

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC (IN ENGLISH)

Prosocial actions and personal resources: Longitudinal research

Prosocial actions are undertaken voluntarily to benefit others and they may include a range of behaviors such as helping an individual in need; sharing personal resources; volunteering time, effort, and expertise. Such actions are of great importance to interpersonal relationships groups and also to economic and societal outcomes. We use a term 'prosocial actions' which covers prosocial behavior and prosocial personal goal realization (personally meaningful prosocial goals, charged with substantive importance).

Although research findings bring relatively broad knowledge on antisocial behavior (such as violence), our understanding of prosocial behavior and its stimulation is much smaller. We need more research which would demonstrate mechanisms through which prosocial actions are encouraged and what are psychological consequences of such actions for an individual. Therefore in our research project we investigate psychological mechanisms stimulating prosocial actions, looking for dynamic interplays between personal resources and prosocial actions. We concentrate on positive psychological factors such as positive beliefs (called positive orientation) and affect. The positive side of human functioning still needs proper recognition as a resource reservoir which enable an individual to undertake activity. These motivational personal resources may lead to prosocial actions and in turn may be increased as a consequence of these actions. Thinking positively about the world, oneself and future as well as experiencing positive emotions may lead to greater readiness for helping, sharing etc. and those actions may in turn stimulate positive thoughts and emotions. Verification of these postulated mechanisms is possible thanks to complex research.

To be able to reveal psychological mechanisms which operate across time, we apply longitudinal study design. Participants of our research report their prosocial actions each day for a week or four times for 16 weeks. We also analyze the role of stable trait-like characteristics as well as changeable state-like characteristics which may operate on specific day or context. Thanks to this methodology, we will be able to uncover dynamic and probably reciprocal relationships between personal resources and prosocial actions as well as provide evidence of how stable/changeable prosocial activity is across time.

Based on the knowledge gained from these research, we would also like to develop and to test effectiveness of an intervention rising prosocial actions in young people . As people do not develop behaviors intended to benefit others in a vacuum, educators, policymakers, and researchers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of programs helping in nurturing prosocial activities. Such interventions may be especially important for young people, called "Generation Me", as there are generational shifts showing an increase of self-interest and decrease of concern for others: empathy for outgroups, charity donations, importance of having a job worthwhile to the society. Therefore, better understanding of psychological mechanisms responsible for prosocial actions and providing tips for rising them in young people is of high societal importance. It may improve practice in a number of fields, including education, social work, and even economics.