



EXAMINING THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN DEVELOPING ALTRUISM AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG YOUTH

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Abstract

This study was aimed to investigate the role of religion in developing altruism and self-esteem among youth in a church which is located in Kepong. The quantitative approach with the experimental design was used for this study. The researcher had identified forty youths actively involved in church activities and another forty who was not actively involved in the administration of the church. They were selected through purposive sampling method as studied subjects. The subjects were divided into 80 youths for the experiment and control groups equally. Researchers used a questionnaire to collect data from respondents. The data was analyzed using inferential analysis involving Pearson correlation analysis to explain relationships between the studied variables. The findings showed a positive correlation between religion and youth altruistic deed. Furthermore, the study also revealed a negative correlation between self-esteem and religion. As a conclusion, this study implicates that the potential benefits of religiousness direct an individual towards practising a righteous life. Self-righteousness seems to be a fundamental component of religious teaching. The difficulty in comprehension concerning the critical element of teaching consequentially leads to fundamentalism and violence.

Keywords: Religion, Altruism, Self-Esteem, Youth, Church



Introduction

The nineteenth century philosopher Augustus Comte (1798 – 1857) introduced the term altruism which characterized the willingness of an individual to care for the needs of others. Historically, various studies have been conducted in order to explore the underlying factors that lead towards the altruistic act. Markedly, the role of religious philosophical teaching has been a prime indicator and made very positive contribution towards the expansion of an individual altruistic act (Einolf, 2011)¹.

“And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” Luke 6:31

This golden rule is clearly stated in every religious scripture such as the Mahabaratha, one of the greatest scriptures according to the religion of Hinduism, Analects of Confucius, Jewish Talmud, and also in the record of sayings of Prophet Mohammed. These golden rules emphasize that, the goodness one hopes to receive from others should begin with goodness given to others, ultimately forbidding any behavior which would harm others.

Every religion underlines pro-social behavior (Habito & Inaba, 2006)² but it is still ambiguous whether this pro-social behavior reflects in attitude. The notion concerning altruism and self-esteem has been a prime indicator of human well-being psychologically (Nolan, 2014)³. Therefore, comprehending the contribution factor towards practicing those notions becomes a crucial social intention. Several domain of the study, such as sociology and behavior studies, aim to answer this thought provoking critical question. Over several decades, religion has played a leading role in an individual’s life. Religion has, for 5,000 years, been an essential part of the human condition (Archer, 2014)⁴. Religion concentrates profoundly on the notion of altruism, yet the contribution of religion towards developing the act of altruism is still uncertain among youths. The increase in violent crime is a proof that is being revealed by poor reflection of altruism in our Nation. According to Haslinda, Adriana, Nobaya & Syamsyihana (2015)⁵, the rise of juvenile delinquency among youth in urban and sub-urban residential areas are at an alarming rate. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of religion in developing altruism and self-esteem among youth in a church which is located at Kepong.

Religion and Altruism

Every religion concentrates on the great notion of altruism in their philosophical teaching (Einolf, 2011)¹. As it is known, developing the sense of caring towards others makes humanity more civilized and achieve tremendous development in every aspect. According to Saroglou (2006)⁶ most of the psychological research has discovered a moderate correlation between religiosity and human tendency to helping others. Although it may be true, it is still unclear whether these altruistic thoughts reflect in human behavior. The paradoxical view concerning the role of religion in nurturing the concept of humanity is still emerging. Historically, religion has simultaneously triggered so much of violence across the globe and an essential factor towards



developing a sense of caring towards others. The effect of religion in creating violence and altruism are twisted together, causing difficulty in separating each other.

On the other hand, various empirical studies have found a positive correlation between religiosity and altruism. Almost all classic psychologists such as Freud, Erikson, and James revealed the extraordinary finding concerning the positive correlation of religion in developing helping behavior (Saroglou, 2006)⁶ although each of their approach explored distinct theoretical areas. According to the normative theory developed by Schwartz (1977)⁷, a few elements were proposed to explain the sense of altruism in human behavior. He added that those elements influence human behavior and has a positive tendency to continuation if it receives appropriate external motivation. The three main elements are first described as personal obligation, defined as influenced by a collective expectation concerning appropriate action and social rewards based on a cognitive structure of norms and values, and the relevance or appropriateness of feelings of moral obligation. Individuals begin to helping other because they assume that it is their commitment to do so, thus boosting their behavior through social observation (Schwartz, 1977)⁷. This altruistic motivation is believed to be sustained by religious teaching and social observation of the individual involved.

Religion and Self-esteem

Are religious youths more jubilant with their character and ability? Batson and Stocks (2004)⁸ stated that contemporary religion plays a crucial role in enhancing the feeling of worthiness in an individual life. Religiosity as a self-enhancement hypothesis (Paulhus & Holden, 2010)⁹ stated that the relation between self-enhancement and religiosity is stronger in cultures that ascribe a notably positive value on religiosity. In such cultures, being religious means “being a good, moral, and decent person.” It follows that people with a higher self-enhancement need (i.e., those scoring higher on socially desirable responding) will satisfy this need through greater levels of religiosity.

Various researches have discovered the positive correlation between religion and self-esteem (Gebauer, Sedikides & Neberich, 2012)¹⁰ but recent findings show that religious people from certain countries only show a positive correlation. According to Sedikides and Gebauer (2010)¹¹, individual involvement in religious activity greatly enhanced the social value of the individual and is assumed as a part of esteemed members in their society. This positive assumption is potentially associated with positive psychological adjustment.

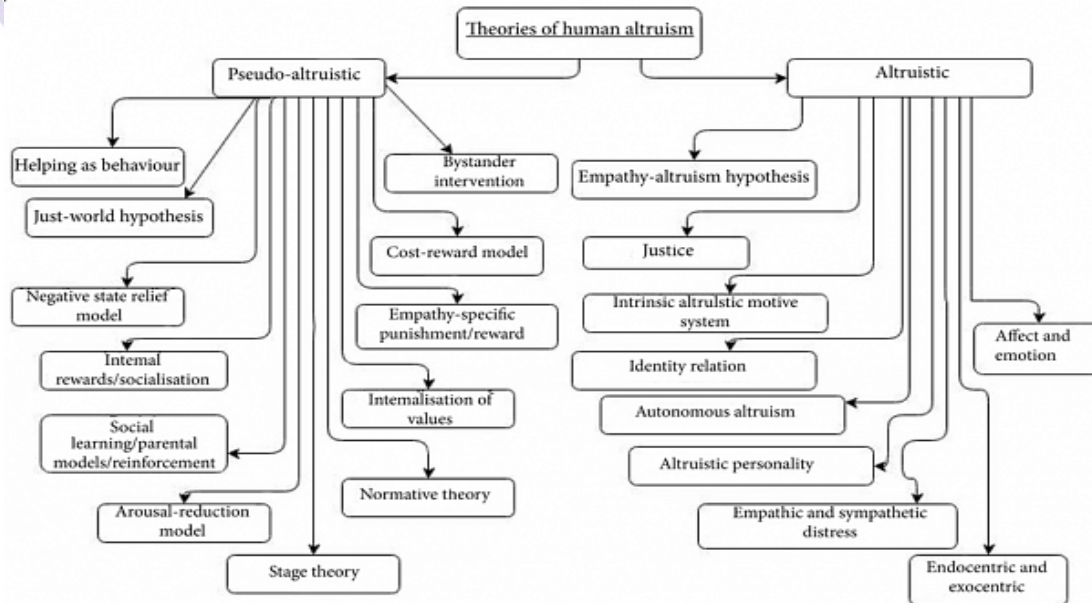
According to Rosenberg (1965)¹², self-esteem is defined as an evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regards to himself. Ostrowsky (2010)¹³ discovered that the instability of self-esteem is associated with aggressive behavior. Additionally, numbers of these studies revealed unfavorable and ambiguous results with regards to the role of religion in developing the feeling of self-worth.



Above all, religious belief, psychological theory, and empirical research are different, sometimes displaying conflicting findings and explanations. Notably, the positive assumption about religion on nurturing the sense of altruism was challenged and disproved by recent international research findings by Decety et al., (2015)¹⁴ by revealing that religiousness was negatively correlated with children’s altruism and increasing a tendency towards punitive attitude. The contradictory findings of this study has placed a critical question towards the role of religion in developing the feeling of caring about the needs and happiness of other people more than their own. Therefore, this study is intended to examine the role of religion in developing altruism and enhancing self-esteem among youths participating actively in religious activities.

Literature Review

Throughout history, many social psychologists have been interested in the study of altruistic behavior and in particular, understanding the underlying factors that contribute to these voluntary actions carried out for the benefit of others. According to Haski-Leventhal (2009)¹⁵ altruism is defined as caring for others. The researcher assumes that altruism is the behaviour of helping the needy and less fortunate with no return. Similarly, Piliavin & Charng (1990)¹⁶ stated that altruism is an act of assisting or helping others for the benefits of community without expecting to receive anything in return. Amazingly, this social behaviour intensifies moral development and certainly transforms the gradual expansion of human civilization into a society, underlining the essence of humanity. Defining altruism solely depends on the mechanism of the research. Smith (2009)¹⁷ stated that the notion of altruism is concentrated solely on promoting the well-being of another person.



(Source: Feigin, Owens, & Goodyear-Smith, 2014)¹⁸



The Theory of human altruism is comprised of two main approaches, namely Pseudo-altruistic and altruistic. Empathy has laid a very common foundation towards the concept of human altruism. In the empathy-altruism hypothesis, the term empathy refers to the ability to understand another person's feeling and experience. Its cognitive element is reliant on the developmental phase of the individual. As children grow, they tend to become more cognizant concerning others and assume that each person has personal identities, eventually practicing empathy as a subjective as well as an instinctive stimulation.

Besides that, scholars also identified altruistic behavior, not just as a means to promote another's well-being, but eventually based on one's ego-motivation (Schwartz, 1993)¹⁹. This Pseudo-altruistic approach (Hoffman, 1981)²⁰ has been an influential element in the theory of psychology. The Pseudo altruistic approach explained that individual altruistic behavior is solely driven by egoistically-motivated advantages towards one's own life satisfaction. Altruism thus changes the nature of argument that the entire human action is self-serving and makes an effort to gain compliance, differing from Comte's definition. This approach was supported by Darwin's early evolutionary theory which stated that every human action accentuates internal selfish motivation.

Studies revealed that religion plays a very important role in developing individual psychological well-being, such as self-esteem (Colbert, Jefferson, Gallo, & Davis, 2009)²¹. Papazisis, Nicolaou, Tsiga, Christoforou & Sapountzi-Krepia (2014)²², conducted a study research to determine the relationship between religious beliefs, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in nursing students in Cyprus. One hundred and twenty-three nursing students were asked to complete a survey consisting of four self-report questionnaires. The finding revealed that constant religious and/or a spiritual faith positively is associated with improved self-esteem and negatively connected with depression and stress.

Research Objectives

1. There will be no correlation between religion and altruism among youth in Jesus Caritas Church, Kepong.
2. There will be no correlation between religion and self-esteem among youth in Jesus Caritas Church, Kepong.
3. There will be a difference between male and female towards altruistic behavior among youth in Jesus Caritas Church, Kepong.

Research Hypothesis

Ha₁: There is a statistically significant relationship between the religion and altruism among youth in a church which is located at Kepong.



- Ho₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between the religion and altruism among youth in a church which is located at Kepong.
- Ha₂: There is a statistically significant relationship between the religion and self-esteem among youth in a church which is located at Kepong.
- Ho₂: There is no statistically significant relationship between the religion and self-esteem among youth in a church which is located at Kepong.
- Ha₃: There are significant differences between male and female towards altruism.
- Ho₃: There are no significant differences between male and female towards altruism.

Research Methodology

This study involved two groups, namely the control group and experimental group. The experimental group is defined as a group of people with a church-going attitude, while the control group is defined as a group of people who isn't actively involved in the ministry of the church. The control group involves a group of people who are actively involved. The population of this study is targeted at Kepong. The researcher has identified forty youths who involved actively in this church activities. They are categorized into experimental group and has identified forty youths who aren't actively involved in the administration of the church.

Research Finding

Table 1: Pearson's Correlations for Religion and Altruism among Youth in a church which is located at Kepong.

Variables	R	Sig.
Religion	.807**	.000
Altruism		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between religion and altruism. Based on the result of the study, religion is strongly related to altruism $r = .807$, $p < .05$. The result has proven that religion correlates positively towards the development of altruistic acts among youths engaged actively in church activities.



Table 2: Pearson’s Correlations for Religion and Self-esteem among Youth in a church which is located at Kepong.

Variables	R	Sig.
Religion		
	-.022	.848
Self-esteem		

Correlation is not significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between religion and self-esteem. Based on the result of the study, religion is negatively related to self-esteem $r = -.022$, $p > .05$. The result has proven that religion correlates negatively towards the feeling of self-worth among youths.

Table 3 : One-way Anova for identify significant differences between male and female towards altruism

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Between Gropus	2.467	16	2.137	4.532	.000
Within Groups	126.525	63	.471		
Total	128.992	79			

$K > .05$

A One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the act of altruism was different for groups with different gender. Participants were classified into two groups, namely male and female. There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(16,63) = 4.53$, $p = .000$).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study was intended to explore the role of religion in developing altruism and self-esteem among youths engaged actively in every activity in the church which is located at Kepong. Amazingly, the finding of this study revealed very likeable results by displayed positive correlation between religion and youth altruistic act. Study discovered that individuals involved actively towards church activities have been linked to altruistic acts rather than individuals who don’t belong to any religious denomination. In contemporary decades, a growing empirical study has discovered that individuals from active religious backgrounds are likely to assume them as being prosocial.

The finding of this present study is very much identical to the several other research findings (Einolf, 2011¹; Saroglou, 2006)⁶ and contrary to recent findings which found a negative



correlation between religion and altruism (Decety et al., 2015)¹⁴. Although this present study is unable to generalize for the largest population owing to the smallest numbers of respondent, the positive role of religion in developing altruism in humanity is exposed with clarity.

There are numerous advantageous events conducted by the church such as youth gathering, calling single working adults, and catechetical. They have also successfully established the Hospitality Ministry, which is coordinated by a team of personnel. Due to the deep analysis, all of these activities that are conducted nowhere else, nurtures the philosophy of altruism indirectly. Youth derived the idea of helping others from this positive social context and internalized those inputs into their own identity. Afterwards, they engage eagerly with this received input and reflect it in their behavior. From this standpoint, they comprehend perfectly the very nature of helping others and understand the innermost need grounded in the God-given ability to love and care for others. Astonishingly, the human brain also plays a major role in encouraging the continuing act of donation or charity. Psychologist Glasser (1985)²³ in his book entitled 'Positive Addiction' stated that charity is a positive sort of an addiction. Study shows that nerve cells in our brain produce a chemical product called Dopamine when we have had the pleasure of engaging in charitable acts. Dopamine is one of the most powerful neurotransmitter in pathways that control brain reward and pleasure center. This activation of the brain reward pathway tells humans to repeat their certain behavior to feel rewarded.

On the other hand, the finding of this study surprisingly revealed that there is no correlation between religion and self-esteem. The finding of this study contradicts with a previous study conducted by Fruehwirth, Iyer & Zhang (2016)²⁴. However, the finding of this study doesn't conclude that religion is unable to enhance the feeling of self-worth among youths, but solely depends on the uniqueness of an individual in extending their effort to master their life events. Priests and religious teachers at this church always encouraged youth to have a positive image of themselves and prohibit negative self-evaluation. Correspondingly, there are numerous verses in the Bible which is utilized to emphasize the feeling of self-worth among youths attending the church. Amazingly, Verses 7 in Luke chapter 12, displayed a very marvelous idea on how God appreciates the existence of human being compared to His other creatures.

The potential benefits of religiousness direct an individual towards practicing a righteous life. Self-righteousness seems to be a fundamental component in religious teaching. The difficulty of comprehending concerning the critical elements of teaching consequentially leads to fundamentalism and violence. The profound solution for the rise in violence is in educating oneself on the philosophy of genuine humility. The spreading of this sagacious philosophy to humankind will be a revolutionary change to all of humanity throughout the world in the near future. Ultimately, this church has been working towards this unceasingly with blissful guidance.



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