size. The results showed that age [$\chi^2(90) = 119.990, p = 0.019$] and presence of religious belief [$\chi^2(90) = 126.951, p = 0.006$] were found to influence altruistic behaviour in emerging adults. The study concluded that age and religion are influential factors of altruistic behavioural tendencies among emerging adults. Altruism in this study increase by age from 18 to 25 years and there were no gender discrepancies the current study compared to prior research, thus future studies could target a wider scope of emerging adults to discover the altruism trend.

Key words: Altruism, Altruistic Behaviour, Helping, Emerging Adults, Prosocial behaviour.

1. Background

Altruistic behaviour, also referred to as helping behaviour, is characterised by acts that benefit other individuals other than oneself (Clement, et al., 2014). Altruistic behaviour is among many things characterised by kindness, compassion, helping sharing and willingness to sacrifice for another individual(s) (Jeffries, 1998). Altruism is regarded a subgroup of prosocial behaviour (Seefeldt, 2008). The nature versus nurture debate is present in the area of altruistic behaviour. The nature versus nurture debate has introduced two perspectives of altruism namely: evolutionary and social psychology perspectives (McAndrew, 2002; Hoffman, et al., 2017).

Theoretical perspectives on the concept of altruism are varied. The evolutionary perspective is based on the belief that altruism is as a result of inclusive fitness known as “kin selection” thus helping and cooperation is based on gene survival purposes (McAndrew, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2017). The social psychology perspective of altruism on the other hand, defines altruism as the voluntary action to help another individual regardless the type of relationship specifically based on empathy from the altruist (McAndrew, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2017).

Hoffman (1981) believed that altruistic behaviour is ingrained in human nature meaning humans are naturally empathetic (Farsides, 2007). In addition, individuals are altruistic as they have a natural desire for social cohesion (Clement et al., 2014). However, some individuals are not as altruistic as others, raising the element of the environment’s (nurture) role in altruistic behaviour.

Altruism involves an individual doing something for someone at ones’ cost also known as sacrifice (Zhao, 2012). In 2002, Seglow stated that freedom of choice is an essential factor of altruism. He explained that individuals need to be free to choose if and when to be altruistic.

The amount of social proximity is recognized as a factor that can influence on altruism which supports the kin selection theory (Zhao, 2012). Individuals are more likely to help a relative than a friend (Impett et al., 2005); similarly, people are more like to help a friend than a charity who may need more help due to kin related influencers (Zhao, 2012; McAndrew, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2017). Altruism has been found to have interpersonal benefits for both the performer and receiver of the altruistic act as both of them tend to feel better about themselves and other individuals’ (Freund & Blanchard-Fields, 2014).

Media has been found to positively influence behaviour of viewers and users in prosocial direction related to altruism (Jeffries, 1998). Researchers have found this to be true as, elevating media evokes positive emotions such as helping behaviour on the consumer of the media sometimes as there are other mediating factors (Ellithorpe et al., 2015). Thus, media has an influence on the subconscious mind and consumption of prosocial behaviour oriented media can promote empathy related to altruism among individuals’.

Researchers believe people are altruistic because of empathy. A significant element of emotional quotient (EQ) is empathy; which has been found to be an essential factor of for altruistic behaviour (Bethlehem et al., 2016). The reason being, empathy is based on affective mechanisms in the human brain (Szuster, 2016). Neurobiologists believe empathy is useful for survival and has been found to have evolved in primates (Bethlehem et al., 2016). Related to empathy is compassion which has been found to be a key motivating factor of altruism and is associated with virtuous

development of altruistic personality (Weng et al., 2013; Jeffries, 1998). Both compassion and altruism are significant in successful societies (Weng et al., 2013).

The researchers found that perception of what is moral, influenced altruistic behaviour over a long period of time (Ellithorpe et al., 2015). Altruism and its moral connotation it was found to be influenced by the presence of religious belief (Zhao, 2012). It is through religion that some individuals are guided on how to put their faith into action such as by being altruistic (Jeffries, 1998).

Studies on factors influencing altruism have been carried out in universities such as UCLA (Impett et al., 2005), University of British Columbia (Zhao, 2012) and in the workplace (Heilman & Chen, 2005) among others. However, there is a dearth of similar studies in Africa specifically among emerging adults studying in Kenyan universities. Hence, the current study aims at contributing to bridging the knowledge gap in the area of altruism among emerging adults in Kenya.

Hence, this study aimed at investigating six factors that influence altruistic behaviour among emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage comprised of individuals' in late teens and early twenties (ages 18 to 25years) (Arnett, 2000).

2. Methods

The target population was undergraduate students between age 18 to 25 years in USIU-A, a private university located in Nairobi, Kenya. The sample of 141 participants were selected 49% of which were males. The sampling method used was the multistage cluster sampling. Stage one involved selecting a School from the four schools in USIU-A. Stage two involved the selection of one department from each of the four schools. Specifically, numbers were randomly assigned to each department within the four schools.

Stage three of the sampling procedure involved identifying courses under the randomly selected departments. The courses that were randomly selected were in-session during the summer semester 2017. The selection of the courses was done using random number tables. Finally, the participants of the study were the students registered in the undergraduate program courses aged between 18-25 years.

A quantitative research design was used to investigate the factors influencing altruistic behaviour among emerging adults. The research instrument is the Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRA). The SRA was administered through face-to-face administration. The SRA required participants to state the frequency of performing 20 altruistic behaviours through the Likert scale that comprises of five categories "Never", "Once", "More than once", "Often", or "Very often" (Rushton, Chrisjohn & Fekken, 1981). Some modifications made to the SRA that included demographic characteristics and also an open ended question on how altruism can be encouraged among emerging adults.

Data was analysed using a Chi-Square Test of Independence to establish the relationship between 20 forms of altruism and various factors at 95% confidence level using SPSS[®] version 25.

Ethical considerations included confidentiality and anonymity, informed Consent and voluntary participation as explained in the informed consent form. The study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the United States International University Africa (USIU-A).

3. Results

Six factors were entered into the contingency table to determine whether they were associated with altruistic behaviour. These factors are age, gender, religious belief, number of siblings one had, number of individuals present during the altruistic act and the year of study of the participants. The Chi-Square test was used to test for association and found that some factors were significantly associated with altruistic behaviour (Table 1).

Table 1: Chi-Square test of independence among the factors influencing altruistic behaviour

Factor influencing altruistic behaviour	Person Chi-Square Value	Degree of Freedom (DF)	Asym. Sig (2-sided)
Age	119.990	90	0.019*
Religious Belief	126.951	90	0.006**
Number of Siblings	40.235	45	0.674
Group Size	33.872	45	0.888
Year of study	35.389	45	0.847
Gender	32.875	45	0.910

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The age of the participants was found to be significantly associated with altruistic behaviour [$\chi^2(90) = 119.990, p = 0.019$]. Therefore, one's age between 18 to 25 years does have an effect on altruistic behaviour. The Phi and Cramer's V for the relationship between age and altruistic behaviour varied implying that as age increases from 18 to 25 years, altruistic behaviour self-rating also increases.

An individual's commitment to religious belief was also shown to be associated with altruistic behaviour [$\chi^2(90) = 126.951, p = 0.006$]. This means that presence of religious belief has a statistical significant relationship with altruistic behaviour. This implies that if an individual report themselves as religious, they are more likely to behave altruistically compared to those who do not.

Four factors were found not to be statistically significant for altruistic behaviour among emerging adults namely, the number of siblings that a participant has did not reveal any association with altruistic behaviour [$p = 0.674$], group size [$p = 0.888$], the participants' year of study [$p = 0.847$], and gender of the participants [$p = 0.910$].

4. Discussion

As an individual develops, prosocial tendencies have been found to increase (Toumbourou, 2016). In the current study, an influential a factor of altruistic behaviour between the sexes was age. Thus implying that even among emerging adults aged between 18 and 25 years (Arnett, 2000) there was an increase in altruistic behaviour as the participants' age increased. According to Sze et al. (2012), the reason for this is that preparedness to help in various contexts such as loss, pain and injustice have been found to be age-related.

Furthermore, the development of altruism entails moving from low stages of altruism known as egoism characterised by self-centeredness to higher stages of altruism characterised by selflessness self-identified, universal unselfish love (Jeffries, 1998). Hence the altruism process moves from an extrinsically driven process to an intrinsic one as one grows up (Warnken & Tomasello, 2014). Researchers have found that emotional empathy increases as age increases for both males and females (Sze et al., 2012). The findings of the current study are concurrent with a study done in among adults in Switzerland (Freund & Blanchard-Fields, 2014).

Using a cross-sectional design to investigate age-related differences in altruism among adults' researchers found; young adults are less willing to spend their resources compared to middle aged adults (Freund & Blanchard-Fields, 2014). The current study among emerging adults in a Kenya found there is similar relationship; as the older the emerging adult the higher self-reported altruism scores. Furthermore, the younger one is the more they optimize personal financial gain than contribution to public good (altruism) (Freund & Blanchard-Fields, 2014). Research has found that older adults are more likely to be sympathetic and empathetic and willing to help and contribute to public good than younger adults (Sze et al., 2012).

The group size is a situational determinant of altruistic behaviour (Wolfson, 1978). Conversely the current study found, the number of people present when performing the last altruistic act were found not to be significantly different in altruistic behaviour. This is contrary to prior research that found the probability of an individual helping or contributing to public good decreases as the number of people increase (Hindriks & Pancs, 2002; Fischer et al., 2011). Researchers have found, in altruism the bystander effect is a phenomenon as the larger the group size the more passive the bystanders are in a critical situation due to diffusion of responsibility (Fischer et al., 2011). This is regardless of the social and emotional benefits presented in being altruistic offered by larger group sizes (Fechter, 2016).

The differences in findings may be a result of different methodology such as meta-analysis (Fischer et al., 2011) and experiments' (Fechter, 2016). Furthermore, while the current study has been done in Kenya; prior similar studies have been done in some different geographical locations such as European countries (Fischer et al., 2011; Wolfson, 1976) and USA (Fechter, 2016); thus may have different results due to cultural variations. Individuals in a similar location tend to have similarities in behavioural tendencies due to culture. Culture in many ways has been found to have a direct influence on altruism (Jeffries, 1998). As much as group size was not a significant factor for emerging adults in the study, religiosity was.

Religiosity has been found to encourage a humane approach of treating others (Zhao, 2012). Decety et al., (2015) claimed that religion has been found to promote prosocial behaviour and morality and demote antisocial behaviour. Religious belief, in this study was found to be a significant factor of altruistic behaviour. The presences of religious belief increased the odds of altruistic behaviour tendencies, regardless of the gender of participants' in the current study. The possible reason is, religion conveys a strong drive for powerful, long lasting and pure altruistic behaviour (Jeffries, 1998). This was concurrent with a study that found religiosity and altruism had a high positive correlation among undergraduate students (Zhao, 2012). Both studies imply that

presence of religion may have an association with an individual's willingness to help (Pessi, 2011) however this is not always the case.

Sibling-directed altruism has been found to positively predict altruistic behaviour among adults (Sznycer, et al., 2016). According to evolutionary theorists, the reason for this is individuals tend to act altruistically to persons they are affiliated to or who are their kin for continuity and survival purposes (McAndrew, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2017). This study found, the number of siblings was not significantly different in the altruistic behaviour compared to a recent study that found siblingship to be a significant factor of altruism (Sznycer, et al., 2016). Thus, the hypothesis that the more siblings' ones has the more altruistic they are; being rejected in the current study.

Formal education can prospectively contribute to altruistic socialization (Jeffries, 1998). Research has found that both secular and religious curriculum emphasise morality, ethics and prosocial behaviour (Jeffries, 1998). However, the present study found the year of study which was defined as of the years of educational experience among the emerging adults; was found not to be an influential factor of altruism. For instance, senior undergraduate students (in fourth year) have more educational experience than freshmen (in first year); if the university undergraduate system is used to measure it. Age on the other hand is the biological years on has lived from their date of birth and does not necessarily depict educational experience. Thus, explaining why for the age factor there was a statistically significant relationship with altruism but no significant relationship with the year of study for the participants.

According to Wolfson (1976), gender is an individual determinant of altruistic behaviour. The current study found no statistically significant differences in the altruistic behaviour in the gender of the participants. These findings differ from prior studies that found gender differences (Rand et al., 2016; Bethlehem et al., 2016). The findings of the current study are seen to differ with the stereotypical view that women are more altruistic than males due to socialization (Rand et al., 2016). This is a positive finding as a study in 2016 found both males and females who scored highly in self-reported altruism showed an improvement in mental health (Fechter, 2016).

However prior research such as Bethlehem et al., (2016), found gender differences in altruistic behaviour; men were more generous than women in helping situations. In addition, a recent study found that women were more generous compared to males (Zin et al., 2015). Both studies, found results that are contrary to the ones in the current study (Zin et al., 2015; Bethlehem et al., 2016). This may be due to the variations in the sample used as they examined adults in general and not specifically emerging adults.

5. Limitations

The current study has some potential limitations. The sample size of the current study is small and although a probability sampling method namely multi-stage cluster sampling was used, the results are not generalizable to all emerging adults. In addition, the current study was done in one university thus cannot be generalized to other university populations.

The SRA instrument was used to collect the data for the present study and was originally developed from the United States of America. Thus, the instrument was constructed for the western context. However, minor modifications were made to suit the Kenyan context. Also during the data

collection, there were no participants who expressed their dissatisfaction or irrelevance of the research instrument.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the current study found that among emerging adults, age and religiosity are significant factors for altruistic behaviour. Consequently, confirming that both socialization and development have a significant influence in altruism among emerging adults. Although, factors such as gender, group size, the number of siblings and the participants' year of study of emerging adults were found to have no differences in altruistic behaviour in the current study; does not mean that they are not entirely sources of altruism. It signifies that for emerging adults in the current study they were not primary factors of altruism; as prior literature has found differing results to this study. In addition, this study has found that altruistic behaviour should not be subject to stereotypical view and differences in behaviour across various populations do exist. Altruism is a personality has been found to continuously develop throughout emerging adulthood which is an encouraging finding as it is a valued prosocial behaviour. Future studies could study a wider scope of emerging adults and also use other methods for assessing the altruism behavioural trends.

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