



# Enugu State University of Science & Technology Journal of Social Sciences



## Journal of Social Sciences

### Editor-In-Chief

Prof. Oby Omeje

### Managing Editor

Barnabas E. Nwankwo, Ph.D

### Associate Editor

Nicholas Attamah, Ph.D

published by

Faculty of Social Sciences  
Enugu State University of Science & Technology  
[www.esutjss.com](http://www.esutjss.com)

## **Influence of Religious Orientation on Altruistic Behaviour**

**Ozor, Tobias Obiora**

Department of Psychology

Faculty of the Social Sciences

Enugu State University of Science and Technology

ozor.obiora@esut.edu.ng or ozor.obiora@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the influence of religious orientation on altruistic behaviour. Four hundred and eighty (480) Nigerians (275 Christians and 205 Muslims) who were present at the time of this study and agreed to respond to the researcher's instrument participated in this study. They were drawn from different parts of Nigeria, such as Enugu, Kano, and Lagos States. Their age ranged between 25 and 50 years. Their minimum educational qualification is WAEC or SSCE, while a Masters Degree is their maximum educational qualification. The Self-Report Altruism (SRA) Scale developed by Rushton, Chrisjohn and Fekken (1981), validated for use in Nigeria by the researcher, was used to measure the Nigerians' altruistic behaviours. The design for this study was a Cross-Sectional Survey, while Analysis of Variance was used for statistical analysis of data generated. The result indicated a significant influence of religious orientation on altruistic behaviour of Nigerians [ $F(1,472) = 5.87, p < .05$ ]. This showed that Christians were found to be more altruistic than their Muslim counterparts, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. The researcher therefore, recommended that attention should be given to the development of altruistic behaviour among Muslims, while Christians should be encouraged to sustain the tempo since it will go a long way to enhance national unity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Religious orientation, Altruistic behaviour, national unity, social cohesion

### **Introduction**

Man lives by influencing as well as being influenced by his environment. In the course of man's interactions with his environment, very many stimuli requiring different responses get him challenged. Sometimes, these stimuli or information require the individual to engage in behaviours that help others only, or behaviours that are beneficial to others and self. Our everyday experiences provide us with many examples of helping behaviours technically known as altruism. For the fact that no man is an island, man lives by either giving or receiving one form of help or the other from friends, family members, co-workers, religious groups, strangers, and even from our enemies.

Altruistic behaviours have received many attentions from many scholars and especially social psychologists. Altruistic behaviours refer to only helpful behaviours or actions that are

intrinsically motivated and are intended to benefit another without expectation of any reward. Taylor and David (2006) explained altruistic behaviour as the act of giving support or assistance to someone in need of such, without request or intention of any reward. According to Hoffman (1981) altruistic behaviour is that action which promotes the welfare of others without conscious regard for one's own self-interest. Coleman (2010) maintains that altruistic behaviour is composed of three elements; namely (1) giving or its desire (2) empathy and (3) no motives of reward from the beneficiary of the altruistic behaviour.

McQuire (1994) listed some examples of altruistic behaviours to include: changing a flat tyre for a stranded person, giving a stranger road direction, donating blood to an accident victim or sick person in hospital, sponsoring an indigent child through a career development, offering lift to strangers, counseling or advising someone after listening to his or her problems, etc. Batson (1998) grouped altruistic behaviour into two, namely behaviours of long durations, examples are behaviours such as training someone in school, or vocation, getting job appointment, and resolving marriage problems, and short durations, examples are changing a flat tyre for stranded person, giving financial aid, giving a road direction, donating blood to an accident victim, etc.

Our daily lives are filled with altruistic behaviours. The biblical story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:31-39) attests to this. The Good Samaritan helped a person at some cost to himself without any apparent thought of reward. In fact, the belief that people should help one another is entrenched in the moral fabrics of most nations. Often we help others not because we have consciously calculated that such behaviour is in our interest but simply because something tells us we ought to. The belief that people should help those who need help without regard to future exchanges is the norm of social responsibility (Berkowitz, 2000).

Furthermore, Evolutionary Psychology contends that the essence of life is gene survival. Our genes drive us in ways that have maximized their chances of survival. When our ancestors died, their genes lived on, predisposing us to behave in ways that will perpetuate them into the future. In Kin protection, our genes dispose us to care for relatives in whom they reside. Genes help themselves by being nice to themselves, even if they are enclosed in different bodies (Binham, 1980). Other relatives share genes in proportion to their biological closeness. We share one-half

of our genes with our brothers and sisters, one-eighth with our cousins (Binham, 1980). Bryn and Test (1999) maintained that people are more likely to offer help if they have observed someone carry out the helping act, a process called modeling. According to Noddings (2010), we need care giving and the special attitude of caring that accompanies care giving if we are as a care giving social group. Those who care for each other come forward to help, comfort, encourage, support, stimulate and cheer one another. In addition, people offer help at different situations and for different reasons or motives. For Levine (2008) men offered help mostly to the person of the opposite sex and in the presence of bystanders. Eagly and Crowley (1986) stated that help is offered more when someone is in a negative mood (that is, Negative-state-Relief Model).

For example, Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of learning helpful acts, and pointed out that as we grow up, we are taught to share our items such as food, clothes, shoes, pencils, ideas, biscuits, etc. However, this theory can be criticized on the basis that what is learned can also be unlearned. That is, one who learns to be altruistic from others can also learn to be unaltruistic from others as well. For example, some religions discourage, while others encourage helping others in need (Ozor, 2014).

Many studies have investigated the role of religion in altruistic behaviour. Overall results on the studies suggest a general pattern of weak, but consistently positive association between religiousness and helping people in need (Spilke & Gorsach, 2003). Religion is the study of relationship between man and God – supernatural being who created the entire universe including man, and who is all-powerful; is above destruction and death (Bensen & Russel, 2004).

Religion has been found to impact on the helping behaviour towards close relation and target. Isabelle and Sarogolu (2007) found that religiousness does not predict helpfulness. They hypothesized that religious people sometimes see people in need as being responsible for their predicament especially when such people are on the other side of the religious group. They further reported that religiousness and helping were influenced by the degree of religious orientation. Most religions teach some version of the Golden Rule, urging us to do unto others as we would want others to do unto us, yet their members restrict their helping behaviours only to their members. For example, Fernandez (2007) reported that Muslims sometimes see people in need as being responsible for their predicaments, especially when such persons are on the other

side of the religious group (out group), and further affirmed that religious fundamentalists do discriminate against out-group members by attributing to them high level of responsibility for their problems. As a result of this, helping behaviours seem to be on the decrease in most of our religious institutions.

In Nigeria, critical observations show that in the past, particularly before the Nigeria civil war, families, villages, towns, tribes, both males and females lived happily, receiving and giving mutual assistance to one another. Then communities, village and family meetings contributed money to sponsor education or business careers of their indigent sons and daughters. For example, Egwu (2002), Balogun (2000), and Musah (1998) reported in their works that many of our successful businessmen and graduates before and during 1960s were products of community, villages and family sponsored career/education programmes. According to them, family bonds of love and empathy were very strong then in social relationship. Car snatching, kidnapping, child trafficking, armed robbery, ritual killings were strange stories then.

However, in the recent past, the undiluted, love, trust and unity that characterized the social relationships of our people are very fast fading away. Everybody seems suspicious of one another. Conflicts seem to abound in families, accusations and counter accusations, apathy and hatred exist now as in violent society, that is, society without human feelings. To support this claim, AberCrombie and Warde (1992) pointed out that periods of 1960s to 1980s represented an epitome of peace, justice, security, and caring, while the 1990s marked the beginning of greed, materialism, hatred, lack of caring, insecurity, selfishness and apathy. This could be as a result of modernization, exposure to different life styles, differences in level of education, age, and cultural practices among people.

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate whether differences in religious orientation will influence altruistic behaviour among Nigerians.

Many theories have been proposed in explaining religion, such as Substantive or Essential Theory of Religion which focuses on the content of religion and the meaning the content has for

people. This theory proposed by Taylor (1997) focuses on the explanatory value of belief system of religion to religious adherents. This approach asserts that people have faith because beliefs make sense to them. This theory can be criticized on the fact that it is not everybody that has belief in his or her religion, and also has faith in the same religion. For example, many people belief in God, but do not have faith in God and what God can do to them.

The second theory of religion which is the Functional Theory focuses on the function which religion performs for the society and its members (Frazer, 1984). In other words, it focuses on the social or psychological function that religion has for a group or a person. For example, in the Christian Bible, God commanded that His followers be kind to each other, expressing love for all manner of people, helping without expectation of reward, showing charity to those in need: sick, poor, widow, strangers, brothers/sisters, and even to our enemies. Helping others seems to be a major part of most organized religions (Gershaw, 1988). This theory seems to be most appropriate in explaining altruistic behaviour since the members of a particular religious organization learn those behaviours or practices as prescribed by the teachings or custom of that religion. If the teachings or customs of the religion prescribed that her members should or should not render help to people, obviously the members will be socialized in accordance with the teachings or customs of that religion. This, as a matter of fact, brings about either an increase or decrease in helping behaviour among people in many of our religious institutions. Therefore, what we learn from the religion we practice either increases or decreases our altruistic behaviour in our society today.

Studies have been carried out on religious denomination and helping behaviour. Batson (2003) reported that Catholics do not appear to feel more empathy toward others, though they are more likely to help when it is in their best interest to do so. The reason could be that the Catholics are many in number, and may not want to use helping others to attract members to the denomination as other denominations that are small in number do. Afolabi (2000) carried out a study on religious differences on helping behaviour between Catholics and Protestants using 120 participants drawn from the population of College students in Lagos, Nigeria. The result revealed that Catholics and Protestants offered more help than their Muslim counterpart. Essien (1999) investigated the influence of religious belief on altruism between Catholics and other Christians, using 80 participants randomly drawn from the population of workers of the Ministry of

Education, Asaba, Nigeria. The result revealed that neither the Catholics nor the non-Catholics (other Christians) helped very far more than the other.

Ekekwe (1993) study predicted that willingness to help another person would be influenced by one's religious orientation, and further pointed out that neither Methodists nor the Catholics were found to be more altruistic than the other. Since their studies showed no difference in altruistic behaviour among Christians, it is possible that it will be the same across all religions. The present study therefore, focused on Nigerian Christians and Muslims who are seen and regarded as nation builders through moral upbringing and intellectual development of the younger ones who are the leaders of tomorrow.

### **Hypothesis**

Religious orientation will not significantly influence altruistic behaviour among Nigerians.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Four hundred and eighty (480) Nigerians (275 Christians and 205 Muslims of 210 males and 270 females) were drawn from Enugu, Kano and Lagos States of Nigeria, using available sampling technique. In Enugu State, 116 Christians and 41 Muslims were drawn, in Kano State, 54 Christians and 114 Muslims were drawn, and in Lagos State, 105 Christians and 50 Muslims draw participated in this study. Their ages ranged between 25 and 35 years, with WAEC or SSCE as their minimum educational qualification and first degree as their highest educational qualification.

#### **Instrument**

The Self-Report Altruism (SRA) Scale developed by Rushton, Christjohn and Fekken (1981) was used for data collection. Section A of the scale contained demographic variations and participants were instructed to indicate their gender, state, age, highest educational qualification and religious denomination. SRA is a 20 item Likert scale which requires participants to rate the frequency with which they have engaged in the altruistic behaviour using the categories "Never"-1 point "Once"-2 points, "more than once" – 3points "Often"-4 points and "very often"-5 points.



The researcher adapted the scale for use in the Nigerian context by conducting a pilot study using 44 participants randomly drawn from Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. A Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient value of .81 was obtained. The data were also subjected to split-half reliability and a co-efficient value .77 was observed. Any participant that scores less than 40 is regarded as having low altruism, while scores from 40 and above are regarded as having high altruism

### **Procedure**

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the participants at different locations in their State. Four hundred and eighty-five copies of the questionnaire were administered, and collected back on the spot. One hundred and sixty copies of the questionnaire were administered, filled, and returned from Enugu State. In all the copies administered here, all were returned but only three copies were wrongly filled and were discarded, while in Kano State, one hundred and sixty-nine copies of the questionnaire were administered, filled and returned. Of all the copies administered and collected, only one copy was discarded because of improper completion of the copy, and in Lagos State, one hundred and six copies of the questionnaire were administered, filled and collected back and only one copy was wrongly filled and was discarded for that reason. The researcher employed the services of 5 (five) research assistants that helped in the administration and collection of the questionnaire, which took three weeks of one week per State.

---

### **Design/statistic**

The design for this study was a Cross-Sectional Survey design, while One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for statistical analysis of data.



## Result

**Table 1: Table of mean and standard deviation for religious orientation and altruistic behaviour**

	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Religious denomination:			
Christians	65.96	11.50	275
Muslims	64.22	11.51	205

Table 1 above shows that Christians had a higher mean altruistic score ( $x = 65.96$ ,  $SD = 11.50$ ) than their Muslim counterparts ( $x = 64.22$ ,  $SD = 11.51$ ).

**Table II: ANOVA Summary table for religious orientation and altruistic behaviour**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Sum of square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Religious orientation	741.024	1	741.024	5.871	Sig.
Error	59578.684	472	126.226		
Total	2079490.000	480			
Corrected total	63950.800	479			

Key: = \* significant,  $p < .05$

Result as shown in table II above indicated a significant influence of religious orientation on altruistic behaviour [ $F(1,472) = 5.87$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. This means that Christians were found to be more altruistic than their Muslim counterparts; hence the hypothesis which stated that religious orientation will not significantly influence altruistic behaviour among Nigerians was rejected.

## Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate whether differences in religious orientation would influence altruistic behaviour among Nigerians. The result showed a significant difference in altruistic behaviour of Christians and Muslims. Christians were found to be more altruistic than their Muslim counterparts. This result supports the findings of Afolabi (2002), Essien (1999), and Ekekwe (1993), that pointed out in their various studies that Catholics and

Protestants were more altruistic than their Muslim counterparts. That is, both Catholics and Protestants engage in altruistic behaviour, more than the Muslims. This could be that both the Catholics and the non-Catholics (other Christians) respect and practise the benevolence commands of Christian Bible, which provides the rules binding on their followers to be helpful to their brothers, sisters, strangers, even enemies and non-believers. Furthermore, those who do not engage in altruistic behaviour could be that their religion frowns or does not allow them to help others especially those seen as out group members in the religious group.

### **Implications of the finding**

This study considered some theoretical and empirical issues. This theoretical input has contributed to the overall extension of the frontiers of knowledge in psychology in general and social psychology in particular. Social psychological theories have been enriched by adding to knowledge that difference in religious orientation is one of the factors that influence altruistic behaviours of Nigerians.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study investigated the influence of religious orientation on altruistic behaviour among Nigerians. The Christian and Muslim participants were drawn from the population of Christians and Muslims in Enugu, Kano and Lagos States of Nigeria. The result of the study indicated a significant influence of religious orientation on altruistic behaviour among Nigerians. That is, the Christians were found to be more altruistic than their Muslim counterparts in Nigeria. This led to the rejection of the hypothesis which stated that religious orientation will not significantly influence altruistic behaviour among Nigerians.

In conclusion, difference in religious orientation has been found as one of the factors that influence altruistic behaviour of Nigerians. Being a Christian predisposes one to altruism and should be encouraged, while the Muslims should be made to borrow a leaf from the Christians. Since nations without serious concern for their members do not last long, there is every need for altruistic behaviour to be sustained among the Christians, and the Muslims be encouraged to imbibe the spirit of altruism, for this will ensure national unity among Nigerians, and help to avert the dangers of religious conflicts and individualism currently prevalent in Nigeria and

which is against African extended family system. African extended family system encourages helping others, especially those who are in need of such help without expectation of any reward. Government, schools, churches, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, should design a type of education, policy, and method that will be moral in purpose and orientation, to encourage both the Christians and Muslims, especially the Muslims to be more altruistic since it will in turn endear people to one another and give rise to interpersonal and religious group harmony among Nigerias. This will go a long way to eradicate the negative effect of religious conflicts, individualism and capitalism occasioned by Western influences in Nigeria.

## References

- Abercrombie, N. & Warde, W. (1992 ). *Social change in contemporary society* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Britain, Cambridge Polity Press.
- Afolabi, D. O. (2000 ). *Religious difference as determinant of helping behaviour among Christians*. Unpublished M.Sc thesis presented to the Department of Psychology, Lagos State University.
- Balogun, I.H. (2000). *Psychology in contemporary society* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.)Nigeria: Quality Press Inc.
- Batson, C. D. (2003). Is empathy-induced helping due to self-other merging? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; 73, 495 – 509.
- Batson, C. D. (1998). *Altruism and pro-social behaviour*. In *handbook on Social Psychology*, 12, 282 – 356.
- Becker, G. S. (2007). A Theory of Social Interactions. *Journal of Political Economy*, 82, (6), 1063 - 1093
- Benson, L. & Russell, P. ( 2004 ). *Selection of selfish and altruistic behaviour*. Man and beast. Comparative Social behaviour. Washington DC. Institutional Press.
- Berkowitz, L. (2000). Mood, self-awareness and willingness to help. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 721 – 729.
- Binham, R. (1980). March – April: Trivers in Jamaica. *Science* 80, 57 – 67.
- Bryn, J. H. & Test, N. A. ( 1999 ). Models and helping: naturalistic studies in aiding behaviours. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 6, 400 – 407.
- Coleman, R. (2010). Altruism: Human, natural, or what? *Journal of Social Issues*, 28, 39 – 57.

- Eagly, A. H. & Crowley, M. ( 1986 ). Helping behaviour: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 100, 283 – 308.
- Egwu, N. U. (2002). *Effect of sentiments on prosocial behaviour among Igbos*. Unpublished M.Sc work presented to the Department of Psychology, Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria.
- Eisenberg, N. (2006). *Empathy-related responding in children*. Handbook of moral development, 517 – 549 N. J. Eribaum.
- Ekekwe, J. C. (1993). *A study of religious inclination and willingness to help*. A seminar paper presented to the Department of Psychology, UNN.
- Essien, U. E. (1999). Influence of religious belief on altruism. *Annual Psychological Bulletin*, 4, 213 - 221.
- Fernandez, P. (2007). Religion and helping impact of target. Thinking styles and just world belief. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 4, 26 – 48.
- Frazer, H. (1984). Social evolution and religion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 223 – 237.
- Gershaw, C. (1988). Religious belief and the society. *Sociological Reports*, 14, 112 – 118.
- Good News Bible, Luke 10: 31-39.
- Hoffman, M. L. (1981). The helping soliciting functions of tears. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 5, 22 – 41.
- Isabelle, P. & Sarogolu, V. (2007). Religion and helping impact of target, thinking styles and just world beliefs. *Achieve for the Psychology of Religion*, 4, 26 – 48.
- Levine, R. V. (2008). The kindness to strangers revised. A comparison of 24 US cities. *Social Indicators Research*, 85, 461 – 481.
- McQuire, A. (1994). Helping in natural environment: Dimension and Correlates. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 20, 45 – 56.
- Musah, Y.I. (1998). On the psychology of philanthropy. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 18, 6-9.
- Noddings, N. (2010). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Roberts, R. D. (2006). A positive model of private charity and public transfers. *Journal of Political Economy*, 192, (1), 136 – 148.

- Rushton, J. P., Chrisjohn, R. D. and Fekken, G. C. (1981). *Altruism Scale*. Hillsdale, New Jersey, Lawrence Associates.
- Spilka, B. H. & Gorsach, R. (2003). *Psychology of religion and ethical practices. An empirical approach* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) New Jersey: Holt Press.
- Sugden, R. (2004). On the economics of philanthropy. *Economic Journal*, 92, 341 – 50
- Taylor, S. E. & David, D. O. (2006). *Social Psychology*: (12th ed.) Delhi: India LPE Pearson Education.
- Taylor, S. E. (1997). Moderators of resources sharing. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 44 – 52.