

IMPACT OF ALTRUISM AND FORGIVENESS ON EMPATHY AMONG POLICE PERSONNEL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of altruism and forgiveness on empathy among police personnel. 150 female police personnel (age range 30-45 years) were administered Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine, 2009), Self-report altruism scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, Fekken, 1981) and Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, Snyder & Hoffman, 2005). Correlational analysis and regression analysis was applied. Results indicated that empathy is positively related to altruism and forgiveness. Results revealed that altruism and forgiveness turned out to be relevant and were retained as predictors of empathy among police personnel.

KEYWORDS: *Altruism, Empathy, Forgiveness, Police Personnel*

INTRODUCTION

Police system is an important part of a country's governance. It is the most visible part of the government for the public and also the most approachable in need. This makes it important to identify factors that can affect the personnel in their line of duty. Empathy is one such factor that can influence the working as well as a perception of police personnel. Empathy helps to shape the interactions of police and members of the communities they are assigned to protect (Posick, Rocque & Rafter, 2012). Empathy refers to the process of understanding a person's subjective experience by vicariously distributing that experience while maintaining an attentive position (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). In a profession like police where an individual is required to deal with various sorts of people under varied situations at daily basis, it becomes even more important to understand the perspective of others. Empathy on the part of police not only encourages citizens to approach them in need; but also increase the likelihood of a victim taking the case to court (Maddox, Lee & Barker, 2010). If police is helped in practicing more respectful and empathetic communication in their interaction with the public, their acceptance in very communities that they are meant to protect increases manifold (Suttie, 2016). Keeping in mind this importance of empathetic attitude on the part of police personnel, police departments of various states are stressing upon having better public-police relations being mediated by empathy. Police must display empathy and compassion with sincerity, not in a researched way (Puduchery Police Department website, n.d.). Mazerolle et al. (2012) found that when police treat people with dignity and are able to convey their trustworthy and empathetic motives to the public, they feel more satisfied with the interaction and are more cooperative towards police.

Empathy is not only helpful in dealing with the public at large but also helps in crisis situations. Empathy training decreases the officers' emotional distance from the people they deal with thus making them better at dealing with people than those personnel who use conventional methods, and have not undergone any empathy training (Compton et al., 2011). Empathy thus can help police personnel in carrying on his duties smoothly and in an improved manner.

Altruism refers to behavior that benefits another individual at a cost to oneself (American Psychological Association, 2015). The nature of a police person's job includes placing life and needs of other individuals' (public) before her own. Altruistic police personnel feels a sense of fulfilment when she risks her life to help others. Altruism makes personnel to be approachable by citizens and to reserve strict and harsh attitude only for the chosen few who deserve a stern attitude and face of authority (Hein, 2014). Police personnel who aspire for a sense of professionalism also inspire for high ideas: in which they include altruism along with other ideals such as honor and integrity; respect; excellence; caring, compassion, and communication; leadership; and responsibility and accountability (Carter & Wilson, 2006).

The importance of altruism in police work is evident from the fact that police executive research forum in their guidelines on police use of force put forth altruism towards public the first and foremost rule for a police personnel on duty (Couper, 2016). Research has shown that police personnel who are altruistic draw more satisfaction from their job and have better psychological health (Khoury & Khoury, 1981). Bonifacio (1991) states that police works on altruism hypothesis as given by Kirkham i.e. the police work gratifies the altruistic impulses of police personnel and this motivated them to keep doing their job and endure the repulsive situations that come with it. Altruism, thus, can be viewed as inseparable part of police work.

Forgiveness is the intentional and voluntary process of change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, letting go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well (American Psychological Association, 2011). The notion of forgiveness is generally considered unusual in the political field but Hannah Ardent, suggests that it can liberate resources both individually and collectively in the face of the irreparable as it plays important role in restorative justice (Kohen, 2009). Forgiveness is important for police personnel even though they work with accused, offenders and convicts. The criminal justice system is based on the rehabilitation of convicts and police is a major stakeholder in this process (Lerman, 1999). Any act of rehabilitation of convicts will not be possible if the individuals in charge of their rehabilitation have negative attitude towards them. The forgiving model offers a humane approach to justice delivery (Bibas, 2007) and it can only work if the police have a forgiving attitude towards rehabilitated offenders by viewing them as humans first. Forgiveness refers to making peace with the pain and hurt (Manfred, 2013) and police personnel can help victims in achieving this state. Thus, forgiveness is an important aspect of police work.

The literature points out towards the multifaceted relationship between altruism and empathy. The most common work in the field of empathy and altruism is the empathy-altruism hypothesis which states that feelings of empathy for another person produce an altruistic motivation to increase that person's welfare (Batson, 1991). The empathy-specific reward hypothesis proposes that the prosocial motivation associated with empathy is directed toward the goal of obtaining social or self-rewards, i.e., praise, honor, and pride (Batson, 1988). Cialdini et al. (1997) established that empathy only influences altruistic behavior through a feeling of oneness. Both positions though differ on the process of how the relationship works, but, accepts the positive relationship between empathy and altruism. Researchers have also found an enduring relationship between forgiveness and empathy (McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997; Toussaint & Webb,

2005; Kmiec, 2009; Marigoudar&Kamble, 2014; Gaur &Bharadwaj, 2015). Empathy is the basis of forgiveness for the person who has bought some sort of hurt, without empathy forgiveness process is difficult to exist (McCullough et al., 1997). Various intervention models built to enhances forgiveness starts with victims' development of empathy towards the harmer as a necessary step for forgiveness (Enright, 1996). Various studies over the years have focused how empathy impacts altruism acts and forgiveness, however, the focus of the present study is to find the impact of altruism and forgiveness on empathy.

Empathy, altruism, and forgiveness play an important part in life, work as well as public perceptions of police personnel. However, there is lack of research about these behavioral aspects of police personnel. Therefore, the study was undertaken with the primary aim of exploring altruism and forgiveness as predictors of empathy among police personnel. The study also investigates the associations between empathy and altruism, empathy and forgiveness. Based on the review of literature following hypotheses were proposed;

- Empathy will be positively related to altruism and forgiveness among police personnel.
- Altruism and forgiveness will predict empathy among police personnel.

METHODS

Female police personnel in the age range of 30 to 45 years employed in Punjab police were contacted for data collection. 150 participants, who met the inclusion criteria, were taken for the final analysis.

The data for the study was collected from Jalandhar range of Punjab police, India. It includes three districts i.e. Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala. Participants were given the standardized questionnaire along with semi-schedule questionnaires regarding age, rank, and gender.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants were from assistant subinspector and subinspector ranks
- The personnel working in the area for past three years were included.
- Married Personnel were included.
- Personnel who are graduates and can understand the English language were included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Personnel on leave for a long duration were excluded.
- Personnel on deputation to other zones were excluded.
- Personnel undergoing any type of psychological treatment were excluded.
- Personnel on whom there is any criminal case pending in any court or departmental inquiry were excluded.

MEASURES

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine, 2009) consists of 16 questions, and each rated on a five-point scale from 'never' to 'often'. The TEQ demonstrated strong convergent validity, and good internal consistency and high test-retest reliability.

Self-Report Altruism Scale

Self-report altruism scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn & Fekken, 1981) is a 20-item self-report questionnaire with five response options for each item. The scale has demonstrated significant inter-rater and internal consistency reliability and good discriminant validity.

Heartland Forgiveness Scale

The Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, Snyder & Hoffman, 2005) is an 18-item self-report questionnaire that measures a person's dispositional forgiveness (i.e., the general tendency to be forgiving). It has demonstrated convergent validity, satisfactory internal consistency reliability, and strong test-retest reliability.

Statistical Analysis

Correlation analysis was used to find the correlations between variables (empathy, altruism, and forgiveness) and another objective of the present study was to delineate the significant predictors for criterion variable i.e. empathy, for which regression analysis was applied.

RESULTS

One of the objectives of the study was to find the relationship between empathy, altruism, and forgiveness. The result shows that altruism ($r = 0.23^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$) and forgiveness ($r = 0.37^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$) are positively related with empathy. Additionally, altruism and forgiveness also have a positive correlation with one another ($r = 0.19^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$).

The primary objective of the present study was to delineate the significant predictors for empathy. Variables i.e. altruism and forgiveness were entered as predictors. Regression analysis revealed that altruism ($\beta = 0.23$) and forgiveness ($\beta = 0.25$) turned out to be relevant and were retained as predictors for SI police personnel. They explained 55% ($R^2 = 0.55$) of the variance in the criterion variable i.e. empathy (Table 1).

Variables entered as predictors i.e. altruism ($\beta = 0.34$) and forgiveness ($\beta = 0.23$) also came out to be a significant predictor among ASI police personnel. They explained 14 % ($R^2 = 0.14$) of the variance in criterion variable i.e. empathy (Table 1).

Table 1: Shows the Regression Equations for Altruism and Forgiveness as Predictors of Empathy among SI and ASI Police Personnel

Predictor Variables	Standardized Coefficients	t-Value	R ²	F-Value
SI				
Altruism	0.23	2.05*	.055	4.23**
Forgiveness	0.25	5.34**	.282	28.60**
ASI				
Altruism	0.34	3.12**	.118	9.77**
Forgiveness	0.23	2.05*	.054	4.20**

**Significant at $p \leq .01$ level *Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

DISCUSSIONS

The current study aimed to investigate the associations between altruism, forgiveness, empathy and to investigate whether altruism and forgiveness predict empathy in police personnel. Empathy is an important aspect of roles and responsibility of police personnel. Empathy among police officers influences how they interact with citizens and the likelihood of their job outcomes. It is an emotional connection with citizens which result from shared experience. An officer who can share an experience with the victim is more likely to offer his best service in order to help the victim overcome his unpleasant situation (Sanborn, 2015). This study found two psychosocial factors viz. altruism and forgiveness to be positively influencing empathy among police personnel.

Empathy refers to understanding the perspective of other individual and this understanding enhances altruism. Understanding and viewing the situation from another' perspective makes it easy to help him/her even if it is not beneficial for oneself or is even harmful in some way. When an individual is able to share the feelings of another individual he is more likely to help him in any given situation (Klimecki et al., 2016). Altruistic behavior refers to positive evaluation and reactions to others; welfare and needs with aim of benefiting others (Mujic&Frijters, 2011) and understanding the perspective of another (empathy) help an individual to reach these evaluations. Individuals with empathetic understanding are more sensitive and can respond more effectively to need of others which enable them to provide the best quality of help and more often (Penner&Orom, 2010). An individual high on empathy also has altruism and cooperation to face hurdles in life along with positive and negative feelings of other individuals (Ali &Bozorgi, 2015). When one feels the emotions another is going through the act of self-less help becomes more of a rite of passage. Batson's (1981) empathy-altruism hypothesis model sums up the relationship of empathy and altruism i.e. empathy acts as a motivator to help another individual with a goal to reduce the distress he is going through. Thus, empathy and altruism positively influence one another.

The results also indicate a positive relationship between forgiveness and empathy. When an individual is able to establish empathy with another individual, the process of forgiveness becomes easy (Konstam, Chernoff&Deveney, 2001). Having empathy towards the offender or injurer releases positive emotion such as affection and reduces negative emotions of rage and revenge in individual leading to forgiveness (Greenberg, Warwar& Malcolm 2008). The feeling of empathy appeals to the humanitarian side of an individual where one is able to view the offender in terms of the fellow being helping him to let go of the build-up negative emotions towards a particular action of the offender. Konstam, Chernoff, and Deveney, (2001) in their forgiveness therapy model state, it should be ensured that victim/counselee is able to establish empathy in order to overcome the negative impact of an incident or situation on the present and future life.

Empathy enables an individual to view hurt from the offenders' perspective rather than from ones' own experience (Worthington, 1998) and that is why lack of empathy adversely affects the forgiveness in interpersonal relationships (Chung, 2014). Empathy and forgiveness work in conjunction with empathy helps in replacing negative and stable attribution about an offender by a broader view of offense and offender, thus, leading to forgiveness (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007).

Another objective of the present study was to delineate the significant predictors for criterion variable i.e. empathy. For this, regression analysis was applied to the sample. The variables i.e. altruism and forgiveness were entered as predictors. The results revealed that both the variables contribute in the prediction of empathy among police personnel. Altruism refers to the concern for the welfare of others which leads one to help another without any selfish motive (Ricard, 2015). When one helps another individual he is open to experience the emotions involved in given situation which leads him to understand the emotion the receiver is going through. This process leads to an empathetic understanding. Experience of oneness guides the behavior of helper in situations where he chooses to help another without any benefits and this experience leads to an empathetic understanding of receiver's situation (Cialdini et al., 1997). Altruism teaches an individual to live in a collective way and makes the self-centered notion of individual existence secondary, which enables the individual to foster better empathetic understanding of fellow beings. While helping others we become increasingly sensitive to their needs which lead towards empathetic feelings (Batson, 2011). Thus, altruism is capable of enhancing empathetic understanding.

As empathy joy model (Smith, Keating & Stotland, 1989) states that an individual helps another because he can draw happiness when the receiver experiences relief from his helping behavior. This happiness is the result of feelings of empathy which enables the helper to feel what the receiver is feeling which in given case is happiness. At the social level, altruism is a sign for cooperation towards fellow beings (Safin, Arfer & Rachlin, 2015) when one cooperates with other he tries to view the situation from his point of reference which is nothing but a form of empathetic understanding. Thus, altruism helps in predicting empathetic understanding at the individual as well as social level.

Forgiveness came out to be yet another significant predictor of empathy. Forgiveness is a process of letting go of the feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness towards someone who has hurt or wronged us. When one let go of these negative emotions, he/she is better able to view things from the rational perspective which leads to the development of an empathetic understanding of others' feelings and circumstances. In the process of forgiveness, negative emotions are replaced with positive emotions like empathy (Aragon, 2016), so empathy follows the feelings raised by process of forgiveness. The individuals who internalize the concept of forgiveness always act with empathy and remedial feelings for a better sense of wellbeing (McCullough et al., 2001). When an individual forgives what has hurt him, he starts to renounce hostility and begin to have an even more empathetic understanding within himself (Wilson et al., 2008).

Structural equalization model views forgiveness as a motivational behavior which motivates individual to be constructive in a given situation rather than honing the destructive feelings and this distinction is positively mediated by empathy (McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997), an individual moves towards forgiveness, he moves towards empathy too. Lazarus's model of emotions when applied to process of forgiveness (Reisenzein, 2006) states that the first step i.e. interpretation of given situation can ascertain if forgiveness will occur or not and this interpretation is influenced by the empathetic understanding of another's perspective. If forgiveness occurs, it will add to the understanding of others'

perspective. Thus, forgiveness is a simpler process that leads to the relatively higher mental function of i.e. empathy (Duan & Hill, 1996).

One of the limitations of the study is that the sample is based only on female police personnel. For better understanding and clear picture, it is important to include male personnel as well. Also, the sample belongs to subinspector and assistant subinspector ranks only which again limit its scope. For the broad understanding of police system, it is suggested that other ranks are also taken into consideration. The study also suffers from geographical constraints as it covers only one range of Punjab police, for further studies it is suggested that other ranges are also considered.

CONCLUSIONS

On basis of this study, one can conclude that forgiveness and altruism are very closely related to empathy among police personnel. Thus, the focus should be put in the training of police personnel to help them in building and focusing on variables such as forgiveness and altruism. These are positive factors of personality which will not only add to their empathetic understanding but will also help them in performing well at their jobs as they will be able to serve people better.

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