



THE PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE TECHNICAL STUDIES. SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Oana Jitaru *

Petre Andrei University of Iași, Romania

Abstract

The paper presents results of a sociological research based on the method of questionnaire, regarding forms of manifestation of the pro-social behaviour in young students and graduates from the technical studies. It is analysed the evolution of the manifestation of the pro-social behaviour with age and enrichment of the social environment where the young people are active, differences of manifestation according to the gender of the subjects, as well as factors that can influence their participation in activities beneficial for the community. The results are interpreted from the psychological point of view, and offer a base to support the civic education and the stimulation of the actions of volunteering as strategies of social influence, where young people can generate change and can interfere in the sense of the development of the community they belong to.

Keywords: pro-social behaviour; charity; volunteering; altruism; participation in community

What is the pro-social behaviour

The concept of “pro-social behaviour” has acquired, in the context of theoretical research and delimitations, different nuances. Some important authors prefer to use the term of “altruism,” while others place in a central

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

* Ph.D., Petre Andrei University of Iași, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Iași, Romania. Tel.: 0755060210. E-mail: oana_gavril2002@yahoo.com

positions the concepts of “helping behaviour” or “positive social action” instead of pro-social behaviour.

Janusz Reykowski (1976, 355, *apud* Mamali, 1978, p. 592) offers an integrating definition to the pro-social behaviour, as being pointed towards helping, protecting, supporting, developing the other persons without waiting for external rewards. Bierhoff (1987, p. 113) delimits the pro-social behaviour by means of two conditions: the intention to help other persons and the freedom to choose, that is offering help outside the professional obligations. Bar-Tal (1982, p. 104) added a third restriction: the presence of intentionality, the absence of office obligations, the behaviour to be done without waiting for external rewards. Baron and Byrne (1997/2001, p. 356) define this type of behaviour as being the action that does not bring benefice but to the one who receives the help. Macaulay and Berkowitz (1970, p. 3) operate the difference between the behaviour of helping and altruism, defining the latter as a behaviour by which the persons acts in the benefit of the other without waiting for external rewards. It can be noted that we find the same basic elements in defining the pro-social behaviour and the altruism. I agree with the opinion expressed by Chelcea (2010, 228), who considers that these definitions have the merit to indicate essential notes of the concept, which confer a narrow meaning, reducing it to the field of altruism. The author’s vision, to which I agree, places altruism as sub-species of the pro-social behaviour. To obtain a more exact clarification of the terms, I will also use the specification done by Boncu (2005, p. 166), who locates even the helping behaviour as a sub-category of the pro-social behaviour, and the altruist behaviour form a sub-category of the helping behaviour. On going further, we can integrate also other types of behaviour in the sphere of the pro-social behaviour that are very important in the architecture of the thesis and that correlate with the civic abilities and the participation in the community. In this sense, Baron and Byrne (1997/2001, p. 356) include in the concept of pro-social behaviour the behaviour of helping (*helping behavior*), the *charitable behaviour* and volunteering (*voluntarism*).

Chelcea (2010, p. 228) gives a definition of the pro-social behaviour that also offers a larger extension of the concept: “that intended behaviour, done outside the office obligations and oriented towards supporting, preserving and promoting the social values.” Thus defined, the pro-social behaviour comprises varied phenomena: helping the peer, defending the property, self-sacrifice for justice, integrity and independence of the country. In this context, Chelcea

(2010, p. 228) mentions that “Helping, protecting and supporting the development of the others has a central position in the system of pro-social behaviour, the man being the supreme social value”.

Approaching a study regarding the pro-social behaviour, in relation with the actions of volunteering, can be important as long as we can identify the mechanisms, structures and processes that can facilitate the persons’ voluntary involvement in helping the peer and the community they belong to. In this paper it is materialized the interest to decipher the social behaviour and the impulses it makes available for the community and the articulated action of the people in society.

Pro-social behaviour. Sociological research

The purpose of the research

While stating the purpose of the research, we took into consideration fundamental theories regarding the pro-social behaviour (Darley, 1991, 2000; Chelcea, 2008/2010, p. 147; Moscovici, 1994/1998, p. 61) that integrate in the structure of these constructs several subordinated categories of behaviour. The pro-social behaviour is underlined by the following three categories: helping behaviour, charitable behaviour, volunteering. Starting from these considerations, the study wants to identify to what extent the pro-social behaviours manifest in young people and adults, in the context of the crisis in Romania.

The objective of the research was to evaluate the forms of manifestation of the pro-social behaviour and the pro-social attitudes in young people and adults in Romania.

The hypotheses of the research

The literature in the field dedicated to the study of the pro-social behaviour makes me state the following hypotheses:

1. As citizens age, the degree of manifestation of their pro-social behaviour increases.
2. There are differences between men and women when it comes to the pro-social behaviour.
3. The pro-social behaviour varies according to the perception of the subject as beneficiary of the pro-social behaviour of the peer.

Operationalizing the main concepts of research

Indicators. I will evaluate the pro-social behaviour by the following dimensions oriented towards pro-social attitudes and actual behaviour of helping, charity and volunteering, manifested by the subjects:

1. *Moral values* - altruism, spiritual love, ethical values.
2. *Participation to community* - voluntary participation to some activities to the benefit of the community, such as: charity, social initiative as help or contesting some local, social, political decisions, participation in associations of volunteering on social or political purpose.
3. *Helping and protecting the others* - emotional help; material help; help to develop; protecting the life of others; informational help.

The first two indicators have been measured with the questionnaire “Values and pro-social behaviour,” instrument elaborated and validated for the purpose of this work. The last category of indicators was measured by the questionnaire to evaluate the pro-social behaviour adapted by Constantinescu (2004, p. 253), based on situations mentioned by Schwartz (1977).

Method

Participants

The population taken into account by this study was formed by the students and graduates of the Technical University “Gh. Asachi” in Iasi. Even though they represent the population accessible to the study, there are enough logical and methodological arguments to consider that fact that, even though it was not possible to select a representative sample for the whole population of Romanian students and graduates, the results of the research obtained are, most probably, relevant also for other social and professional categories of citizens in Romania.

Among this population, we selected a lot of 403 participants, students and graduates, aged between 18 and 64 years old, among which: 171 (42.4%) of feminine sex and 232 (57.6%) males; 212 (52.6%) students, 104 (25.80%) master’s students, and 87 (21.5%) graduates – employees in the field; 307 (76.2%) single, 91 (22%) married and 5 (1.2%) divorced.

Methods and instruments

To collect the information at this stage of the research, we used the sociological survey based on questionnaire, applied in form of pencil-paper, in a group, in the period 1 March - 30 May 2012.

Instruments of the research

Questionnaire to evaluate the pro-social behaviour – SCP. To evaluate the pro-social behaviour, I will use a questionnaire of own construction (adaptation of the questionnaire published in 2006), to investigate the moral values and the pro-social behaviours. To elaborate this questionnaire, we used a series of theories, questionnaires, and relevant research (Chelcea, 1994; Hart & Atkins, 2002; Iluț, 2004; Patrick, 2004; Rokeach, 1973; Youniss & Yates, 1997). The questionnaire is built on two scales: moral and community service scale.

To evaluate the pro-social behaviour, we used also the *questionnaire “pro-social behaviour”* adapted by Maria Constantinescu (2004, p. 253), based on situations mentioned by Shalom H. Schwartz (1977). We considered necessary to apply this questionnaire because it evaluates the pro-social behaviours in actual situations of helping and protecting the others.

Indicators are: emotional help (3, 4); material support (8); help to develop (5, 7); protect the others' life (9, 10); informational help (1, 2, 6). The questionnaire is built from 10 items expressed in form of situations that underline the pro-social behaviour.

Procedure

In a first stage, it was elaborated and validated by factorial analysis and analysis of items the instrument “Questionnaire to evaluate the pro-social behaviour - SCP” in the period January - April 2010, for a lot of 45 students of different faculties of the Technical University “Gh. Asachi” Iași. In January 2012 we elaborated a conceptual re-adaptation of the questionnaire, without interfering in its structure. At the second stage, in the period March-May 2012, the battery of instruments was applied to the lot of 403 subjects.

Results of the research and psychological interpretations

The relation between the age of the participants and their pro-social behaviour

The hypothesis of the research no.1 mentioned the existence of an important relation between the age of the subjects and the manifestation of the pro-social behaviour in the subjects investigated.

Statistical interpretation

It was underlined that there are important correlations statistically, even weak, between the age of the subjects and their scores in the scales of the pro-social behaviour.

Thus, there are important correlations statistically between the age of the subjects and their scores at the moral scale of the questionnaire SCP ($r=.100$; $p<.05$) and its sub-scales: altruism ($r=.104$; $p<.05$) and ethical virtues ($r=.121$; $p<.05$).

These results indicate the fact that by aging of the investigated subjects, there is also a slight intensification of the altruist interference in the community and the honest and responsible rapport, based on respect towards the others, as it appears in the subjects' self-assessment. Also, there are important relations statistically between the subjects' age and their scores in the scale community service in the questionnaire SCP ($r=.199$; $p<.01$) and its sub-scales: participation in the community ($r=.163$; $p<.01$) and decisions at the community level ($r=.258$; $p<.01$). It is thus underlined a slight tendency towards valuing the principles and social norms, and the participation in activities of helping, volunteering or charity, as people age.

The same important correlation statistically is underlined also in relation with the scale of pro-social behaviour ($r=.114$; $p<.05$) that contains situations adapted after Schwartz (1977) by Constantinescu (2004, p. 253).

The relations between age and these variables are directly proportional, but weak, which suggests a slight tendency for the subjects to get involved into pro-social activities, with age.

Psychological interpretation

The results obtained show that aging determines, in the case of the people investigated, a slight increase of the pro-social manifestations expressed by altruism, behaviour of helping, honest involvement, responsible behaviour, balance approach to own decisions and respect for the personal and others' principles. With age, it is also generated a better understanding of the way to structure the society and the decisional and political system, as well as a tendency to respect and value the norms to live in the society, and democratic cooperation at the community level.

As for the community participation - operated by getting involved in actions of volunteering, charity actions, social initiatives to value the resources of the community, promotion of the social rights and getting involved in political decisions - it is enhanced with age.

The statistically important relations between the subjects' age and the scale *pro-social behaviour* comprising actual situations of help offered to the others brings into attention a series of behaviour for the manifestation of which the subjects are more receptive with age. Thus, the subjects become more open to offer emotional, material and informational support to the others, even more open to help the development and protection of the others' life.

It can be concluded that age represents a factor that facilitates the accumulation of social experience that increases the manifestations of help, volunteering and charity in people. Still, there are other factors related to the non-formal education given by the professional environment that generates an important development of the pro-social behaviour in the subjects investigated.

Differences between men and women when it comes to pro-social behaviour

Statistical interpretation

There are statistically important differences between the female and male subjects when it comes to the scores obtained for the following scales:

Moral scale ($t(401)=3.62$; $p<.01$) and its sub-factors: altruism ($t(401)=3.01$; $p<.01$), ethical virtues ($t(401)=2.64$; $p<.01$);

Sub-scale participation in the community of the scale SCP to evaluate the pro-social behaviour ($t(401)=3.46$; $p<.01$)

The pro-social behaviour ($t(400)=5.43$; $p<.01$) - scale of actual situations of giving help.

For all of these scales, women received significantly higher scores than men.

There is an effect of statistically important interaction ($F=5.75$; $p<.05$) between the variables of the sex of the subject and the level of civic competences on the subjects' scores at moral scale. For the subjects with a high level of civic competences, there are no significant differences between men and women in respect of the scores at the moral scale, while for the subjects with a low level of civic competences, these differences are significant ($t(158)=3.46$; $p<.01$). This result suggests the fact that, even though the women

are more prone than men to pro-social behaviour corresponding to the moral values they support, a high level of civic competences diminishes the differences between men and women in this respect.

Psychological interpretation

The results obtained allow some conclusions regarding the differences between men and women when it comes to the pro-social behaviour. There are some statistically important differences among the female subjects and the male ones for the scores obtained in the following scales: moral scale and its sub-factors: altruism and ethical virtues; sub-scale of participation in the community; pro-social behaviour - scale of actual situations of offering help. For all of these scales, women obtained scores significantly higher than men. According to these results, the female subjects in the lot investigated are involved to a higher extent than the male ones in actions of offering help, volunteering in humanitarian associations, charity, actions of defence of some unfavoured persons or of the social and political rights, in general. The women show to a higher extent than men, generosity, kindness, unconditional love and value more the moral responsibility and the social respect. Also, the women in the lot investigated get involved more than men into actions of emotional, material, informational, development or protection support for the peers' life. It can be explained based on some research done in the literature in the field (Argyle, 1998, p. 84), which proved that women have an empathic and cooperation level higher than men, while men are more assertive than women. The empathic aptitude base contributes to the manifestation more frequent and prompt in the social context of the interference of the women to help.

As for the effect of interaction statistically significant ($F=5.75$; $p<.05$) between the variables of the subject's gender and the level of civic competences on the scores of the subjects at moral scale, both women and men who have a high level of civic competence get involved in pro-social behaviour to help at the same extent. The increased level of development of civic competence determines, regardless of gender, the high participation in pro-social actions.

In the subjects with low level of civic competence, we can notice differences between men and women in offering help and altruistic manifestation. Even though they participate in civic actions to a low level, nevertheless women seem to assume, more than men, offering help and respecting moral and social values.

From beneficiary to initiators of the pro-social behaviour

Statistic interpretation

After having gathered the information, the subjects were asked about the occasions when they had been beneficiaries of some pro-social behaviour initiated by other members of the community and were asked to tell such an event. Their open answers were coded into a non-parameter variable of dichotomy type (1 = I have never benefitted from any behaviour of help, 2 = I have benefitted from such behaviour). We then followed the differences between the subjects who benefitted from some pro-social behaviour and those who did not, based on the scores obtained for the scales of the pro-social behaviour. The statistic analysis of the information proved that there are no such significant differences. In other words, initiating some pro-social behaviour is not influenced by the fact that the subjects could have benefitted from such behaviour. The pro-social behaviour seems to not have been learnt by direct model.

Psychological interpretation

One of the questions addressed to the subjects at the end of the instruments applied was: "Have you ever experienced situations where you benefitted from the help of the community or of some unselfish people? If yes, describe in a few words what happened." The question appeared during some focus-group meeting where the participants gave examples of personal situations where they benefitted from the peers' help, and they said that those experiences determined the participative behaviour later on. It appeared the question if there are statistically important differences between those who benefitted from the community help and those who did not, in respect with their pro-social behaviour.

The experiences presented by the participants occupy a wide range of types of help from the one offered at interpersonal level between friends and acquaintances, to the help from the community solidarity in more severe cases. We considered that it was important the self-perception the subjects had as beneficiaries of help from the community.

The statistic analysis of the information showed that there are no significant differences between the subjects who benefit from the community help and the ones who do not, in respect of their pro-social behaviour. We cannot say that those who were helped in the past have a bigger availability to

manifest themselves pro-socially. The norms of reciprocity and social justice should have generated, in my opinion, pro-social behaviour after having benefitted from help. The explanations for this fact must be approached cautiously, because a large number of participants to the research did not give any answer to this question. However, it seems that the subjects investigated are not influenced, in their pro-social manifestation, by the personal experiences of valuing the help received from the peer.

Thus, it can be appreciated that aging determines, in the case of the investigated lot, a slight increase of the pro-social manifestations; the subjects become more open to offer emotional, material and informational support to the others, even willing to offer help for the development and protection of the others' life. Women act to a larger extent in the direction of the community participation and the decisions at the level of the community.

I consider that education for volunteering creates the possibility of social reconstruction and transforms into action the wish to change the world. Each person has the right to offer in their free time, the talent and energy for the benefit of others or their community, by individual or collective actions. Being a volunteer facilitates the involvement of the whole community in identifying and solving their own problems, offers a voice to those who cannot represent themselves, allows the accumulation of new knowledge and abilities, the valuing of potentialities, the increase in self-reliance and creativity, promoting the solidarity at the community level, but also at national and global level. The activity of a volunteer and the pro-social behaviour in general, offer that "empowerment" of the communities, as underlined by Ion Ionescu (2004, 281), they becoming able to solve the problems faced and take control on the projects, programs that affect the life of their members.

References

- Baron, R. A., & Byrne, D. [1997] (2001). *Social Psychology* (Edition VIII). New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India.
- Bar-Tal, D. (1982). Sequential Development of Helping Behaviour: A Cognitive-Learning Model. *Development Review*, 2, 101-124.
- Bierhoff, H. W., & Rohmann, E. (2004). Altruistic Personality in the Context of the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. *European Journal of Personality*, 18, 351-365.

- Boncu, Șt. (2005). *Procese interpersonale. Autodezvăluire, atracție interpersonală și ajutorare*. Iași: Editura Institutul European.
- Buju, S., & Jitaru, O. (2006). Questionnaire for moral-civic values diagnosis. *Educație - profesionalizare - creație. Buletinul Institutului Politehnic din Iași, LII(LVI)*, 5.
- Chelcea, S. [2008] (2010). *Psihosociologie. Teorii, cercetări, aplicații*. (Ed. III). Iași: Polirom.
- Constantinescu, M. (2004). *Competența socială și competența profesională*. București: Editura Economică.
- Darley, J. M. (1991). Altruism and prosocial behavior research: Reflections and prospects. In M. S. Clark (Ed.), *Prosocial Behavior, Personality and Social Psychology* (pp. 312-327). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Hart, D., Atkins, R., & Ford, D. (1998). Urban America as a Context for the Development of Moral Identity in Adolescence. *Journal of Social Issues, 54*, 513-530.
- Iluț, P. (2004). *Valori, atitudini și comportamente sociale*. Iași: Editura Polirom.
- Ionescu, I. (2004). *Sociologia dezvoltării comunitare*. Iași: Editura Institutul European.
- Macaulay, J. R., & Berkowitz, L. (1970). Overview. In J. R. Macaulay, & L. Berkowitz (Eds.), *Altruism and Helping Behaviour. Social Psychological Studies of Some Antecedents and Consequences* (pp. 1-9). New York and London: Academic Press.
- Mamali, C. (1978). Studiul comportamentului social în condiții naturale. *Viitorul Social, 3*, 590-605.
- Moscovici, S. [1994] (1998). Forme elementare ale altruismului. In Moscovici, S. (Ed.), *Psihologia socială a relațiilor cu celălalt [Psychologie sociale des relations à autrui]* (pp. 61-73). Iași: Polirom.
- Patrick, J. (2004). The Civic Missions of Schools: Key Ideas in a Research-Based Report on Civic Education in the USA. *Teacher Librarian, 32*(2), 26-28.
- Reykowski, J. (1976). *Egocentric and Prosocial Behavior*. Varșovia: Kiw.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1977). Normative influences on altruism. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 10 (pp. 221-279).

New York: Academic Press.

Youniss, J., & Yates, M. (1997). *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Received January 29, 2014
Accepted June 05, 2014