



Self-Compassion and Empathic Concerns as Correlates of Prosocial Behavior among Youths in Awka Metropolis

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Abstract

This study investigated self-compassion and empathic concern as correlates of prosocial behavior among youths in Awka metropolis. A total of 188 participants were systematically drawn from a list of youths who applied for the Anambara state small scale business startup loan at the Ministry of Spots and Youth Empowerment who reside in Awka metropolis. 81 of the participants were male while 107 were females. They included 89 students, 34 civil servants, 42 self-employed and 15 unemployed. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 35 years with the mean age of 22.7 and a standard deviation of 4.35. Three instruments were used for data collection, namely: Self-compassion Scale (SCS), Empathic Subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and Self Report Altruism scale (SRAS). Correlational design and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis were used for design and appropriate statistics respectively. The result revealed that: a) a positive significant relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behavior $r=.58, p<.05$; b) a positive significant relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behavior at $r=.17, p<.05$. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents, religious leaders and other religious agents of socialization should set examples and also get youths to engage in various practical community services in order to help inspire them to participate in helping.

Keywords: self-compassion, empathic concerns, prosocial behavior, interpersonal reactivity, youths,

Introduction

In our deeming “digital” era and society, there seems to be a high trend of what one might call “social selfishness”. This is to say that most people, especially young adults engaged in selfish activities that will benefit or promote their digital social relevance and importance. For instance, when there is an accident scene or an ongoing robbery attack most people gather to take picture or make videos with the sole aim of being the first to

either blog about it or make waves as the first tom post the information online forgetting the fact that human lives are at stake. During the rave of the police brutality and the “endSARS” protest whereby in some situation, when someone is being rough-handled or tortured by security operatives, passersby tend to ignore the situation or will be reluctant to help all in the name of minding their business or basically begin afraid of the outcome of intervening in



the situation and in order to avoid trouble, they tend to ignore the fact that there is need for urgent intervention. A personal observation by the researcher revealed that nowadays, most young adults find it difficult to help the elderly. Even when they do, it is because the said elder is related to them or they may get a tip or token for rendering the help. This is because youths especially those born in the 1980s are a generation of unapologetically focused individual who have been taught to put their need first and to focus on feeling good about themselves (Twenge, 2006). Twenge (2006) further found in her research, evidences of increase in narcissism, self-focus and entitlement in the recent generation of youth. She asserts that this trend has created a belief system that places little value on social rules. Sprecher and Fehr (2006) criticized the methodology of Twenge by arguing that the result obtained from a collage population sample cannot be generalized to an entire generation which means that every individual is guided by his or her own personality. So, based on this background, this research intends to investigate self-compassion and empathic concerns as correlates of prosocial behavior.

Prosocial behavior is defined as any voluntary acts performed with the goal of benefitting others (Dovidio, et al., 2005). That is to say that prosocial behaviour covers a range of actions intended to benefit others. This includes cooperation, sharing, helping, charitable giving and volunteering. The implication of the above definition is that prosocial behaviour usually entails some cost for the helper such as spending resources, time, efforts and sometimes even incurring physical harm in the process of rendering help. For example, acts of

kindness of charity such as giving money to a beggar self-sacrifices or heroism such as donating blood to save another are all prosocial behaviour. Batson (1991) proposed that individuals exhibit prosocial behaviour based on four motives:

Scoring high on these personality traits can lead to a various prosocial behavior towards strangers such as helping behaviors and accommodative behavior. Being a prosocial individual may also serve as protective factors for self. Studies have shown that those who engage in more prosocial behavior engage in less aggressive and antisocial behavior succeed in academics and participate in positive extracurricular activities (Badarnell, et al., 2008).

Empathic concern may correlate with pro social behavior. Previous researches have shown that empathic responses precede many prosocial acts. Batson (1991) and Eisenberg, et al (2006) have studied the emotional and cognitive state of empathy most extensively, and while their use of the term “empathy” “sympathy” and “personal distress” differs, the conceptual framework that they use is similar. They, however, define empathy as an effective response to that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel. This initial emotion of empathy often leads to “sympathy”, which Eisederg et al (2006) define as feeling of sorrow or concern for the distress of or needy other. Batson and Ahmad (2002) based on their research are of the view that people who experience empathic concern tend to show high levels of prosocial behaviour to others. Penner and Orom (2010) indicated that two major characteristics are related to prosocial



personality; the first is the other-Oriented empathy and Behaviour Oriented Empathy. People who score high on other-oriented empathy have a high sense of social responsibility, empathize with and feel emotionally tied to the needs of other people, understand the problem the victim is experiencing and have a heightened sense of moral obligation to be helpful. The second characteristics is more behavior oriented in the sense that people who fall under his category of helpfulness have been helpful to others in the past and because of that they believe that they can be effective with the help rendered to those in need.

A commonly held notion is that one must love or act compassionately towards oneself in order to love others (Campbell & Baumeister, 2001). From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, compassion or 'tsewa' for self and others is necessarily intertwined (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2002; Vreeland, 2001). Discussing compassion, the Dalai Lama proposed 'yourself first and then in a more advanced way the aspiration will embrace others. That is to say that one must be compassionate to oneself before external compassion. In a way, high levels of compassion are nothing but an advanced state of self-interest (His Holiness' the Dalai Lama, 2002, p.98). "Self-first', or the notion that self-compassion may promote kindness to others is reasonable given the way self-compassion is conceptualized (Hofmann, et al, 2011). Inherent in self compassion is the notion that all humans suffer and are worthy of human kindness (Neff, 2003b). Cultivating the capacity to turn towards oneself with kindness in the midst of emotional pain and recognizing that suffering is common in all humanity may in turn, encourage compassionate responding

towards other. Dunning (2002) in his research, predicted that self-compassion has a powerful influence on perception for others, making it likely that compassion could also influence how people relate to and treat their fellow humans. Neff and Pommier (2013) showed that there is a relation between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour. It was predicted in the research that greater self-compassion would predict greater empathy for others and more willingness to help a person in need. Self-compassionate individuals are forgiving of their own flaws and recognize their experiences as being part of the larger human experience therefore it will be reasonable to expect that they will be more understanding of the difficult situation of others and be more inclined to help.

Current Theoretical Perspectives

Indeed, several theories have been propounded by academic scholars to explain prosocial behaviour and its antecedents. Part of these theories is, evolutionary theory of Darwin, which argues that we are biologically disposed to help members of our family, as this will increase the chances of our genes surviving. According to evolutionary psychologists, each organism is engaged in a struggle to send as many of its gene as possible into the gene pool of the next generation. In this regard, the genes that promote prosocial behaviour can be seen as self-selected and as such, being helpful is an inheritable trait (Banyard, 2010). Furthermore, Stevens et al (2005) argue that four different types of behaviour can be used to explain evolutionary prosociality. They include: kin selection, which states that genetically related individuals are made likely to help each other as this increase the



chance of the common genes surviving; reciprocity, which states that help is given on an assumption of being helped at a later time; mutualism, which states that cooperative behaviours will help both individuals, and sanctioning, which states that attendant behaviour is punished to prevent repetition in the future.

The second is Neff (2003) Model of Self-compassion. This model indicates that there are three components of self-compassion, which are: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. According to him, self-kindness is based on understanding of one's weaknesses and mistakes. It manifests itself in experiencing kindness, care and goodness towards oneself. It is the awareness of the fact that it is not always possible to be able to fill one's own expectations and ideals allow to avoid frustration, stress and exaggerated self-criticism. The opposite of this is judging of oneself and excessive self-criticism.

The third is Empathy-Altruism Model by Batson (2011), which posits that the key to altruism is empathizing with the victim. That is, putting oneself in the shoes of the victim and imagining how the victim must feel. When taking this perspective and having empathic concern, potential helpers become primarily interested in increasing the wellbeing of the victim, even if the helper must incur some costs that might otherwise be easily avoided. The empathy altruism model does not dismiss egoistic motivations; helper not empathizing with victims may experience personal distress and have egoistic motivation, because egoistically motivated individuals are primarily concerned with their cost-benefit outcomes. They are less likely to help if they think they can escape the situation with no costs to

themselves. In contrast, altruistically motivated helpers are willing to accept the cost of helping to benefit a person with whom they have empathized with.

Batson (1991) is the strongest proponent of the idea that people offer help purely out of the goodness of their hearts. According to Batson's perspective, he acknowledges that people sometimes help others for selfish reasons, such as to relieve their own distress at seeing another suffer but he also argued that peoples' motives are sometimes purely altruistic, in the sense that their only goal is to help another even if doing so involves some cost to them.

However, some empirical postulations have also been carried out on the research interest. Specifically, Burnstein et al (1994) carried out a research on evolutionary theory with 40 males and 20 females, who were asked to answer some personal questions about their response to their close relatives and associates in the times of emergency. Most of the participants reported that they would be more likely to help genetic relatives than non-relatives in life and death situations such as house fire. Interesting most of the participants did not report that they would be more likely to help genetic relatives when situations was non-life threatening, which supports the idea that people are most likely in ways that ensure the survival of their own genes. Neff and Pommier (2012) conducted a research to examine the link between self-compassion and concern for the wellbeing of others and others focused concern which includes empathic concern, prosocial behaviour, personal distress and greater forgiveness. Participants included 384 college undergraduates, 400 community adults and 172 individual practicing Buddhist



meditation. Higher levels of self-compassion were significantly linked to more perspective taking, compassion for humanity, empathic concern and prosocial behaviour. Devin, et al. (2015) tested the hypothesis that mere experience of viewing another's display of emotion and responding with emotion can influence one more perception. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three emotional conditions – positive emotions (happiness), negative emotion (sadness) and neutral emotion (in control). Each participant viewed stimuli (video clip) that serve as a targeted emotion display which correspond to their assigned emotional condition, afterwards they were asked to self-report on how positively and negatively the stimuli made them feel. Later on, assignment of self-perceptions was completed in which participants rated themselves on a list of traits among these three prosocial traits (compassion, kind and generous) who serve as composite measurement of a participant's self-perceptions of their won prosociality. Results showed that participants in the neutral condition significantly were more prosocial than those in the negative and positive mood. Likewise, Welp and Brown (2014) in their research on empathy-altruism found that participants who felt greater empathy for the target reported more willingness to help out in a given situation.

Vexing issues on self-compassion

Over the years, in the area of social psychology, there has been a debate whether true altruism really exists. That is to say, if people can ever help others for reasons that are not really selfish. Some psychology literatures argue that there is always a selfish reason underlying altruistic motives. In our

present generation and in our society at large especially here in eastern Nigeria, this is argument might seem valid because from personal observation people seem to find it difficult to render help to others because of some reasons best known to them. Maybe because of trust issues or maybe to them, the cost of helping outweighs the benefit.

In our local communities, we seem to be losing a lot of social values. For example, young adults are now reluctant to help elderly people to carry their load because they do not see it as a necessity because they seem to prefer to live in their own world where everyone else feelings or affairs do not matter. In most urban habitations, people tend to engage in extravagant spending not minding if their immediate neighbour is dire need of help. Even if they have the intention to help, they will require some incentives in exchange for their "good deeds". Emergence of blog and news sites for profit has not helped matters either because most adults that are tech-savvy now tend to make profits out of misfortune of others. For example, insinuations where there are unpleasant incidences like road accidents, bloody fist fights, bullying and torturing someone to death, most people gather to either snap or video the ongoing incident for the sole purpose of uploading to their various blog sites for people to click on their respective news links forgetting the fact somebody's life is at stake and that immediate intervention is needed. It is important to note here, the concept of Bystander Intervention which refers to the tendency for people to become less likely to assist a person in distress when there are a good number of people present. In some situations, witnesses might assume that since there are so many people present, someone else will have



surely called for help, as the case may be, at the end of the day, no one will be willing to intervene. Penner and Dovidio (2005) argued that some situational factors can affect the willingness of people to help. These factors include that the people are less likely to help when the cost of helping is high. People are more likely to help attractive people and that people in good mood are more likely to assist others more than the ones in a bad mood. In line with the aforementioned, this study sought to investigate whether true or pure motives of helping still exist among youths in Nigeria. Thus, a study on self-compassion and empathic concern as correlates of prosocial behaviour becomes apt.

Based on this, this study would provide answers to the following questions:

- i. Will there be a relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis?
- ii. Will there be a relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate “self-compassion and empathic concern as correlates of prosocial behavior among youths in Awka metropolis,”

Specifically, the major aims of the study are:

- i. To investigate whether there will be a relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis.
- ii. To investigate whether there will be a relationship between empathic

concern and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis.

Hypotheses

- i. There will be a relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis.
- ii. There will be a relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour among youths in Awka metropolis.

Method

Participants

A total of 200 youths was randomly selected from different social walks of life namely: students, civil servants, artisans, self-employed and unemployed. Their age ranged between 18 and 35 years with the mean age of 22.7 and standard deviation of 4.35. Out of the participants, 81 (43%) were males while 107 (57%) were females. 89 of the participants were students, 34 were civil servants, 8 were artisans, 42 were self-employed and 15 were unemployed.

Instruments

The research employed three measuring scales, which includes index of self-compassion scale (SCS), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and the self-report altruism scale (SRAS).

Index of Self Compassion (SCS):

This is a 26-item questionnaire by Neff (2003) to measure the level of self-compassion. The subscales are self-compassion, self-judgment, common humanity, mindfulness, isolation and over identification, each subscale contains two items. The scale has 5 likert response scheme from 1 – never, the lowest response



scheme to 5 – the highest response scheme. Thirteen items (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25) were reversed. It has a minimum score of 2.5-3.5 and a maximum score of 3.5-5.0. Scores above the norm means they are high in self compassion. Scores below the norms means they are low in self compassion.

The SCS demonstrates a good validity and reliability cross culturally (Neff, 2003). Using the Cronbach alpha, the SCS total score has been found to have high consistency as reported by Van Dam et al. (2011) (α - .92), Neff et al., (2007) (α - .90) and Raes (2009) (α - .94). internal consistency between items is high for each subscale of SCS, including self-kindness (α - .89), self-judgment (α - .75), common humanity (α - .72) and over identification (α - .72). the SCS has demonstrated a good test retest reliability over three weeks period (r - .71) Reas (2011). This scale has been proven valid and reliable with Nigeria samples and it was used to assess individual's self-compassion orientation. For this study, Cronbach alpha .87 was obtained.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)

This is a 28-item questionnaire by Davis (1980), with four subscales to measure the level of love, sympathy and concern for others. The subscales comprise of perspective taking scale, fantasy scale, empathic concern scale, and personal distress scale. Each scale contains 7 items. Since the study variable is based on empathic concern, the empathic concern scale was selected from the four subscales in order to correspond with the measurement scales. The scale has a 5 Likert response scheme ranging from 0 – does not describe me very well, the lowest response scale to 4

– describes me very well. It contains 7 items. The score ranges from 0 to 28, those who score above the norm are high in empathic concern. The IRI demonstrated good test-retest reliability and convergent validity is indicated by correlations with other established empathy scales (Davis, 1980), which produced internal consistency ranging from .70 to .78 (Davis, 1994). Sex differences are reported to exist for subscale, with each woman tending to score higher than men on each subscale. This scale has been proven valid and reliable with Nigerian samples through the pilot study conducted: Cronbach's alpha of .73 was obtained.

Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS)

This is a 20-item questionnaire developed by Rushton (1981). It was designed for adult use to measure helping tendency in individuals. The scale has a 5-points Likert response scheme range from 1 – never, as the lowest response scheme to 5 – very often as the highest response scheme.

Rushton (1981) experiment using SRAS was reported valid which has good test retest reliability, the score correlate ($r = .20$) with other people who are generally caring, helpful and considerate. The range score is from 0 to 100. This scale has been proven valid and reliable with Nigerian samples used in the pilot study to assess prosocial behaviour of individual. Cronbach's Alpha of .75 was obtained.

Procedure

The researchers obtained the contact of a staff at the Anambra state Ministry of Sports and Youth Empowerment commission, Awka who provided a comprehensive list of the 2019 youth empowerment program and are residents of Awka and environs. A



systematic random sampling was done and 200 participants were selected from the provided list. The contact phone numbers and functional e-mails of the selected participants were obtained from the provided list. With the consent of the Ministry staff, the researcher sent out a bulk SMS to the selected participants informing them that they should check their respective email inbox for a questionnaire that will be sent shortly. The respondents were instructed to reply the email, fill the questionnaire and send their feedback to the email that will be attached to the body of the mail (which is temporary email account that the researcher opened for the purpose of the research) within 10days that the email was sent. They were further instructed that it is important that they respond to the mail and fill the questionnaire because it will form as

part of the criteria for the final selection process for the approval of the grant/loan for the small-scale business which they had earlier applied for. A total of the 200 respondents were contacted via the email and bulk SMS for the research and the questionnaire was sent to their mails. A total of 194 feedbacks were gotten after 13 days of contact. 6 of the responses were invalid and the researcher finally settled for 188 which was the eventual number of responses studied in the research. The demographic data collected from the respondents were gender, age, religion and occupation.

Design and Statistics

The research is a pure survey, which adopted correlation design. The statistics used is Pearson Product Moment Analysis.

Result

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients for the Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2
1. Prosocial Behaviour	12.04	2.32	-	
2. Self-compassion	30.66	5.51	.580**	-
3. Empathic Concern	15.76	5.95	.321**	.165**

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

The result of table Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis revealed a positive and

significant relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour among



the studied population $r = .58, p < .05$. Therefore, the hypothesis, which stated that “there would be a positive and significant relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour,” is accepted. The table also, showed a positive and significant relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour among the studied population $r = .17, p < .05$. Therefore, the hypothesis, which stated that “there would be a positive and significant relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour,” is accepted.

Discussion

The study tested two hypotheses. The result of the first hypothesis revealed that there was a positive relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour. This means that self-compassion individuals have a high tendency in exhibiting prosocial behaviour towards others in distress. These findings are in agreement with previous studies. Neff and Pommier (2013) compared undergraduate students, community adults and mediators in a relationship between self-compassion and prosociality. Self-compassion was positively correlated with self-reported prosocial actions in participants. A higher self-compassionate individual feels more satisfied with interpersonal relationships, they are linked to a higher propensity for prosocial behaviour, they have greater tendency to empathic reactions and accepting the perspective of other people and less prone to experience personal distress when they see a suffering person. It suggested that people with greater self-compassion have a sense of benevolence towards themselves and other people. Self-compassionate people are more emotionally stable during unpleasant or

stressful personal events (Leary, et al., 2007). Bluth and Blanton (2015) suggests that self-compassion is linked with higher satisfaction with life and general well-being, higher self-esteem, greater levels of intrinsic motivation and higher mastery goal.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that there was a positive relationship between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour. Those who have concern for others feeling are prone to exhibit prosocial behaviours. This finding is consistent with the findings of Strayer and Roberts (2004), who found that empathy is positively related to prosocial behaviour towards others. Batson (2011) supported the hypothesis that empathy plays a key role in the motivation to help. De Waal (2008) proposed that empathy is an evolved mechanism that promotes prosocial behaviour. If a person sees someone in distress, he or she may feel distressed too and this will provide a strong internal signal that the other person needs help. At that point, the feeling of distress may lead to the person to think of what might make him feel better in similar situations, which may then promote helping behaviour. Williams et al. (2014) found that empathy have generally had positive correlations with prosocial behaviour in children aged between 5 to 6 years. Empathic concern for others has been linked to benefits for both the self and the receiver if the compassionate behaviour. Concern for other is associated with higher personal wisdom, higher self-esteem, more self-awareness, the feeling of being close to other individuals, general good feelings as well as expectations of positive mood (Pommier, 2011; Specher & Fehr, 2006). Concern for others leads to positive interpersonal behaviour. It has been



associated with higher empathic feelings for others which leads to more social support and volunteering behaviour, being more helpful and as well as having a greater chance of treating others with politeness, dignity and respect (Pommier, 2011).

Implication of the Study

The research has created awareness on the correlation between self-compassion, empathic concern and prosocial behaviour among youths. The findings revealed a significant relationship between self-compassion and prosocial behaviour, in the sense that compassion for oneself can predict prosocial behaviour. That is to say compassionate care for oneself in difficult times needs to be put under considerations when attending to others' needs. The study also revealed that empathic concern was indeed related to prosocial behaviour. This implies that one, at all times, need to have the best interest of others at heart in trying times and this unconditional love and care towards others can promote prosocial

behaviours. That is to say, that one has to feel the need to help before engaging in prosocial behaviour.

Recommendation

In our present era of social media, social media influencers should publish articles and blogs that will serve as inspirations to our youths to see the felt need to engage in prosocial behaviours because a lot of negative social media influence has been going on and because of this, a lot of youths are deviating from the past social norms. Parents, religious leaders and other agents of socialization should set examples and also get youths to engage in various practical community services in order to help inspire them to participate in helping. Lecturers in social sciences should tutor the students more in seeing the benefits of prosocial behaviour and adults should also see the need to join local and international NGOs like the Rotary and Rotaract club so as to render services to humanity and also encourage others to do so.

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