



## BUILDING ALTRUISM AMONG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS THROUGH THE RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018  
Received in revised form  
19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018  
Accepted 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2018  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2018

#### Key Words:

Altruism,  
Altruism exercise,  
Adolescence.

### ABSTRACT

Altruism is the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others. The present paper is an attempt to test the result of an altruism exercise on building altruism among adolescent students. Altruism has very significant implications in making collective well being of a society. Despite such significance, altruism has been getting less importance in the psychological studies. Researches, conducted in the field of positive psychology supports that traits like altruism characterizes self-concepts which is high in empathy, high in internal locus of control, less egocentric and socially responsible. Hence, developing certain skills to build altruistic behaviour in a scientific way has become a necessary concern. Therefore, the researchers attempted to test an exercise of building altruism and experimented on a group of adolescent students. It was evident from the present research that altruism can significantly be taught and learnt through Random Acts of Kindness.

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Citation: Pranjal Buragohain and Pankaj Sonari. 2018. "Building altruism among adolescent students through the random acts of kindness", *International Journal of Development Research*, 8, (06), 21361-21365.

### INTRODUCTION

Altruism is the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others. It is a social behavior carried out to achieve positive outcomes for another rather than for the self (Rushton, 1980). Altruistic behavior can be motivated by personal egotism, or it can be prompted by "pure" empathic desire to benefit another person, irrespective of personal gain (Batson, 1991; Batson, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2009). Positive psychology supports that traits like altruism characterizes self-concepts which is high in empathy, high in internal locus of control, less egocentric and socially responsible (Beirhoff, Klein and Kramp, 1991). Oliner (2002) asserts that to consider a behavior as altruistic it should meet four criterias: it (1) is directed toward helping another, (2) involves a high risk or sacrifice to the actor, (3) is accompanied by no external reward, and (4) is voluntary. In contrast to Oliner, however, Batson (1991) distinguishes between altruism and two related terms: helping and self-sacrifice.

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Altruism "is the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of one or more individuals other than oneself" (Batson, 1991, p. 606). Batson notes that helping behaviors, although often altruistic, cannot be assumed to be intrinsically altruistic because they are not always intended to enhance the welfare of others. Altruism has three psychological forms. The First one is Nepotistic Altruism, which it is based on family. We generally see that people usually self-sacrifice to care for the wellbeing of their child. It can be seen as selfish if someone helping an extension of himself (through a blood line), which is a little different than helping a stranger. However, from the altruism point of view, it is still a form of altruism and it is termed as Nepotistic Altruism. The second form of altruism is Reciprocal Altruism, which is seen through a give and take relationship. For example, two friends were going for a movie and one of them buys movie tickets. If the other person got a chance he will return the favor the next time they go out together for a movie. In such kind of altruism, both the parties were benefited. However, it should be noted that Reciprocal Altruism only works if the favor of a friend is received and returned to another friend in some way. This form of altruism is also one of the key characteristics of long-term relationships or friendships as it allows each person to lean on the other in a

time of need and give back when they are able. Third one is Group-Based Altruism which involves self-sacrificing on account of supporting a group. For example, donating old clothes, toys etc for the needy people instead of dumping them. The study of altruism has its root in the works of early social psychologists. Research conducted over the last few years has shown that the positive emotions and attitudes like optimism, helping attitude, love and hope have tremendous impact on well-being. In spite of that positive attitude and emotions have been getting less attention in scientific psychological studies. Four major theories have been developed as an attempt to explain pro-social motivation of an individual. First one is *Empathy Altruism Hypothesis*. The empathy altruism hypothesis states that feelings of empathy for another person produce an altruistic motivation to increase that person's welfare. In the empathy altruism hypothesis the term Empathy refers to compassionate feelings which is generally perceived to be a cause of leading to helping behavior. Since for the arousal of empathy person provides help simply because victim needs help and because it feels good to provide help. One view of empathy is that it involves the ability to match another person's emotion. Altruism refers to a motivational state in which the goal increases another person's welfare as an end in itself. Hence, this motivation to help can be sufficiently strong that the individual who provides help is willing to engage in unpleasant, dangerous and even life-threatening activity (Baron & Byrne, 1999). On this underlying assumption, Batson and his colleagues (2009) proposed the empathy altruism hypothesis. This theory predicts that those feeling high level of empathy for a person in need will be more likely to help than will those feeling less empathy. *Negative State Relief Model* is another theory of altruistic behavior. This theory suggests that when a person experiences negative affect he helps someone because he wants to make himself feel better. This explanation of pro-social behavior is known as the negative state relief model (Batson et al., 2009). When negative affect is aroused person provides help in order to reduce own negative affect and make the helper feel better. One of the altruistic theories is *Empathetic Joy Hypothesis*. It is generally true that it feels good to have a positive impact on other people. Helping other brings good feelings to the giver and receiver of the deeds because receiver will be pleased that someone cares, and looks out for him and giver will become satisfied and inside his heart for helping someone from his own will. It can literally be better to give than to receive. By helping one individual can enjoy a self-esteem boost for making others lives better, and make the world a better place. It is due to the empathetic joy person provides help in order to engage in an activity that has a successful outcome making the helper feel good. The fourth theory of altruism is *Genetic Determinism Model*. The proposal that behavior is driven by genetic attributes that evolved because they enhanced the probability of transmitting one's genes to subsequent generations. This model suggests that unconscious desire to help occurs if the person perceives the victim to be genetically similar to himself/herself. People help if the individual feels emotionally close relative is perceived as rational ethical and a matter of obligation.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem under study is formally entitled as "Building Altruism among Adolescent Students through the Random Acts of Kindness."

### Significance of the Study

The importance of studying positive psychological traits, emotions and character strengths has gained increasing attention over the past decades since Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's seminal publication in *American Psychologists* (2000). Seligman (2002, 2013) asserted that one area in need of further investigation is how positive characteristics predict good outcomes and the absence of unwanted outcomes in youth. The proposed study will add to the available body of literature that is available to answer such questions by exploring the extent to which one positive psychology trait, altruism, can be developed. Recent researches conducted by Seligman (2013), Emmons (2008), Fredrickson (2009), Lyubomirsky (2012), discovered that the strengths of life are skill based and can be built methodically. Buragohain (2014), Buragohain & Bordoloi (2015) proved that *hope* as one of the positive traits of life can be taught through exercises. Buragohain and Senapati (2016) found that altruism can be measurably developed by using *Altruistic Journey* exercise. The present study reexamines those findings on an independent research group and extends the conclusions to an ethnically, geographically and economically diverse sample of adolescents. The present paper is attempting to examine the result of an altruism exercise named as *Random Act of Kindness* in building altruism among adolescents. As altruism is found to be correlated with many positive outcomes of adolescents, therefore, it will bring an implication for practitioners. Practitioners may implement the tested interventions to develop the levels of altruistic behavior among clients and participants. Lack of study on the positive aspects of life like altruism, helping, gratitude, hope etc keeps the society unaware of their positive impacts. In this context the present study will throw some light on altruism as one of the positive aspects of life and its credit as pro-social behavior. So keeping view the significance of altruism the present study is an attempt to test the impact of stated altruism exercise in building altruism among the adolescent students.

### Objectives

#### The objectives of the study were

- To compare the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercise.
- To compare the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- To study the significance of change of the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- To study the significance of change of the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- To study the significance of change of the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercise.

### Hypotheses

- H1- There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercise.

- H2- There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- H3- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- H4- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercise.
- H5- There is significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescents after the altruism exercise.

### Definition of the key term

- **Altruism:** Altruism is the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others. The level of altruism in the present study was quantified by using 'Altruism scale' developed by S. N. Rai and Sanwat Singh. More the scores in the scale refer more the level of altruism.
- **Altruism Exercise:** Altruism exercise in the present study is operationally defined as the exercises or activities which inspire altruistic behaviour of an adolescent. *Random Acts of Kindness* is the altruism exercise in the present study.
- **Adolescence:** Adolescence is defined as the participants of age group between 12 to 18. In the present study, the researcher will include the students of class nine and ten which are belong to this age level and will be considered as adolescent.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants:** The sample selected for the investigation comprised of 38 adolescent students studying in class nine and ten of Ujani Sadiya Higher Secondary school, Sadiya, Assam.

**Design:** The present study is an experimental study. The investigators decided to use quasi experimental single group pre-test post-test design to meet the objectives. A residential camp was organized for nine days and the investigator arranged for the altruism exercises for the adolescents students. The investigators arranged for teaching of the school curricular contents of the respective classes in the rest of the time. An altruism test was conducted on the students before introducing the altruism exercise. After nine days of exercises the levels of altruism of the students were re-tested and the significance of difference of the mean scores of both the test was calculated to get the result of introducing the altruism exercise.

**The Tool used:** The 'Altruism scale' developed by S. N. Rai and Sanwat Singh was used for the study. This scale consists of 30 items having three alternative responses i.e. altruistic, neutral and egoistic. A score of two for altruistic, one for neutral and zero for egoistic is awarded to each item of the scale. The maximum score is 60 and the minimum is zero. Scores obtained for each item are summed to get a total score. The reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.84 which was estimated by test-retest method. The concurrent validity of the scale is 0.63. The researchers translated the Altruism scale in to Assamese language for local convenience and estimated split half reliability which is 0.80.

**Statistical Technique:** The researcher used 't' test to estimate the significance of difference between means.

### Variables

- **Independent variable:** In the present study the altruism exercise is the independent variable. The Exercise is named as Random Acts of Kindness
- **Dependent/observed variable:** Dependent variable in the present study is the level of altruism.

### The Treatment

- **Random Acts of kindness:** Investigators arranged a residential camp and encouraged participants to perform some random acts of kindness among the participants resided in the camp. In the evening the participants were instructed to make a list of the random kind activities performed by them in the day. The kindness activities performed by them may not be restricted to the fellow participants. They may perform such act towards other people and animals also.

### Analysis and Interpretation

#### Comparison of the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercise

H1 There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercise.

**Table 1. Significance of difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercise**

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents	22	28.09	5.57	1.69	0.65	36	Not significant
Female adolescents	16	29.19	4.45				

Table-1 shows that the t value is 0.65 which is less than table value (2.03) at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female adolescent students in the level of altruism before altruism exercises.

#### Comparison of the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after the altruism exercises

H2- There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescents after the altruism exercises.

**Table 2. Significance of difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescents after the altruism exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents	22	33.59	4.27	1.24	1.24	36	Not significant
Female adolescents	16	32.69	2.82				

Table-2 shows that the 't' value is 1.24 which is less than table value (2.03) at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

### Significance of the change in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises

**H3**-here is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises. To test statistically the present directional hypothesis is converted in to null hypothesis as 'there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises.'

**Table 3. Significance of change in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	r	t	df	Inference
Pre-test	38	28.55	5.09	0.66	0.60	7.06	74	Significant
Post-test	38	33.21	3.71					

Table-3 shows that 't' value is 7.06 which is more than table value (2.38) at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

### Significance of the change in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises

**H4**- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises. To test statistically the present directional hypothesis is converted in to null hypothesis as 'there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises.'

**Table 4. Significance of change in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises**

Sex	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	r	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents (Pre-test)	22	28.09	5.57	1.59	0.66	3.46	42	significant
Male adolescents (Post-test)	22	33.59	4.27					

Table-4 shows that 't' value is 3.46 which is greater than table value (2.42) at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

### Significance of the change in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises

**H5**- There is significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises. To test statistically the present directional hypothesis is converted in to null hypothesis as 'there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.'

Table-5 shows that 't' value is 2.69 which is greater than the table value (2.46) at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

**Table 5. Significance of change in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises**

Test	N	Mean	SD	SED	r	t	df	Inference
Female adolescents (Pre-test)	16	29.19	4.45	1.30	0.53	2.69	30	Significant
Female adolescents (Post-test)	16	32.69	2.82					

### Major Findings

- There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before altruism exercises.
- There is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after altruism exercises.
- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises.
- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises.
- There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

### Conclusion

Altruism is the quality of individual which benefits the giver as well as the receiver and work as a strong pro-social behavior. The study showed that altruism can significantly be developed by the Random Acts of Kindness. As altruism can bring measurable positive outcomes to life, therefore, teaching of altruism may be a serious concern of the policy makers and the practitioners.

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