

Empathy Levels in Rural Areas Compared To Urban Areas

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I am studying whether or not there is a difference between empathy levels (according to the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire) in rural areas compared to urban areas. Though it would be interesting to investigate why this is, I would first have to start by seeing if there actually is a significant difference between both populations. In the event that there is a significant enough difference between empathy levels, further studies can be conducted investigated now the “why” rather than the “if”. Ultimately, I find this to be of vast importance due to our increasingly divided nation that desperately needs to find its way back to an empathetic union.

In a similar study to mine, researcher Mirja Kalliopuska had 78 individuals complete a three-step emotional empathy scale (Kalliopuska, 1994). As per the scale, the participants were scored on different personality factors, and those were analyzed as well. Their total empathy scores and factor scores were compared in groups based on their residential locale, and they found that the groups differed significantly in the fifth factor of emotionality. This fifth factor is described as people who feel empathy for healthy others but not for helpless people or animals. This supports my hypothesis on whether there is a difference at all between rural or urban communities, and according to this study, the rural population had more empathy than the urban one.

The next study was thorough in its investigations; its attentiveness to detail was apparent through its two hypotheses. Their first hypothesis was that rural areas had higher cognitive, affective, and evaluative place identity than in urban areas (Belanche, Casaló, and Rubio, 2021). Cognitive place identity refers to an individual’s identification with the community, affective place identity refers to an individual’s emotional attachment with the community, and the evaluative place identity refers to an individual’s significance in terms relating to self-worth with

the community. Their second hypothesis was that an individual's age will affect the influence on either populated area's cognitive, affective, and evaluative place identity. A questionnaire was distributed by their research team at public areas in each settlement which were self-administered and done by volunteers. They made the point that although it was done by volunteers, they focused on getting a wide range of residents. The questionnaire asked the participants to report their level of agreement/disagreement with a variety of statements through 7-point multi-item Likert scales with an included measurement of place identity. The results of this study concluded that the affective and evaluative components of place identity was indeed higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Cognitive place identity although, was similar. In relation with age, the older residents had higher place identity in all of the dimensions. Also, it was found that the younger residents from a rural community demonstrated place identity at earlier ages than their urban counterparts. These results further support my hypothesis of there being a difference between empathy levels while contrasting rural and urban areas.

The last study was conducted with two hypotheses as well. The first hypothesis was centered on finding differences in altruism and empathy between adolescents living in differing population areas. The other hypothesis studies the impact of empathy on altruistic behavior in these adolescents. They obtained their sample size by selecting (at random) 120 adolescents from rural schools and 120 adolescents from urban schools. They then presented the students each with a personal information sheet, an Altruism Scale and an Empathy Scale (Kaushik, Chawla, and Vig, 2020). The results were that there were more rural adolescents with a high level of altruism and most of adolescents in urban communities are at moderate level of altruism. Overall, the results demonstrated that rural adolescents had a significantly better altruistic score than the urban adolescents. The study's last conclusion was that altruistic behavior and empathy

of adolescents benefited their social development. This last study further defends my hypothesis of there being a difference in empathy levels between rural and urban communities.

Due to this overwhelming amount of evidence that supports my hypothesis, I predict that there indeed will be a difference between empathy levels when comparing a less populated community to a more populated community.

Method

Participants

The participants will be randomly selected men and women from different counties, recruited through finding their publicly posted emails on websites pertaining to their region. I will contact five different people from a total of 20 counties, 10 with a population of less than 2,500 inhabitants and 10 with populations greater than 2,500. My goal for this study is to have an equal amount of both female and male participants. It would be about 25 rural men and women and 25 urban men and women. This will allow my data to be representative of both sexes, as to not have information that sways too far in either direction. Another goal is to have equal variation in age as to have a proper representation in my participants. Having too many or too few of a certain age group can greatly alter the scores and render my data less applicable. Lastly, my final goal is to have an adequate representation of all races/ethnicities in Texas. I understand that urban areas will have a more diverse population than rural areas, but the goal is to have a diverse set of racial and ethnic backgrounds among my participants.

Design

My study is quasi-experimental as I am questioning whether or not there is a difference to be found, while not being able to control for an individual variable. The individual variable in this case is place of residence, because I cannot randomly assign participants to live in a rural or

urban community. This is also a between-subjects group design, as I am using an independent samples t-test to find a difference in between my population groups.

Measures

The aforementioned survey is called the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, which consists of 16 questions inquiring about an individual's regularity of interpersonal emotions. There are five answer choices to select, "Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Often", and "Always". This questionnaire was created by Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, and Levine with the intention to have a "short, clear and homogenous" scale that is proven to have "high internal consistency, construct validity, and test re-test reliability" (Spreng et al., 2009). Some examples of the questions are, "*When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too*", "*When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else*", or "*When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him/her*" (Spreng, 2021). As for demographics, I have questions pertaining to an individual's race/ethnicity, age, and gender. As stated earlier, it is my goal to have a diverse and equal amount of participation across ages, races/ethnicities, and gender in my participants. This will allow for better real-world application and not risk underrepresenting any demographic.

Procedure

The individuals chosen will be sent an email explaining the study and then questioned if they are interested in participating. The email will also include contact information should they need it, along with a link to a program called "Qualtrics". Once the link has been activated, the participant will be shown a consent form then the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, which upon completion, will record the score along with a randomly generated number as to keep the identity of the participant anonymous. The participant will be thanked and contact information will still

be provided should they desire to inquire further once the study is terminated. I will download a spreadsheet of all of the scores and random identification numbers so I may know which score belongs to which population demographic. This information will give me the results I need to make a conclusion on my study.

Expected Results

As stated before, I hypothesize that empathy scores between rural and urban communities will differ. I plan on studying this by running an independent samples t-test, to compare and find out if there is a difference between the mean scores from two different groups. I expect to find a significant enough difference between mean empathy scores, as all of the studies discussed above found significant differences between their own measurements of empathy between rural and urban population groups.

Discussion

I expect there to be a dissimilarity between empathy scores while comparing rural and urban populations. The difference between the values from the urban community compared to the values from the rural community will be significant enough to solidify a contrast between rural and urban peoples' levels of empathy. This study could prompt others to ask deeper questions like investigating what reason causes this discrepancy. The results can be used as a basis for finding specific reasons, such as constant migration of inhabitants or not having an active community. Demographic differences among the population variation can also be further explored. For example, a study can question whether rural men have more empathy than urban woman or investigating whether younger rural people have more empathy than older urban people. Most importantly, the results of this study clarifying the reality of the difference can

allow future researchers in investigating what can be done to increase empathy through all boundaries.

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