

THE ROLE OF SINCERE INTERPERSONAL BONDS AND EMPATHY IN PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

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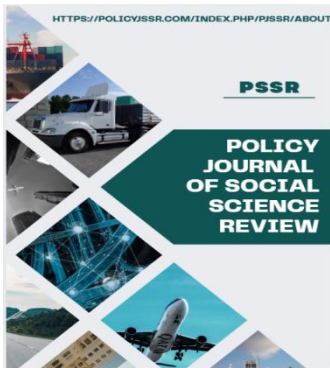
Dr. Sherin Gul

ABSTRACT

Understanding the factors that promote prosocial behavior is essential for explaining social development during emerging adulthood. The present study examined whether sincere interpersonal bonds, reflected in friendship quality and empathy contribute to prosocial behavior among emerging young adults. A purposive sample of (N = 200) participants with mean age (M = 21.8 years) was recruited from public and private educational institutions. Data were collected using the Perth Empathy Scale (Eq et al., 2019), Friendship Quality Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994), and Prosocial Behavior Scale (Caprara et al., 2005). Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 26. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between friendship quality, empathy and prosocial behavior. The Linear regression analysis indicated that friendship quality was found to be a significant positive predictor of prosocial behavior. Furthermore, significant gender differences were observed in friendship quality. Overall, the results suggested that although sincere interpersonal bonds and empathy are closely related, they may not independently explain prosocial behavior during emerging adulthood. Instead, developmental and contextual factors may play a more prominent role in shaping helping behaviors among young adults. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of the factors associated with prosocial behavior during this important developmental period.

Keywords: Empathy, emerging adulthood, friendship quality, sincere friendship, prosocial behavior.

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1. Introduction

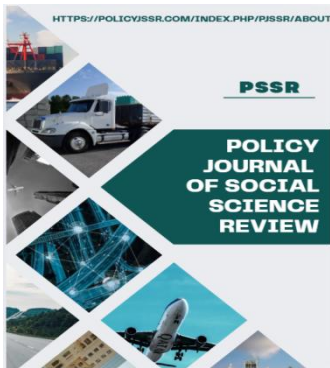
The modern world is experiencing rapid adjustments driven by technological advancements, global interconnectedness, and evolving social dynamics. These shifts significantly affect how individuals relate to their social environments (Batson & Ahmad, 2018). In this changing landscape, prosocial behavior—defined as voluntary actions intended to benefit others—is vital for community cohesion and individual psychological well-being (Ben-Zur & Zohar, 2018). This behavioral dynamic is particularly critical during emerging adulthood, a developmental period marked by identity exploration and shifting social networks.

Empathy is widely recognized as a foundational psychological mechanism that influences social behavior. Described as the ability to understand and share the emotional states of others (Stürmer & Snyder, 2016), empathy serves as a primary driver of altruistic action (Cikara & Fiske, 2016). Consequently, individuals with higher levels of empathy are significantly more likely to engage in cooperative and supportive behaviors across various social contexts (Cheung & Chow, 2020). Alongside these intrinsic psychological traits, the quality of an individual's interpersonal relationships acts as a critical social determinant of behavior. High-quality friendships characterized by mutual trust, emotional support, and deep

understanding foster an environment of collaboration and mutual moral responsibility (Cheung & Chow, 2020). These sincere interpersonal bonds create a micro-social environment where prosocial values are actively nurtured and practiced (Cikara & Fiske, 2016).

Prosocial behavior is widely documented as a product of both emotional and contextual influences (Pozzoli & Gini, 2020). Empathy, in particular, is a primary predictor of supportive action because it allows individuals to recognize and address the needs of others (Batson & Ahmad, 2018), thereby creating an intrinsic motivation to alleviate distress (Zaki & Ochsner, 2019). Research consistently shows that individuals with higher empathy scores exhibit an increased tendency toward helping, sharing, and cooperative behaviors (Van Doorn, 2019). Additionally, empathy is positively correlated with moral decision-making and collaboration within both organizational and educational settings (Weng & Wyer, 2020).

Beyond individual predispositions, friendship plays a unique and vital role in shaping prosocial behavior. High-quality friendships defined by trust, reciprocity, and emotional support foster a natural tendency toward helpful behavior (Clark & Rivera, 2020). Through these close interpersonal bonds, individuals become more attuned to the needs of their peers and are more likely to act with social



responsibility (Zaki & Ochsner, 2019). However, emerging evidence suggests that situational and contextual factors may have a more profound impact on prosocial outcomes than fixed individual traits alone (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2015).

The purpose of this study stems from the need to address the empirical gap between theoretical emotional constructs and actual social behavior within the specific developmental stage of emerging adulthood. While the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior is well-documented in adolescent populations, there is a dearth of research examining how sincere friendship quality and emotional resonance function as predictors of prosocial behavior within the high-pressure environment of higher education. Furthermore, it is crucial to determine whether internal emotional processes or external contextual factors exert a stronger influence on a student's tendency to help others. This study seeks to make these predictive relationships explicit, offering universities a foundation to develop evidence-based social interventions that move beyond strictly academic performance-focused models toward more holistic institutional policies.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between sincere friendship quality, empathy, and prosocial behavior among emerging young adults.

2. To determine whether sincere friendship quality and empathy serve as significant predictors of prosocial behavior.

Hypotheses

- There is likely to be a significant relationship between sincere friendship quality, empathy, and prosocial behavior among emerging young adults.
- Sincere friendship quality and empathy are significant predictors of prosocial behavior among emerging young adults.
- There is likely to be gender differences between sincere friendship quality, empathy, and prosocial behavior among emerging young adults.

2. Materials and Method

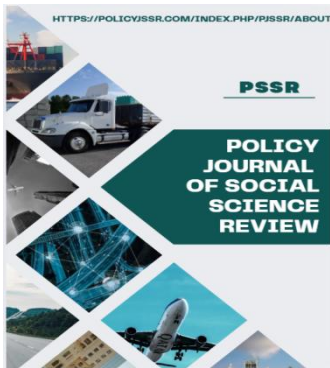
2.1 Research Design

Cross-sectional research design was used to examine the relationship between empathy, friendship and prosocial behavior. This research design was chosen for examining contemporaneous associations between variables at a single point in time, providing an effective way to assess the predictive relationships of interest in this look.

2.2 Participants

The sample comprised of (N = 200) emerging adults, enrolled in public and private educational institutions. The data consisted of 114 male (77%) and 86 female (43%) college students, with an age ranging from 18 to 25 years (M = 21.8 years, SD = 2.1). Participants have been recruited

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through purposive sampling. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

2.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from student populations at selected public and private universities. After being fully informed about the purpose of the study, all participants provided written informed consent prior to completing the questionnaires. Participants were assured of the strict confidentiality and anonymity of their responses; they were also reminded that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The questionnaire battery was administered in paper-and-pencil format and required approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Data collection occurred over a period of (specify time frame, e.g., three weeks in November 2025). All procedures strictly adhered to the American Psychological Association (2017) ethical guidelines.

2.3 Instruments

The tools of assessment that were used were:

2.3.1 Perth Empathy Scale (PES).

The Perth Empathy Scale (Eq et al., 2019) is a self-report measure to assess people's ability to recognize emotions in others (cognitive empathy) and vicariously experience other's emotions (affective

empathy), across positive and negative emotions. It consists of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect greater levels of empathic responding. The scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in prior research.

2.3.2 Friendship Qualities Scale (FQS).

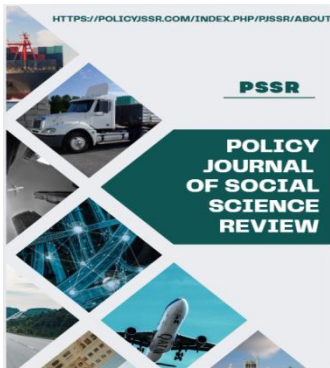
The Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994) assesses the perceived quality of close friendships across dimensions including companionship, conflict, help, security, and closeness. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher friendship quality. The scale has been widely used in adolescent and young adult samples.

2.3.3 Prosocialness Scale for Adults.

Prosocial behavior was developed by Caprara et al. in 2005 to assess the tendencies toward helping, sharing, and cooperative actions. It has 16 items. For each prosocialness item, participants indicate on a five-point Likert scale whether the statement was never/almost never true (coded as 1), occasionally true (coded as 2), sometimes true (coded as 3), often true (coded as 4), and almost always/always true (coded as 5).

3. Data Analysis

Prior to the primary analyses, descriptive statistics were calculated for all study variables. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to



examine the bivariate associations among friendship quality, empathy, and prosocial behavior. A multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted to assess the predictive effects of age, friendship quality, and empathy on prosocial behavior.

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Demographics

Table 1:

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 200)

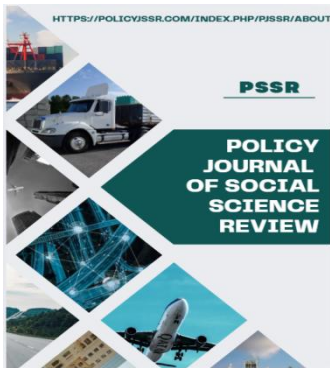
| Variable | <i>n</i> | % | <i>M (SD)</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|---------------|
| Gender | | | |
| Male | 114 | 57.0 | |
| Female | 86 | 43.0 | |
| Age (years) | | | 21.8 (2.1) |
| Institution Type | | | |
| Public | 100 | 50 | |
| Private | 100 | 50 | |
| Education (in years) | | | |
| 13 years | 46 | 23 | |
| 14 years | 44 | 22 | |
| 15 years | 42 | 21 | |
| 16 years | 48 | 24 | |

3.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the relationship between study variables. Age was found to be significantly negatively associated with prosocial behavior whereas gender has a significant negative relationship with friendship level among emerging adults. It indicated that males scored more on

Additionally, an independent-samples t-test was used to examine gender differences in prosocial behavior. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0).

friendship as compared to females. In addition to this, friendship quality was positively associated with empathy ($r = .23$, $p < .05$) and prosocial behavior ($r = .31$, $p < .05$) among emerging adults. A significant positive correlation was also found between empathy and prosocial behavior ($r = .25$, $p < .05$).

**Table 2:***Relationship between Demographics and Study Variables*

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------|---|------|--------|------|--------|
| 1. Age | - | -.04 | .01 | .02 | -.33** |
| 2. Gender | | - | -.27** | -.04 | .07 |
| 3. Friendship Quality | | | - | .23* | .31* |
| 4. Empathy | | | | - | .25* |
| 3. Prosocial Behavior | | | | | - |

Note. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

3.3 Regression Analysis

A linear regression analysis was conducted with prosocial behavior as the criterion variable and age, friendship quality, and empathy as predictor variables. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 100)$,

$p < .05$. As presented in Table 3, friendship quality was found to be a significant positive predictor of prosocial behavior ($\beta = .33$, $p < .05$), indicating that good friendship quality is associated with higher prosocial behavior.

Table 3:*Linear Regression Predicting Prosocial Behavior*

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Constant | 28.37 | 22.62 | | |
| Age | -.96 | .58 | -.22 | .11 |
| Friendship Quality | .44 | .18 | .33* | .02 |
| Empathy | .21 | .35 | .08 | .56 |

Note. * $p < .05$.

3.4 Gender Differences in Prosocial Behavior

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in prosocial behaviour. Results revealed no significant difference between male ($M =$

46.6, $SD = 6.39$) and female ($M = 45.3$, $SD = 6.64$) students, $t(198) = 0.20$, $p = .84$, $d = 0.04$. The effect size was negligible, indicating that gender did not meaningfully differentiate prosocial behavior in this sample (see Table 4).

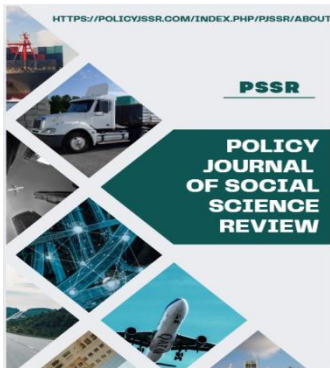


Table 4:

Independent-Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Prosocial Behavior

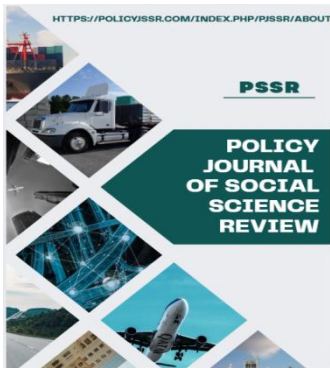
| Variable | Male | | Female | | <i>t</i> | <i>Cohen's d</i> |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Friendship quality | 46.6 | 6.39 | 45.3 | 6.64 | 2.75* | 0.04 |
| Empathy | 47.95 | 2.42 | 47.79 | 2.25 | .26 | |
| Prosocial Behavior | 44.30 | 5.80 | 45.18 | 6.28 | -.51 | |

Note. $P < .01$

4. Discussion

The current study examined the roles of friendship quality and empathy as predictors of college students' prosocial behavior, while also accounting for the effects of age and gender. The current findings indicated that high-quality friendship emerged as significant predictors of prosocial behavior. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that friendship quality was significantly associated with prosocial behavior whereas empathy is a robust predictor of helping and cooperative behaviors (Van Doorn, 2019; Weng & Wyer, 2020). One feasible explanation is that the contextual pressures inherent in university life including academic strain, stringent time demands, and competitive institutional environments may mitigate the impact of interpersonal traits on actual prosocial actions (Sturmer & Snyder, 2016). The significant negative relationship observed between age and prosocial behavior is particularly noteworthy. As students mature, they may increasingly

prioritize personal academic milestones and career commitments, thereby reducing their engagement in altruistic or cooperative behaviors (Zaki & Ochsner, 2019). This interpretation aligns with developmental perspectives suggesting that the demands of emerging adulthood can constrain opportunities for spontaneous social engagement (Weng & Wyer, 2020). Notably, a significant positive correlation was found between empathy and friendship quality ($r = .38, p < .01$), replicating previous findings that friendships characterized by emotional support are linked to increased compassionate responding (Pang et al., 2022). However, this association did not translate into observable prosocial outcomes, suggesting that the empathy-friendship link may operate more strongly at the affective level than in behavioral expression. This highlights the critical importance of distinguishing between emotional dispositions and actual behavioral performance in future studies.



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The gender differences were found to be significant in friendship quality with males scoring high as compared to females. The absence of significant gender differences in prosocial behavior contrasts with literature reporting greater prosocial tendencies among women (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2016), though it aligns with contemporary evidence suggesting that gender effects are highly dependent on the specific type and context of the prosocial behavior evaluated (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2015). Overall, this study illuminates the complex nature of prosociality among university students. Although empathy and friendship quality remain fundamental to emotional well-being and are meaningfully interrelated, they failed to serve as reliable predictors of behavior within modern institutional contexts. These findings underscore the need for contextually nuanced models of prosocial behavior that extend beyond individual, trait-based factors. Consequently, educational institutions should prioritize the development of cooperative and supportive campus environments. Structural interventions such as collaborative learning programs and peer-support initiatives may prove more effective in fostering prosocial conduct than approaches targeting individual emotional traits in isolation.

4.1 Limitations and Future Directions

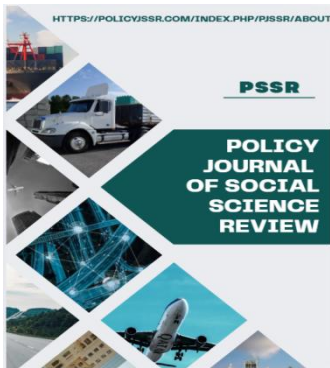
The current study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the findings

are constrained by a relatively small sample size, a cross-sectional design, and an exclusive reliance on self-report measures, which are susceptible to social desirability bias. Future research should employ larger, more representative samples, alongside longitudinal designs capable of establishing temporal precedence. Additionally, multi-method approaches that incorporate observational or peer-rated measures of prosocial behavior would provide a more objective evaluation. Finally, investigating the moderating roles of specific contextual variables such as educational aspirations, institutional culture, and social capital warrants further empirical exploration.

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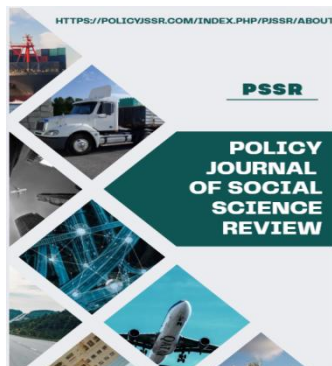


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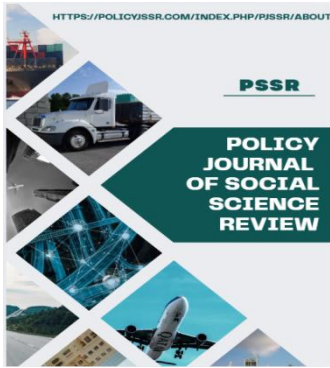
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