

Which type of people tend to help others?



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Abstract

Have you ever helped a friend find a lost item? Or donated old clothes or toys to a charity? When you help someone, you are taking part in prosocial behaviors. In our study, we analyzed data to determine which factors relate to prosocial behavior. We explored life satisfaction, positive emotions, and negative emotions. We found that people who are more satisfied with their life take part in more prosocial

behaviors. We also found a relationship between positive emotions and prosocial behaviors. We learned that negative emotions are more difficult to use as a predictor for prosocial behaviors. Negative emotions often relate to less prosocial behaviors. But the relationship between negative emotions and prosocial behavior was less consistent.

Introduction

There are many ways to help others. You can donate money to a charity, listen to a friend at the end of a bad day, or take care of a neighbor's pet while they are out of town. **Whether you are giving money or time, when you help others, you are being prosocial.** Prosocial behaviors are behaviors that benefit other people.

Why do people take part in prosocial behaviors? **Research connects prosocial behaviors with a person's subjective well-being.** This is often used as a measure of happiness. There are three main factors that contribute to a person's subjective well-being: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Life satisfaction is how a person feels about their life. **Positive affect** refers to positive emotions, such as excitement and pride. **Negative affect** refers to negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, and anxiety.

Previous research showed that life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect impact prosocial behaviors. We wanted to determine the size of these relationships. **We hypothesized that the more people feel satisfied with their life, the more they take part in prosocial behaviors.** We also hypothesized that positive affect predicts more prosocial behavior. We did not make a prediction about the relationship between prosocial behavior and negative affect.



A



B

Prosocial behaviors are actions that help others, including

- A)** comforting a friend and
- B)** volunteering time to a charity.

Methods

We explored the data about subjective well-being collected by the Gallup World Poll. This is a questionnaire given to adults in 163 countries. We used different questions to measure prosocial behavior and each well-being factor.

- Prosocial behavior – People stated if they had donated money, volunteered time, and helped a stranger in the past month.
- Life satisfaction – The poll asked people to imagine their life as a ladder with steps numbered 0 to 10. Zero represented the worst possible life for them and 10 represented the best possible life for them. People stated on which step they felt they were.
- Positive affect and negative affect – People described how they had felt the previous day. They also described what activities had occurred that day.

We also considered country-level factors that could affect prosocial behaviors. We combined data that described a country's culture and wealth with the Gallup World Poll data.

We analyzed the data using a computer program. The program determined an **effect size score, r** . The higher the r value between a factor and prosocial behavior, the greater effect the factor has on prosocial behavior. When the r value is positive, there is a **direct relationship** between the variables. That means as one factor increases, the other factor also increases. When the r value is negative, there is an **inverse relationship**. That means as one factor increases, the other factor decreases.

Results

Our analysis of individuals within a country showed that life satisfaction had an r value of 0.09. Positive affect had an r value of 0.11. Negative affect had an r value of 0.0048. So, all the values were positive on average.

Then we determined r values for each factor in 161 countries. All the r values were positive for prosocial behavior. But they were not the same for all countries. The r values for positive

affect varied from 0.01 in Congo to 0.22 in Ecuador. They were 0.00 for Syria and Swaziland.

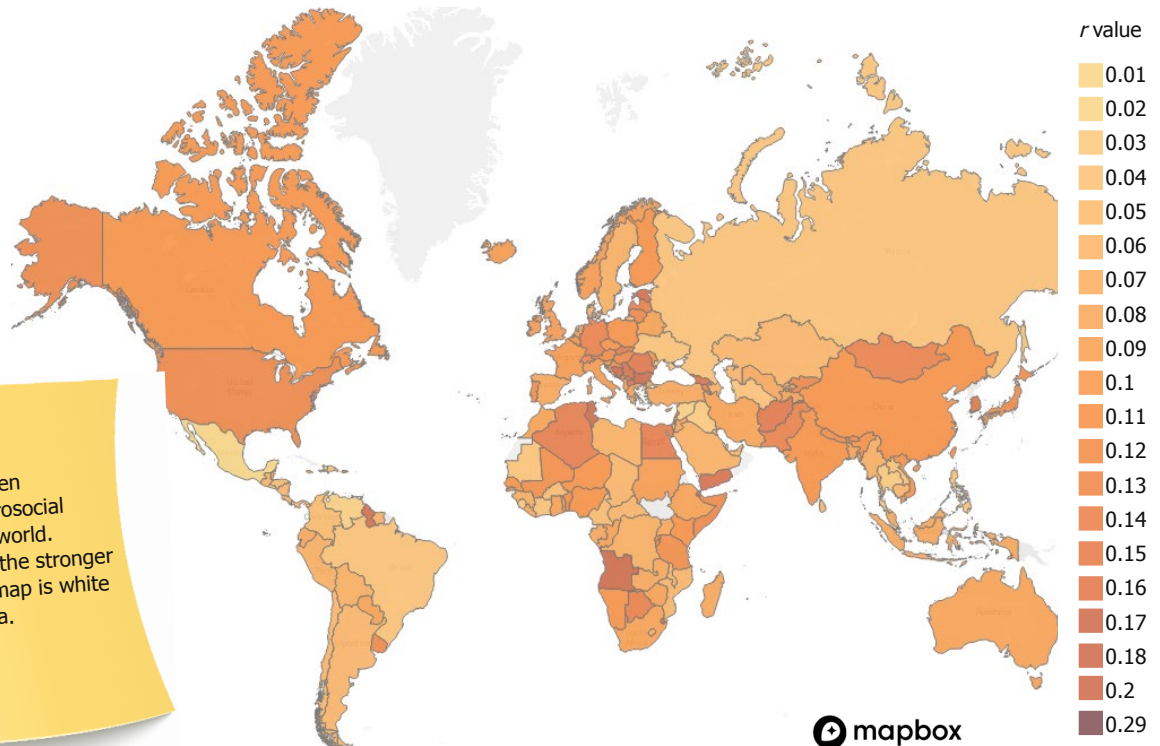
The r values were also positive for life satisfaction. They varied from 0.01 in Mexico and Haiti to 0.29 in Somaliland. Negative affect was more inconsistent. In some countries, like Afghanistan, the r value was negative. Other countries, such as Madagascar, had a positive r value.

Where are many of the countries with the strongest relationship between life satisfaction and prosocial behaviors located?

Figure 1:

The correlation between life satisfaction and prosocial behaviors across the world. The darker the color, the stronger the correlation. The map is white in places without data.

Map © Mapbox



Discussion

Our research showed that positive affect and life satisfaction relate to prosocial behaviors. But positive emotions have a slightly greater relationship. That means that **when people feel positive emotions, they tend to help others. People who feel satisfied with their life are also likely to take part in prosocial behaviors.**

Negative affect was inconsistent across countries. We think this variation is because people are unhappy for different reasons. Some reasons include poverty, pollution, war, and racial inequality. We also think that some of these factors have a greater impact on prosocial behavior.

The culture of a country also impacts the impact of negative emotions. People in some countries are more indulgent. That means they put more emphasis on pleasure. These countries showed a positive relationship between negative affect and prosocial behaviors. It is possible that people in indulgent countries help others to make themselves feel better.

Our research shows correlation, but it does not prove causation. That means our findings show that happier people are more likely to give their time and money to others. But to determine why, we need more research.

Conclusion

There is a connection between being happy and prosocial behaviors. There are many ways to increase your personal well-being. You can participate in hobbies and exercise. You could write about the people and things that you are grateful for in a journal. You might also spend time with

positive and supportive friends and family. Engaging in acts of kindness is both prosocial and can make you feel happier. Taking time to increase your happiness and others' can help make the world a better place.

Glossary of Key Terms

Causation – a relationship between two sets of data when the trend in one of the sets causes the change in the other. For example, as the temperature in a heating pot with water rises, the amount of water in the pot decreases (because it evaporates).

Correlation – a relationship between two factors in the data which change in sync with each other: as one increases, the other increases too (if it's directly correlated) or the second one decreases (if it's inversely correlated). Correlations do not show that one factor causes the change in the other factor; there may be other factors that affect them both, or that affect each independently.

Direct relationship – a relationship between factors where the factors increase or decrease together. For example, when the number of sunlight hours increases, the air temperature also increases.

Effect size score, r value – The higher the effect size score, the greater the relationship between two variables. In our case, the higher the r value between a factor and prosocial behavior, the greater the relationship between the factor and prosocial behavior.

Inverse relationship – a relationship between factors where if one factor increases, the other decreases. For example, as the price of pizza increases, the number of slices purchased decreases.

Negative affect – negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, and anxiety.

Positive affect – positive emotions, such as excitement and pride.

Prosocial – taking actions that benefit other people.

Subjective well-being – a combination of how a person feels about their life and how much positive and negative emotions they experience.

Check your understanding

1 What factors contribute to a person's subjective well-being?

2 Brainstorm a list of prosocial behaviors that you, friends, and family participate in.

3 Give two examples of emotions associated with negative affect. What are some possible reasons that negative affect has a more inconsistent relationship with prosocial behaviors?

4 Why is it important to remember that the relationships we found are considered correlations, not causations?

5 Identify three activities that you think help increase your happiness. Explain your choices.

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