

The widow's mite: Religiosity, emotional intelligence and empathy as predictors of charitable giving among impoverished population

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Abstract

This study examined if religiosity, emotional intelligence and empathy could account for the variance in charitable giving among impoverished population. Religious orientation, emotional intelligence, empathy and philanthropic scales were used to elicit responses from participants. Contrary to H1, the results of the hierarchical regression analyses revealed that religiosity had a main effect predictive value on charitable giving. Consistent with H2, emotional intelligence was found to predict charitable giving. Also consistent with H3, empathy had a main effect predictive value on charitable giving. The results imply that religious context is fundamental when charitable giving is essential. Limitations of the study were highlighted and suggestions for further research were offered.

Keywords: Religiosity, emotional intelligence, empathy, charitable giving, impoverished population.

INTRODUCTION

For quite some time now, social scientists have attempted to establish the reasons behind individuals' participation in charitable giving, especially in developed economies where people could afford the resources to spare, but researchers have not given corresponding attention to investigating what motivates those that are in lack to give to others they perceive to be in need. Among possible drivers of this behaviour, the influence of personality factors, especially the Big Five on prosocial and volunteering dominate literature (e.g., Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011). Personal factors such as religiosity and emotional intelligence and personality factor (empathy) have not been given considerable empirical attention, especially as it concerns impoverished population and this is the focus of the present study.

In the Christian folklore, the story of the widow's mite could be cited as the most basic articulation of charitable giving. It is also imperative to note that individual's capacity to respond to others in need is an essential aspect of the human condition, that helps people form social bonds, facilitate harmonious group relations, and enhance the "greater good" (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Hoffman, 2000). From an economic view of human behaviour, people are motivated to maximise their rewards and to minimise their costs (Piliavin & Callero, 1991) and whenever people, especially the impoverished population

sacrifice their comfort to the benefit of others they perceive are in need of help, then there are essential factors that are responsible and that need not be over-emphasised.

Generally speaking, impoverished people are those living in a condition that is unable to satisfy most basic requirements for human survival in terms of good food, clothing, shelter, electricity, transport, health, education and recreation. Poverty has remained one of the most critical challenges that have continued to threaten human race. This challenge is more pervasive and severe in sub-saharan Africa and Nigeria is not exempt after the country's current poverty situation reported to have grown worse with 70% of the Nigerian population living in poverty and seven out of every ten Nigerians live below the poverty line of less than one U.S. dollar a day (*National Empowerment and Development Strategies; NEEDS, 2004*). The National Household Survey conducted in 2005 shows that 51.6% of the Nigerian population lives in poverty (NBS, 2005). The United Nations Development Programme {UNDP} (2009) report estimated that Nigeria has Human Poverty Index (HPI) of 36.2% which ranks her 114 out of 135 countries assessed. Although there are variations in these reports, it is clear that greater percentage of Nigerians is poor, and carrying out a study to establish whether religiosity, emotional intelligence and empathy have predictive value on

charitable giving among impoverished population is the first of its kind.

However, different fields of specialization - psychology, religion, economics, sociology, political science (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011) have attempted to elucidate the reason of giving and not receiving, and each has provided substantial explanation. Research has examined philanthropy or charitable giving in different but often related perspectives. Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) defined charitable giving as the donation of money to an organisation which benefit others beyond one's own family. It has also been conceptualised as private action for the public good (Brown & Ferris, 2007). Philanthropy represents a unique phenomenon that traverses self-interest with the action of helping others. It is about feelings and exercise of civic duty, stewardship and being socially responsible for the well-being of society as a whole. Charitable giving and philanthropy are used interchangeably in the present study.

Charitable giving can be related to various dimensions of religiosity (Weaver & Agle, 2002). Glock and Stark (1965) argued that one such critical dimension is that of religious beliefs that God created the world; Jesus is the only Son of God. Arguing from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Walker, Smither and De Bode (2012) believe that this basic belief about God can affect both the religious identity and

associated role expectations for religious individuals. Therefore, religion has been cited as a major reason many give, as many religions include charity as part of their doctrines (Wiepking, 2009). Religion has much intuitive appeal given that philanthropy, in its barest sense, is giving unconditionally to make the world a better place, through the values and principles they espouse, seek to offer their adherents principles, values, norms, and beliefs as documented in religious codes for making these choices (Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008).

Religious organisations can serve to promote the development of character strengths (Ahmed, 2009) which may encourage philanthropy because they often engage individuals in socially approved activities, thereby providing opportunities for prosocial behaviour (Kress & Elias, 1997). Religion increases one's networks with people, and highly religious people are more likely to be involved in charitable projects (Brown & Ferris, 2007). In another vein, most religions preach love, care and social justice, especially for the disadvantaged (Dillon & Wink, 2004), and accommodating or yielding to the demands of the less privileged of the society and pursuing their welfare through charitable giving is an attribute of an emotionally intelligent person.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) defined as the ability to monitor one's own and others'

emotions, to discriminate among them, and use the information to assist individuals in problem solving and decision making (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) was brought into limelight by Goleman's (1995) excellent book "Emotional Intelligence" and by a subsequent lead article in Time magazine (Gibbs, 1995). Since then interest in the topic has not waned but rather has become so great that it appears to have surpassed the empirical research (Ravichandran, Arasu, & Kumar, 2011). Its popularity misled management consultants into promoting EI as key to success in variety of live situations. Such claims have also been said to be spurious and such consultants have been accused of hyping the contributions of EI to success in several life domains as only few of these claims have been based on empirical data (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000). Ravichandran and colleagues (2011) support this accusation when they reported that in a literature search using the PsycInfo database, Landy (2005) found 102 citations only that are related to EI in empirical journals after several years of its existence. Landy speculated that the appearance of such cites in non-empirical journals would even be much larger. Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel and Hooper (2002) stated that the claims have been drawn from anecdotal evidence relating to exceptional individuals. It might be this that prompted Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts (2002), Landy (2005) and Brackett, Mayer and Warner (2004) to state that despite such claims in the power of EI, supporting

empirical evidence is still lacking, and also that till date what EI predicts is still not very clear and suggested that beyond these earlier studies more research is necessary to assess the criterion validity of EI.

Ever since Brackett and colleagues' (2004) assertion more research efforts have been put forth to empirically establish the consequences of EI. EI has been related to transformational leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour (Modassir & Singh, 2008), psychological well-being (Landa, Martos, & Lopez-Zafra, 2010), mental well-being (Sharma, 2011), and workplace deviant behaviours (Winkel, Wyland, Shaffer & Classon, 2011), but there is dearth of research relating EI competencies to philanthropic behaviour. Besides, most of these studies on EI were carried out in a more developed economy of America and Europe (e.g., Carmeli, Yitzhak-Halevy, & Weisberg, 2009) and to depend on these data alone would not account for a complete understanding of the EI construct. Clearly, a more empirical step needs to be taken especially from other cultures beyond America and Europe so as to compare data and come to a firm conclusion on the meaning and understanding of EI and for EI construct to be credible.

Research has also attempted to link charitable giving to personality. Studies reveal that donations to charitable causes are related to individual differences in

personality characteristics (e.g., Bekkers, 2006). The Five-Factor Model of personality, the level of generalised social trust (e.g., Bekkers, 2007; Brown & Ferris, 2007) have all been linked to charitable giving. Another personality characteristic that has received research attention relating to philanthropy is empathy (Bekkers, 2006; Bekkers & Wilhelm, 2006). It has been documented that empathy stir up an altruistic motive, the eventual objective of which is to protect or promote the welfare of the person for whom empathy is felt (Batson, 1991). Empathy refers to an emotional response related to the perceived welfare of another that results from the thought of imagining taking the position of a person in clear need (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1999). It reflects feelings of compassion, sympathy, tenderness, warmth, and concern towards the other, and personal distress, or feeling of distress and discomfort (Sze, Gyurak, Goodkind, & Levenson, 2012). Empathic concern is an expression of the vicariously-induced arousal generated from anxiety of the other's emotional state or general situation (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). It is thought to rely on higher-level cognitive processes such as perspective taking (Lamm, Batson, & Decety, 2007).

Religiosity and Philanthropy

Religion has received significant attention in philanthropic studies (e.g., Brown & Ferris, 2007). There is a rich literature in the sociology of religion on the relationship

between religious involvement and giving (e.g., Wuthnow, 1991). Positive relations between church membership and/or the frequency of church attendance with both secular and religious philanthropy appear in almost any article in which this relation was studied (e.g., Feldman, 2007; Lyons & Nivison-Smith, 2006; Lyons & Passey, 2005). Some studies (e.g., Lyons & Nivison-Smith, 2006; Lyons & Passey, 2005) have found that religious involvement and secular giving appear not to be related or even inversely related. Brooks (2004) found no relationship between self-identifying as Christian and secular philanthropy; in a later study the relationship between more than weekly church attendance and secular philanthropy was negative (Brooks, 2005). A study of giving to human services found no relationship with religious affiliation (Marx, 2000).

Exceptions to the regularity that religious involvement is positively related to philanthropy are often reported in experiments, in which the participants had an opportunity to donate in a non-religious context (Bekkers, 2007; Eckel & Grossman, 2004). The fact that no relationship between giving and religiosity was found in these studies may indicate that either the religious context is crucial, or that the higher likelihood of being asked is the reason for heightened generosity of the religious, or both. However, Heller-Clain and Zech (1999) found no relationship between

individual religious attendance and secular giving. Using a two stage least squares regression model, two studies found a positive association between church attendance and giving (Lunn, Klay, & Douglass, 2001). Bekkers (2006) found that empathy and verbal proficiency affects giving partly through church attendance. It is therefore hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity will not have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy.

EI and Philanthropy

Researchers have claimed that EI may be the best predictor of success in life and that EI will confer an advantage in any domain in life, whether in romantic and intimate relationships or picking up the unspoken rules that govern success in organisational politics (Goleman, 1995). Research records that it is evident that the life of people who have higher EI is safer, happier and more successful and also, they are more productive in working environment (Tischeler, Biberian, & Makeage, 2002). Large amount of research evidence relates EI to general positive behaviours and outcomes such as life satisfaction, happiness, and health (e.g., Carmeliet al., 2009). It has been established that EI is strongly related to social engagement and positive social functioning, in that it leads to positive social relationships through being able to identify, deduce, and handle one's own and others' emotional states (e.g.,

Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). Ogunleye and Olawa (2013) found that EI predict moral competence. EI has been found to be significantly correlated with scores on two of the five OCB factors: altruism and civic virtue (Charbonneau & Nicol, 2002). Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: EI will have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy.

Empathy and Philanthropy

It has been largely established that empathy is associated with helping behaviour (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005), prosocial behaviour (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007). Stocks, Lishner and Decker (2009) asserted that this well-documented empirical relationship has sparked renewed interest in the argument concerning the likelihood that humans are capable of genuine altruistic motivation. As a result, empathy and its role in prosocial motivation have become a central focus of the egoism–altruism debate (Maner, Luce, Neuberg, Cialdini, Brown, & Sagarin, 2002). But most of these studies were carried out with European and Western samples (e.g., Barr & Higgins-d'Alessandro, 2007; Walker, Smither, & DeBode, 2012) with more developed economy and where most people have enough resources to spare. It would therefore be inappropriate to base all arguments and conclusions of the

relationship between empathy and philanthropy on foreign data. In order to have a full understanding of this relationship, African data should also be put into perspective, where most people barely have enough for themselves but yet extend hands of fellowship to those in need. As far as the present authors could see, the importance of empathy-related responding and philanthropy has not been investigated among impoverished population. This may be the first attempt to examine some of the factors that propel impoverished individuals to engage in philanthropic behaviour.

Hypothesis 3: Empathy will have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A total number of 127 300 level university undergraduate students from two departments randomly selected from a South-Eastern university participated in the study. They consisted of 71 female and 56 male students. The ages of the participants ranged from 24-39 years ($M = 26.06$; $SD = 4.55$). They were predominantly Igbos and participation in the study was voluntary. There was exclusion criterion during data collection the participants (students) were asked to indicate who their sponsors are, to be able to determine those to be classified as indigent and non-indigent students. Only those students whose sponsorship come

from charity organisations or from good spirited individuals in society and who admitted that they wouldn't have been able to continue schooling had it not been for the intervention of these sponsors were regarded as impoverished students and therefore considered for the study. A total number of 139 sets of scales for the study were administered to the participants before their regular lecture periods. One hundred per cent return rate was recorded in each of the three different sessions for the scales administration to participants. Out of the 139 questionnaire copies, 12 copies were discarded due to improper completion and only 127 questionnaires were considered for analysis of data.

Measures

Religiosity. Religiosity was measured with 10 items drawn from Allport and Ross' (1967) 20-item Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) that taps into the individuals' extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientations. The extrinsic (sub)scale assesses an individual's degree of acknowledgement of the peripheral role that religion plays in his or her life, as well as the degree to which he or she frankly admits to religious involvement in order to secure solace and/or social approval. The intrinsic (sub)scale involves the role that religion plays as the "master motive" of one's life. It is a 5-point Likert-type response format that ranged from (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include: "Although I believe

in my religion, I feel there are more important things in my life” (extrinsic), “It is important for me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and meditation” (intrinsic). For the present study, the Cronbach's α of the extrinsic (sub)scale was 0.88, whereas that of the intrinsic (sub)scale was 0.83. When treated as a composite scale the Cronbach's α was 0.86.

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). EI was measured using the 10 items from the Schutte Self-Report Inventory (SSRI)

developed by Schutte and colleagues (1998). The SSRI is a well known measure of emotional intelligence (Brackett & Mayer, 2003). The measure is based on the original theoretical work of Salovey and Mayer (1990) on emotional intelligence. It is a 5-point Likert-type response format measure that ranged from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)*. Sample item is: “I know when to speak about my personal problems to others”.Cronbach's α for the scale for the present study was 0.79.

RESULTS

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Philanthropy	24.87	4.64	-								
2 Age	26.06	4.55	-.06	-							
3 Gender	1.45	.50	-.10	-.01	-						
4 Marital Status	1.26	.44	.01	-.02	.22**	-					
5 Parental education	1.43	.50	-.04	-.10	-.18*	-.05	-				
6 Employment status	1.40	.50	.04	.19	.07	-.01	-.04	-			
7 Religiosity	26.81	4.94	.46***	.11	-.08	.14*	-.09	.08	-		
8 Emotional intelligence	27.57	3.71	.34***	.11	-.00	-.07	.14*	.19**	.21**	-	
9 Empathy	19.85	1.71	.19**	-.11	.11	-.02	.04	-.18	-.07	.13*	-

Key: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

Note:A total number of 127 participants took part in the study. Gender (female = 1, male = 2 = female); marital status (single = 1, married = 2); parents education (educated = 1, not educated = 2). Raw scores of other variables were entered as they were collected.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression results

Variables	1	2	3	4
Age	-.08	-.13	-.14*	-.13
Gender	-.13	-.06	-.08	-.10
Marital status	.03	-.04	-.02	-.01
Parents education	-.07	-.02	-.07	-.08
Employment status	.07	.03	-.01	.03
Religiosity		.47***	.41***	.42***
Emotional intelligence			.28**	.25**
Empathy				.19**
..	-.02	.20	.26	.29
R ² Change	.20	.21	.07	.03
F-Change	$F(5,121) = .59$	$F(1,120) = 32.69$	$F(1,119) = 12.17$	$F(1,118) = 5.80$
F-Value	$F(5,121) = .59$	$F(6,120) = 6.07$	$F(7,119) = 7.43$	$F(8,118) = 7.49$

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

The results of the analyses revealed that none of the 5 control variables tested in the study was significant. However, the control variables studied accounted for 1.6 percent of the variance in philanthropy. The results equally indicated that religiosity accounted for 19.5 percent of the variance in philanthropy, far and above the control variables. In the regression equation model, religiosity was statistically significant on philanthropy ($\beta = 0.47, p < .001$). This contradicts H1 in that religiosity will not have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy. EI accounted for 26.3 percent of the variance in philanthropy, far and above the control variables and religiosity. In the regression equation model, EI was statistically significant on philanthropy ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001$). This is in agreement with H2 in that emotional intelligence will have a main predictive value on philanthropy. Furthermore, the results of the analyses revealed that empathy accounted for 29.2 percent of the variance in philanthropy, far and above the control variables, religiosity and EI. In the regression equation model, however, empathy was statistically significant on philanthropy ($\beta = 0.19, p < .01$). This is also consistent with H3 in that empathy will have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy.

DISCUSSION

The predictive value of religiosity, emotional intelligence and empathy on philanthropy among impoverished population was investigated. Contrary to

H1 religiosity had a main effect predictive value on philanthropy. This result is supported by the fact that despite the economic well being of individuals, as long as they are religious, they extend hands of fellowship to 'their' brothers and sisters in need. However, as Walker and colleagues (2012) asserted, religious people, that is, those who perceive God as a loving, and compassionate being, share the believe that God loves and seeks their good. As a result of attempting to reciprocate the love of God, they seek the best for others through philanthropy (Walker et al., 2012). Besides, demonstrating the love for God on God's people, there may be need to strengthen the collectivistic cultures in our society, where people are integrated from birth in groups, relationship prevails over tasks, and management of groups is more important than management of individuals as this may have explained the inconsistency of the present result with that obtained in Western culture which society are individualistic.

However, this finding contradicts previous studies (e.g., Lyons & Nivison-Smith, 2006; Lyons & Passey, 2005) which found that religious involvement and secular giving appear not to be related or inversely related. This finding is also in conflict with Heller-Clain and Zech (1999), Marx (2000), Eckel and Grossman (2004), Brooks (2005) and Bekkers (2007) who found no relationship between religiosity and secular giving. Despite that this current finding counteracts most previous studies,

it equally agrees with few of them. For example, Lunn and colleagues (2001) used a two stage least squares regression model and found a positive association between church attendance and giving.

The result of this study equally revealed that EI predicted philanthropy. Thus, the result is consistent with H2 in that EI will have a main effect predictive value on philanthropy. This might have been necessitated by the notion that EI is viewed as a concept that could predict morality of individuals during interpersonal relations. It has also been examined as the ability to perceive and express emotion accurately and adaptively, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, the ability to use feelings to facilitate thought, and the ability to regulate emotions in one and in others (Salovey & Pizarro, 2003). This finding is however consistent with earlier studies. For example, Ogunleye and Olawa (2013) found that EI predict moral competence. Carmeli, Yitzhak-Halevy and Weisberg(2009) have established that EI is strongly related to social engagement and positive social functioning, and leads to positive social relationships.

Empathy was also found to predict philanthropy and this is consistent with H3. This result is not surprising in that empathy has been credited for having the capacity to stir up an altruistic motive, the eventual objective of which is to care for or advance the welfare of the person for whom

empathy is felt (Batson, 1991). Since empathy is an emotional response related to the perceived welfare of another that results from the thought of imagining taking the position of a person in clear need (Batson et al., 1987; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1999) it presupposes that empathic individuals render practical help through engaging in philanthropic behaviour in favour of those they perceive to be in need. This result seems to be consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2006; Penner et al., 2005), which established that empathy is associated with helping behaviour. It is also seems to be in tandem with Barr and Higgins-D'Alessandro(2007) who found that empathy is positively related to prosocial behaviour.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study have implications for cross-cultural analyses. This study was carried out among peculiar group of individuals; impoverished samples where many people hardly have enough resources to take care of themselves, and where researchers have neglected to look into. With such a unique population for this study, most Nigerians have had to grapple with ugly experiences in terms of poverty which often diminishes the chances of people to engage in philanthropy. Since the society must endure, certain factors have been revealed to inspire those who may not have enough to spare for the survival of the society. An intriguing aspect of the findings is that it seemsto oppose earlier findings

from developed economies of North America and Europe (e.g., Lyons & Nivison-Smith, 2006; Bekkers, 2007). This finding therefore indicates that the religious context is crucial when giving or philanthropy is discussed.

Furthermore, the result of the study also indicated that EI predicted philanthropy; this points to the instrumentality that EI fosters philanthropy. Since it has been established that EI is strongly related to social engagement and positive social functioning, which also lead to positive social relationships, which is manifested in engagement in philanthropy; efforts should be geared towards promoting and rewarding such individual since such activity guarantee smooth functioning of the society.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for further Research

Like all human endeavours, this current study has some weaknesses. First of all, it was not possible to establish cause and effect relationship since the data were collected at only one point in time (a cross-sectional survey design). Researchers (e.g., Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999) advocated that in such instance additional research with longitudinal design should be used in future to address the issue of causality.

Also social desirability bias may have contributed to the weakness of this study.

Often times, participants respond to questions about socially desirable attitudes, states and behaviours in a positive light - they fake their responses. This might have artificially inflated the philanthropy scores. However, even though the researcher pledged anonymity and assured that participants' responses would be used for academic purposes only, this may have reduced any biases, but may not have eliminated it.

In spite of these weaknesses, the present study should be seen as one of the earliest attempts to empirically investigate the predictive value of religiosity, emotional intelligence, and empathy on philanthropy among impoverished population. This opens new research opportunities on how to promote philanthropy through laying emphasis on religiosity, emotional intelligence and empathy using longitudinal designs or embarking on diary studies.

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