

Like chimpanzees, humans may console victims of aggression out of empathy

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Like chimpanzees, humans may console their threatened peers out of empathy, according to a study published May 31, 2017 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Marie Rosenkrantz Lindegaard from the

Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), The Netherlands, and the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and colleagues.

Consolation is generally defined as an uninvolved [bystander](#) initiating friendly contact with a victim of aggression. Previous research has suggested that children and chimpanzees console their peers, but there is little research on consolation in human adults.

The authors of the present study analyzed real life CCTV footage of 249 individuals who were present in the immediate aftermath of 22 commercial robberies. They investigated whether the social closeness (for example, age similarity or being employees of the same business) and gender of the victim and the bystander affected the likelihood of physical consolation behaviour, such as a touch on the arm or a hug.

The researchers found that social closeness, rather than physical proximity, was important in determining if a bystander would console a victim, which is consistent with the theory that bystanders console victims when they empathize with them. While females were more likely to console a victim, both male and female victims were equally likely to be consoled. Finally, a victim in a more threatening situation was more likely to receive consolation.

The authors suggest that these patterns resemble previously observed post-aggression consolation behaviors in chimpanzees, indicating that both humans and chimpanzees may be motivated to console their peers out of empathy. The authors emphasize that comparative research across different species can provide insight into the mental lives of animals, and should have implications for practices in behavioral science and animal research.

"Unique surveillance camera observations from contexts of real-life

violent crimes show that [human adults](#) provide victims with consolation in ways similar to what is observed among [chimpanzees](#)," says Lindegaard.

More information: Lindegaard MR, Liebst LS, Bernasco W, Heinskou MB, Philpot R, Levine M, et al. (2017) Consolation in the aftermath of robberies resembles post-aggression consolation in chimpanzees. *PLoS ONE* 12(5): e0177725.

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