

## The Mechanism Underlying Empathy-Related Helping Behavior: An Investigation of Empathy-Attitude- Action Model

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**Abstract :** Empathy has been an important issue in psychology, education, as well as cognitive neuroscience. Empathy has two major components: cognitive and emotional. Cognitive component refers to the ability to understand others' perspectives, thoughts, and actions, whereas emotional component refers to understand how others feel. Empathy can be induced, attitude can then be changed, and with enough attitude change, helping behavior can occur. This finding leads us to two questions: is attitude change really necessary for prosocial behavior? And, what roles cognitive and affective empathy play? For the second question, participants with different psychopathic personality (PP) traits are critical because high PP people were found to suffer only affective empathy deficit. Their cognitive empathy shows no significant difference from the control group. 132 college students voluntarily participated in the current three-stage study. Stage 1 was to collect basic information including Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Revised (PPI-R), Attitude Scale, Visual Analogue Scale (VAS), and demographic data. Stage two was for empathy induction with three controversial scenarios, namely domestic violence, depression with a suicide attempt, and an ex-offender. Participants read all three stories and then rewrite the stories by one of two perspectives (empathetic vs. objective). They would then complete the VAS and Attitude Scale one more time for their post-attitude and emotional status. Three IVs were introduced for data analysis: PP (High vs. Low), Responsibility (whether or not the character is responsible for what happened), and Perspective-taking (Empathic vs. Objective). Stage 3 was for the action. Participants were instructed to freely use the 17 tokens they received as donations. They were debriefed and interviewed at the end of the experiment. The major findings were people with higher empathy tend to take more action in helping. Attitude change is not necessary for prosocial behavior. The controversy of the scenarios and how familiar participants are towards target groups play very important roles. Finally, people with high PP tend to show more public prosocial behavior due to their affective empathy deficit. Pre-existing value and belief as well as recent dramatic social events seem to have a big impact and possibly reduce the effect of the independent variables (IV) in our paradigm.

**Keywords :** empathy, cognitive, emotional, psychopathy

**Conference Title :** ICECE 2020 : International Conference on Emotional and Cognitive Empathy

**Conference Location :** Tokyo, Japan

**Conference Dates :** September 10-11, 2020