

Study finds educated people more likely to help a stranger

December 13 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

People from highly educated neighborhoods are more likely to help a stranger, according to a study by researchers at The University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University.

Study author Dr. Cyril Grueter, from UWA's School of Human Sciences, said that while altruism was a universal human trait, little was known about its specific links to someone's socio-economic background.

"Previous research by us and others has suggested that residents of high-SES areas are more likely to feel concern for the welfare of others," Dr. Grueter said.

"What we've found is that a person's willingness to help a [stranger](#) depends on their socioeconomic environment.

"But what exactly is it about socioeconomic status that makes people go out of their way to help a stranger?"

The study, published in [Evolutionary Human Sciences](#), investigated the relationships between various underserved measures of [socioeconomic status](#) and acts of kindness.

The researchers used a field experiment to investigate pro-social behavior. Study co-author Grace Westlake dropped 600 envelopes across a range of 20 Perth suburbs and recorded how many were delivered.

The results show that the usual suspects—crime and [economic resources](#)—were not associated with the likelihood of a letter being returned. Instead it was [educational attainment](#) and occupation status that had a

profound positive effect on helping behavior.

"The precise reason why altruism flourishes in areas that are populated with highly educated individuals working in high-[status](#) jobs requires further investigation," Dr. Grueter said.

"But these results offer a fascinating glimpse into community attitudes and may also prove relevant for policy development and intervention."

More information: Grace Westlake et al. Educational attainment is associated with unconditional helping behaviour, *Evolutionary Human Sciences* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/ehs.2019.16](https://doi.org/10.1017/ehs.2019.16)

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Study finds educated people more likely to help a stranger (2019, December 13)
retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-12-people-stranger.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--