

# Teaching Altruistic Behaviour among Adolescent Students

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## 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 focus on the role of altruism exercises on building altruism among adolescent students. Altruism has a very significant implication on the process of making collective well being of the society. Despite such significance, altruism has been getting less importance in the Indian psychological study. So, present paper is an effort to bridge such gaps in Indian context. 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 task. Therefore, the researchers developed 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 exercises.*

**Keywords:** Altruism, altruism exercise, adolescence

## I. 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 behavior is altruistic if it meets four criteria: 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” (p. 123). In contrast to Oliner, however, Batson (1991) distinguishes between altruism and two related terms: helping and self-sacrifice. 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 but the study of positive attitude and emotions have a very short past. Because most of the time the study of negative aspects like schizophrenia, truancy, alcoholism etc have been getting more importance.

## A. Three Interactional (rationalistic) Theories of Altruism

There are three major interactional (rationalistic) theories of altruism, viz., egoistic, egocentric, and altercentric. The egoistic perspective,

best expressed in the work of Robert Axelrod (1984), maintains that altruistic assistance would be offered if one expects future benefit. The egocentric view, affiliated with Gary Becker (1974), argues that the donor's utility function includes the utility of potential recipients. That is, the donor would give if the enjoyment of watching the pleasure of others exceeds his satisfaction of consuming the said commodity. The altercentric approach ('alter' after the Latin 'other') can be surmised from the works of Robert Frank and Herbert Simon. It views the benefactor's action as stemming from a personality trait that arises from artificial selection (Khalil, 2004).

### **B. Factors Affecting Altruism**

Altruistic behavior can be motivated by personal egotism or it can be prompted by "pure" empathetic desire to benefit another person, irrespective of personal gain (Batson, 1991; Batson, Ahmed & Lishner, 2009). The term egotism refers to the selfish motive to pursue some sort of personal gain or benefits through targeted behaviour such as altruistic behaviour. But all the times, under some circumstances, egotism motives account for the altruism. On the other hand empathy is an emotional response that refers to feelings of compassion, sympathy, tenderness and the like or to perceive plight of another person without any selfish motives. For the empathy people help those in need simply because it feels good to do so. The investigator now turns to the four major theories that attempt to explain pro-social motivation.

#### **1) 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.

#### **2) Negative State Relief Model:**

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.

#### **3) 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.

#### **4) 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 (Baron & Byrne, 1999). This model suggests that unconscious desire to help occurs if the person perceives the victim to be genetically similar to himself or 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 "Teaching Altruistic Behaviour among Adolescent Students".

### **II. 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.

The present study will reexamine these findings by an independent research group and extend the conclusions to an ethnically, geographically and economically diverse sample of adolescents. The present study expands upon those earlier studies by showing the worth of some altruism exercises in building altruism among adolescents. As, altruism is found to be correlated with many positive outcomes of adolescents, therefore, it may bring an implication for practitioners. Practitioners may implement the tested interventions to help cultivate and increase their levels of altruistic behavior.

Lack of study on the positive aspects of life like altruism, helping, gratitude, hope, happiness etc keeps the society unaware of their positive impacts. In this context the present study will through some light on altruism as one of the positive aspects of life and its credit as pro-social behavior. Further, the idea of positive psychology is relatively new. India is far behind in the research of positive psychology. So the present study is a humble initiative in this regard. So keeping view the significance of altruism the present study is an attempt to test the impact of altruism exercises in building altruism among the adolescent students.

### III. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were-

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

### IV. HYPOTHESES

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

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

**H3-** There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the 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.

**H5-** There is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

### V. DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERM

#### A. *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 and adapted by the investigator. More the scores in the scale refer more the level of altruism.

#### B. *Altruism Exercise:*

Altruism exercise in the present study is operationally defined as the exercises or activities which inspire altruistic behaviour of an adolescent. Altruistic journey is the altruism exercise in the present study.

#### C. *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.

### VI. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Participants:*

The participants selected for the study comprised of 32 adolescent students of class nine and ten studying in Bhakat Chapori High School, Majuli, Assam.

#### B. *Design:*

The present study is an experimental study within the positive psychology paradigm. The researchers decided to use quasi experimental single group pre- test post-test design to meet the objectives. A residential camp was organized for seven days and the investigator arranged for the altruism exercises for the adolescent students along with other curricular

areas. An altruism test was conducted on the adolescent students before introducing the altruism exercises. After seven days of exercises the levels of altruism of the adolescent students were re-tested and the significance of the difference of the mean scores of both the test was calculated to get the result of introducing altruism exercises.

**C. 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.

**D. Statistical Technique:**

The researcher used ‘t’ test to estimate the significance of difference between mean scores.

**E. Variables:**

- 1) **Independent variable:** In the present study the altruism exercise is the independent variable.
- 2) **Dependent/observed variable:** Dependent variable in the present study is the level of altruism.

**F. Treatment: Altruistic Journey:**

An exercise designed by the researchers as a way to increase adolescent students’ likelihood of being altruistic is to teach them to have greater empathy for the circumstances of other people. How can such empathy be promoted? One simple approach is to have a person interact more frequently with people who need empathetic behavior. Then, once individual truly begins to understand the perspectives and motives of the people who are being helped, this insight breaks down the propensity to view inter-personal matters in terms of ‘us versus them’ (Snyder, Lopez & Pedrotti, 2011). The researchers in the experimental camp, thus, arranged for such meeting of the participants with some people need altruistic behavior and encouraged to understand and analyse the perspectives and motives of the persons being helped. The participants were instructed to write the understanding and analysis in their altruistic journey diary in daily basis. They were further instructed to share their insights with the peer group and the researchers. These activities were continued for a

period of seven days and finally there levels of altruism were retested.

**VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

**A. Comparison of the Level of Altruism Between Male and Female Adolescent Students Before the Altruism Exercise:**

To compare the level of altruism between male and female adolescents before the altruism exercises the researchers formulated the hypothesis as “there is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students before the altruism exercises” and tested the hypothesis.

**Table-I: Significance of Difference in the Level of Altruism Between Male and Female Adolescent Students Before the Altruism Exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D	SE D	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents	16	44.75	4.43	1.82	0.582	30	Not significant at 0.01 level.
Female adolescents	16	45.81	5.83				

Table-I shows that the t value is 0.582 which is less than the table value (2.75) 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 altruism before altruism exercise.

**B. Comparison of the Level of Altruism Between Male and Female Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercise:**

To compare the level of altruism between male and female adolescents after the altruism exercises the researchers formulated the hypothesis as “there is no significant difference in the level of altruism between male and female adolescent students after the altruism exercises” and tested the hypothesis.

**Table-II: Significance of Difference in the Level of Altruism Between Male and Female Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D	SE D	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents	16	51.25	4.55	1.72	0.256	30	Not significant at 0.01 level
Female adolescents	16	51.69	5.26				

Table-II shows that the t value is 0.256 which is less than the table value (2.75) 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 altruism after altruism exercise.

**C. Significance of the Change in the Level of Altruism of the Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercises:**

To estimate the significance of change in the level of altruism of the adolescents students after the altruism exercises the researchers formulated the hypothesis as “there is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises.” The researchers converted the hypothesis in to a null hypothesis as “there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercises” and tested.

**Table-III: 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	32	45.28	5.13	1.46	0.66	4.24	62	Significant at 0.01 level
Post-test	32	51.49	4.85					

Table-III shows that the t value is 4.24 which is greater than the table value (2.39) at 0.01 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the adolescent students after the altruism exercise.

**D. Significance of the Change in the Level of Altruism of the Male Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercises:**

To estimate the significance of change in the level of altruism of the male adolescents students after the altruism exercises the researchers formulated the hypothesis as “there is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises.” To test the hypothesis researchers converted it in to a null form as “there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the male adolescent students after the altruism exercises.”

**Table-IV: Significance of Change in the Level of Altruism of the Male Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D	SED	r	t	df	Inference
Male adolescents (Pre-test)	16	44.75	4.43	1.95	0.45	3.33	30	Significant at 0.01 level
Male adolescents (Post-test)	16	51.25	4.55					

Table-IV shows that the t value is 3.33 which is greater than the table value (2.45) at 0.01 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a 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:**

To estimate the significance of change in the level of altruism of the female adolescents students after the altruism exercises the researchers formulated the hypothesis as “there is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.” To test the hypothesis researchers converted it in to a null form as “there is no significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.”

**Table-V: Significance of Change in the Level of Altruism of the Female Adolescent Students After the Altruism Exercises**

Group	N	Mean	S.D	SE D	r	t	df	Inference
Female adolescents (Pre-test)	16	45.81	5.83	2.21	0.80	2.66	30	Significant at 0.01 level
Female adolescents (Post-test)	16	51.69	5.26					

Table-V shows that the t value is 2.66 which is greater than the table value (2.45) at 0.01 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant progress in the level of altruism of the female adolescent students after the altruism exercises.

**VIII. MAJOR FINDINGS**

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

Thus from the above findings it is found that the altruism exercise can significantly change the level of

altruism of the adolescent students. It is further concluded that altruism can significantly be taught and learnt through exercises.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

Altruism is the quality of individual which benefits the giver as well as the receiver and work as a strong pro-social behavior. So it is an urgency to develop certain scientific skills to cultivate this virtue. It has been discovered that the virtues and strengths of life can be significantly taught and learnt through exercises (Seligman. 2013). It is evident from the present study that altruism can also be taught and learnt through altruism exercises. 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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