



Try a Little Kindness: Evaluating Altruism and Bullying Perpetration Among Youth and Young Adults

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<https://cehs.unl.edu/empowerment/>



Introduction

- Bullying is a pervasive problem which causes harm to victims through a variety of behaviors (e.g., physical contact, verbal assault, social exclusion, and cyberbullying). Bullying is defined as engaging in repeated negative actions intentionally designed to inflict harm to individuals who are unable to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993).
- Limited research has been conducted exploring the relationship between youth and young adults' altruism and bullying behavior. Altruism is defined as a form of unconditional kindness without the expectation of receiving anything in return (Hung et al., 2011).
- Altruism has been associated with higher prosocial behaviors (Bieroff, 2002), lower levels of aggression (Jones et al., 2011), and lower bully perpetration among a sample of Swedish children (ages 9 to 13) (Thornberg and Wänström, 2018).
- The cross-sectional study described in this poster session is designed to understand the relationship between U.S. youth and young adult's altruism and their reported bullying perpetration.
- It was hypothesized that participants who reported having higher levels of altruism would report fewer experiences of bullying perpetration.

Methods

Procedures

- This study is part of a larger, ongoing international study with youth and young adults ages 13-25 years-old.
- Data collection took place between May 2016 and March 2017 using the Qualtrics online platform.

Participants

- 1,178 youth (ages 13 - 18) and 4,154 young adults (ages 19 - 25) completed the Born Brave Experiences 3.0 survey. Inclusion criteria: Participants (ages 13 -25) from the United States ($n = 852$) who completed questions about their involvement in bullying and a measure on altruism. Participants had a mean age of 20.09 ($SD = 3.23$), with 69.8% identifying as Caucasian and 57.5% identifying as female.

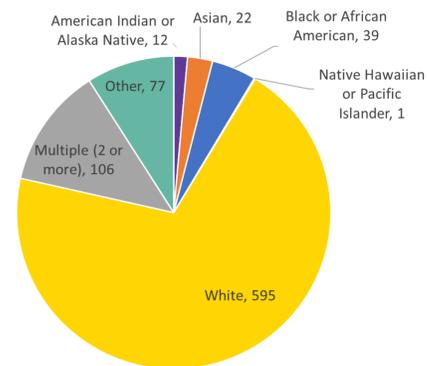


Figure 1. Racial demographics of participants.

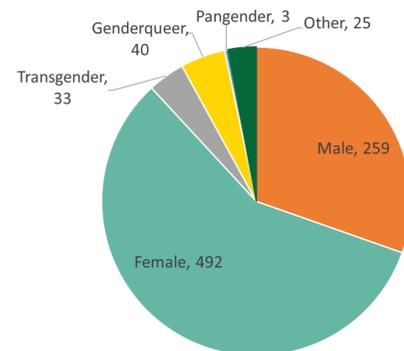


Figure 2. Gender demographics of participants.

Measures

- Participants' altruism was measured using a 14-item scale which was adapted from the Altruism Scale (Rushton, 1981). Utilizing a five-point scale ("never" to "very often"), participants were asked questions such as "I would allow someone I did not know to go in front of me in line." to "I would help a classmate who I did not know well with a homework assignment when my knowledge was greater than his or hers." Internal consistency for the Altruism Scale was .91
- Bully perpetration was reported on the Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale (VPBS; Swearer, 2008). The VPBS is a 26-item scale (i.e., 13-items victimization and 13-items bullying perpetration) that assesses both verbal and physical bullying. All items are scored on a 5-point scale ("never happened" to "always happened"). Example of items assessing bullying perpetration include "I made fun of other kids," and "I pushed and shoved others." Internal consistency for the VPBS – Bully Perpetration was .80.

Results

Altruism Scores by Bully Perpetration Scores

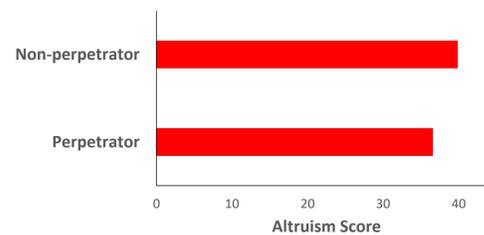


Figure 3. Results of the independent-samples t-test.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare endorsed levels of altruism between bully perpetrators and non-bully perpetrators. There was a significant difference in the altruism scores for bully perpetrators ($M = 36.58$, $SD = 10.74$) and non-bully perpetrators ($M = 39.85$, $SD = 10.94$); $t(850) = -2.46$, $p < .001$.

Bully Perpetration and Altruism

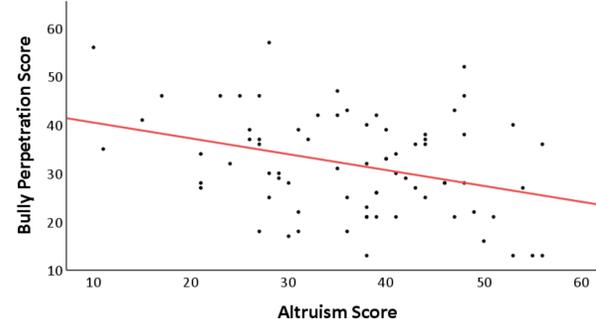


Figure 4. Scatter plot of bully perpetration scores and altruism scores.

A linear regression explored the relationship between participant's total altruism score on self-reported bullying perpetration. Results revealed a significant relationship between participant's total altruism score and their reported bullying perpetration, [$F(1,72) = 9.28$, $p < 0.05$], with an R^2 of 0.11.

Discussion

- Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that participants who bullied others endorsed lower levels of altruism.
- On average, participants who endorsed bullying perpetration endorsed lower levels of altruism when compared to participants who did not report bullying others.
- Our findings suggest that efforts to increase individual's levels of altruism and kindness may be an effective way to reduce bullying perpetration.

Limitations

- Since this study utilized a cross-sectional design, we cannot assume a temporal relationship between altruism and bullying perpetration since both variables were simultaneously assessed.
- The participants in the current study were predominantly Caucasian, female, young adults. The results may not reflect a more diverse population accurately.

Implications for Mental Health & School Professionals

It is important for mental health and school professionals to increase the use of kindness interventions for students, promoting kinder schools and lower levels of bullying perpetration. The following are kindness interventions that can be used in a classroom:

- www.ChannelKindness.org – Read and share stories about kind acts happening across the United States. Sign up for Channel Kindness updates by visiting their website.
- <http://Bornthisway.foundation/> - Sign up to get involved with BTWF and learn more about how you can help build a kinder, braver world.
- [Kindness Cards](#) - Kindness cards are a great and easy way to show kindness for people in your class and school.
- [Secret Agents of Kindness](#) – A kindness intervention where students are asked to be secret agents in their school to help spread kindness.
- [Random Acts of Kindness Classroom Curriculum](#) - Become a Raktivist (Short for 'Random Acts of Kindness activist') with Random Acts of Kindness and gain access to their classroom curriculum focused around kindness! They have a downloadable curriculum for students in kindergarten to high school.

