

# The Relationship between Relative Deprivation and Prosocial Behavior and Its Influencing Factors

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## Abstract

With the rapid development of life, the gap between the rich and the poor caused by "some people get rich first" has caused many problems. It is not only the shackle of building a well-off society in an all-round way, but also gives many people a "sense of relative deprivation". However, the previous literature mostly focuses on the negative impact of relative deprivation on individual behavior, and lacks the research on it and prosocial behavior. This paper discusses the relationship between relative deprivation and prosocial behavior, and analyzes the role of empathy, just world belief and viewpoint selection.

## Keywords

Relative deprivation, prosocial behavior, Empathy, Belief in a just world.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Relative deprivation refers to a subjective cognitive and emotional experience in which individuals or groups perceive that they are at a disadvantage through horizontal or vertical social comparison with the reference object, and then experience negative emotions such as anger and dissatisfaction (Smith et al., 2012). According to the theory of fairness, whether a person is satisfied with his own reward does not lie in the absolute value of his actual reward, but in the relative value of social comparison with others and historical comparison with himself. When people think they do more than others, but get the same or less return than others, they will have a sense of unfairness or relative deprivation (Guo, 2001). The research shows that the expectation of fair distribution is significantly positively correlated with prosocial behavior. When individuals believe that society is fair, the sense of fairness promotes individuals to make more prosocial behavior. On the contrary, people who experience relative deprivation may see themselves as victims of unfair treatment, and a sense of injustice will make individuals show less prosocial behavior.

Prosocial behavior refers to helping, cooperating, sharing and other behaviors and trends that meet social expectations and benefit others or society. It is an important aspect of the development of individual social ability (Eisenberg et al., 2006). The generation of relative deprivation is often accompanied by emotional experience of anger and resentment (Smith et al., 2012), and these two negative emotional experiences will reduce individual prosocial behavior. First, anger is a destructive emotional state aimed at others, which usually leads to aggressive and confrontational behavior. Some studies have found that anger can inhibit individual prosocial behavior (Lemay et al., 2012). Secondly, resentment refers to the strong dissatisfaction or hatred of individuals based on specific reasons. For a long time, resentment and gratitude have been regarded as two ends of a continuum. Research shows that gratitude can promote individual prosocial behavior. On the contrary, as the opposite of gratitude, resentment inhibits an individual's prosocial behavior. At the same time, some studies have proved that individual relative deprivation can inhibit prosocial behavior (Xiong et al., 2021).

In a word, individuals who experience relative deprivation experience anger and resentment, and use more psychological resources to digest their own negative emotions. Therefore, they do not have sufficient psychological resources to notice that others are in trouble, so as to reduce prosocial behavior.

## **2. INFLUENCING FACTORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

### **2.1. Empathy**

Empathy is an individual's understanding of the emotional state of others and produces a similar social emotional response. The study found that empathy is a prerequisite for helping others. The empathic altruism hypothesis holds that when others are in trouble, bystanders will have an emotional experience, such as empathy, compassion, compassion, etc. the stronger the degree of emotional experience, the stronger the individual's altruistic motivation to alleviate others' difficulties, and the more inclined he is to make prosocial behavior (Batson, 1987), and a large number of studies show that empathy is significantly positively correlated with altruistic behavior and donation behavior.

The core psychological process of relative deprivation is social comparison, and individuals with high relative deprivation are generally in the lower class of society. The theory of vulnerable effect holds that the relatively scarce resource environment formed by social comparison will lead to vulnerable situations, which will make individuals have the desire to change the environment and a high tendency of empathy, and then promote individuals to show Prosocial behavior (Ding & Guo, 2010). The disadvantage faced by individuals in a sense of relative deprivation may make them tend to empathize with individuals in similar or worse situations, Therefore, empathy is an important factor before relative deprivation and prosocial behavior.

### **2.2. Belief in A Just World**

The belief of a just world means that individuals believe that the world they live in is just, controllable and orderly. People can get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Research shows that having a high level of systematic justice belief can reduce anger and weaken the feeling of relative deprivation experienced by people due to inequality (Crosby, 1976). The just world belief will encourage members of vulnerable groups to pursue long-term goals. They believe that the relative disadvantage is temporary and their situation will improve. Therefore, they may not be vulnerable to the feeling of relative deprivation.

According to the theory of justice motivation, the belief in a just world provides psychological advantages by giving people a sense of meaningful, predictable and controllable life. For example, the belief in a just world will buffer individual anger and aggression, and the belief in a just world is also significantly related to prosocial behavior. Research shows that the stronger the belief in a just world, the more prosocial behavior and the higher the tendency of prosocial behavior (Dalbert, 2001). Therefore, individuals with high belief in a just world are less likely to be affected by the sense of relative deprivation.

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