



УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У НОВОМ САДУ
UNIVERSITY OF NOVI SAD

TOP ACHIEVEMENTS 2021

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

Published scientific paper - COVID-19 Protective Behaviors Are Forms of Prosocial and Unselfish Behaviors

Frontiers in Psychology, 12:647710.

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The aim of this study was to explore individual and contextual factors which contributed to the adherence to protective measures aimed at preventing the spread of coronavirus. Having that by protecting yourself you are protecting others, protective behaviors could be seen as health-related behaviors as well as social behaviors. Therefore, we encompassed prosocial and antisocial personality traits as individual factors of protective behaviors. Prosocial personality traits included six types of prosocial tendencies (altruism, direct as helping in dangerous and demanded situations, compliant as helping on request, helping in emotional situations, public as helping with acknowledging who is helper, and anonymous as helping without need to acknowledge of who is helper), while selfishness was included as an antisocial tendency. Contextual factors were related to the pandemic and, in this study, we measured fear related to the pandemic and empathy toward vulnerable groups (i.e., those in forced isolation and elderly persons over 65 years of age). Aside from the main goal of the study, we examined the mediating role of empathy and moderating role of fear related to the pandemic in the relationship between individual factors and frequency of adherence to protective behaviors. The sample included 581 individuals (78.3% female) and data were collected at the time of the first wave of the pandemic and curfew in Serbia, between the 28th of March and the 6th of April 2020. The results showed that, out of six prosocial tendencies, the tendency to help anonymously was the strongest predictor of adherence to protective measures, while selfishness was negatively related to these behaviors. When it comes to the contextual factors, only fear related to the pandemic was a statistically significant predictor of adherence to protective measures, but it did not moderate the relationship between individual factors and protective behaviors. Having that the fear in the first phases of the pandemic could be seen as adaptive, we can assume that inducing adaptive fear among individuals with higher levels of selfishness doesn't change their health-related irresponsible behaviors. However, empathy acted as a mediator and buffered the negative effect of selfishness and protective behaviors. Likewise, the positive relationship between anonymous helping and adherence to protective measures can partly be explained by higher empathy towards vulnerable people – individuals who were more ready to help others anonymously experienced more empathy, which made them more compliant with protective measures. The results revealed that compliance with protective measures could be seen as



a prosocial and unselfish form of behavior. The findings have practical implications for shaping public messages and they can help effectively promote health-responsible behaviors.