

The relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among students at university

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Received: 17 May 2024; **Revised:** 18 December 2024; **Accepted:** 24 August 2025; **Published:** 28 November 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.28916/lsmmb.9.1.2025.164>

ABSTRACT

In today's world, everyone wants to be happy and fulfilled in their life. Knowing what influences one's total level of life satisfaction becomes crucial as people negotiate the challenging terrain of education, personal development, and social obligations. This study evaluated the factors influencing life satisfaction among university students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and examined the relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among these individuals. Data were gathered for the cross-sectional study utilizing a convenience sampling technique. A survey is being distributed to 89 students through Google Forms. The questionnaire that was used to measure altruism was the Adapted Self-Report Altruism Scale, and to measure life satisfaction was the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The majority of students in university (68.5%) have a moderate level of life satisfaction. There is a positive relationship between life satisfaction with altruism and age group. In order to enhance university students' overall life satisfaction and mental health, further research should be done on how to cultivate altruistic behaviours is necessary.

Keywords: *Altruism; life satisfaction and university students*

INTRODUCTION

Altruism, which is frequently considered the cornerstone of pro-social behaviour, can improve the lives of both those who practise it and those who receive it. The influence of altruism on the subjective well-being of university students is of special relevance, as they are at the cusp of maturity and frequently struggle to strike a balance between their personal growth and academic endeavours. Although a great deal of research has been done on the psychological and social advantages of altruism in a variety of contexts and populations, more is needed to know about how specifically altruism affects university students' life happiness.

By investigating the complex interactions between altruistic actions and students' overall life happiness in a university setting, this study aims to close this gap. (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987).

According to Haski (2009), people engage with their surroundings, particularly in the setting of their family and school, and this leads to the development of pro-social behaviours, such as the value of thinking of others. Carlo et al. (2002) classified pro-social behaviours into four categories: altruistic, compliant, emotional, and public. Ummet et al. (2015) define altruistic pro-social activities as voluntary acts carried out in accordance with internalized standards that are predicated on the idea of assisting others out of a sympathy-based concern for their needs and well-being.

Altruism was previously defined by Mateer (1993) as a behaviour that comprises goodwill and benefits to others without anticipating any return. Numerous more pro-social actions fall under the category of altruism, including volunteering in soup kitchens and senior homes, accepting on tasks in a variety of contexts, and giving money and time to charitable organizations. Help provided in exchange for reciprocity and collaboration for financial gain are still considered pro-social activities, but they are not selfless ones. This is true because these altruistic actions demand a reward. That is, even though acts of kindness done out of reciprocity benefit the recipient, they are not considered altruistic acts (Gintis et al., 2003).

In a 2009 study investigating the relationship between idealism (desire to perform a favour), altruism, and emotional weariness, Ngai and Cheung (2009) found a negative correlation between the three. Stated differently, their findings indicate an inverse relationship between the degree of altruistic behaviour and the degree of emotional weariness. Fitzgerald and Colarelli (2009) investigated altruism in a variety of contexts, including everyday life, unexpected events, and life-threatening scenarios. Participants in the study included those with schizoid personality disorder, those with physical illnesses, and those without any mental or physical health issues. Further research revealed that those with the highest levels of altruistic behaviour were often in good health, with survey participants not reporting any physical or mental health issues (Akyüz & Aydin, 2020).

A typical objective for individuals is to attain life satisfaction, a measure of an individual's level of contentment and success in life. Pavot and Diener (1993) defined life satisfaction as an evaluation of an individual's degree of happiness and satisfied with life. Family, food, and overall life satisfaction are closely related, and this relationship is particularly important during the university education phase because life satisfaction is one of the most important factors influencing a university student's social relationships and mental health.

Since college students are learning how to manage their own lives for the first time, it is acknowledged that these years are among the most stressful (Cress & Lampman, 2007). These young adults' level of life satisfaction is influenced by a few stresses, including social, academic, personal, and economic stress. According to Ross et al. (1999), stress comes from the following sources: 38% of stressors were intrapersonal (such as additional obligations), 28% were environmental (such as changes in living arrangements), 19% were interpersonal (such as arguments with boyfriends or girlfriends), and 15% were academic (such as receiving a poor grade). Additional research by Chao (2012) and Darling et al. (2007) demonstrate that stress can be caused among college students by a variety of factors, including anxiety about their grades, uncertainty about their plans, financial difficulties, familial issues, relationships with people of the opposite sex, and interpersonal relationships.

Stress is frequently associated with a number of detrimental signs, including suicidal thoughts and feelings of despair and anxiety in college students (Eisenbarth, 2012; Pengilly & Dowd, 2000). Conversely, positive traits like optimism and self-worth might help college students feel more satisfied with their lives (Eisenbarth, 2012; Pengilly & Dowd, 2000). Consequently, when they mature into young adults and are left to negotiate life on their own for the first time, college students often encounter a great deal of stress. These pressures have the power to change how pupils view charitable actions.

Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between an individual's altruistic activity and life pleasure. Studies have suggested that life satisfaction boosts pro-social behaviours because it encourages people to work hard for others and make positive contributions to their lives without considering their own interests. This, in turn, raises the person's sense of contentment (Ummet et al., 2015). The notion of life satisfaction was introduced by Neugarten et al. (1961). It was defined as a state or outcome that is reached by contrasting people's expectations (or wants) with possessions (or what they have). The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among university campus students. We further examined the predictors of life satisfaction amongst university campus students based on demographic factors and level of altruism.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a cross-sectional design. Using a convenience sampling technique, participants were chosen from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur campus. 89 volunteers, ages 18 to 49, were enlisted in total. G-power was used to determine the sample size, and based on calculation, the sample size was 89. The inclusion criteria where participants must be 18 years of age or older and have registered during the academic session. In the meantime, those with major mental health diagnoses or those on medication are excluded from the study. Data was collected via self-report online questionnaires, which were created through Google Forms. An information letter, an informed consent declaration, a sociodemographic section, and the two main scales, which

included Adapted Self-Report Altruism Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), were all included in the questionnaire. A link to the questionnaire was created, and it was distributed online for participants to complete. The ethics reference number was NN-2020-067.

Adapted self-report altruism scale

In this study, the authors employed questionnaires. The adapted version of the Altruism Scale is a self-report measure developed by Rushton et al. (1981). This 14-item scale was designed to examine intentions towards altruistic behaviours. This scale employed a five-point rating system. The response possibilities ranged from "never" (coded "0") to "very often" (coded "4"). A higher score suggests more altruism. The subscales' reliability was acceptable ($\alpha=0.806$).

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)

Another measure utilized in the study was the Satisfaction with Life Scale, which was established by Diener et al. (1985). It has five items that examine one's overall cognitive assessments of life satisfaction, but it does not include a positive or negative affective dimension. Participants complete a 7-point scale, with 1 being the strongest disagreement and 7 signifying the strongest agreement. The SWLS shows satisfactory internal consistency among university students, with internet consistency of $\alpha=0.85$ and correlation within forms of $r = 0.709$ (Useche & Serge, 2016). For the SWLS categorization, score between 15 to 19 indicates slightly low life satisfaction, score between 26 to 30 indicates satisfied with life and score between 5 to 9 indicating very dissatisfaction with life (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Maroufizadeh et al., 2016)

Statistical analysis

The statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data, and data was reported as mean and standard deviation. A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the level of altruism and life satisfaction among university students. In addition, Pearson's correlation was used to examine the strong relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among university students. In contrast, multiple regression was used to predict the factors of life satisfaction with altruism, such as gender, age group, and level of education.

RESULTS

Following data collection, it was discovered that there were more female participants than male participants, with male participants making up 42.7% and female participants making up 57%. From the perspective of age group, participants aged 20-29 accounted for the majority (42%). In terms of education level, the majority was occupied by postgraduate students, accounting for 71%. According to the study's year, 81% of the participants were in Year 1. (Table 1). The descriptive analysis for the altruism level indicates the mean and standard deviation ($M=47.71$, $SD=13.30$). Table 2 presents the level of life satisfaction among different age groups, which were 22.5% (20-29), 68.5% (21-29) and 9% (>30), respectively.

Table 1

Demographic profile of the respondent

		N	%
Gender	Male	38	43
	Female	51	57
Age	Below 19	8	9
	20-29	37	42
	30-39	31	35
	≥ 40	13	15
Year of study	year 1	72	81
	$\geq$ year 2	17	19
Education	Undergraduate	26	29
	Postgraduate	63	71

Table 2 presented the descriptive analysis of altruism level and life satisfaction level, and the result indicated that life satisfaction on average was moderate life satisfaction level (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Meanwhile, for altruism level, on average, students have moderate altruism. Comparison for altruism score and life satisfaction score between gender was presented in Table 3, indicating there was no significant mean difference ($p > 0.05$) between male and female students. In addition, the results in table 4 showed that different years of study samples didn't show any difference in altruism and life satisfaction ($p > 0.05$), which meant that different years of study samples showed no difference in altruism and life satisfaction.

Table 2

Life satisfaction and altruism level

Parameter	Mean $\pm$ SD
Altruism	47.71 $\pm$ 13.30
Life satisfaction	25.04 $\pm$ 9.34

Table 3

Independent t test analysis between gender in altruism and life satisfaction among university students

	Gender (Mean $\pm$ SD)		t	p
	Male (n=38)	Female (n=51)		
Life satisfaction	26.13 $\pm$ 12.57	24.08 $\pm$ 5.87	1.018	0.311
Altruism score	50.24 $\pm$ 14.68	45.66 $\pm$ 12.03	1.607	0.112

Table 4

Independent t test analyzing differences in altruism, life satisfaction and year of study among university students

	Year 1 (n=72) Mean $\pm$ SD	Year 2 and above (n=17) Mean $\pm$ SD	t	p
Altruism	48.86 $\pm$ 13.67	42.82 $\pm$ 10.60	-1.702	0.09
Life satisfaction	24.97 $\pm$ 9.86	25.35 $\pm$ 6.98	0.150	0.88

The association between years of study, altruism and life satisfaction was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and presented in Table 5. There was a medium, positive correlation between altruism and life satisfaction, $r = .354$, $n = 89$, $p < .001$, with high levels of altruism associated with high levels of life satisfaction (Cohen, 1988). There is a positive relationship between altruism and life satisfaction, whereby the higher the level of life satisfaction, the higher the altruism score.

Table 5

Correlation coefficient between altruism and life satisfaction

Variable	Life satisfaction	Altruism
Life satisfaction		0.354** ($p < 0.001$)
Altruism	0.354** ($p < 0.001$)	

Note: ** $p < 0.001$

Table 6*Regression coefficients for predicting life satisfaction*

Variable	β	SE	p
Gender	-0.013	22.047	0.995
Year of study	-0.818	22.508	0.745
Education	-3.141	2.822	0.269
Age 20-29	67.757	3.798	0.044*
Age 30 – 39	9.396	4.503	0.040*
Age ≥ 40	11.167	5.133	0.032*
Altruism	0.262	0.075	0.001**

*Note: **p<0.001*

Multiple linear regression was used to assess the relationship between life satisfaction with age group, gender, year of study, level of education and altruism score, presented in Table 6. The results indicated that there was a positive and highly significant relationship between life satisfaction and altruism ($\beta=0.262$, $p<0.01$). Furthermore, age category was a significant predictor for all age categories (20-29), $\beta=7.751$, $p<0.05$. age category (30-39), $\beta=9.396$, $p<0.05$, age category (≥ 40), $\beta=11.167$, $p<0.05$. Meanwhile, the results also showed that gender ($\beta=-0.013$, $p>0.05$), year of study ($\beta=-0.818$, $p>0.05$) and level of education ($\beta=-3.14$, $p>0.05$) was not significant in predicting life satisfaction. The $R^2=-0.188$ indicated that the independent variable can predict 18.8% of the variation in life satisfaction. The results indicated that age group and altruism were significant predictors of life satisfaction. The total variance explained by the model was 40.6%, $F(7,81) = 2.671$, $p < .05$. Only two measures were statistically significant, with the age group 20-29 years old ($\beta = 6.012$, $p < .05$). age group (30-39) ($B=6.286$, $p<0.05$, age group ≥ 40 , ($\beta=7.844$, $p<0.05$) and altruism ($\beta = 0.272$, $p<0.01$).

Furthermore, Table 7 represents the multiple linear regression between altruism and gender, year of study, level of education, and age category. The results have $R^2=0.117$, indicating that 11.7% of the variation in the model can be explained by the predictor. However, all predictors were not significant in predicting altruism for gender ($\beta=-3.336$, $p>0.05$), year of study ($B=5.561$, $p>0.05$), and level of education ($\beta=-4.404$, $p>0.05$). age category (20-29), ($\beta=-5.481$, $p>0.05$), age category (30-39) ($\beta=2.256$, $p>0.05$) and age category (≥ 40), ($\beta=-2.008$, $p>0.05$)

Table 6*Regression coefficients for predicting altruism*

Variable	β	SE	p
Gender	-3.336	2.997	.269
Year of study	5.561	3.647	.131
Education	-4.404	4.134	.290
Age 20-29	-5.481	5.568	.328
Age 30 – 39	2.256	6.637	.735
Age ≥ 40	-2.008	7.537	.791

DISCUSSION

In our study of the relationship between life satisfaction and altruism, nuanced insights have emerged regarding the influence of age, gender, year of study and level of education. Through the lens of altruism, individuals experience a profound sense of fulfilment and purpose, contributing not only to their well-being but also to the welfare of others. The findings showed a substantial relationship between participants' generosity and university students' life satisfaction. These findings demonstrated how high life happiness is correlated with high altruism and vice versa. This could be because we assist people in developing a sense of community, forming new friendships, and feeling a sense of belonging (Brown et al., 2012; Pilkington et al., 2012). In-person activities such as volunteering in the community can lessen feelings of loneliness and isolation (Pilkington et al., 2012; Kahana et al., 2013).

This outcome is in line with a study conducted by Dulin et al. (2021) where the researchers discovered that those who served the community out of a sense of altruism rather than in search of financial gain or other tangible

advantages reported better levels of life happiness. According to this study, life satisfaction was inversely related to younger age groups. In this study, life satisfaction has a significant negative relation with age 20 to 29 and above 40. This negative relationship may be associated with the multiple problems that persons between the ages of 20 and 29 experience. Young adults frequently navigate key life transitions such as finishing school, entering the workforce, and achieving financial independence (Jovanović, & Joshanloo, 2022).

These findings are consistent with past studies that found young people to have low levels of life satisfaction. Young adults' low life satisfaction can be attributed to a number of factors. Young people, for example, face enormous pressure to succeed in their personal, academic, and professional endeavours from both themselves and society as a whole. This pressure can lead to stress and disappointment (Chyu & Chen, 2022; Wielewska et al., 2022). Financial stress, which includes debt from college loans and the challenge of finding stable employment, can also lead to low levels of life satisfaction (Borrescio-Higa et al., 2022; Wielewska et al., 2022). Furthermore, some young people might be unhappy if they do not feel that their lives have any purpose or direction (Cliffe et al., 2022). Age becomes a major factor: younger people are more likely to focus on achieving their own goals and objectives, whereas older people place more importance on improving the lives of others. This implies that the experience of altruism and its bearing on life satisfaction may differ between life phases, underscoring the need for interventions that are specifically designed to appeal to a range of age groups (Ismail & Levent, 2020).

In this study, according to the multiple regression analysis, there was no significant relationship between altruism and gender, age group, level of education, and year of the study. These findings indicated that altruism was not associated with gender, year of study in the university or age group. The results are inconsistent with previous studies, which found a significant relationship between altruism and gender and age (Muthuri, 2018). Many psychological studies explore gender variations in altruism, with some claiming that women are normally more altruistic than men due to socialization patterns that favour nurturing and sympathetic behaviours. However, our results do not support this claim. The absence of any significant association between gender and altruism in this study suggests that altruistic behaviours are not always gender-dependent. It is likely that current cultural changes, such as more gender equality and a broader range of social responsibilities, have diminished gender differences in altruism. Alternatively, individual personality traits, values, or situational factors may have a greater influence on altruism than gender (Xi et al., 2022).

In contrast, younger people may be viewed as more self-centred or less involved in pro-social behaviours. However, our research revealed no substantial association between age group and altruism. This lack of relevance may imply that altruistic characteristics are not solely determined by age and that other factors, such as personal values, life experiences, and cultural influences, may play a larger role (Gu et al., 2023). Education is frequently assumed to correlate with higher levels of altruism, as higher education can foster a greater understanding of social issues, empathy, and the importance of pro-social behaviour. However, our findings do not support this assumption, as education level did not show a significant relationship with altruistic behaviour. While education may broaden perspectives, it does not necessarily translate into more altruistic actions. Other factors, such as cultural context, socioeconomic status, or personal beliefs, may have a more direct impact on altruistic behaviour (Elsherbiny, 2022).

Furthermore, this link is more complex due to the degree of schooling. The development of critical thinking abilities and a more comprehensive understanding of societal concerns through higher education may magnify the beneficial impacts of altruism on life satisfaction among college students. This association between altruism and life satisfaction among university students emphasizes how crucial it is to incorporate altruistic principles into academic curricula and campus culture in order to foster a sense of social responsibility and overall well-being. Nevertheless, no significant relationship was found in this study between the life satisfaction score and educational attainment (Aykuz & Aydin, 2020).

In this study, it was discovered that altruism positively predicted life happy fulfilment. Altruistic behaviour, such as volunteering or helping others, is often associated with better life satisfaction ratings than non-altruistic behaviour (Refaeli et al., 2022; Zhao & Epley, 2022). Long-lasting and cumulative positive effects on well-being can also be achieved through altruism. These findings are consistent with analogous findings from previous research (Chi et al., 2021; Ghorbani et al., 2021). This can be explained by the fact that there is a positive association between pleasure in life and acting philanthropically, which can provide people with a sense of direction and significance in their lives (Szcześniak et al., 2022). A meaningful existence and overall well-being depend on relationships, which are established and maintained through social engagement, which is often facilitated by altruistic acts. Acting voluntary helping others has been shown to reduce stress and negative emotions, which are connected to increased life satisfaction levels (Li et al., 2022).

In general, the complexity of altruism and how it interacts with demographic variables influence people's perceptions of life happiness (Hatice & Zkan, 2018). Through accepting variety and comprehending the distinct environments in which altruism functions, we may formulate focused approaches and regulations that foster a compassionate and fulfilling culture for every person in the community, irrespective of age, gender, or level of education. The study has a limitation by the use of a cross-sectional design, which means that information was gathered all at once. Inferring causality between altruism and life satisfaction can be limited. More information about how these characteristics change over time might be available from longitudinal research.

CONCLUSION

Life satisfaction is significantly predicted by altruism. Altruistic attitudes, volunteering, and unofficial helping activities were found to have special effects on maintaining life satisfaction, positive affect, and other well-being outcomes in the earlier study. This study found a significant relationship between age group and altruism score and life satisfaction level among university students. University students who participate in activities that enhance their altruistic behaviours may have happier feelings and a greater sense of fulfilment in life, all of which contribute to a state of balanced physical and mental health. In order to reduce the academic pressure and life anxiety that university students experience, some courses should be designed to help them adopt altruistic behaviors. In light of the current situation, more investigation is necessary.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nur Zakiah Mohd Saat, Siti Aishah Hanawi and Hazlenah Hanafiah were responsible for the methodology, analysis and approved the final manuscript, Lim Jia Hang, Sharan Singh, Faeza Hasnan, Asrul Amirullah, Lin Bomiao, Omar Moh Alzyoud, Feng Jing, Yang Wenchen, was responsible for data collection and draft manuscript.

ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Committee Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (JEP-2023-393). Prior to participation, all respondents were fully informed about the study procedures

FUNDING

No financial support was provided for the conduct of this study or the preparation of this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Faculty Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for the technical assistance.

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Citation:

Hanawi, S.A., Hanafiah, H., Lim, J. H., Singh, S., Hasnan, F., Mohamed Noor, A. A., Bomiao, L., Moh Alzyoud, O., Feng, J., Wenchen, Y. and Mohd Saat, N. Z. The relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among students at university. (2025). *Life Sciences, Medicine and Biomedicine*, 9(1).
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