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Relationship between Altruism and Ecological Attitude among Adolescents

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Abstract

Modern world is conceived as the busy world for almost all the human beings irrespective of the age and gender. On the one side people remain busy in one or the other pursuit specific of their age to face the challenges and pressures either posed by the external factors or perceived due to their internal factors. On the other side humans are social beings and the products and the producers of their environment. The relationship of the individual with the fellow beings and environment is inseparable. But in this era it is increasingly felt that the human beings particularly the young generation is getting oblivious of this fact causing decreased level of interpersonal concerns and sensitivity towards the environment. The world they are born is also responsible largely for this kind of apathy. The present study was conducted to see the difference between boys and girls on altruism and ecological attitudes. For this purpose, 200 adolescent boys and 200 girls were administered altruism scale and ecological attitude and cognitive scale. Significant differences were found between boys and girls on the measure of altruism and real obligation measure of ecological attitude. In both cases boys had significantly greater means. However, on emotional measure of ecological attitude girls had significantly greater mean. Positive significant relationship was obtained between altruism and ecological attitude.

Keywords: Altruism, ecological attitude.

Introduction

Altruism is defined as unselfish concern for the welfare of others. Altruism is performing an act voluntarily to help someone else when there is no expectation of a reward in any form, except a feeling of having done a good deed (Schroeder *et al.*, 1995). Many a times the term altruism and prosocial behaviour are used interchangeably, but prosocial behaviour is much broader category (Batson, 1998). Prosocial behaviour ranges over a continuum from the most selfless acts of altruism to helpful acts that are motivated entirely by self interest.

There are various broad theoretical perspectives concerned with altruistic behaviour. First, an evolutionary approach suggests that a predisposition to help is part of our genetic, evolutionary heritage. Second, a socio-cultural perspective emphasizes the importance of social norms that dictate when we should help people in need. Third, a learning approach proposes that people learn to be helpful, following basic principles of reinforcement and modeling. Fourth, a decision making perspective focuses on the processes that influence judgments about when help is needed. It also emphasizes the weighing of costs and benefits in the decision to give help. Finally attribution theory highlights the idea that the willingness to help depends on the merit of the case and, in particular, whether the person deserves assistance. While lack of the presence / effect of any of the above mentioned perspectives along with diffusion of responsibility, lack of time and motivation, pluralistic ignorance and lack of empathy are likely to become the impeding factors in the altruistic act.

Depending on the effect of the kind of motivating or blocking factors altruistic behaviour may or may not occur. The altruistic paradox which arises from the fact that mankind individually and collectively can be both cruel and kind on one and the same time. Man himself can be good or bad and capable of empathy and kindness, but as a member of social system, he is sometimes forced to carry out inhuman as well as humane acts. In its optimistic mode (man is good) as in the rousseauesque or marxian tradition man is essentially good and capable of kind and noble thoughts and acts. However sometimes he gets caught in bad societies that create selfish and inhuman behaviour. The opposite and the pessimistic mode (man is bad) runs in a line from Machiavelli to Hobbes to Freud. In this mode man is said to possess basically animalistic and bestial qualities that must be controlled by a society and its laws or else he would become worse than an animal.

The dimension of human relationship is not confined only to fellow human beings; it also extends to other aspects of the universe. The human behaviour is not limited to certain specific individual or certain groups of people in a specific area or locality. It functions always in a dynamic and changing pattern all over the world. Thus human behaviour is highly influenced by environmental factors and in return human behaviour changes environmental atmosphere. Through a number of information sources we are aware of the potential environmental hazards. The effects of environmental degradation and imbalance are being faced by almost all the nations in the world and environmental problem has become a global challenge. Lack of awareness, negative attitude and faulty cognitions may be at the base of such environmental apathy and insensitivity, the understanding of which is very essential so that to modify and develop the human psyche which is human and environment friendly. The objective of present study are: (i) to study the altruism in adolescent boys and girls; (ii) to study the ecological attitude of adolescent boys and girls; (iii) to study the difference in altruism between adolescent boys and girls; (iv) to study the difference in ecological attitude between adolescent boys and girls and (v) to study the relationship between altruism and ecological attitude in adolescent boys and girls.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Present study was carried out in Panchkula District, Haryana India (Figure 1). Panchkula district is surrounded by Himachal Pradesh in the north and north east by Ambala district in the east by Kurukshetra district in the south and Punjab and Union Territory of Chandigarh in the west. Panchkula was formed as the 17th district of Haryana on 15th August, 1995. It comprises of two sub divisions and two Tehsils named Panchkula and Kalka. It has 264 villages out of which 12 villages are uninhabited and 10 villages wholly merged in towns or treated as census towns according to census 1991. There are four towns in the district named Kalka, Panchkula, Pinjore and HMT Pinjore. Area of the district is 816 sq km and the total population is 3,19,398 out of which 1,73,557 are males and 1,45,841 females. The male literacy in the district is 61.8% whereas of the females is 46%.

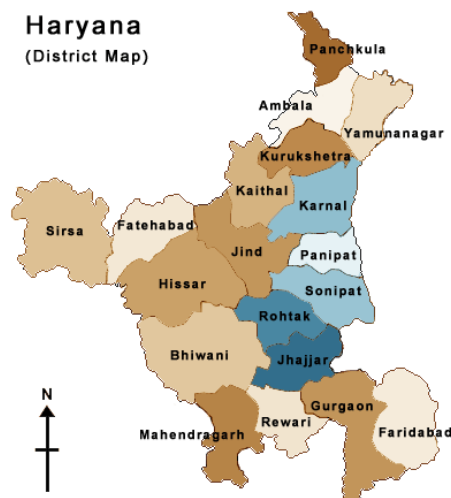


Figure 1 Location of the study

The study was conducted on 400 adolescents (N =200 boys and 200 girls) of age ranging between 15 to 18 years. The sample was homogeneous from educational and socio-economic point of view.

Tools applied for present study are: altruism scale (Rai and Singh, 1998) and ecological Attitude and cognitive scale (Rajamanickam, 1999)

Results and Discussion

The higher level of altruism in adolescent boys in comparison to girls and the significant difference ($p <.01$) has been found in the altruism level of the adolescent boys and girls (Table 1). Boys are more helpful and altruistic in comparison to the girls in their daily lives.

Table 1 Significance of difference between means on Altruism between adolescent boys and girls

Participants	Mean	SD	t	Inference
Boys	42.15	9.51	4.89	0 .01
Girls	36.28	8.29		

Table 2 Significance of difference between means on Oral Obligation measure between adolescent boys and girls

Participants	Mean	SD	t	Inference
Boys	7	3.21	1.59	Non significant
Girls	6	2.19		

The higher level of oral obligation to deal with the ecological problems in boys in comparison to girls but the difference between the two groups has been found to be non-significant (Table 2). It expresses the same level of favorable attitude of boys and girls towards the environmental issues and problems. The results on real obligation measure depict the action oriented mode of the real obligation mode of the adolescent boys to solve the ecological problems as they participate more in activities related to the betterment of environment while the girls lacked in their responsibility towards the active solution of ecological problems. The difference on the real obligation scale has been found to be significant at 0.01 level between boys and girls (Table 3).

Table 3 Significance of difference between means on Real Obligation measure between adolescent boys and girls

Participants	Mean	SD	t	Inference
Boys	8.3	3.53	2.36	0.01
Girls	6.55	2.90		

Table 4 Significance of difference between means on emotional measure between adolescent boys and girls

Participants	Mean	SD	t	Inference
Boys	6.9	1.97	1.98	.05
Girls	8	2.81		

Results in table 4 show the higher mean value on emotional obligation measure in adolescent girls in comparison to the boys, where girls had been found better than boys. It is inferred that the adolescent girls get more emotional i.e. feel bad when ecological problems and issues are posed and have higher level of emotional arousal about the ecological concerns in comparison to the boys.

Table 5 Significance of difference between means on Cognitive measure between adolescent girls and boys

Participants	Mean	SD	t	Inference
Boys	7.8	2.74	1.72	Non significant
Girls	7	1.94		

Table 5 reveals the non-significant difference on the cognitive scale between adolescent boys and girls thereby inferring that the participants' level of awareness about the ecological problems is same. Boys and girls do not differ on this aspect.

The inter correlations between altruism and the four measures of ecological attitude and cognitive scales have been found to be positively correlated ($p < 0.05$). This depicts that altruism is likely to have positive relationship with environment friendly behavior and vice-versa.

Conclusion

On the basis of the results it can be concluded that adolescent boys and girls both are equally aware about the ecological problems being faced by the modern world. This owes to the homogeneity of the sample from the socio-economic and educational point of view and equal opportunities of exposure to the issues of the world. The attitude of both boys and girls is also favorable towards the environment and thus they are pro-environment. Though the girls are more sensitive and emotional about the environmental issues and problems in comparison to the boys but boys are more action oriented towards the resolution of the ecological problems and take active and concrete steps in this direction. Over all boys are more altruistic and display more pro social behavior in comparison to the girls. This difference between the adolescent boys and girls may be attributed to the differences in the socio-cultural norms prevalent for the males and the females in the society. It can be further concluded that altruistic attitude is also positively related with positive attitude towards ecology.

Authors' contributions: Dr. Jyotsana, (Reader and Chaiperson) contributed in experiment design, performance, editing and also corresponding authors of the manuscript.

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