The role of justice sensitivity on pro-social intentions. Findings from a Romanian sample

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Introduction

Justice is an essential human value. One cannot built a good, satisfactory, prosperous life in the absence of justice. Justice research is concerned mostly with the behavioral consequences of the sense of (in)justice. Numerous empirical studies have shown that exposure to injustice affects emotions, attitudes, and behaviors leading to social consequences that can affect the functioning of society as a whole (Hegtvedt & Isom, 2014) **Justice sensitivity** refers to individual differences in the intensity of discomfort people feel when being confronted with injustice or the violation of moral norms (Gerlach, Allemand, Agroskin și Denissen, 2012). Being considered a personality trait, justice sensitivity is supposed to show stability throughout the life span [9]. However, it has been observed that it exhibits some plasticity that could be explained by an increase in social-cognitive and moral skills during childhood and adolescence. The importance of general moral principles increases in adolescence, so is expected for justice sensitivity also to increase. **Pro-social behavior** refers to different acts intended to benefit others. Among most frequent pro-social behaviors are helping behavior – to improve the welfare of another person, and cooperation – to help others with the expectations that other will help back. Helping behavior can be a single act, or can take the form of volunteering or donating resources over time (Ferguson, 2010).

However, there are insufficient studies on Romanian population to show how the development of justice sensitivity is evolving throughout life and on prosocial behaviors therefore, there were established the following assumptions:

H1. People older than 20 years have a higher level of observer-, beneficiary-, and perpetrator- justice sensitivity than people younger than 20 years.
H2. People older than 20 years have a lower level of victim justice sensitivity than people younger than 20 years.
H3. High levels of observer-, beneficiary-, and perpetrator justice sensitivity positively predict pro-social intentions.
H4. High levels of victim.

Participants and procedure

The questionnaires were distributed online to students emails. Other students completed the questionanairs in the informatics laboratory of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Scinces within the University of Bucharest. The sample consisted of 561 Romanian psychology students from University of Bucharest aged 18-48 years (M = 20.60, SD = 4.89), 48 males and 513 females (convenience sampling).. Participants were divided into two age groups, under 20 years old (N = 414) and over 20 years old (N = 147).

Measures

Justice Sensitivity. Victim, beneficiary, observer, and perpetrator sensitivity were assessed with Justice Sensitivity Inventory (Schmitt et al., 2010). The questionnaire is comprised of 40 items, 10 for each subscale. The reliabilities were excellent for the entire scale ($\alpha = .94$), and also for each subscale: victim ($\alpha = .89$), observer ($\alpha = .90$), beneficiary ($\alpha = .91$), and perpetrator ($\alpha = .92$).

Prosocial Intentions. Prosocial intentions were assessed with six items scale Prosocial Intentions Measure (Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2012). The Cronbach’s alpha value was $\alpha = .83$.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for Justice Sensitivity and Prosocial Intentions

	M	SD	α
Victim justice sensitivity	30.75	9.97	.89
Observer justice sensitivity	32.68	9.79	.90
Beneficiary justice sensitivity	28.66	10.49	.91
Perpetrator justice sensitivity	35.14	10.21	.92
Prosocial intentions	21.86	5.31	.83

Results

H1, H2. There are significant differences in the level of justice sensitivity by age group. Thus, for victim justice sensitivity, participants younger than 20 years of age obtained scores higher than those older than 20, M = 28.71, SD = 11.28 respectively M = 31.48, SD = 9.37, t (221.634) = 2.67, p <.01, d = .27, and for perpetrator justice sensitivity, participants younger than 20 obtained scores higher than those older than 20, M = 37.74, SD = 9.88 respectively M = 34.21, SD = 10.18, t (559) = 3.64, p <.01, d = .35.

Results

H3, H4. The four dimensions of moral sensitivity predict in a small proportion prosocial intentions, $R^2 = .07$, F (4,556) = 10.59, p < .01, specifically only two dimensions predict prosocial intentions: victim justice sensitivity in a negative way, $\beta = -.17$, p < .01, and observer justice sensitivity in a positive way, $\beta = .17$, p <.01.

Table 2. Linear multiple regression for justice sensitivity predicting pro-social intentions

Model	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	18.729	.995		18.824	.000
Victim js	-.091	.030	-.171	-3.022	.003
Observer js	.090	.036	.166	2.487	.013
Beneficiary js	.040	.033	.079	1.198	.232
Perpetrator js	.053	.032	.101	1.643	.101

Conclusions

Justice sensitivity is a complex and multifaceted construct. The role of victim determines the person to become reticent, hesitant, to find revenge or to use aggressive methods. These impulses seem to diminish with age. The observer role is much more objective, the responses of these people are more balanced, oriented to punishing the guilty. This role develops over time, the person becoming more accurately into observing, evaluating and correcting situations that attack moral norms. One limitations of this study consists in that the participants are psychology students and that the two groups were not equivalent. In a later research, attempts will be made to assess justice sensitivity in larger samples of general population.

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