Differences in the orientation towards helping others among university students in light of the gender variable - a comparative study

Imad Eddine MHAMEL *

University of Mohamed Khider, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Biskra Algeria, imadeddine.mhamel@univ-biskra.dz

Abstract

The study investigated the differences in the orientation towards helping others among university students in Algeria, focusing on gender as a variable. Utilizing a descriptive method and a scale developed by Shaaban and Al-Shawareb, the researcher analyzed responses from 205 students during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year which was determined by the facilitated method The findings revealed that the Algerian university students in the study sample have a high level of orientation towards helping others, where the dimension of empathy came first, followed by the dimension of helping in life situations and then after helping in situations of danger while no significant gender differences were found in their helping orientation.

الفروق في التوجه نحو مساعدة الآخرين لدى الطلبة الجامعيين في ضوء متغير الجنس ـ دراسة مقارنة ـ

ملخص

هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الفروق في التوجه نحو مساعدة الآخرين لدى الطلبة الجامعيين بالجزائر تبعا لمتغير الجنس، حيث اعتمد الباحث على المنهج الوصفي، واستخدم مقياس التوجه نحو مساعدة الآخرين الذي أعده "شعبان والشوارب" (2023)، وقام الباحث بتحليل استجابات عينة الدراسة الأساسية المكونة من (205) طالبا وطالبة خلال السداسي الأول من السنة الجامعية 2024-2025، والتي حددت بالطريقة الميسرة وتم الاعتماد في معالجة البيانات على مبادئ الإحصاء الوصفي والاستدلالي، خلصت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن طلبة الجامعة الجزائرية عينة الدراسة لديهم مستوى مرتفع من التوجه نحو مساعدة الآخرين، حيث جاء بعد التعاطف في المرتبة الأولى يليه بعد المساعدة في مواقف الحياة ثم بعد المساعدة في مواقف الخطر، كما أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق دالة إحصائيا في التوجه نحو مساعدة الآخرين تعزى إلى متغير الجنس.

* Corresponding author. E-mail : *imadeddine.mhamel@univ-biskra.dz*

I- Introduction :

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of the positive psychology, which gives high importance to humanity, as it is a strong inherent force, unlike the other theories that focus on the human deficits and weaknesses. The positive psychology studies and analyzes the strengths and positive human traits, such as optimism, satisfaction, gratitude, and helping others to foster the human personal happiness in his life, improve his heath and productivity, and develop the institutions that improve the life quality in general.

The human communities aim at protecting themselves through positive behavior, which is directed by standards and through identifying the roles of each party. In this regard, the communities determine the positive acceptable behaviors, which bring rewards, and vice versa. The positive social behavior is a deliberate practice for the benefit of others. It is a set of core actions that influence the nature of communities for the general good. The concept of the positive social behavior covers many sub-behaviors, such as helping, giving, supporting, and participating.

Based on what was said, the study of helping the others turned into one of the main axes of the positive psychology, as it reflects a system of ethics, values, and positive social relations. Besides, it brings happiness, alleviates overthinking about the personal problems, and helps achieve psychological rest and social compatibility. Thus, it is necessary to study the behavior of helping the others, mainly for the youth who are the future leaders.

The social interaction in any society is affected by the psychological, social, and political circumstances. The prevalence of affection, compassion, and positive mood establishes positivity. The behavior of helping is a deliberate practice for the benefit of others. The daily news tell stories about dead people who could be saved if help was provided.

Helping behavior, as articulated by Bandura, encompasses the various forms of support—material, moral cognitive, and behavioral—that an individual extends to others during periods of necessity (Bandura, 1977).

Myers defines the help behavior as a positive social action by the individual to express his will to give and help the others without a personal benefit in return (Myers, 2014). In addition, Salama defines it as a deliberate behavior to benefit another person, or group of people, without expecting a return or benefit (Salama, 1997). In this regard, the orientation towards helping the others has been studied in different contexts. The study of al Anani (2007) shows no differences in the degree of providing help due to the age and gender. Besides, the study of al Chami (1994) found a positive relation between the behavior of helping the others and the gender, and that males are the most helpful. This was supported by the study of Dadouche & al Zebiri (2017), which confirmed the same results. In addition, al Setawi & Fodil (2021) reported no statistically significant relation between the cognitive method and the degree of orientation towards helping the others due to gender.

Furthermore, Al Jaf (1992) confirmed that the university students show the orientation towards helping the others and that males are more helpful. Additionally, the study of al Chemiri (2006) aimed at studying the relation between the orientation towards helping the others and some personal traits for a sample of university students, and revealed statistically significant relations in the orientation towards helping the others for the females. Besides, the study of al Soltane & al Sebaawi (2012) was conducted in Iraq to examine the relation between helping the others and the big factors of the personality for the university students. It showed statistically significant differences in the relation between these points for the females. In addition, the study of al Bibi (2015) that investigated the orientation towards helping the others and its relation with the sociopsychological compatibility for the university students found out statistically significant differences between the males and females on behalf of the males. As for the study of Chaaban & al Chwareb (2023), no statistically significant differences between males and females were reported regarding the orientation towards helping the others.

The interest in studying the behavior of helping the others started in the 1990s, with the establishment of the positive psychology by Seligman in 1998. Thus, the help behavior was seen as a key for interactions between individuals and groups, and the socio-ethical thinking was theoretically and practically linked with the behaviors of help. Besides the interest in studying the cultures and values, and the focus on socialization that affects the positive thing and help behavior started (Carlo et al., 1996).

The behavior of helping the others is one of the positive psychology axes that yields many benefits for the individuals and societies thanks to the happiness it gives to the people who provide help, and to the feeling of satisfaction. Moreover, it strengthens the social ties and values, making itself a social and ethical rule in all the cultures. We can say that the psychologists' interest in this behavior has started since the 1970s, and increased in the 1990s with the emergence of positive psychology (Peterson, 2009).

The main aspects of helping the others include the participation, which represents the 2nd level of orientation towards helping the others. It represents the partial altruism and is based on sharing with the others to alleviate their sufferance. It is a deliberate behavior without any return or benefit. As for the 3rd level, we find compassion that is the hidden motive for help. It is a spiritual internal aspect that influences the orientation towards helping the others. It is about having a strong sense of the others' emotions, sufferance, and pains, with the will to provide the necessary help; at this level, the real participation is not achieved, it is just a will (Al Chemiri, 2006).

The helping behavior has been explained from some theoretical perspectives and models, such as the model of Darley & Latane, which tells that the person must notice situation that needs intervention, interprets it as an urgent situation, supposes he is responsible for providing help, and increases his intervention potentials to provide help (al Chemiri, 2006). In addition, Schwartz model for explaining the orientation towards helping the others is made up of 04 phases that show the conditions where the efficiency of providing help increases, namely:

- **Activation:** The individual recognizes there are people who need help and that he can provide it, and understands the implied responsibilities.
- **Obligation:** At this phase, the help criterion is generally built on feelings, moral obligation, and efficiency that is based on the personal criteria.
- **Defense:** This step represents a backward movement, as the individual starts contemplating the help and its relation with the implied costs, and tries to deny his responsibility in the situation.
- **Action or inaction response:** At this point, the individual decides providing or not providing help.

This model does not suppose that the hidden help implies awareness during the 04 phases, as they may be cognitively initiated and the individual provides help sometimes without understanding why he did the action (al Chemiri, 2006). Besides, the social exchange model pioneers, mainly Homans & Blau, interpreted the orientation towards helping the others saying that what pushes the individual to help the others is the rewards that may be external (social) or internal (subjective). The social ones includes thanks, gratitude, and recognition while the subjective covers the feeling of comfort, satisfaction, and self-esteem (Myers, 1983). This model is based on the principle of compassion, i.e., the decision to help depends on the degree of compassion with the others and on the return (the social exchange) (Batson, 1991).

This difference between the models, theories, and results of studies on orientation towards helping the others requires more research in different contexts, mainly that the current Algerian society needs more social cohesion due to the social circumstances and aspects of cultural invasion. Therefore, the individuals, mainly the university students, must show compassion, altruism, and positive behaviors to provide help, as the students are the future of the state and source of advance. In this regard, they need to help each other, mainly amid the blurry image about their future, which requires moral and material support. Based on the study problematic, goals, theoretical frame, and literature review, we hypothesize that:

The null hypothesis H_0: There are no statistically significant differences between the means of the informants' answers regarding orientation towards helping the others and its dimensions due to gender.

The alternative hypothesis H_1: There are statistically significant differences between the means of the informants' answers regarding orientation towards helping the others and its dimensions due to gender.

II– Methods and Materials:

The study was conducted during the 1ˢᵗ semester of the academic year 2024-2025 on a sample of university students. Due to the nature of the study, we used the descriptive method that analyzes and compares data, makes conclusions, and reaches generalizable results. Therefore, it studies the sociopsychological phenomena in a scientific regular way to reach specific goals for a given situation (Al Hassan, 1982). In addition, we used the non-probabilistic examination based on the convenience sample, which is existing and wants to cooperate and give information (Al Damen, 2007). We collected data online, from Facebook and Gmail, after designing an electronic questionnaire. The sample included 205 students, 89 are males and 116 are females, as shown in table one:

Table 01: The characteristics of the informants according to the gender

Variables		Number	Percentage
Gender	**Males**	89	43.41%
	Females	116	56.59%
Total		205	100%

Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Figure 01: The characteristics of the informants according to the gender
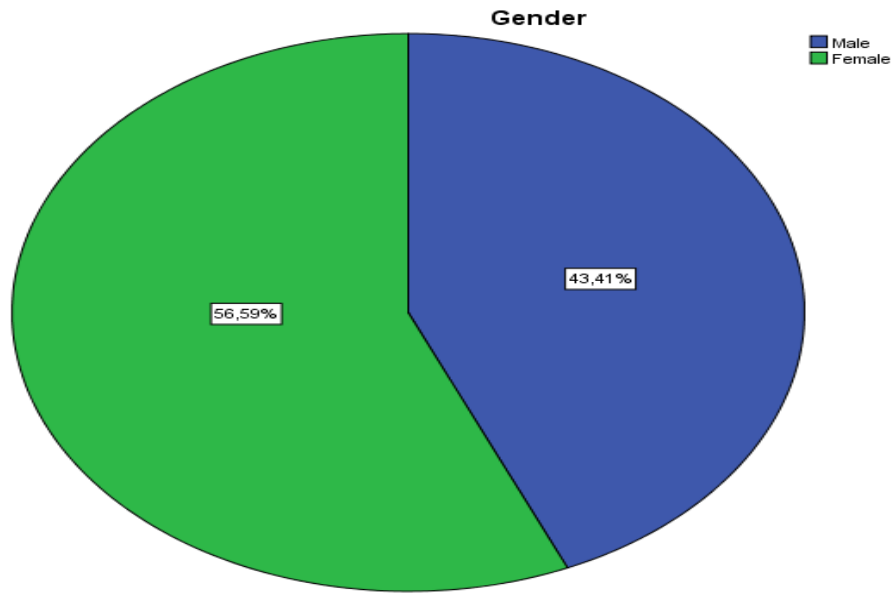
Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Table 01 and figure 01 show that 43.41% of the informants are males and 56.59% are females. The current study uses the scale of orientation towards helping the others, which was designed by Chaaban & Chwareb (2023). It includes 27 items in 03 dimensions. The 1st is about help in life situations (items 01 to 09), the 2nd is about help in danger situations (items 10 to 19), and the 3rd is about compassion (items 20 to 27). In this regard, the answers are: absolutely disagree (1 point), agree (2 points), and always agree (3 points) (Chaaban & al Chwareb, 2023).

To examine the psychometric properties of the tool, we used the validity and consistency tests with a pilot sample of 50 students. Thus, we calculated the coefficient of correlation between the degree of the scale dimensions and the overall degree of the tool to check the validity. The correlation coefficients were between 0.51** and 0.80**, according to SPSS20. As for the consistency, we used Cronbach's Alpha and the half-split. Findings showed values between 0.60 and 0.77 for the dimensions and 0.84 for the tool. These are high and acceptable values. As for the correlation coefficient in the half-split, the value is 0.67. Besides Guttmann's value is 0.80 and is accepted, showing the suitability of the tool for application on the university students.

III- Results and discussion :

In treating the study hypotheses, we used the quantitative method through reliance on SPSS 20 to answer the problematic that revolves around the existence of differences between male and female students in orientation towards helping the others in the general life situations in the danger situations, and in showing compassion. To calculate the significance of the differences using parametrical and non-parametrical tests, we checked the natural distribution using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which checks the null hypothesis that says that the differences between the males and females are random. Thus, this test is used to test the null hypothesis that is chosen using Chi^2. However, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is more exact (Ghanim & Sabri, 2001). In this regard, when all the conditions of Chi^2 are met, it is better to use Kolmogorov-Smirnov test because it is stronger than Chi^2 (Fahmi, 2005). In case the distribution is not natural, it is free and requires the use of the non-parametrical statistics that is generally used with the small samples (Haddad, Khalil, Zedira, 2020)

Table 02: The natural distribution test

Tool	Kolmogorov Smirnov Sig	Significance level
Orientation towards helping the others scale	0.073	0.010

Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Table 02 shows that the value of Kolmogorov test is 0.073 and the significance level is 0.010, which is than 0.05. Therefore, we refuse the hypothesis about the normal distribution of the study sample, as show in figure 02:

Figure 02: The curve of the distribution of the study variable

Normal Q-Q Plot of Orientation towards helping others
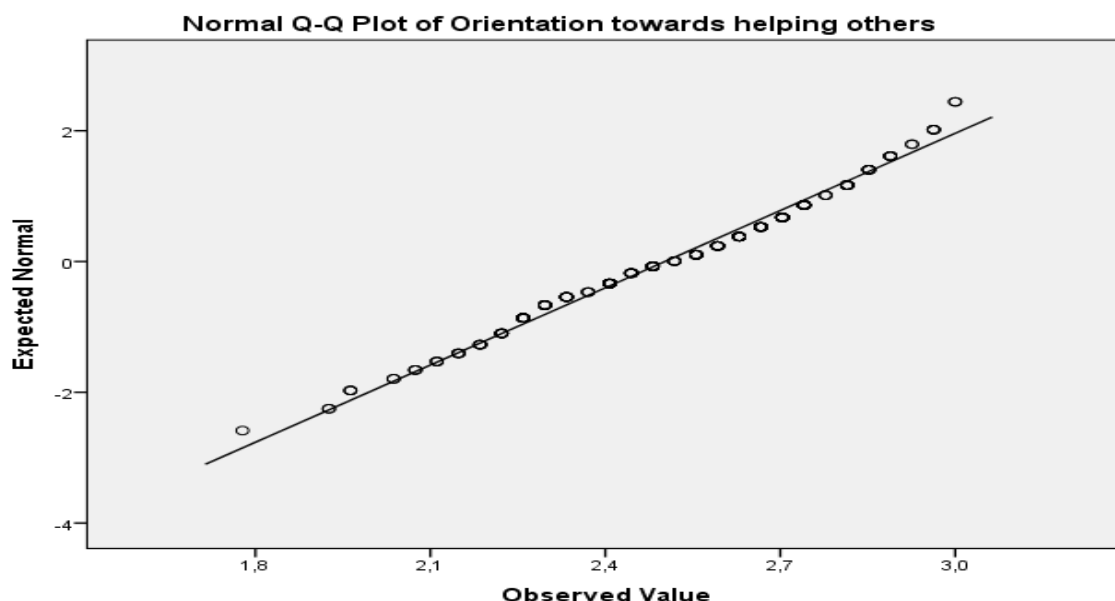
Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

After checking the data distribution, we conducted the descriptive statistics and found the arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the dimensions of the orientation towards helping the others for the university students, as shown in table 03:

The dimensions means	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Rank
Compassion	2,5805	,313970	01
Help in life situations	2,5398	,286770	02
Help in danger situations	2,4054	,354140	03
Orientation towards helping the others	2,5021	,253970	/

Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Table 03 shows the existence of orientation towards helping the others in all the dimensions. The arithmetic mean is 2.5021 and the standard deviation is 0.25397. In this context, the dimension of compassion ranked first, followed by help in life stations and help in danger situations. We used Whitney Mann test to reveal the differences between the males and females in orientation towards helping the others. This test reveals the differences between the groups based on the degrees ranks (Abu Alam, 2009). It is an alternative to the parametric T-test that examines the hypotheses about the differences between the means of independent variables (Safi, 2013).

Table 04: The differences between the ranks of the males and females degrees in orientation towards helping the others:

Dimensions	Ranks	Males	Females
	Number	89	116
Help in life situations	Ranks mean	99,67	105,55
	The value of Mann Whitney	4866,000	
	Significance	,4790	
Help in danger situations	Ranks mean	110,26	97,43
	The value of Mann Whitney	4516,000	
	Significance	,1230	
Compassion	Ranks mean	99,94	105,34
	The value of Mann Whitney	4890,000	

	Significance	,5150	
Orientation towards helping the others (overall degree)	Ranks mean	104,68	101,71
	The value of Mann Whitney	5012,500	
	Significance	,7220	

Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Table 04 shows the values of Mann Whitney test for the dimensions of the scale of orientation towards helping the others. In this context, the help in life situations has a value of 4866.00 with a probabilistic value of 0.479, the help in danger situations has a value of 4516.000 and a probabilistic value of 0.123, and the compassion has a value of 4890.000 with a probabilistic value of 0.515. The probabilistic values of the dimensions are less than the significance level 0.05. Therefore, there are no statistical differences between the means of the university students ranks regarding help in life situations, help in danger situations, and compassion due to gender.

Besides, the table shows that the value of Mann Whitney for the overall degree is 5012.500 with a probabilistic value of 0.722, which is more than 0.05. Therefore, there are no statistical differences between the means of the university students ranks in orientation towards helping the others due to the gender. Thus, we accept the null hypothesis that tells there are no statistical differences between the males and females in orientation towards helping the others as shown in figure 03:

Total N	205
Mann-Whitney U	5 012,500
Wilcoxon W	11 798,500
Test Statistic	5 012,500
Standard Error	420,445
Standardized Test Statistic	-,356
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	,722
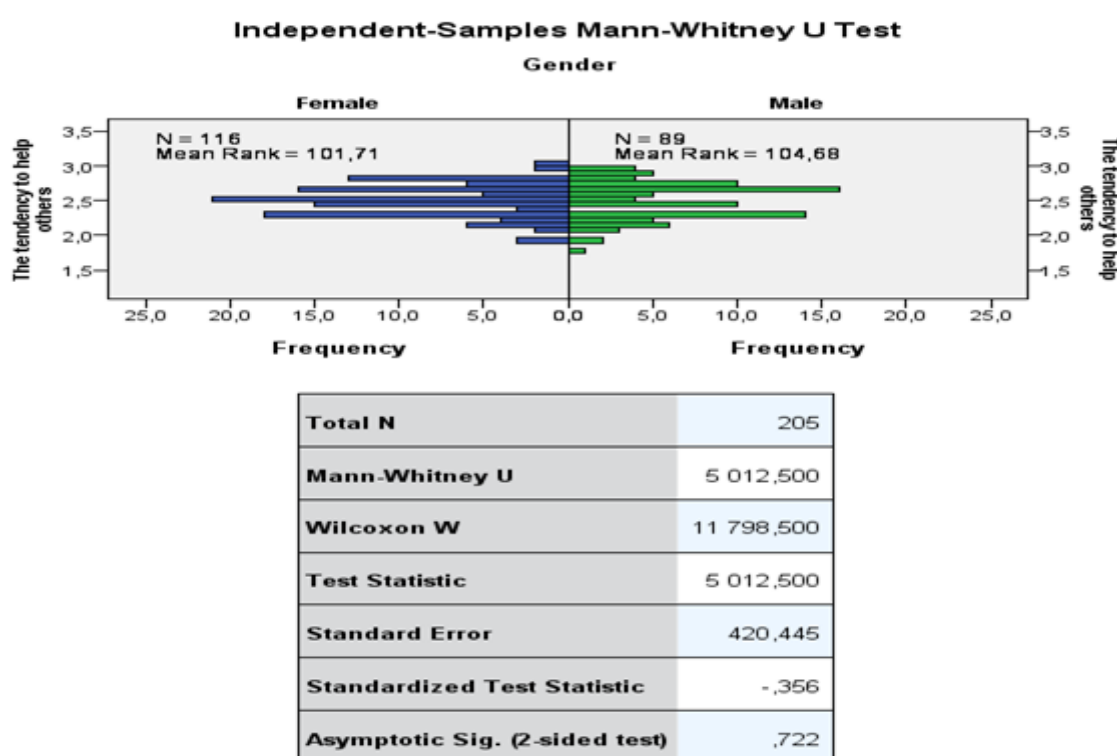
Source: by the author based on the outputs of SPSS20

Findings show a high level of orientation towards helping the others for the Algerian university students. In this regard, the dimension of compassion ranked first with the highest arithmetic mean because the Algerian university youths are excited for cooperation and good making, and enjoy independence and self-confidence to help the others. This is stated in the development psychology, as the characteristics of youth include inclination to cooperation and interaction with the others. Besides, the sense of social responsibility and sacrifice increases at this stage. In addition, the socialization methods, traditions, and customs that are based on good and religious ethics affect their characters. In addition, the university students are more aware and compassionate, as explained by the values theory that states that people help each other because they believe in the values of altruism and love of the others.

Furthermore, there are no statistically significant differences in orientation towards helping the others, meaning there is no relation between orientation towards helping the others and gender. We believe this is because other factors interpret the behavior of help in the sociopsychological context, such as gender, culture, and sociopsychological mood. For instance, the gender factor sees that males provide help during the danger situations while females in less dangerous situation based on the mental and physical abilities. In addition, the cultural factor says that the individualistic societies lean to providing help outside the group regardless the motive; however, the collectivistic societies tend to make decisions in the context of societal norms.

Prior investigations into helping behavior have explored various aspects of altruism, focusing on factors like gender, context, and individual traits. Empathy is a key driver of helping behaviors across demographics; those with higher empathy are more likely to engage in altruistic actions, influenced by cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. Empathy is a key factor in fostering a helping orientation. Research indicates that individuals with higher empathy levels are more likely to engage in altruistic actions. (Andersen et al., 2020)

Contemporary research highlights situational factors affecting helping behavior among university students. Findings indicate a positive link between students' involvement in community service and their inclination to help others (Ardenghi et al., 2024), emphasizing the role of educational settings in fostering a supportive culture.

Moreover, the mood helps understand that people provide help in times of happiness unlike in stress and psychological crises to serve their societal and psychological goals. For instance, those who do not feel respect and self-esteem do not provide help and are more subject to alienation. On the other side, people with self-confidence achieve the social self and have more potentials to provide help to the others.

The orientation towards gender roles significantly influences these outcomes. Men who identify with more traditional masculine traits may engage in helping behaviors in ways that differ from those who lean towards attributes that are more feminine. This nuance implies that merely categorizing individuals based on biological sex could mask essential variations within these groups. (Peralta & Barr, 2017)

Cultural contexts play a role in shaping gender differences in helping orientation, with variations influenced by socio-cultural factors (Andersen et al., 2020). The educational environment is crucial as well; for example, medical students using effective coping strategies associated with high empathy levels tend to demonstrate improved well-being and altruism (Ardenghi et al., 2024). Understanding these intricacies offers deeper insights into empathy and altruism within academic settings.

Based on these findings, our study disagrees with those of (Ardenghi et al., 2024), al Jaf (1992), al Chami (1994), al Bibi (2015), and Daadouche & Zebiri (2017), which found out a positive relation between the behavior of help and the gender, and that the males are more helpful than females.

Besides, it is not in line with the studies of al Chemiri (2006) and al Soltan & al Sebaawi (2012) which reported statistically significant differences in orientation towards helping the others on behalf of the females. On the other hand, it agrees with that of al Setawi & Fodil (2021), which found out a statistically significant relation between the cognitive method (rigidness-flexibility) and the degree of helping the others due to the gender. Furthermore, it is harmonious with the study of al Anani that revealed no differences in the degree of providing help due to age and gender and with the work of Chaaban & al Chwareb that concluded there are no statistically significant differences in orientation towards helping the others and the emotional awareness due to gender and major.

IV- Conclusion:

In conclusion, weaving nuanced views on gender—incorporating both traditional roles and evolving identities—into discussions about helping orientation will enrich our understanding and inform effective strategies aimed at promoting altruistic behaviors across a broad spectrum of student populations, also the exploration of helping orientation among university students provides a fascinating perspective on the interplay of gender dynamics in altruism. Research reveals that gender distinctions significantly affect not only the propensity to engage in helping behaviors but also the underlying motivations driving these actions. the behavior of helping the others is one of the important individual and societal topics as it reflects a system of values and ethics and represents positive social ties. It is one of the axes of positive psychology and has an effect on the individual's psychological growth and comparability with the society. In this context, this behavior is not influenced by gender as males may provide help in danger situations while the females may intervene in less dangerous situations based on the mental and physical abilities of each gender. The study recommends conducting researches that use the quasi-experimental method to develop the positive and ethical thinking that fosters the behavior of helping the others since childhood. In addition, it is necessary to create jobs for the academic psychological counsellors inside the Algerian universities for their vital role in pedagogically and psychologically accompanying students. Besides, the families should foster the social motives for helping others in raising their children. Finally, it is important to make counselling campaigns in schools and universities to support the orientation towards helping the others and reject indifference through showing the benefits of physical and psychological help.

In addition, future investigations should explore the intricate dimensions of helping orientation among university students, particularly given the shifting landscape of social interactions. A promising avenue lies in assessing the impact of digital communication channels, such as social media, on students' altruistic tendencies and their perceptions regarding assisting others. Numerous studies affirm that social media plays a significant role in shaping the experiences and values of young individuals. Delving into these effects could reveal how online interactions either promote or inhibit helping behaviors. Finally, longitudinal research tracking shifts in helping orientation throughout a student's academic trajectory could illuminate how various experiences-academic stressors, career ambitions, and significant life events—shape their altruistic inclinations over time. Such thorough explorations would enrich our comprehension of the complexities related to helping orientation among university students.

- Appendices:

Scale of orientation Towards Helping Others

Mohamed Khider University of Biskra

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences

Dear respected student, greetings:

The researcher is conducting a scientific study on a sample of university students, and since you are one of the research sample members, please respond to the scale items by marking (x) in front of each item under the alternative that you find applicable to you. Note that there are no wrong or right answers as these represent your expression of yourself, and we request that you do not leave any item unanswered. The information will be kept for scientific research purposes only. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

General information:

Gender/...........................

Table 1. Questionnaire Items.

Item	Items	I completely disagree	I sometimes agree	I always agree
Helping in life situations				
1.	If I find something lost, I look for its owner to return it.			
2.	I lend my lecture notes to my colleagues when they need them.			
3.	I help my colleague if they are tired with some of their work.			
4.	I give up my seat on public transport to someone older than me.			
5.	I donate part of my allowance for someone who needs it.			
6.	I participate in a campaign to raise donations for a patient to help them with treatment.			
7.	I welcome helping others.			
8.	I see that helping my colleagues is a behavior that requires sacrifice and altruism.			
9.	I remove from the path things that may cause harm to others.			
Helping in danger situations				
10.	I intervene to save someone being beaten.			
11.	I participate in extinguishing a fire that occurred in a house whose owners I do not know.			

12.	I prevent a thief from trying to steal from someone.			
13.	I am ready to donate blood.			
14.	I take the initiative to help someone in danger who is asking for help.			
15.	I stand by someone being treated badly even if I face trouble for it.			
16.	I take the initiative to help someone who was hit by a car and left alone.			
17.	When I see someone drowning, I risk my life to save them.			
18.	In dangerous situations, I feel that I have a responsibility to help.			
19.	I consider rescuing my colleagues in dangerous situations a positive and social behavior.			
Empathy				
20.	I feel sad when I see a child bearing adult responsibilities.			
21.	I hide (suppress) my feelings of joy at success when others from my colleagues fail.			
22.	I believe I am very perceptive of the feelings of those around me.			
23.	I think that sharing others' sorrows and pains helps lighten their burden.			
24.	Seeing others happy makes me happier and more joyful.			
25.	It is easy for me to be swept away by the emotions of others.			
26.	I feel anxious when I see someone being treated harshly.			
27.	I try to listen to the feelings of those around me.			

Response to (27) Items Was Based on (3) point Likert scale. Responses choices ranged from: (1) I completely disagree, (2) I sometimes agree, (3)) I always agree.

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