

# The current status of Altruistic Behavior Among College Students

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**Abstract Objective:** To explore the status of altruistic behavior among college students. **Method:** A altruistic behavior survey questionnaire was used to survey 836 college students who were selected randomly from Guangdong Province, China. **Results** (1) Among the first 8 items, except for the scenes described in Q1 (19.7%), Q2 (28.8%), and Q7 (0.6%), the percentage of positive selection in the scenes described in the other 5 projects ranged from 63.7% to 85.6%; In items 9 and 10, more than half of college students gave positive answers. (2) The  $\chi^2$  test results show that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 ( $\chi^2=4.104\sim 60.164$ , all  $P<.05$ ); There is a statistically significant difference in altruistic behaviors between only and non- only children in items 3, 6, and 9 ( $\chi^2=7.038\sim 32.790$ , all  $P<.01$ ); The difference in choice between rural and urban students in Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, and Q8 is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=4.006\sim 64.857$ , all  $P<.05$ ). **Conclusion:** Altruistic behavior is prevalent among college students, and most motivations are altruistic; Altruistic behavior is influenced by factors such as scene, gender, whether only child or not, and place of origin.

**Keywords:** Social Psychology, College Students, Altruistic Behavior

## I. Introduction

Altruistic behavior is an individual's voluntary act of helping others without seeking anything in return, within the scope permitted by social norms. Altruistic individuals may need to make some degree of personal sacrifice, but it can bring tangible benefits to others or society [1].

Altruistic behavior can help improve the quality of interpersonal communication, develop good interpersonal relationships, and effectively reduce negative emotions of actors, enhance their positive emotional experiences, and enhance their subjective well-being [1]. It can be said that altruistic behavior is both altruistic and selfish, and is the highest form of prosocial behavior [2-3].

Currently, the worship of money and self-interest among college students is becoming increasingly more and more severe, and a self-centered culture is prevailing. The altruistic concept is becoming weaker, and altruistic behavior is becoming increasingly weak [4-5]. What is the status quo of altruistic behavior among college students? This study aims to answer this question.

## **II. Objects and Methods**

### **2.1 Objects**

Online recruitment method is adopted to select undergraduate students from Guangdong Province. A total of 900 questionnaires are distributed, and 836 valid questionnaires are collected, with an effective rate of 92.89%. Among them, there are 438 boys and 398 girls; 404 only children and 432 non-only children; 445 urban students and 391 rural students; 217 freshmen, 182 sophomores, 156 juniors, 140 seniors, and 141 fifth-year students.

### **1.2 Tools**

#### **1.2.1 Altruistic Behavior Questionnaire, ABQ**

Compiled by Yang Meirong et al. (2006) [6], there are a total of 10 items, with the first 8 items depicting 8 social scenarios that require altruistic behavior. Participants are asked if they are willing to provide assistance, and can provide positive or negative answers; The last two items ask college students about the motivation for altruistic behavior, with two options: positive and negative. The positive option indicates that the motivation for altruistic behavior is altruistic, that is, it does not require any return, and the starting point and purpose of helping others are to achieve the interests of others. The negative option indicates that the motivation for helping others is self-interest, which is to achieve personal interests on the basis of realizing the interests of others, that is, "subjectively for oneself, objectively for others" [7]. In this study, the Cronbach's coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.739.

#### **1.2.2 Self-compiled personal general information Questionnaire**

It includes 4 items, namely gender, grade, place of origin, and only child or not.

### **1.3 Data processing**

SPSS 20.0 software is used for statistical analysis, and the main statistical methods include descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, and  $\chi^2$ -tests, etc.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1 The number and percentage of respondents who made positive or negative choices in ABQ**

Table 1 shows that among the first 8 items, except for the scenes described in Q1 (19.7%), Q2 (28.8%), and Q7 (0.6%), the percentage of positive choices in the scenes described in the remaining 5 items ranges from 63.7% to 85.6%; In items 9 and 10, more than half of college students provide positive responses.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Students Who Made Positive and Negative Choices for Each Item [n (%)]

Item	Yes	No
Q1. If a person wearing strange clothes encounters difficulties or troubles, (80.3) are you willing to provide assistance?	165 (19.7)	671
Q2. If a drunken person is unconscious and lying on the roadside, are (71.2) you willing to help them?	241 (28.8)	595
Q3. If a child or woman encounters difficulties or troubles, are you (14.4) willing to provide assistance?	716 (85.6)	120
Q4. If a pedestrian was hit by a car and the driver runs away, are you (15.7) willing to provide assistance?	705 (84.3)	131
Q5. If a child or elderly person encounters danger or difficulty and no (34.4) one is around, are you willing to provide rescue or assistance?	548 (65.6)	288
Q6. If someone encounters danger or difficulty, but many people around (36.2) them remain indifferent, are you willing	533 (63.8)	303
Q7. Are you willing to help a young and strong beggar? (99.4)	5 (0.6)	831
Q8. Are you willing to help a beggar who is old, weak, sick, or disabled? (30.9)	578 (69.1)	258
Q9. Do you think that helping others will help you in the future? (59.7)	337 (40.3)	499
Q10. What are you helping others for? Received praise 83 (9.9) Others' happiness 753 (90.1)		

Note: Q1-Q10 are the abbreviations for each item in the Altruistic Behavior Questionnaire, the same below.

## 2.2 Gender comparison of positive and negative choices for each item

Table 2 shows that there are statistically significant differences between boys and girls in the choices of items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 ( $\chi^2 = 4.104 \sim 60.164$ , all  $P < .05$ ).

**Table 2. Gender Comparison of Selection [n (%)]**

Item	Option	Boys	Girls	$\chi^2$	P
Q1	Yes	89 (20.3)	76 (19.1)	.197	.657
	No	30 (79.7)	322 (80.9)		
Q2	Yes	177 (40.4)	64 (16.1)	60.164	<.001
	No	261 (59.6)	334 (83.9)		
Q3	Yes	347 (79.2)	369 (92.7)	30.866	<.001
	No	91 (20.8)	29 (7.3)		
Q4	Yes	380 (86.8)	325 (81.7)	4.104	.043
	No	58 (13.2)	73 (18.3)		
Q5	Yes	295 (67.4)	253 (63.6)	1.322	.250
	No	143 (32.6)	145 (36.4)		
Q6	Yse	265 (60.5)	268 (67.3)	4.215	.040
	No	173 (39.5)	130 (32.7)		
Q7	Yes	1 (0.2)	4 (1.0)	2.116	.146
	No	437 (99.8)	394 (99.0)		
Q8	Yes	281 (64.2)	297 (74.6)	10.709	.001
	No	157 (35.8)	101 (25.4)		
Q9	Yes	159 (36.3)	178 (44.7)	6.147	.013
	No	279 (63.7)	220 (55.3)		
Q10	Received praise	37 (8.4)	46 (11.6)	2.256	.133
	Others' happinss	401 (91.6)	352 (88.4)		

### 2.3 A comparison of altruistic behavior between only and non-only children

Table 3 shows that there are statistically significant differences between only and non-only children in the choices of items 3, 6, and 9 ( $\chi^2=7.038\sim 32.790$ , all  $P<.01$ ).

**Table 3. Comparison of Altruistic Behavior between Only Children and Non-only Children**

Item	Option	Only children	Non-only children	$\chi^2$	P
Q1	Yes	84(20.8)	81(18.8)	.550	.459
	No	320(79.2)	351 (81.2)		
Q2	Yes	125(30.9)	117 (27.1)	1.510	.219
	No	269(69.1)	315 (72.9)		
Q3	Yes	317(78.5)	399 (87.7)	32.790	<.001
	No	87(21.5)	33 (12.3)		
Q4	Yes	343(84.9)	362 (83.8)	.193	.661
	No	61(15.1)	70 (16.2)		
Q5	Yes	271 (67.1)	277 (64.1)	.809	.368
	No	133(32.9)	155 (35.9)		
Q6	Yes	276 (68.3)	257 (59.5)	7.038	.008
	No	128 (31.7)	175 (40.5)		
Q7	Yes	2 (0.5)	3 (0.7)	.140	.709
	No	402 (99.5)	429 (99.3)		
Q8	Yes	283 (70.0)	295 (68.3)	.304	.581
	No	121 (30.0)	137 (31.7)		
Q9	Yes	140 (34.7)	197 (45.6)	10.400	.001
	No	264 (65.3)	235 (54.4)		
Q10	Received praise	45 (11.1)	38 (8.8)	1.281	.258
	Others' happinss	359 (88.9)	394 (91.2)		

#### 2.4 Comparison of altruistic behavior among college students from different origins

Table 4 shows that there are statistically significant differences between urban and rural students in the choices of Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, and Q8. ( $\chi^2=4.006\sim64.857$ , all  $P<.05$ ).

**Table 4. Comparison of Altruistic Behavior of urban and rural [n (%)]**

Item	Option	Urban	Rural	$\chi^2$	P
Q1	Yes	77 (19.7)	88 (19.8)	0.001	.976
	No	314 (80.3)	357 (80.2)		
Q2	Yes	104 (26.6)	137 (30.8)	1.779	.182
	No	287 (73.4)	308 (69.2)		
Q3	Yes	345 (88.2)	371 (83.4)	4.006	.044
	No	46 (11.8)	74 (16.6)		
Q4	Yes	341 (87.2)	364 (81.8)	4.617	.032
	No	50 (12.8)	81 (18.2)		
Q5	Yes	300 (76.7)	248 (55.7)	40.630	<.001
	No	91 (23.3)	197 (44.3)		
Q6	Yes	257 (65.7)	276 (62.0)	1.237	.266
	No	134 (34.3)	169 (38.0)		
Q7	Yes	0 (0)	5 (1.1)	4.420	.036
	No	391 (100)	440 (98.9)		
Q8	Yes	324 (82.9)	254 (57.1)	64.857	<.001
	No	67 (17.1)	191 (42.9)		
Q9	Yes	161 (41.2)	176 (39.6)	.229	.633
	No	230 (58.8)	269 (60.4)		
Q10	Received praise	35 (9.0)	48 (10.8)	.784	.376
	Others' happinss	356 (91.0)	397 (89.2.)		

### Discussion

Among the 10 items, except for the scenes described in Q1 (19.7%), Q2 (28.8%), and Q7 (0.6%), the percentage of affirmative selection in the scenes described in the other 5 items ranged from 63.7% to 85.6%. However, among the scenes described in these 8 items, the percentage of making positive choices is lower than the results of previous studies [4, 5]. It is suggested that a considerable number of college students identify with and engage in altruistic behavior, but the incidence of altruistic behavior among college students is decreasing year by year. At the same time, the occurrence of altruistic behavior is also influenced by external interference clues such as relevant scenarios and the characteristics of the seeker, which may be related to changes in the living environment. First, the social responsibility of college students has not yet been established. The current college students live in a more open era, without experiencing the struggles and pains brought about by social change. Therefore, their social cognition is shallow, their social emotions are weak, and their sense of social responsibility is not strong [8-9]. Second, influenced by the "family planning" policy, most college students are

only children who grew up under the full care of the previous two generations, and have good family and social resources. However, the lack of interaction between brothers and sisters hinders the development of their empathy ability, which is an important motivation factor for altruistic behavior, and researchers found that empathy ability can directly lead to altruistic behavior, it can also work together with moral principles to promote altruistic behavior [10]. Third, under the influence of a relatively democratic and warm family atmosphere, a strong sense of "justice" has been developed since childhood, emphasizing the realization of individual rights and interests. This consciousness is called the "belief in a just world"[11], which means that people need to believe that they live in a world where everyone deserves what they deserve. The academic community often explains the relationship between the belief in a just world and altruistic behavior from the following two perspectives. One is that the belief in a just world has an important adaptive function for individuals [11]. When an individual's belief in a just world is threatened, they will use altruistic methods to compensate for the injustice suffered by innocent victims, in order to rebuild their world beliefs [12]. The other starting from the developmental function of the belief in a just world, individuals with strong beliefs in a just world believe that a person's bright future is a reward for their actions and qualities [13]. The developmental function of the belief in a just world is based on the realization of its adaptive function. According to this principle, Lippus et al. [14] further distinguished the belief in a just world into their own belief in a just world (BJWS) and their belief in a just world of others (BJWO). In the process of cognitive operation, BJWS takes priority over BJWO [15]. Therefore, when encountering a certain scenario, individuals first make judgments about their fairness to themselves, and only actions that they believe are fair to themselves may be considered altruistic. However, the limitations of social experience and dialectical logical thinking ability make it difficult for them to correctly handle the relationship between "fairness" and "altruism" (including differences and connections), and they are prone to mistakenly equating "altruism" with "being treated unfairly", or demanding that others engage in "altruistic" behavior towards themselves without considering moral and legal constraints.

The percentage of respondents who answered positively on the three items Q1, Q2, and Q7 in this group were 19.7%, 28.8%, and 0.6%, respectively, mainly due to the influence of implicit altruistic tendencies. Researchers classify altruism into explicit and implicit altruism based on factors that individuals voluntarily help others at the conscious or subconscious level without expecting any external rewards. Implicit altruism refers to an individual's behavior of internalizing social feedback by helping others to obtain internal, not necessarily conscious self-rewards. The connotation of explicit altruism is opposite to implicit altruism [16]. Implicit altruism is an implicit attitude, which Greenwald and Banaji believe is unconscious, automatic, and uncontrollable in individuals [17-18]. Traces of past experiences that cannot be identified introspectively or accurately regulate an individual's liking or dislike of social objects [19]. Research has found that implicit altruism has a better predictive effect on the rapid occurrence of altruistic behavior in real situations than explicit altruism [20-21]. The implicit altruistic attitude enables college students to make the following judgments based on their usual impressions rather than the truth of the situation: "eccentric individuals", "drunkards", and "young and strong beggars" are scammers and criminals, and their help is actually a

performance and should not be given. This also reflects that the rational thinking of college students has not yet developed well, and their understanding is largely constrained by emotional thinking.

The percentages of positive responses to the 9th question "Is helping others for the sake of others helping oneself in the future" and the 10th question "What are you helping others for?" were 59.7% and 90.1%, respectively, indicating that explicit altruistic behavior among college students is mostly altruistic in terms of motivation, which is consistent with the research results of Zhang Huiping et al. [6]. In other words, most college students consciously believe that helping others is not for their own gain, but for the happiness and joy of others.

This study found that there were statistically significant differences between boys and girls in items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9. Eagly et al. and Cao Yanmiao et al [22-24] pointed out that due to differences in gender roles, males are more likely to lend a helping hand when the seeker is a stranger or the situation is potentially dangerous. Women are more inclined to engage in altruistic behavior in safe and nurturing contexts, such as volunteering to help researchers conduct experiments or spending time with disabled children. The results of this study are consistent with those of Eagly et al. and Cao Yanmiao et al.[22-24].

On Q3 "if a child or woman encounters difficulties or troubles, are you willing to provide help? ", the percentage of non-only children who are willing to lend a helping hand is significantly higher than that of only children; On Q6 "if someone encounters danger or difficulty but many people around them remain indifferent, are you willing to provide help?", the percentage of non- only children who are willing to lend a helping hand is significantly lower than that of only children; On Q9 "do you think others will help you in the future?", the percentage of non-only children who gave a positive answer was significantly higher than that of only children. This may be due to the difference in conformity between only children and non-only children. Compared with non- only children, only children have weaker collective consciousness and are more inclined to promote their personality, express courage, ignore the evaluation of others and interpersonal pressure, and their conformity is significantly lower than that of non-only children. Therefore, in situations like Q3 where interpersonal pressure is relatively low (i.e. everyone unanimously believes that help should be given), the percentage of non-only children willing to lend a helping hand is significantly higher than that of only children, and the same reason also leads to non-only children being more inclined to give positive answers on Q9. In situations like Q6 where interpersonal pressure is high (i.e. everyone refuses to help), only children are better able to overcome the influence of conformity and lend a helping hand.

The percentages of rural students who gave positive answers on four items, Q3, Q4, Q5, and Q8, are significantly higher than those of urban students. Under both interpersonal pressure and no interpersonal pressure, urban students exhibit less altruistic behavior than rural students. This may be related to the differences in living conditions between urban and rural college students. Compared to rural areas, cities have the characteristics of large space, high population mobility, weak kinship, lack of security, and obvious interpersonal alienation. With the development of urbanization, the population of cities is increasing, but the relationships between people seem to be becoming increasingly indifferent. Urban college students who grow up in this



atmosphere have a faster weakening of altruistic awareness: On one hand, they are more inclined to believe that the difficulties of others are not related to themselves, and on the other hand, they are also worried that helping others may lead to being deceived and framed. This kind of livelihood news, “where one person is in trouble and everyone” is watching, often occurs in cities.

#### **4. Areas for further exploration**

Although the results of this article show that altruistic behavior among college students is quite common, in this complex process of social transformation, utilitarianism is gradually infiltrating people's lives, fundamentally affecting the behavior habits, psychological state, thinking mode, values, and attitudes of young college students. Manifested in behavior is the weakening of altruistic behavior and the inversion of self-interest and altruistic concepts [25]. The weakening of altruistic behavior not only reduces social and national cohesion, but also reduces the effectiveness of the political system and affects the value system and evaluation mechanism of society [26]. Therefore, it is imperative to cultivate altruistic behavior among college students and make it a habit.

Scholar Wu Qiulan [26] believes that cultivating altruistic behavior among college students requires a good institutional condition: first, establishing a socialist value system and adhering to the correct value orientation; Second, establishing and improving the social credit system; Third, establishing a guiding incentive and punishment mechanism; Fourth, establishing a supervision mechanism for real name registration.

David G. Myers [27] believes there are two ways to increase altruistic behavior. First, we can reverse the factors that inhibit altruism. Measures can be taken to reduce the ambiguity of emergencies, enhance the attractiveness of individualization, and increase the sense of responsibility of bystanders. Second, cultivate altruism.

#### **Conclusion**

Altruistic behavior is widespread among college students, and the motivation is mostly altruistic. The altruistic behavior of college students is influenced not only by the event scene, but also by personal factors such as gender, whether they are an only child, and their place of origin. It reflects the influence of social, economic, and cultural characteristics on individual psychological qualities and behavior patterns from a deep level.

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