

Help your neighbor...help yourself

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(Medical Xpress)—Looking to improve your happiness, self-esteem and relationship satisfaction? Put down that self-help book and try working on your desire to help those in need.

New research from the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) shows that people who are inclined to help others (who are communally oriented) experience positive emotions and social benefits that enhance their daily lives.

"When it comes to giving help, we often focus on the selfless nature of the giver," says Bonnie Le, a PhD student in the Department of Psychology. "But in our study we were curious whether being a helpful and caring person can actually be beneficial to the giver."

Le and her team tracked 232 people during the month-long study. Participants were first surveyed to determine their levels of communal orientation. Le found that [respondents](#) on average scored five out of seven on the scale, suggesting that people are generally inclined to help others.

Participants then completed an [online survey](#) three times a week. The surveys collected information about whether the participants felt positive emotions that day, whether they felt love and satisfaction in their close relationships with [romantic partners](#), friends, and family, and whether they felt love for humanity as a whole.

"Communally oriented people may not explicitly seek something in

return when they give help to others, but our findings suggest that they experience many indirect benefits," says Le.

The study findings support previous research that giving help to others makes a giver feel good, and showed that people who are higher in communal orientation experience higher self-esteem and higher-quality relationships. They also feel more love in their [close relationships](#) and for humanity as a whole.

Although people who are communally oriented are inclined to give help, Le points out this help is not offered as a direct exchange. Rather the giving and receiving of help is based on who is in need.

"These people don't have a mind set of 'I supported you when you were going through a hard time and now you owe me something in return'," she says. "They hope they will receive care back when they are in a time of need, but actually avoid keeping track of what's owed to each person in a relationship."

Le says that being a giving person is not necessarily a sacrifice that detracts from the giver's own personal life. Communally oriented givers are rewarded with greater happiness and stronger relationships, which might help buffer them through the stress of caring for others.

"If you have to give a lot of help to someone in need, that can be very taxing on you," she says. "Rewards such as these [positive emotions](#), feeling satisfied and feeling loved in your relationships might help to sustain your well-being during these times of giving help. And it might bolster you in helping not just those closest to you, but strangers as well."

The research is published online in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Provided by University of Toronto Mississauga

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