

Association between Happiness and Altruism

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Abstract

In the last several years, researchers were interested to observe the effects of prosocial behaviour and Happiness. Being more on the subjective narrative side, measuring these variables become more allusive. However, with growing interest on positive side of human nature considering these variables become all the more important. To understand this intricate fabric, researchers have tried understanding this concept relating it to wellbeing, altruism, hope and optimism. The main purpose of this study is to observe the association between these two variables. The study further looked into the aspects on how these variables affect each other. To study the above parameters a total of 200 college students were considered with the help of simple random sampling technique. Standardised tools measuring both prosocial behavior like Altruism and Happiness were administered. The findings suggested that there is significant relationship between both variables. Apart from the above findings the study also indicated that there exist differences on demographic variables with altruism and happiness.

Keywords: *Prosocial Behavior, Altruism and Happiness*

1. Introduction

The quest for happiness is a human's paramount goal [1]. Concepts like wellbeing, quality of life, flourishing, flow, satisfaction and related areas are constantly studied together to better understand how they mitigate with each other [2]. In philosophy and eastern perspectives for that matter even religion, happiness may be defined in terms of way of living as a holistic person this may include living a good life, rather than simply taking it as an emotion. There are great many Indian philosophies which parallel the views of hedonism of the west, especially the Charvaka school of thought. Later happiness was considered as a virtue from both western and eastern perspectives.

In psychology, happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being which can be defined by others as positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy [3]. With enough literatures focusing on the abnormal side of human nature, Psychologists Martin Seligman, Ed Diener and RuutVeenhoven have increasingly become interested in developing an approach to human flourishing. These works emphasized the importance of virtues, strengths and concepts like flow.

RuutVeenhover has drawn four inferences: a) In actuality happiness can be insensitive to actual quality of life. Since individuals can be happy even in not so good conditions or they may feel unhappy during good conditions. b) Happiness cannot be raised permanently. This is because standards in reality is dynamic and changes every now and

then. c) Happiness builds on adversity. People tend to be happier after facing hard times. d) Happiness is neutral not as an extreme. Studies have pointed how happiness results from fall and rise of living conditions and from comparison like should and ought of life adjustments [4].

Diener says that people perceptions of happiness is key in making them happy or not, they are happy if they think that they are happy, as each individual is the best judge of their subjective evaluations on themselves and evaluate whether they are happy or not. He claims that psychological wealth is more worth than money. It encompasses attitudes, engaging activities and goals. Martin Seligman found that happy people are those who have discovered and make optimum use of the '*signature strengths*'. He concluded that happiness has three dimensions: the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life which is felt when an individual finds a deeper sense of fulfilment.

Pursuit of happiness is subjective and culturally sensitive. It depends on the individual's background, nationality, culture, personality and also gender. Research has pointed out that pursuing happiness can damage subjective well-being of the individual i.e., worsen psychological health, [5] induce loneliness, [6] and give paradoxical effect. [7].

Studies have pointed the basis for happiness from cultural perspective especially in India its more on collectivistic side, where greater willingness towards sharing and helping others with higher feelings of serving as life goals. When it comes to biological basis for happiness there are literatures pointing the role of genetics such as volume of grey matter [8] and the effect of polymorphism regardless of ones gender. Spirituality plays a significant role in happiness, [9] and is associated with higher level of personal happiness [10]. Moderators that predict happiness are: religious commitment, life sanctification, religious support, and religious hope.

One main objective of the study is to find the directional roles of the happiness on one of the Prosocial behavior that is altruism. Before understanding altruism its important to touch upon Prosocial activity. According to oxford dictionary Prosocial is defined as relating to or denoting behaviour which is positive, helpful, and intended to promote social acceptance and friendship. Prosocial behaviours represent a broad range of behaviours that are intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, comforting, donating, or volunteering, and mutually beneficial behaviours, such as cooperation. It is a multi-dimensional construct [11].

It majorly depends on the relationship between the giver and its beneficiaries acts as social glue between individuals, societies and even countries. Prosocial behaviours range from small acts of kindness to greater degree. These behaviours can be altruistic or egoistically motivated. Altruism is defined as 'unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others' (Merriam-webster). Altruistic behaviour is generally described as a selfless behaviour that benefits third parties' welfare and by doing so it provides an understanding "of social solidarity in modern societies" [12].

The present study aims to find the cursory role of altruism and happiness in student's life that can be an ultimate goal towards "the pursuit of happiness." It further investigates whether altruism follows happiness or is a catalysing element of happiness. Studies done in the area suggest that altruistic behaviours make people happy. However we try to find

the relevance and reliability of prior research on our Indian setting and establish an exploratory ground for building further concrete researches [13-16].

From the literature it is evident that there is bidirectional influence of happiness and altruism. These include happiness influences individuals to exhibit Prosocial behaviours. However very few studies indicated the influence of Prosocial behaviors on happiness. Considering the above review and research objectives, the present study focused on whether there exists any relation between happiness and altruism and to see directional influence on each other. The study would further enhance our understanding on these parameters and present the researchers the current scenario in general among students especially with specific reference at GITAM deemed to be Univeristy, Visakhapatnam.

2. Method

It has to be noted that the objective of the study is to observe the directional association of happiness and altruism. For this 100 students were given initially altruism scale and later happiness scale. The other half of the sample were provided with happiness first and altruism later.

2.1 Hypothesis

On the basis of literature review the following hypothesis was formulated:

1. It is hypothesized that there will be association between subject's perception of altruism and happiness.
2. There would be differences on demographic variables on happiness and altruism.

2.2 Design and Samples

The study adopted descriptive survey method. Adolescents with age ranging from 17 to 24 years, having a mean age of 19.82 (SD= 1.88) were considered for the present study. The sample consisted of both Males (89) and females (111) in number, making a total of 200. Samples were taken from different courses such as Management, Law, Arts, Psychology, Science and Technology. They were categorized into two types: one signifying graduates and two signifying post graduates.

2.3 Measures

Standardized scales considered for the present study:

Altruistic Personality Scale [17]. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.82 (0.83 and 0.86 in Canada and China respectively). The Spearman-Brown correction was 0.85; $p < 0.001$. In the Chinese study, this coefficient was 0.82

Oxford Happiness Scale [18]. Internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha in sample of students showed .92 indicating high reliability.

Demographic information:

Age, Gender, Course, Religion, Father's occupation, Mother's occupation, No. of siblings (including the subject himself), No. of friends, Socio-economic status, Spiritual/Religious, Amount of time spent with Family, Friends and Gadgets.

3. Results

It is noted that there is significant positive correlation between Happiness and Altruism (.241**) supporting the previous findings done in this area.

Table 1: Directional Differences on Altruism and Happiness

Variable		Happines s	Altruism	t
Spell 1 Happiness 1 st Altruism 2 nd	Mean	4.184	53.83	2.802**
	S.D.	.57	12.08	
Spell 2 Altruism 1 st Happiness 2 nd	Mean	4.105	49.39	.942
	S.D.	.64	11.11	

Note: ** = p < .01; * = p < .05

From table 1 it is observed that there is differences on subject’s perception of happiness on altruism. ($t- 2.802 = p < .01$). Individuals who responded to happiness first reported higher means on altruism.

3.1 Differences on Demographic variables between Happiness and Altruism

Among the demographic information collected, the following variables contribute significantly to the increase of happiness and/or altruistic behaviours:

Table 2: Gender differences on Happiness and Altruism

Variable	Mean / SD	Male	Female	t
Happiness	Mean	4.12	4.17	.509
	SD	.57	.63	
Altruism	Mean	54.08	49.57	2.642**
	SD	12.9	10.29	

Note: ** = p < .01; * = p < .05

Gender: It was found that, males tend to be more altruistic than their counterparts. ($t- 2.642 = p < .01$)

Table 3: Course level differences on Happiness and Altruism

Dimension	Mean / SD	Graduates	Post Graduates	t
Happiness	Mean	4.15	4.14	.135
	SD	.59	.64	
Altruism	Mean	53.05	49.20	2.183*
	SD	11.65	11.47	

Note: ** = p < .01; * = p < .05

Course: Graduates are more altruistic than postgraduates. ($t- 2.183 = p < .05$)

Table 4: Differences on Mother Occupation on Happiness and Altruism

Dimension	Mean / SD	House wife	Employed	t
Happiness	Mean	4.14	4.18	.447
	SD	.60	.62	
Altruism	Mean	50.66	54.94	2.205*
	SD	11.87	10.73	

Note: ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

Mother's occupation: Children belonging to employed mothers feature to be more altruistic in nature. ($t = 2.205 = p < .05$).

Table 5: No. of Friends Differences on Happiness and Altruism

Dimension	Mean / SD	Less than 6	More than 6	t
Happiness	Mean	4.02	4.31	3.402**
	SD	.58	.60	
Altruism	Mean	49.82	53.77	2.377**
	SD	11.84	11.29	

Note: ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

Having a bigger circle of friends enhances happiness and altruistic behaviours in an individual ($t = 3.402$ and $2.377 = p < .01$).

Though not significant it was observed that less time spend with gadgets, can enhance happiness and altruism of an individual as the mean scores tended to be on higher side. The remaining demographic characteristics of the sample reported no significant influence on happiness and/or altruism.

4. Discussion

The outcome of this study showed that there exist differences on happiness and altruism specifically where the former tends to be mitigate more with increased altruistic behaviour. Past studies indicate that the link between happiness and prosocial is bidirectional [19-20].

The question now could be whether happiness can play such a prominent role in instilling prosocial behaviour in individuals. The challenge becomes more prominent with contrary findings on its direction with altruism influencing happiness. Buchanan & Bardi, 2010, found that performing acts of kindness and acts of novelty resulted in an increase in life satisfaction.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging and a public pledge for future generosity results showed the brain mechanisms that link generous behaviours with increase in happiness. It was found that subjects assured to spend money over the next 4 weeks either on others or on themselves. It was found more generous choices in an independent decision-making task and showed increased self-reported happiness [21].

The present study considered religion as one aspect that has an interacting element on both happiness and altruism. However, no such association or differences were noticed. Studies that assessed life satisfaction, character strengths and the orientations to happiness of participants showed that people with a religious affiliation that also practice their religion were found to be more satisfied with their life and scored higher on life of meaning than those who do not practice their religion and then non-religious people [22]. Studies constantly point to the association between these variables.

Gender: Study has shown that males tend to be more altruistic than their counterparts; the probable explanation could be due to the fact that we tend to nourish or seek approval from our egalitarian ethos. Results indicated that bigger social circle had significant influence on social behaviours. Eisenberg & Mussen substantiate this factor in their book, *the roots to prosocial behaviour in children*. It is found that friends and social group influences individual's behaviours which can either be towards the positive side or sadly towards the negative [23].

Future studies could overcome the limitations in the area and can look into more demographic variables like religious orientation, perceived social support, peer group pressure, family environment etc., and its influence on happiness and altruism dimensions. Studies can also be taken up to examine the relevance of intervention programs aimed to enhance these prosocial behaviours among adolescent population. Longitudinal observational studies that measures happiness, cheerfulness, and related constructs could be associated prospectively with health parameters and how they reduce ill health. Studies can be taken up to determine how resources or being in a more advantaged social status influence happiness and altruistic behaviours. With happiness being one of the primary economic indicators in recent past, studies could focus on these developing economies emphasizing the role of happiness and how it may particularly address the issues of certain section of people who are more prone or vulnerable to unhappiness.

Happiness as a leading force that drives individuals into executing prosocial behaviours is concluded. It is suggested that longitudinal observational studies that measure happiness and related constructs could be associated prospectively with health parameters and how they reduce ill health.

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