

Service with a Smile: A Study on Altruism and Happiness Among Young Adults

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Abstract

Altruism, broadly defined as actions aimed at benefiting others without seeking external rewards, has been associated with improving subjective well-being, including happiness. This study investigates whether Altruism predicts the levels of happiness in young adults from age 18-26. The present research assessed 200 participants with the Self-Report Altruism (SRA) Scale and Steen Happiness Index (SHI). Findings highlight a significant interplay between altruistic traits and happiness, suggesting that higher levels of altruism predict enhanced levels of happiness. The interaction between altruism and happiness was evident, with altruism accounting for 24.4% of the variance in happiness among young adults. These results provide a robust understanding of how altruistic tendencies serve as foundational psychological factors for happiness in subjective well-being. Hence, the findings underscore the importance of integrating altruistic engagement into youth-focused mental health and well-being programs, promoting both emotional fulfilment and social connectedness.

Keywords: Altruism, Happiness, Young Adults, Well-being.

Introduction

“You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.” These words from *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran capture the idea of altruism- not as materialistic charity but gifting one’s care, effort or even presence. A must have experience, your classmate is struggling with a tricky formula or endless history dates and you readily share your notes. A stranger with heavy bags and you instantly reduce the weight off their shoulders. And during all of these actions, don’t you feel a strange sense of satisfaction tug at your chest? Doesn’t it make you smile? Because you were ‘happy to help?’

These regular moments of acts of service might get often brushed off as solely acts of kindness, however these acts carry a profound emotional stance. Every altruistic act has a foundation of psychological connection, such as doing something good and in return, feeling good.

Altruism, broadly defined as actions aimed at benefiting others without seeking external rewards, was introduced into the social sciences by Auguste Comte (1798– 1857) as the opposite of selfishness. According to Macaulay and Berkowitz (1970), altruistic behaviour is "carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources." In terms of personality the concept of altruistic personality emerged as a framework to explain consistent patterns in prosocial behaviour. Altruistic personality can be considered a social responsibility, moral reasoning, and a helping orientation without

expecting external rewards, which influence the motivation to serve and the quality of the service (Penner, 2002).

Offering to help someone who is lost or providing support for someone in distress, are aimed at improving subjective well-being, including happiness.

Happiness refers to a positive emotional state that includes satisfaction with life and the occurrence of frequent positive emotions (Layous et al., 2015; Michalos, 2012). It has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes such as improved physical health, longevity, and productivity (Layous et al., 2015; Malik & Singh, 2012). The latest research indicates that it is possible to increase levels of happiness through intentional behaviours and positive interventions (Layous et al., 2015).

Beyond just feeling good emotionally, altruism activates the brain's reward system. Functional MRI studies have shown that when people engage in generous or prosocial behaviours, areas such as the ventral striatum and medial prefrontal cortex light up, regions commonly associated with reward, pleasure, and meaning (Cutler & Campbell-Meiklejohn, 2023). Helping others, quite literally, makes us feel good neurologically.

Happy people show higher levels of cooperative behaviours and greater levels of satisfaction. These results indicate that happiness, as a core positive emotion, is important in promoting altruism and empathy at both individual and societal levels (Meyzari Ali & Bozorgi, 2016).

What this suggests is that helping others may be a powerful, natural way to boost our own well-being not through selfishness, but through connection. Altruism offers a unique emotional return: the sense that one's actions matter, that empathy has value, and that giving is itself a form of gaining.

Method

Objective

To assess the predictive role of altruism for level of happiness in Young Adults.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine whether altruism significantly predicts happiness levels in young adults.

Sample

A purposive sample of 200 participants, aged between 18 to 26 years, residents of the Delhi-NCR region, were recruited for the study. Data collection was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire, which was disseminated through digital platforms as well as distributed physically in academic institutions and public settings.

Tools

1. The Altruistic Personality and the Self-Report Altruism Scale (20-item scale): Developed by J. Philippe Rushton, Roland D. Chrisjohn, and G. Cynthia Fekken (1981).
2. Steen Happiness Index (20-item scale): Developed in 2005 by Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson.

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. Once consent was obtained, participants were asked to complete

the tools: The Altruistic Personality and the Self-Report Altruism Scale, and the Steen Happiness Index. Data was collected in community centres, universities, or other accessible locations, ensuring a controlled environment for accurate responses. Participants were assured about the confidentiality of data and the consent form was willingly filled in before moving to the questionnaire. Participants were allowed to mark their responses by themselves after receiving basic instructions about test conduction. Once the data was collected it was further scored, analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, regression to see the interaction effects.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the characteristics of the sample, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions. Pearson Product Correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between altruistic personality traits and happiness levels. Regression analysis was conducted to explore the predictive role of altruism on the happiness levels of young adults.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were assured of confidentiality, including the protection of participant privacy and the use of data solely for the purpose of this research. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time without penalty. All analyses were conducted using statistical software to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results. Any additional feedback or clarifications needed during the study was communicated to participants in a timely manner. Participants were given truthful information about the study, and they were not deceived in any way during conduction. Participants were not forced or manipulated into filling out these forms and they had the freedom to decline participation without facing any consequences. By respecting these ethical guidelines, the study ensured the security of participant’s rights, wellbeing and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Result

The current study's findings are presented in this chapter, as it explores the relationship between altruism and happiness levels among young adults. Results are described as following:

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics Showing Minimum, Maximum, Mean, and Standard Deviation Scores on Self-Report Altruism (SRA), and Steen Happiness Index (SHI) Among Young Adults (N = 200).

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SRA	200	4	80	40.42	16.617
SHI	200	29	100	62.03	14.117
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Note: SRA- Self Report Altruism, SHI- Steen Happiness Index.

Table 3.1 depicts the descriptive statistics for the Self-Report Altruism (SRA) and Steen Happiness Index (SHI) scales, including the minimum and maximum scores, mean, and standard deviation. The Self-Report Altruism (SRA) scores among the 200 participants ranged from 4 to 80, with a mean of 40.42 and a standard deviation of 16.62, indicating a wide distribution in reported altruistic behaviours within the sample. The Steen Happiness Index (SHI) scores ranged from 29 to 100, with a mean of 62.03 and a

standard deviation of 14.12, suggesting a moderately high level of happiness with some variability across the participants. The valid number of cases considered for analysis was 200.

Table 3.2 Represents the Correlation Between Self-Report Altruism (SRA) and Steen Happiness Index among Young Adults (N=200).

Variable	N	r	P
SRA	200	.493	Sig**
SHI	200		

** $p < 0.01$

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between altruism and happiness among individuals as shown in Table 3.2. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between Self-Report Altruism (SRA) and Steen Happiness Index (SHI), $r(198) = .493, p < .01$. This suggests that individuals who report higher levels of altruistic behaviour also tend to report higher levels of happiness.

Table 3.3 showing the Model Summary of enter Regression Analysis for Altruism on Happiness

Model	R	R ²	Ad R ²	SE
1	.493a	.244	.240	12.309

a. Predictors: SRA

Table 3.3 shows Model Summary of enter Regression Analysis for Altruism on Happiness, the table presents the model summary of the enter regression analysis for predicting the impact of Altruistic Traits on levels of Happiness. Altruism was entered as the predictor where Presence predictor causes variance in prediction of Happiness. The value of R was found to be 0.493 and the value of R square is 0.244 which means that the percentage of variance is 24.4% in Happiness is explained by Altruism

Table 3.4 showing the ANOVA^a, of enter Regression Analysis for Altruism on Happiness in young adults

Model		SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9656.700	1	9656.700	63.734	.000 ^b
	Residual	30000.175	198	151.516		
	Total	39656.875	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Happiness (PSQI)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Altruism

Table 3.4 showing summary result of ANOVA of Model for the sample (N-200). There is a significant relationship between independent variables that is Altruism and the dependent variable that is Happiness. Where (F= 63.734, and p =0.000) This implies that the predictor (Altruism) has a significant effect on the dependent variable, Happiness. The model is statistically significant.

Table 3.5 Showing Model Coefficients of enter Regression Analysis for Altruism on Happiness. The table presents the coefficients of the predictors (Altruism) in the stepwise regression analysis for young adults

Model	Coefficients			t	Sig.
	B	SE	Beta		
1 (Constant)	45.078	2.294		19.648	.000
Altruism (SRA)	.419	.053	.493	7.983	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Happiness (SHI)

The table 3.5 presents the model coefficients for an enter regression analysis examining the impact of Altruism on Happiness. The model includes Altruism as an independent variable alongside the constant term. The regression equation indicates that the constant (B = 45.078, SE = 2.294) is highly significant (t = 19.648, p < 0.000), suggesting that when all predictors are held constant, the baseline level of integrative ER is 45.078. Altruism shows a positive and significant relationship with Happiness (B = .419, SE = .053, Beta = .493, p < 0.000), indicating strong statistical significance. The results suggest that Altruism plays a crucial role in predicting Happiness.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the predictive role of altruism on levels of happiness among adults. At first, Pearson product correlation reported a positive significant relationship between altruism and happiness as SRA (Self-Report Altruism) scale correlated significantly with scores of SHI (Steen Happiness Index), with Regression analysis, where altruism predicted 24.4% of the variance in happiness.

Our findings correspond with the idea that prosocial behaviours, here altruism fosters personal well-being, such as happiness. World Happiness Report (2023) reported a bi-directional association between altruism and well-being which meant that acts of kindness promote happy feelings but also happier individuals were found to have increase role in charitable behaviour. Consequently, Cash, Aknin, and Girne (2024) found that these daily acts of kindness were associated with upliftment of mood, boosting happiness, flourishing and resilience among individuals. Even small, informal acts of altruism can well-build emotional outcomes. In neuroscientific context, altruism stimulates reward systems in the brain, releasing feel-good hormones like dopamine and oxytocin. In the meta-analysis by Cutler and Campbell-Meiklejohn’s (2019) fMRI, altruistic giving behaviours revealed to specifically engage reward-related brain areas (e.g., ventromedial prefrontal cortex) These were particularly different from strategic giving, suggesting intrinsic satisfaction from selfless acts. The neural activation according to the findings likely underlies the “warm-glow” reported by participants with higher SRA scores and corresponding SHI scores in our study. However not all altruistic acts yield benefits, forced or obligatory helping may undermine well-being as reported by Deci & Ryan (2000). Singh and Parashar (2024) investigated the connection between psychological distress, motivation, and happiness among college students who volunteer for non-governmental organizations. Happiness was found to be negatively impacted by psychological distress and introjected extrinsic motivation, but to be positively correlated with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Volunteers reported high levels of happiness, but they also reported significant psychological distress. However, our results likely reflect autonomously motivated helping, consistent with findings that voluntary prosocial behaviour fosters autonomy, well-being, and positive affect.

With due importance in our study, altruism's contribution to variance in happiness (~24%) proclaims that while significant, it can be considered one of multiple factors shaping well-being. Overall, Altruistic traits in individuals can be both associated with social welfare as well as personal fulfilment. It is a meaningful way for the youth population to foster happiness and overall well-being, purpose and belonging.

Conclusion

Our research explored the significant role of altruism in shaping happiness among young adults. The positive significant correlation, as well the predictive strength of altruism suggests that prosocial behaviours or helping behaviours, altruism in this context are not only beneficial and supporting to others but also quite rewarding to the helper itself. They might not seek any extrinsic rewards in particular, however, the behaviour may contribute to well-being through fostering a purpose, social harmony and emotional satisfaction. These insights highlight a noticeable value in promoting altruistic engagement among individuals through either academic institutions or policy makers, NGOs or Government initiated programs, like volunteering and daily acts of kindness, to enhance psychological well-being in emerging, transitioning adulthood.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could be perceived as influencing the outcomes of this study.

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