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## **Does Empathy Enhance Undergraduates' Pro-Social Behaviour? The Mediating Role of Compassion**

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### **Abstract**

Empathy, as the ability to understand other people's thoughts and feelings and be sensitive to them, has received much attention in the recent past. It is an essential human quality that helps individuals to work well with others, regardless of their social, emotional, or cultural differences. Empathy is well recognized as a critical soft skill that undergraduates need to develop for the success in their careers and life. Researchers acknowledge that employee empathy leads to compassion and prosocial behaviour. While universities strive to develop empathy among the undergraduates focusing on its numerous benefits, limited research related to this topic is available in the Sri Lankan context to date. This study examines the impact of empathy on pro-social behavior and whether compassion mediates this relationship using a sample of Sri Lankan undergraduates. Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand how someone else feels and to work out what they might be thinking and emotional empathy is the ability to share other's emotions and they are considered as main dimensions of empathy. The sample size consists of 156 undergraduates from the Faculty of Management and the Finance University of Ruhuna. Data were collected through an online survey using standard questionnaires validated by previous researchers. Smart PLS structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to estimate the hypothesized relationships. Considering the direct effect, compassion has a positive impact on undergraduates' pro-social behaviour. Further, cognitive empathy and emotional empathy have a positive impact on compassion. Considering the specific indirect effects, pro-social behaviour and cognitive and emotional empathy are mediated by compassion. Moreover, considering the total indirect effect, cognitive and emotional empathy have a positive impact on undergraduates' pro-social behaviour. Accordingly, this study provides empirical support to confirm the mediating effect of compassion between empathy and pro-social behavior. So, the results of this study have important implications for human capital development initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Cognitive Empathy, Compassion, Emotional Empathy, Prosocial Behaviour.*

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