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Religiosity, Empathy, and Its Relationship with Prosocial Behaviour, The Mediating Role of Peer's Relationship

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the role of religiosity and empathy in elucidating prosocial behavior's development in light of peers' relationships among Muslim adolescents in Jordan through testing a proposed model that represents the relationship among variables. The study sample consisted of 380 first- and second-year students at the University of Jordan during the academic year 2023-2024 who were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The results revealed that religiosity and empathy predicted prosocial behavior. Peers' relationships were predicted by both religiosity and empathy, which in turn predicted prosocial behaviors.

Keywords: Religiosity, Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, Peer's Relationship

INTRODUCTION

Prosocial behavior has been variously addressed and studied from different angles across the literature (Hay, 1994). Normally, it represents a social behavior that benefits another person and makes him happy (Malti et al., 2009). While defined by Kruss et al. (2012) as an ethical behavior that promotes harmony between individuals and benefits society, Humans have a remarkable capacity to engage in prosocial behaviors, especially in the adolescent stage (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003).) as a result of physical maturity and increasing autonomy that happen in adolescence and let them participate in different prosocial behaviors, according to Carlo and his colleagues (2012); additionally, adolescents' growing capacity for perspective-taking (Vandergraaff et al. 2014, for example) might help in the development of more advanced moral thinking, which ought to promote and facilitate positive social behavior (Eisenberg & spinrad, 2014).

Prosocial behavior can be seen clearly in adolescents when they engage in behaviors like sharing, cooperating, involvement in sports, volunteerism, altruism, and constructive engagement with the community (Boles et al., 2006) without expectation of obtaining external rewards (Macauley & Berkowitz, 1970). Prosocial behavior's importance comes from considering it a key to positive adolescents' development because engaging in prosocial activities is linked to favorable outcomes like wellbeing, greater academic performance, increased confidence, desirable personal traits, beside better ways to cope (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014). Moreover, compared to other age groups, anti-social behaviors like substance misuse, vandalism, hostility, and sexual behaviors are more common during adolescence; prosocial behavior serves as an effective factor that prevents these behaviors (Perren & Hornung, 2005).

Prosocial behavior's development can't be separated from the various internal and external factors' roles. Religion, which is defined as "a combination of internal religious experiences and external religious practices" (French et al., 2008), can be a major external force that influences prosocial behavior through its potent social influences, which possesses a powerful effect capable of impacting how each person's life turns out. Additionally, it has been connected to a number of largely favorable things for adolescents, such as increased prosocial behavior and reduced problem conduct (Eisenberg et al., 2010).

Also, empathy, which is defined by Eisenberg & Fabes (1999), to "an affective response that stems from one's apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition and involves feeling similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel," is an important internal factor since it can predict a person's desire to help others (Bohns & Flynn, 2021). When adolescents' pursuit of desired values is motivated

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by empathy (Betzler, 2019), their engagement in prosocial behaviors such as cooperation, volunteering to help others, and donations will increase (Ramey et al., 2017). Furthermore, when individuals see empathy as a source of emotional depletion, they tend to be more self-focused beside adopting selfish values (Kashirskaya, 2020). Consequently, focusing on and developing empathy skills from a young age will provide a stronger basis that facilitate upcoming person's desirable interpersonal behavior (Simon & Nader-Grosbois, 2021).

prosocial behavior's emergence has been connected to ecological factors, especially the good relationship with peers since it provides adolescents with opportunities and support to engage with prosocial behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Additionally, according to researches results; quality of acquired prosocial behavior displayed by adolescent is impacted by the level of their engagement with their peers (Heng, 2014)

The concept of developmental assets is quite pertinent to the current research (Benson et al., 1998), which proposes splitting 40 developmental assets into 20 internal and 20 external components. Assets that are internal, such as empathy or religiosity, when integrated with external assets, such as peers' relationships, will lead to positive and desirable outcomes. Also, for a number of reasons, positive youth development theory represents the scientific basis for the current study, especially from the perspective that adolescents, according to the theory, possess the capacity for constructive growth alongside development and that this potential is further enhanced when young people engage in multiple nutrient-rich relationships with their peers.

Religion and Prosocial Behavior

Adolescents' prosocial behavior and religiosity are positively correlated and negatively predicted antisocial behavior as stated by Stolz and his colleagues (2013), which is shown by several studies that have found that prosociality has a positive correlation with major facets of religion, such as religious belief and going to mosque (Preston, Salomon, & Ritter, 2014; Saroglou, 2013). Probably one of the best logical illustration for these correlations is the method by which religion encourages prosocial values and attitudes while condemning problematic ones (e.g., behave kindly with your neighbor, don't hurt others). Also, socialization is the most well-established way in which religiosity may influence prosocial behavior by stressing positive social behaviors (Ellison, 1992; Youniss et al., 1999). Additionally, prosocial concepts are present in all religious writings, which offer rewards such as eternal recompenses when a person behave prosocially and penalties like hell when doing problematic behaviors (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

This relation between religion and prosocial behavior in adolescence was studied by several studies, which showed that religion is positively associated with prosocial behavior (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Regnerus, 2003). For instance, Marris and his colleagues (2000) found that religious attendance is also associated with volunteerism. In another study done by Hardy & Carlo (2005) which showed positive relationship between religiosity and different types of prosocial behavior in adolescents.

According to a study by Malhotra (2010), those who regularly came to church had higher charitable giving rates than those who did. Similarly, Einhoff (2011) found that religious beliefs were a driving force behind people's charitable actions. Furthermore, a study done in Morocco by Duhaim, which is an environment similar to the current study (2015), reported that religious salience increases prosocial behavior. Kaneez and Imtiaz (2020) also found a significant statistical effect of various religious levels on adolescents' prosocial behavior.

Peers' Relationship and Prosocial Behavior

Positive peers' relationships were defined by Vanhalst and his colleagues (2013) as "a sense of connectedness, acceptance, and positive feelings when interacting with peers." Good peer relationships have been linked to thriving social behavior, reduced negative behavioral issues, and psychological adaptation (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Adolescents' positive peers' relationships are a vital factor in developing prosocial behaviors because of the huge amount of time they interact with each other, and thus the influence that results from that interaction (Brendgen et al., 2007). Literature has asserted that peer interaction provides opportunities for adolescents to learn social skills from each other (Yoon, 2020). A positive relationship with peers also functions as a protective factor because it provides guidance and monitoring against problem behavior (Markiewicz et al., 2006).

These positive interactions between peers are associated with improved academic achievements, social adaptation, increased self-value, and prosocial behavior. Also, peers provide a frame of reference for adolescents' role orientation; peer influence can be the key core of risky behavior, or it can also bring learning and prosocial behavior (van Hoorn & Fuligni, 2016). Adolescents also tend to imitate people similar to themselves, such as their peers, compared with people in other age groups (Ryalls et al., 2000).

Empathy and Prosocial Behavior

Empathy was defined by Eisenberg and Fabes (1999) as an "affective response that stems from one's apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition and involves feeling similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel." Also, it has been studied as a multiple-dimension concept, including emotional and cognitive sides; emotional empathy is defined by Decety and Jackson (2004), as "indirect experience of emotions consistent with those of the observed person and often leads to empathic concern, which includes feelings of sorrow or concern for another. While Cognitive empathy which is the same of perspective-taking refers to "awareness and understanding of another's emotional status" as Davis (1983) indicated. Adolescents' prosocial behavior may be facilitated by both perspective-taking and empathic care (Hoffman 2000). Researchers have long recognized empathy as a fundamental social skill that allows an individual to anticipate, understand, and experience the view points of others (Davis & Franzoi, 1991). According to Feshbach (1978), empathy is a crucial factor in determining social interactions; it seems to be crucial for the development of the mental processes to understand social atmosphere and prosocial behavior (Staub, 1971). Which several researchers of various ages and populations have found (Pang et al., 2022). Empirical data from earlier studies supports that prosocial behavior and adolescents' empathy are positively correlated, although that cross-sectional studies provide most of the evidence (Berger et al. 2015). An article done by Carlo and his colleagues (2015) showed that prosocial behavior in the early to middle stages of adolescence and one year later was likewise predicted by empathetic concern.

Current Study

Prosocial development has consistently been a field of research, and studies pertaining to all age groups from infancy to adolescence have been conducted (Crocetti et al. 2016). However, prosocial behavior in muslim communities during adolescence has been the subject of very little cross-sectional research according to Luengo and his colleagues (2013). In addition to focusing on the information showing that a number of nations with a majority of Muslims, including Jordan, are having difficulty meeting the needs of their youthful populace in terms of positive development (Krauss, 2018) and steering adolescents towards desirable adulthood and keep them away from deviant standards (Bazemore and Terry, 1997), this study's main objective is to study prosocial behavior predictors between Jordanian adolescents. Positive youth development theory serves as the foundation for the current study, which asserts that the relationship between ecological context (e.g., peers) and personality characteristics (e.g., empathy, religiosity) influences adolescents' development. In addition, PYD theory asserts that the majority of adolescents have innate potential to develop positively when they are engaged in relationship contexts and ecologies that support their development. Moreover, PYD theory covers developmental contexts, especially peer relationships, as well as developmental strengths (personal qualities such as the abilities of adolescents, including their acquired skills, qualifications, attitudes, and dispositions), which have the capacity to create, encourage, and provide means and chances for adolescents to act pro-socially (Lerner, 2004).

METHOD

The study used a cross-sectional research methodology to study the predictors of prosocial behavior in Jordanian adolescents. Data collection was done through a self-administered questionnaire in relation to religiosity, intentional self-regulation, and prosocial behavior

Settings

This study took place in Jordan at the University of Jordan

Sample

In this study, A simple random sampling technique was applied and 380 adolescents participated; study's population was all 1st and 2nd year students at the University of Jordan.

Measures

Religiosity

A scale developed by Purwono (2010) was used to measure the extent to which individuals exhibited the required and recommended Muslim religious behavior. Participants answered statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never/almost never true (1) to almost always/always true (5) to respond to 16 questions about how regularly they participate in mandated acts of worship ("I pray all of the daily obligatory prayers (salah)) and recommended (e.g., "I pray the nonobligatory (sunnah) prayer before or after the obligatory prayers"). Prior to use for this study, the original items were adjusted for Jordanian use (and examined by Jordanian experts with backgrounds in psychology and Islam), and four items were removed according to the recommendations of developmental psychologists and Islamic scholars because these items do not suit the Jordanian community. Internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0.81$). A confirmatory factor analysis for one factor solution yielded satisfactory fit indices $\chi^2 (62.59, df = 27)$, $CMIN/DF = 2.39$; $n = 380$ $P < 0.001$, $CFI = 0.97$; $RMSEA = 0.7$; $SRMR = 0.01$.

Empathy

The Basic Empathy Scale (BES) was used to measure empathy. BES has been developed by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006). Participants responded to statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). This scale consisted of 20 items on how adolescents show empathy (e.g., when someone is feeling 'down', I can usually understand how they feel) or ignore others feelings (e.g., I am not usually aware of my friends' feelings). Internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0.77$). A confirmatory factor analysis for one factor solution yielded satisfactory fit indices $\chi^2 (51.59, df = 35)$, $CMIN/DF = 1.52$; $n = 380$ $P < 0.001$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.4$, and $SRMR = 0.01$.

Prosocial Behavior

Adults' Prosocialness Scale for Caprara and colleagues (2005) was used to assess participants' prosocial behavior. It measures behavior and feelings that can be traced back to one of the four actions: sharing ("I easily lend money or other things"), helping ("I try to help others"), showing care of, and demonstrating empathy for the needs and requests of others ("I easily put myself in the shoes of those who are in discomfort"). Participants responded to 16 items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never/almost never true (1) to almost always/always true (5). Internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0.79$). A confirmatory factor analysis for one factor solution yielded satisfactory fit indices $\chi^2 (74.36, df = 28)$, $CMIN/DF = 2.73$; $n = 380$ $P < 0.001$, $CFI = 0.96$; $RMSEA = 0.7$; $SRMR = 0.03$.

Peers Relationship

To measure peer relationships, the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale was used (Huebner, 1994). It consists of nine items, e.g., "My friends treat me well," "I wish I had different friends," and "My friends will help me if I need it." All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Strong internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0.91$). A confirmatory factor analysis for one factor solution yielded satisfactory fit indices $\chi^2 (31.36, df = 21)$, $CMIN/DF = 1.68$; $n = 380$ $P < 0.001$, $CFI = 0.99$; $RMSEA = 0.5$; $SRMR = 0.03$.

RESULTS

Introductory statistical Analyses

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the measures are presented in Table 1. Structural equation model (SEM) analyses were conducted using the statistical package Amos. The amount of missing data was smaller than one percent across scales and was replaced with the item-mean substitution method, which is a

practice followed when the amount of missing value is less than 10% (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The variables of the study achieved a multivariate normal distribution, as all the values of the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis ranged between [-1, +1], which supports the univariate normal distribution according to George & Mallery (2010). After eliminating eight participants (multivariate outliers), our data exhibited multivariate normality (Byrne, 2016).

Table (1) Descriptive statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4
Religiosity	-	0.40**	0.27**	0.35**
Empathy		-	0.38**	0.41**
Peers relationship			-	0.46**
Prosocial behavior				-
Mean	4.49	4.11	4.12	4.39
SD	0.44	0.52	0.49	0.45

**P<0.001

Main Analysis

The hypothetical model of the current study consisted of four latent variables: Religiosity, Empathy, Peers Relationship, and Prosocial Behavior. SEM analyses were done using the maximum likelihood estimation procedures using Amos (Byrne, 2016) to test the hypothesized causal relationships. A chi-square test was used to assess model fit (Kline, 2011). Model fit was assessed using the following: the comparative fit index (CFI), the incremental fit index (IFI), the standard root mean square residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). A normed chi square value lower than 3.0 (Bollen, 1989), a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value less than or equal to 0.08 (Kline, 2011), and a comparative fit index (CFI) equal to or larger than 0.90 represent an acceptable fit (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2007).

The final model (Figure 1) showed an adequate fit: $\chi^2(2) = 1.75$; CFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.4; SRMR = 0.004. However, the modification index suggested adding covariance between some items, which could be justified by the similarity of the content and wording of the two paragraphs.

The direct relationships between religiosity and prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and empathy and prosocial behavior ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$) were significant. Also, peer relationships were predicted by religiosity and empathy.

Peer relationships predicted prosocial behavior

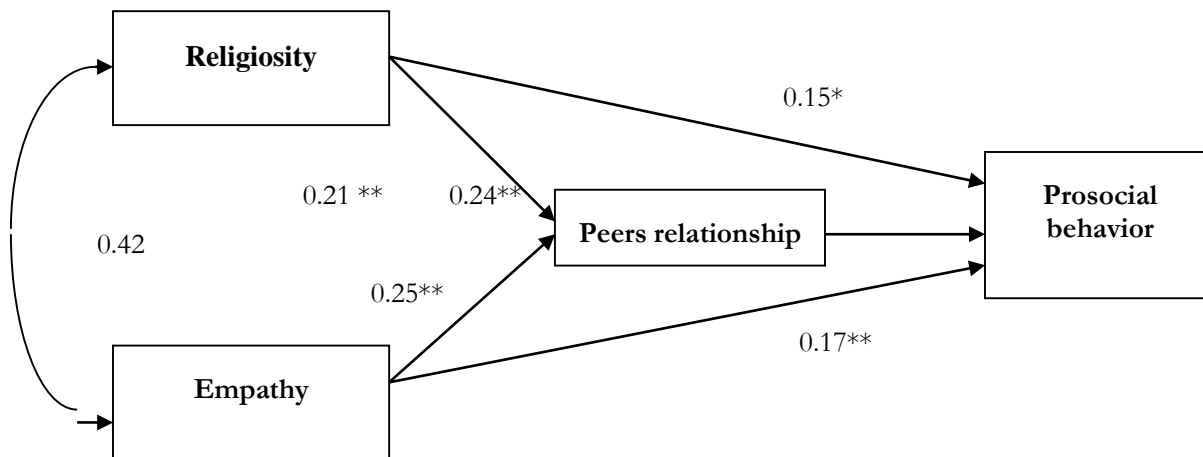


Figure 1 model results showing significant paths only. Path coefficients are presented as standardized coefficient. ** P<0.01; * P<0.05

To assess the significance of the indirect effects, bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated in Amos 23.0 at a 95% confidence interval. All indirect paths are significant. It can be seen from Figure 1 results that religiosity positively predicted peer relationships (β 0.21, $P < 0.01$), and religiosity also positively predicted prosocial behavior (β 0.15, $P < 0.05$). In addition, empathy positively predicted peer relationships (β 0.25, $P < 0.01$), and empathy also positively predicted prosocial behavior (β 0.17, $P < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Discussion: The study's main objective was to investigate the presence of a causal relationship between religiosity and empathy and prosocial behavior in light of peers' relationships through testing a proposed model that represents the relationships among variables. We hypothesized that religiosity and empathy would significantly predict adolescents' prosocial behavior in light of peers' relationships. The study's model and the hypothesized relationships were examined using SEM. The findings revealed that the suggested mathematical model, which explains the different relationships between the variables of the study, had acceptable matching indicators, and the result confirms the assumptions that were made before the study.

The results showed that religiosity positively predicted prosocial behavior among adolescents, which can be interpreted by saying that religiosity grants adolescents clear moral directives that direct and energize adolescents thinking and behavior, as Smith (2003) has proposed, such as Islam's strong emphasis on helping those in need and supporting them, which is one of the five pillars of Islam (Homerin, 2005), which are included in the Islamic religious scriptures that are rich of role models and teachings too, as a result of prosocial behaviors (Hardy & Carlo, 2005), leading adolescents to act prosocially. Also, religious rites encourage prosocial behavior by serving as a reminder to adolescents and strengthening their adherence to prosocial religious values, which promote prosocial behaviors (Atran & Henrich, 2010) through emphasizing prosocial behaviors during socialization (Ellison, 1992; Youniss et al., 1999). Besides that, prosocial values can be noticed in the vast majority of religious scriptures and thoughts, which offer rewards to behave in a prosocial way and abstain from problematic behavior in the form of occasionally eternal rewards and penalties (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

Secondly, the results showed that empathy positively predicted prosocial behavior among adolescents; this can be illustrated by the fact that adolescents may use empathy as an effective strategy to regulate emotions when dealing with peers, which consequently caused a rise in prosocial behavior (Stevens & Taber, 2021). Also, according to Bohns and Flynn (2021), empathy consists of two subsystems: cognition and emotion, which form the basis for prosocial behavior. In addition, adolescents are empathetic and use their understanding of people's sentiments and thoughts to make themselves feel comfortable and connected (Zhang et al., 2019), building positive relationships with those around them. Better bonds with others lead to greater prosocial behavior (Jordan & Foster, 2016); thus, adolescents with strong empathy interact with peers more effectively and additionally display increased prosocial behaviors, which matched earlier research (Hameed et al., 2018). The Hypothesis of Empathy Altruism suggests that having an empathic feeling for someone results in a type of concern with empathy, leading to a selfless desire to improve the welfare of the individual (Batson, 1991), leading to peer engagement. Therefore, feelings like empathy will arise when people see and experience the suffering of others (Batson et al., 1981). This matches the findings of earlier studies (Ding & Lu, 2016; Carrizales et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2022; Van der Graaff et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). For instance, Ding and Lu (2016) found that empathy and prosocial behavior had a moderately positive correlation.

Finally, results showed that religiosity and empathy predicted peer relationships, which in turn predicted adolescents' prosocial behavior. This result is in harmony with an array of research results that suggest that religiosity and empathy are associated with greater-quality peer relationships (Wagaman, 2011). Results can be explained by the fact that adolescents will exhibit a greater feeling of empathy for their peers because they have experienced comparable life circumstances (Batanova and Loukas, 2012), which will lead to an increase in one's sense that he is accepted, linked, and happier when he is with his peers (Vanhalst et al., 2013), resulting in prosocial behavior, flexible social functioning, and thriving social conduct (Luthar, 2006; Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Religiosity's influence on peer relationships can be explained through two complementary processes (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). The first process, named homophily, is that religion motivates adolescents to form positive relationships with peers who are similar to themselves (Kandel, 1978). As well, late- adolescents often

mimic the religious practices and beliefs of their friends (Denton, 2005). As a result, religious adolescents commonly seek out peers who also engage in positive social behavior, such as prosocial behavior, which is consistent with their beliefs (Adamaczyk, 2009). Thus, spending more time with peers is a vital factor in developing prosocial behaviors because of the huge amount of time they interact with each other, and thus the influence resulted from that interaction (Brendgen et al., 2007). Furthermore, literature has asserted that chances are provided for adolescents when they interact with their peers and learn how to engage in prosocial behaviors from each other (Yoon, 2020) because adolescents tend to imitate people similar to themselves, such as their peers, compared with people in other age groups (Ryalls et al., 2000).

The current study has three limitations. First, all measures were self-reported; thus, we evaluated how adolescents' behaviors were recognized instead of their real actions. Furthermore, self-report measures raised concerns from certain researchers. For instance, social desirability bias may arise from the use of self-report measures in studies of prosocial and religious studies (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Secondly, it is possible that the results of this study cannot be applied to all adolescents globally. The bulk of the adolescents in our sample were Jordanian Muslims who were either living with both biological parents or just one of them. Additionally, the results may be more useful to Muslim adolescents than those from other religious backgrounds. This is because all adolescents in our current sample were Muslim, and only Muslim adolescents are eligible to participate in answering the measures. Lastly, we measured prosocial behavior by asking adolescents to rate their own prosocial behavior instead of how frequently they engage in prosocial behavior. In addition, our measure doesn't measure all kinds of prosocial behavior, such as public or altruistic. Furthermore, a number of academics claim that behavioral frequency measures of prosocial behavior have clear limits (EI Mallah, 2019)..

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Religiosity, Empathy, and its Relationship with Prosocial Behavior; the Mediating Role of Peer's Relationship

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