

## EFFECTS OF BENEFACTOR AND RECIPIENT STATUS ON HELPING BEHAVIOR\*

*Department of Psychology, University of Allahabad, India*

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JANAK PANDEY<sup>1, 2</sup>

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### SUMMARY

This study assessed the effects of status and status similarity of benefactor and recipient on helping behavior in a naturalistic situation. Thirty Faculty members and 30 graduate students (all males) were high and low status benefactors, respectively. The high and low status roles of recipient were played by a faculty member and a student, in a residential campus setting. Ss were approached either by a faculty recipient or by a student recipient and asked to (a) rate their willingness and feelings about helping and (b) donate money to victims of recent floods. The results indicated that status of both benefactor and recipient determined helping behavior independently, as well as jointly.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to assess the effects of status and status similarity of benefactors and recipient on helping behavior. The major variables investigated here were status of the benefactor (faculty/graduate students) and status of recipient (faculty/graduate student) who received help for flood victims. Thus, the factorial design also provided manipulation of status similarity of benefactor and recipient. For the purpose of this analysis, helping behavior is defined as the extent to which an individual shows willingness and feelings about helping and donates money to a recipient who is collecting funds for flood victims.

Previous studies have indicated a relationship between status variables and helping behavior (6, 7). These investigators have studied the role of

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<sup>2</sup> Request for reprints should be sent to the author at the address shown at the end of this article.

achieved and ascribed status in helping behavior. In one study, Midlarsky (5) found a significant relationship between achieved status and helping. In a later study (6) significant relationship of helping was found both with achieved status and ascribed status. It is argued that persons with high achieved status may feel the sense of potency or effectiveness, and subsequently may perceive that they are more capable than others. Furthermore, the perception of self-competence in itself may lead to expectations of lower costs in helping. Midlarsky and Midlarsky (7) have argued that sense of competence and effectiveness may lead such persons to put aside their own concerns for another. The individual with high-ascribed status may be more helpful for similar reasons. The positive role of perceived competence in helping has been demonstrated by other investigators in laboratory settings. For example, it was found (3) that perceived competence increased *Ss* volunteering to donate blood. In another study (2), *Ss* who were led to feel competent at a task were more likely to help with a similar task than those who were not led to feel competent.

In the studies referred to above, status and competence factors were experimentally manipulated. There is a lack of evidence to substantiate the above findings from real-world data. The present study was planned to show the effects of status of both benefactor and recipient on helping in a naturalistic setting. In earlier researches recipient's status factor was ignored. In addition, the present study was planned to demonstrate the effects of similarity of benefactor's and recipient's status on helping. As mentioned earlier, faculty and student confederates were not the real recipients: they were fund collectors, on behalf of the National Flood Relief Committee for flood victims. Quite possibly the high status of the recipient might increase the credibility of need and purpose of receiving help in the mind of benefactors.

## B. METHOD

### 1. *Design and Subjects*

The design of the experiment was a  $2 \times 2$  factorial with two levels of benefactor's status and two levels of recipient's status. The high or low status role of the recipient was provided by a faculty member and a student, respectively. There were 15 *Ss* in each of the four groups with 30 faculty members and 30 graduate students, a total of 60 *Ss*.

## 2. Procedure

Faculty and student Ss were approached individually either by a faculty recipient or by a student recipient. The faculty recipient while approaching Ss introduced himself as a faculty member and told them that he was collecting funds on behalf of the National Flood Relief Committee for victims of recent floods in different parts of the country. The faculty member who played the recipient's role had recently joined the institution where this study was conducted; thus other personal factors possibly did not enter into the experimental setting. Furthermore, he did not approach his own departmental colleagues and students and other persons who might have known him previously. The student recipient introduced himself as a student to Ss and followed the above-mentioned procedures and precautions. After a personal introduction, Ss were requested to complete a small questionnaire which measured their willingness to help and their feelings concerning helping<sup>3</sup> on five-point scales, as well as the number of rupees they would contribute to the flood victims.

After completion of the questionnaire, Ss were asked to pay the amount which they had mentioned for contribution. They were encouraged to open their wallets and to count the full amount of money for actual donation. Just before they actually turned the money over, the recipient thanked and debriefed Ss and told them the real purpose of his visit.

## C. RESULTS

A separate  $2 \times 2$  analysis of variance was computed for each of the three dependent measures: i. e., willingness to help, feeling about helping, and amount of donations for flood victims. For all  $F$  values reported below,  $df = 1, 56$ .

### 1. Willingness to Help

Analysis of variance of Ss' willingness to help indicated significant main effects for benefactor's status factor,  $F = 43.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , with more willingness shown by faculty benefactors ( $M = 4.53$ ) than by student benefactors ( $M = 3.79$ ). The recipient's status factor reached a significant level,  $F = 104.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , with more willingness shown to a faculty recipient ( $M = 4.73$ ) than to a student recipient ( $M = 3.58$ ). The two-way

<sup>3</sup> "Willingness to help" simply means readiness to help. However, while helping, one may not always feel good, and it was to check the "feeling" aspect while helping that the additional item was used.

interaction effect was found to be significant,  $F = 41.60$ ,  $p < .001$ . It is evident that the significant interaction effect was due primarily to the unwillingness of student benefactors to help flood victims through the student recipient. Faculty and student benefactors did not differ in the faculty recipient condition, but in the student recipient condition faculty benefactors showed more willingness to help than student benefactors.

### 2. *Feeling About Helping*

The results of analysis of variance of responses on the item measuring feeling in helping indicated significant main effects for benefactor status factor,  $F = 14.36$ ,  $p < .01$ , with more positive feelings for helping shown by faculty benefactors ( $M = 4.26$ ) than by students ( $M = 3.40$ ). The recipient's status factor reached a significant level,  $F = 43.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , with more feeling shown to a faculty recipient ( $M = 4.53$ ) than to a student recipient ( $M = 3.58$ ). In addition, the interaction effects reached significance,  $F = 8.14$ ,  $p < .01$ . Both faculty and student benefactors showed lesser feelings for helping to a student recipient in comparison to a faculty recipient. This discrimination in demonstrated feeling was greater in case of student benefactors than in faculty benefactors.

### 3. *Amount of Contributions*

An analysis of variance of amount of actual contributions revealed significant main effects for benefactor status factor,  $F = 48.3$ ,  $p < .001$ , with more rupees donated by faculty benefactors ( $M = 4.90$ ) than student benefactors ( $M = 3.19$ ). The recipient's status factor reached a significant level,  $F = 8.69$ ,  $p < .01$ , with more rupees donated to a faculty recipient ( $M = 6.03$ ) than to a student recipient ( $M = 2.62$ ). The interaction effect was not significant for this dependent measure,  $F = .17$ , N.S.

Correlational analyses reflected the magnitude of the relationships between the overt behavioral measure of donating and the two verbal measures of helping (for all mean  $r$ s reported below,  $p < .01$ ). These correlations were computed for each cell of the design, and therefore mean product-moment correlation coefficients are reported, as well as the range of correlations within cells, as follows: Amount donated *vs.* willingness to help,  $r = .42$  (range = .31 to .48); amount donated *vs.* feeling about helping,  $r = .36$  (range = .22 to .44); willingness to help *vs.* feeling about helping,  $r = .54$  (range = .46 to .62).

## D. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the status of both benefactor and recipient determined helping behavior. The faculty-benefactors who have a relatively higher socioeconomic status, especially on a campus, than student-benefactors did show greater willingness and feelings for helping and also readily contributed more money for flood victims. The findings suggest that the status factor of the recipient also played a role in helping. A high status faculty recipient in comparison to a student recipient clearly evoked greater willingness and stronger feelings, and he received larger actual donations. The significant two-way interaction effects further suggest that helping was greatest when both benefactor and recipient were faculty, and it was lowest when both benefactor and recipient were students. Thus the results tend to support the hypotheses.

The findings of the study support earlier experimental results demonstrating the role of benefactor's competence and status (2, 3, 5, 6, 7), even though they were obtained in a different culture. In addition, the findings indicate the role of the recipient's status in helping. It is plausible to argue that the high status recipient perhaps enjoys high credibility, and therefore a request for help from him may be perceived as genuine by benefactors who subsequently help more. The high status benefactors, perhaps because of their high socioeconomic level in a particular social context, are guided by heightened social responsibility norms (1, 4, 10); they perceive themselves as competent and subsequently perceive their reduced cost in helping (2, 3, 8, 9, 11); the latter perception probably motivates them to help more than low status benefactors. This interpretation of the findings seems quite valid for Indian society which is labeled as hierarchy ridden and traditional in nature. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the high status similarity of benefactor and recipient became an additive factor leading to greater help in such a situation. However, the low status similarity of benefactor and recipient influenced helping behavior adversely. These generalizations and interpretations across other cultures, however, require further empirical research outside of India.

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*Department of Psychology*  
*University of Allahabad*  
*Allahabad 211002, U.P., India*

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