

## Research Article

# EMOTIONAL EMPATHY AND ALTRUISM AMONG HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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## Abstract

**Objective:** In the present study the empathy-altruism hypothesis was studied. According to empathy-altruism hypothesis, altruistic acts stimulated by empathy, are directed to improve another person's welfare. Purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of the emotional empathy and altruism and to determine the predictive power of emotional empathy for altruism among health professionals. **Methods:** Correlational and cross-sectional research designs were used for the present study. Sample size was estimated through G\*power and 200 health professionals (100 MBBS and 100 BDS) were taken from different government and private hospitals and health institutes through purposive sampling technique. Age range of participants was 24-35 years (M=31.45, SD=3.39). Bio data form, Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale and Helping attitude scale were used to get demographic information and to assess the emotional empathy and altruistic behaviour respectively of health professionals. Data were analysed by using SPSS 23. **Results:** Results of the present study showed strong and positive relationship between emotional empathy and altruism among health professionals. Hierarchical regression analysis was run to find the predictive power of emotional empathy for altruistic behaviour of the health professionals. After controlling age, gender, level of education and marital status, emotional empathy emerged as the strong predictor for altruistic behaviour among health professional. Emotional empathy accounted 31.3 % variance for altruistic behaviour. This study can create awareness about the role of health professionals and their behaviour towards patients. Health professional's emotional empathy is the compulsory factors for defining their attitude towards their patients. **Conclusion:** Emotional empathy plays an important role in the altruistic attributes of health professionals. Some training programs must be arranged to enhance their emotional empathy. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 23(2) February, 2022; 1-6.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Empathy, Altruism, Health Professional

## Introduction

In health care, empathy empowers health care experts and patients to cooperate with each other [1]. According to empathy-altruism hypothesis, altruistic acts stimulated by empathy, are directed to improve another person's welfare [2]. Empathy assumes a fundamental part in health care services. Empathy is a potential pro-social

motive in all humans [3]. Empathy plays a central role in establishing a personal connection with the patient. The empathic physician seeks to enter the patient's subjective experience, to see patient's illness as he/she sees it [4]. Health care experts ought to have the capacity to see the world through the patient's eyes. They have to adjust between two distinct universes: the patient's and their own.

Health professionals serve the humanity, their emotional empathy and altruistic behavior can make easier to achieve this goal. Empathic behavior of the health professionals can gain the trust of their patients, reduce their anxiety and emotional distress and improve clinical outcomes [5]. Moreover, emotional empathy has positive influence on health professionals themselves [6].

According to empathy–altruism hypothesis those who show empathic attitude for someone, also exhibit an altruistic behavior to build that individual's welfare [2] In the empathy–altruism hypothesis, the term empathy refers to feelings of compassion, sympathy, delicacy, and altruism alludes to a motivational state in which the objective is to expand someone else's welfare as an end in itself. It is also indicated that empathy explains more variance in altruistic motivation as compared to the egoistic behavior [7].

Related to empathy a researcher [8] explored the personal and contextual factor. Personal factor involves self-esteem, altruism and personal experience linked to the health. Study conducted on medical students yielded that those medical students who were active in psycho-social circular activities also showed high level of empathy [9].

Batson [10] investigated that altruistic motivation is caused by empathic emotion. It was concluded that to help someone, empathy leads to the altruistic motivation rather than egoistic acts. Feldman Hall [11] investigated whether empathic concern initiates altruism or not. Study found that the empathic concern was associated with altruism and it was concluded that empathic concern predicts high altruism.

Gleichgerrcht investigated the role of empathy in clinical practice and determine the factors which undermine empathic experience in clinical setting. Different aspects; distress, altruism, well-being and emotional awareness were used. Results concluded that physicians who have ability to regulate their emotions have altruistic abilities [12].

Present study aimed to investigate the relationship of the emotional empathy and

altruism among the health professionals. It was also aimed to determine the predictive power of emotional empathy for altruistic behaviour.

## **Material and Methods**

Correlational and cross-sectional study designs were used to assess the relationship emotional empathy and altruism, to find the predictive power of emotional empathy for altruism and to compare the health professionals. The sample of this study was consisted of two hundred (N=200) health professionals, one hundred (n=100) were MBBS doctors and one hundred (n=100) were BDS doctors. By purposive sampling technique, sample was collected from both of the government and private hospitals and health institutes. Age range of participants was 24-35 years (M= 31.45, SD=3.39). M.B.B.S and B.D.S was the educational criteria for doctors and dentists respectively. House officers, medical officers, post graduate trainee and assistant professors were included in this study.

Quacks and diploma holder were not included in this study. Demographic Information Sheet was used to collect the information about age, gender, education level, monthly income, and marital status, number of children, family status, employment position and organization. Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale [13] was used to measure the emotional empathy of the health professionals. Greater scores were signifying a greater level of emotional empathy. The alpha reliability for the total 30 items scale was 0.88.

In this study Helping Attitude Scale [14] was utilized to measure the altruism of the health professionals. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.86 and Test-Retest reliability was 0.85. Before collecting the data, consent to participate in this research was taken from all of the participants. Raw scores were put in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to arrange and analyze.

## **Results**

The data were analysed with the help of SPSS (version 23). According to the results there were 100 MBBS doctors and 100 BDS doctors with age range 24- 35 years (M= 31.45, SD= 3.39). 35

% of the participants were male and 65 % were female. Doctors with age ranged of 24-27 were 71%, 22% were having 28-31 and 7% were having 32-35 age range. Results also indicate that 67.5 % doctors were graduated and 38.5%

were highly qualified doctors. Doctors who were under training were 61.5%, 15% were doing specialization in the medical field and 23.5% were specialized doctors. 29% participants were married and 71% were unmarried.

**Table 1. Inter-correlation among emotional empathy and altruism.**

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Empathy	-----	0.55**
2. Altruism	-----	-----

\*\*: $p < 0.01$

Relationship between emotional empathy and altruism among health professionals was found by using Pearson correlation method. Table 1

indicates the strong positive relationship between emotional empathy and altruism among health professions,  $r=0.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis to determine the predictors for altruistic behaviour among the health professionals (n=200).**

Variables	Altruistic Behavior		
	Model -1	Model- 2	95% CI
Constant	B	B	
Constant	71.60	28.13	[12.5, 43.8]
Age	-0.752	-1.44	[-4.14, 1.25]
Gender	-0.534	-1.83	[-4.40, 0.738]
Marital status	1.92	1.09	[-3.031, 5.50]
Educational level	1.95	1.31	[-1.17, 3.79]
Monthly income	.506	0.625	[-0.519, 1.76]
Emotional empathy	---	13.49	[10.70, 16.29]
R2	0.023	0.316	---
F	0.93	16.28	---
$\Delta R2$	0.023	0.313	---

Note: B: Unstandardized coefficient;  $\Delta R2$ : R Square change;  $\Delta F$ : F change; CI: Confidence Interval

Hierarchical regression analysis was performed for predicting the contributing factors of altruistic behaviour (Table 2).

By controlling gender, age, educational level, marital status and monthly income, emotional Empathy was emerged as the significant predictor for altruism that accounted 31.3% of variance for altruism among health professionals,  $\beta=0.56$ ,  $t=9.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . F value=16.28

indicated the statistical significance of the regression model.

Positive value of beta indicated that for every 1-unit increase in emotional empathy (predictor), the altruistic behaviour (outcome variable) would rise by the value of beta coefficient.

**Table 3. Independent sample t-test between MBBS and BDS doctors for their scores on emotional empathy and altruism.**

Variables	Female Doctors (n=100)		Male Doctors (n=100)		df	t	Cohen's d	P
	M	SD	M	SD				
Emotional empathy	3.72	0.40	3.57	0.44	198	2.50	0.37	0.05
Altruism	79.4	9.6	74.4	10.3	198	3.49	0.49	0.001

\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

Table 3 displays highly significant difference on the mean scores of emotional empathy and Altruism between female and male (MBBS and BDS) doctors. The results indicated that there was a significant mean difference between male and female on their mean score of emotional empathy,  $t=2.5$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and have medium effect size, Cohen's  $d=0.37$ . The emotional empathy was more in female doctors ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=0.40$ ) as compared to male doctors ( $M=3.57$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ). The result also indicated significant mean difference between male and female doctors on their mean scores of altruism  $t=3.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$  with medium effect size, Cohen's  $d=0.49$ . Female doctors had high mean score ( $M=79.34$ ,  $SD=9.64$ ) as compared to male doctors ( $M=74.44$ ,  $SD=10.33$ ) on altruism.

### Discussion

Several studies perceived the relation between well-being, mental health, empathy and altruism which reveals a strong relationship between empathy and altruism. Empathy-altruism hypothesis also suggested that people with empathic feelings for other people also motivated for altruistic behaviour. Present study has attempted to test this hypothesis among health professionals as they serve the humanity. Their altruistic motivation can help to achieve this ultimate goal of their lives.

Analysis of the obtained results indicated significant positive correlation among emotional empathy and altruism. There is a considerable body of literature that is consistent with this result of the present study. Hoffman reported that individuals with high level of empathy were more motivated to pro-social acts. Dovidio

reported that empathy known as the vibrant characteristic of the pro-social conduct. Batson also specified in the empathy-altruism hypothesis that empathic feelings for another individual yielded an altruistic motivation to enhance that person's well-being. He concluded that empathic emotions were prerequisite for the altruistic motivation to help others. This study supported empathy-altruism hypothesis and concluded that emotional empathy was highly correlated with altruistic motivation. So, the emotional empathy is an important motivator for helping others. Health professionals serve the humanity, their emotional empathy and altruistic behaviour can make easier to achieve this goal. Empathic behaviour of the health professionals can gain the trust of their patients, reduce their anxiety and emotional distress and improve clinical outcomes. Moreover, emotional empathy has positive influence on health professionals themselves.

The analysis of the results of the present study revealed the emotional empathy as a strong predictor of altruistic behaviour among health professional. In many literature reviews, empathy had been recognized as basic ethical value for pro-social behaviour. Present study investigated by using hierarchical regression, total variance accounted by emotional empathy for altruism (31.1%). Literature review of the present study also supported this result of the present study. It is documented that empathy evokes altruism to help other in the time of need. It is also indicated that empathy explains more variance in altruistic motivation as compared to the egoistic behaviour.

Females are more empathic, sympathetic, and altruistic than males [15]. Keeping this in view, it was hypothesized that female doctors would likely to be more empathetic and altruistic than male doctors. Results of the present study found significant gender differences on the mean scores of emotional empathy and altruism. The result of the present study is consistent with the results of a research which reported higher empathy scores among female undergraduate medical students compared to male undergraduate medical students.

### **Conclusion**

This study concluded that emotional empathy plays an important role in the altruistic attributes of the health professionals. Emotional empathy motivated the health professionals to behave altruistically toward their patients and doctor-patient relationship is also developed by empathic feeling and altruistic acts of health professionals.

Present study found that health professional's empathy is an important factor to understand the patient's feelings and emotional state, which motivated the health professionals to give care and help the patients. Doctor-patient relationship is also enhanced. This study has identified the factors that play a role in shaping altruistic behaviour in which emotional empathy considered as one of most contributing factors which predicted health professional's altruistic behaviour.

Emotional empathy predicted higher altruism in the health professionals. Understanding patient's basic need, is vital in health care services and in this field of health care, doctor's duty is to help those in need. So, without understanding of patient's need, health care experts cannot be motivated to help the patients. Therefore, emotional empathy increases altruistic level in the health professionals.

This study demonstrates that emotional empathy of the health professionals is a good predictor of shaping their altruistic behaviour towards their patients. This study will help the health professionals in better understanding of patient's

feelings, pain and problems. More they get knowledge about patient's pain; more they will be motivated to help them. Furthermore, this study can create awareness about the role of health professionals regarding their attitude towards patients. There should be some training programs for health professional to enhance their emotional empathy, as it is basic for prosocially behaviour.

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**Received:** 07 February 2022, Manuscript No. AJOPY-22-53655; **Editor assigned:** 10 February 2022, PreQC No. AJOPY-22-53655(PQ); **Reviewed:** 18 February 2022, QC No AJOPY-22-53655; **Revised:** 24 February 2022, Manuscript No. AJOPY-22-53655(R); **Published:** 07 March 2022, DOI: 10.54615/2231-7805.47321.