

Compassion, Volunteering, and Charitable Giving in Wartime Ukraine: A Gender Analysis

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Abstract: The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created suffering and destruction, but also catalyzed displays of compassion among civilians. In 2023, Ukraine was reported to have a record high annual growth in charitable activities and was ranked second globally according to the World Giving Index. This study focuses on the gender differences in compassion for those affected by war and the association between compassion, volunteering, and charitable giving in Ukraine after the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine War. The study used a cross-sectional design and employed an online survey method, conducted between September and October 2023. A total of 170 respondents took part in the study; the age range was 18 to 69 years, and the majority were female (72.9%). Participants completed measures of volunteering, charitable giving, compassion for war-affected individuals, and the standardized compassion for others (SCBCS) questionnaire. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlations, and Mann-Whitney U tests. Women reported higher levels of compassion for others ($p = .002$, $r_s = -.24$) and for those who were affected by war than men ($p = .008$, $r_s = -.20$). No significant gender differences were found between those who participated in volunteering activities and charitable giving. Among those who volunteered, both women ($Md = 5$) and men ($Md = 5$) reported a similar amount of monthly volunteering time ($p = .673$). Compassion for others but not compassion for war-affected individuals was significantly associated with the amount of volunteering hours ($r_s = .23$). The findings suggest that despite the differences in compassion levels between genders in wartime Ukraine, both men and women display similar involvement in volunteering activities and charitable giving. Compassion for others may play an important role in civic engagement.

Keywords: Volunteering, Gender, Charitable giving, Compassion

1. Introduction

Wars bring destruction, disruption of livelihoods, and psychological scars. War atrocities and violence towards innocent citizens represent some of the worst human traits, like anger, cruelty, and revenge. On the other hand, such extreme circumstances also become a stage for the display of the most noble human qualities like compassion, selflessness, and love. The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has brought pain and suffering for millions of citizens, many of whom were stricken by grief, desperation, harbored anger, and desire for revenge. At the same time, in many hearts of those affected by the war arose compassion and desire to help, which led to an unprecedented volunteering and charitable movement. For example, 86% of Ukrainian residents reported engaging in charitable giving in 2022, which was 19% more than in 2021 and 26% more than in 2019 (Zagoriy Foundation, 2022). Later in 2023, Ukraine was reported to have a record high annual growth in charitable activities, with 37% of Ukrainian adults reporting participation in volunteer activities (Charities Aid Foundation, 2023). Since then, Ukraine has been steadily ranked one of the ten most charitable countries in the world (Charities Aid Foundation, 2024).

Volunteering in Ukraine spread beyond registered NGOs and included informal networks and community initiatives (Zarembo and Martin, 2024). Many mobilized volunteers had no previous experience of civic or political participation (Stepaniuk, 2022). Such initiatives were found to be driven by mutual support and a sense of responsibility toward community well-being (Zarembo and Martin, 2024). Helping behaviour in Ukraine was also motivated by personal connection and social justice, although, for many civilians, it has also become a form of resistance (Boichak and McKernan, 2024). Furthermore, interviews have shown that Ukrainian wartime volunteering has resulted in social transformation and brought new meanings to the societal notions of solidarity and belonging (Boichak and McKernan, 2024). The research conducted among volunteers during the military operation in Israel also found that for both genders, the main motive for volunteering was social solidarity (Kulik, Bar and Dolev, 2016).

Empirical research also supports the role of empathy or compassion-related motivation in prolonged intentions to give one's efforts and time (Nowakowska, Rajchert and Jasielska, 2024). Sprecher and Fehr (2005, p. 630) define compassion as an attitude towards close others or strangers that contains feelings, cognitions, and

behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, and an orientation toward supporting and helping those suffering or in need. Based on the expansion of compassion, scholars distinguish between compassion towards family or close ones, which is commonly experienced, and compassion towards all humanity and strangers, which is less prevalent but can be developed (Ekman and Ekman, 2017; Ash *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, compassion at an even broader scale might extend to those perceived as enemies or to individuals who have conducted cruel actions against a subject. Such compassion does not exclude the legal responsibility of the felon, or one's right to defend against such actions. Even a soldier may feel compassion towards the opponent while carrying out his/her duties on the battlefield. Such compassion heals hatred and sincerely wishes for the welfare of the world and the elimination of ignorance in the minds of those who cause harm.

At the same time, both prosocial behaviour and compassion have a considerable gender component. International research indicates that women tend to report higher levels of compassion-related constructs like empathic concern and caring values than men (Einolf, 2011; Mesch *et al.*, 2011). Research conducted in the US found that men had lower willingness to donate money or volunteer time to a poverty relief organization, which in turn was mediated by lower levels of empathy toward others in men (Willer, Wimer and Owens, 2015). Women were also found to support a wider range of charitable sectors than men, particularly animal welfare, education, and elderly support (Piper and Schnepf, 2008; De Wit and Bekkers, 2016). However, findings on gender differences in charitable giving are mixed. For example, in the US and UK, men reported giving less than women (Piper and Schnepf, 2008; Willer, Wimer and Owens, 2015), while in the Netherlands, males were found to donate higher amounts than females (De Wit and Bekkers, 2016). Meanwhile, other studies have found that gender differences in the rates of volunteering and donations were often small and inconsistent, although there were evident differences in motivation and financial resources between women and men (Einolf, 2011; Krause and Rainville, 2018). A study conducted among employees in Korea found that cognitive empathy was a strong predictor of volunteering among men, whereas affective empathy was a stronger predictor of volunteering among women (Chung, Im and Kim, 2021).

Research conducted in Ukraine since the invasion has also found various gender patterns in prosocial activity. Before 2022, women were more engaged in charity, but since then, men have increased their participation and now engage in volunteering on a par with women (Zagoriy Foundation, 2022). Women were found to donate more regularly and support a wider range of projects, while men donated larger amounts of funds (Zagoriy Foundation, 2022, 2025). Men and women in Ukraine were also inclined to different types of activities. For example, men engaged more in military aid, physical and cyber volunteering, while women were more likely than men to engage in information volunteering, organizing charity events, and helping hospitals and schools (Zagoriy Foundation, 2022).

The qualitative study conducted among Ukrainian civilian volunteers after the initial stages of armed conflict in 2015 has reported that witnessing the vulnerability of those who lost their homes and possessions elicited empathy and compassion (Stepaniuk, 2022). Furthermore, some female war volunteers even perceived combatants and internally displaced individuals as their own children, symbolizing the experiences of motherhood directed towards individuals in need (Stepaniuk, 2022). Women volunteers also reported higher emotional involvement and greater empathic engagement than men in the Israeli military context (Kulik *et al.*, 2016). Despite the growing descriptive research on volunteering in Ukraine, several gaps remain. First, limited research analyzed the relation between compassion and prosocial activity during an ongoing war. Second, while gender differences in volunteering are depicted in the literature, few quantitative studies viewed these differences through the lens of compassion in relation to actual helping behaviour. This study also distinguishes between general compassion for others and compassion specifically directed toward individuals affected by war.

1.1 Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and prosocial behaviour research conducted in wartime Ukraine since 2014, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Ukrainian women will report significantly higher levels of compassion than men during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War.

There will be no significant gender difference in volunteering and charitable giving in Ukraine during the ongoing war.

Higher levels of compassion will be positively associated with monthly volunteering hours in Ukraine during the war.

2. Method

2.1 Procedure

The study used a cross-sectional design and employed an online survey method, conducted between September and October 2023. A survey link was distributed via social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Telegram). Inclusion criteria were Ukrainian citizenship, age 18 or above, and the ability to access the online survey. Prior to the questionnaire, participants read the Informed Consent that described study procedures and purpose, risks, benefits, data protection, etc. Participants further expressed their willingness to participate or not, confirmed their understanding of the informed consent, and confirmed their age being 18 or older. The study's ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board.

2.2 Participants

A total of 174 participants responded to a questionnaire, of whom 170 provided informed consent and constituted a final sample. The majority of participants were female (72.9%), with no one selecting the "other" gender option. Participants' age range was 18 to 69, with a sample average of 37.14 years ($SD = 9.2$). Almost all participants had a higher education degree (93.5%), lived in urban areas (90.6%), and 55.5% of individuals reported living with a partner.

3. Measures

Compassion for others was measured by the Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale (SCBCS) (Hwang, Plante and Lackey, 2008). The SCBCS consists of 5 items (e.g., "I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them.") and uses a 7-point Likert scale (from "not at all" to "very true of me"). The SCBCS has previously been used in countries culturally similar to Ukraine, for example, in the Czech Republic (Novak *et al.*, 2021) and demonstrated good reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in our study was .82. The scale was translated into Ukrainian and reverse-translated into English to ensure translation accuracy. Two translators holding degrees in linguistics have verified the translation.

Compassion for those affected by the Russia-Ukraine War was assessed based on four items, each describing possible cases of people affected by war (e.g., "How compassionate do you feel towards a Ukrainian who lost someone close due to war events"). Participants used a 4-point Likert scale (from "not at all" to "very much") to indicate how compassionate they felt towards each of the cases. Higher scores indicated greater compassion for those affected by war.

Volunteering involvement was measured by the average number of hours spent volunteering each month (those who did not engage in volunteering were asked to indicate "0"). Participants also reported if the average amount of time they spend volunteering per month had changed since the full-scale war in Ukraine, with answer options being "decreased", "remained the same", "increased", "I do not engage in volunteering activities". Participants also indicated how the average amount of monthly donated funds or goods has changed compared to before and after the 2022 full-scale invasion, with answer options being "decreased", "remained the same", "increased", "I do not donate goods or funds".

4. Statistical Analysis

We used descriptive statistics to report sample demographic characteristics and changes in prosocial behaviour. The Mann-Whitney U was utilized to compare compassion scores, hours of volunteering, income, and participation in charitable giving between two groups. We used Spearman's rank-order correlation to examine bivariate relationships between compassion scores and the amount of volunteering hours. An a priori analysis calculated a sample size of at least 138 respondents for a two-tailed correlation with .80 power, and a $r_s = .30$ medium effect size. The statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all analyses. Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 28.0.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Characteristics and Gender

The two gender groups had homogeneous age distribution, with men reporting a mean age of 36.07 ($SD = 1.26$) and females 37.54 ($SD = .85$). Both genders predominantly had similar education levels (91.3% of men and 94.4% of women had higher education), relationship status (71.7% of men and 66.9% of women were in a relationship), and resided in urban areas (89.1% of men and 91.1% of women). Household income, on the other hand, was

significantly higher ($p = .035$) in the male group compared to females. The gender distribution across income groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Household income levels across genders

Income level	Male	Female
Low (below 20 000 UAH)	19.6%	29.8%
Medium (20 to 50 000 UAH)	32.6%	40.3%
High (above 50 000 UAH)	47.8%	29.8%

5.2 Compassion

Women scored significantly higher on compassion for others than men ($p = .002$, $r_s = -.24$). Similarly, women reported significantly higher compassion for Ukrainians affected by war than men ($p = .008$, $r_s = -.20$). The gender difference was observed both in total war-related compassion score and each of the four specific cases (loss of close one, injury due to war, home damage and job loss). In contrast, no significant gender difference was found in compassion for Russians affected by the war ($p = .481$), both in total score and each of the four items (loss of a close one, someone close injured due to war, job loss, and being forced to leave Russia). The gender distribution of war-related compassion responses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Gender difference in compassion felt towards Ukrainians and Russians affected by the war

	not at all		a little		more than a little		very much	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Compassion for a Ukrainian who(se):								
Lost someone close due to war	.0%	.0%	13%	6.5%	21.7%	10.5%	65.2%	83.1%
Was injured due to war	.0%	.0%	10.9%	3.2%	26.1%	13.7%	63.0%	83.1%
Home was damaged due to war	.0%	.0%	15.2%	4.8%	21.7%	20.2%	63.0%	75.0%
Lost his/her job due to war	8.7%	1.6%	30.4%	19.4%	32.6%	33.1%	28.3%	46.0%
Compassion for a Russian who(se):								
Lost someone close due to war	73.9%	70.2%	17.4%	17.7%	2.2%	4.0%	6.5%	8.1%
Someone close was injured due to war	80.4%	88.7%	10.9%	7.3%	8.7%	2.4%	.0%	1.6%
Lost his/her job due to war	87.0%	95.2%	8.7%	2.4%	4.3%	1.6%	.0%	.8%
Had to leave Russian due to war	82.6%	74.2%	13.0%	19.4%	4.3%	4.8%	.0%	1.6%

M = male, F = female

5.3 Volunteering

Overall, 47.6% of respondents reported engaging in regular volunteering. The percentage of volunteering women (50.8%) was higher than that of men (39.1%), although this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .177$). Almost all participants (95.7% males and 94.4% females) reported conducting charitable giving since the onset of full-scale invasion. Regarding the changes in volunteering intensity since the beginning of 2022, 30.4% of males and 25.8% of females reported an increase in hours of volunteering, while 8.7% of males and 16.1% of females reported a decrease. Meanwhile, 58.1% of women and 54.3% of men reported an increase in the average charitable giving amount, while 22.6% of women and 17.4% of men reported a decrease. There was no significant gender difference in hours of volunteering either in the total sample ($p = .216$) or among those who engaged in volunteering ($p = .673$, $Md = 5$ hours/month for both women and men). The amount of monthly volunteering hours correlated with compassion for others ($r_s = .23$) and age ($r_s = .24$), but did not have a significant relation with compassion for Ukrainians affected by the war ($r_s = -.04$).

6. Discussion

In the context of the ongoing war, women reported higher levels of general compassion towards others than men. These findings were consistent with prior literature conducted in peaceful environments (Einolf, 2011; Mesch *et al.*, 2011; De Wit and Bekkers, 2016). Women also reported greater war-specific compassion for Ukrainians affected by war than men. These findings reconfirm that women may have a stronger compassion motivation factor regarding prosocial activities. On the other hand, no gender differences emerged in compassion for Russians affected by war. Low scores in this variable are understandable, as finding compassion for the citizens of the attacking country is a rare possibility for only a few people. Perceiving the suffering of others, which is a component of compassion, in this case, may be influenced by belonging to another group. While gender differences were prominent in compassion for those in the same group, these differences were absent in compassion for those in the out-group.

Despite the differences in compassion, we found no significant difference in levels of volunteering and charitable giving between women and men, although a higher percentage of women participated in volunteering than men. A substantial part of the sample reported an increase in the amount of monthly volunteering. Such an increase, especially in men's involvement, may be explained by viewing volunteering as a form of resistance (Boichak and McKernan, 2024). For example, research conducted in the US has shown that when poverty was framed as a problem that negatively affects the entire nation, men were willing to donate more towards poverty relief efforts (Willer, Wimer and Owens, 2015). This shows that rather than compassion, men are more likely to be driven by the interests of the country. Another explanation for the equal prosocial engagement of men and women might be men's higher income, which balances women's stronger prosocial motivation (Einolf, 2011).

Another dimension of this research addressed compassion in action. The general compassion for others was found to be associated with the hours of volunteering, while compassion for those affected by war in Ukraine was not. This distinction suggests that prolonged pro-social engagement is related to the general compassion trait, rather than context-specific compassion. Data suggests that compassion felt for Ukrainians might not translate into action as much as compassionate love for others, measured by the standardized scale. Our data also confirms that those with higher education engaged in volunteering more. To compare, the Charities Air Foundation report shows that 37% of Ukrainian adults participate in volunteer activities (2023), while this study sample, which constitutes predominantly those with higher education, reports 47.6%.

7. Limitations

The overrepresentation of participants with higher education degrees limits the generalizability of the study. When measuring the charitable giving activity, we have not captured the actual financial amount or equivalent of donated funds or goods, which may be studied in future research. The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for causal inferences regarding the relationship between compassion and the amount of volunteering. Finally, the self-report nature of the measurement suggests that there might be instances of social desirability influencing participants' responses, as prosocial activity is considered valued and respected. Future research should aim for more representative samples, enabling gender analysis at young, midlife, and senior age stages (Kulik, 2017). Another avenue for future research is the inclusion of variables such as cognitive and affective empathy, self-compassion, and compassion received from others. Self-report measures may be complemented by data triangulation, such as verified volunteering hours and peer reports, to ensure scientific rigor.

8. Conclusion

This paper addresses an inspiring topic of compassion, giving, and sharing, even in a hostile environment. Despite the difference in the level of compassion and financial resources, both women and men in Ukraine participate in volunteering and charitable giving at similar levels. This work shows how two genders come together in an attempt to contribute to society and help those in need. General compassion for others was related to hours of volunteering, unlike the compassion for Ukrainians affected by war, pointing to the role of a long-lasting compassion trait in prosocial behaviour.

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Ethics Declaration. All procedures and materials in the current study were approved by the authors' Institutional Ethics Committee (number IEC_SSBS_AL-CWEGE-AVV_059) and were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

AI Declaration. No artificial intelligence tools were used in this research work. All ideas, interpretations, content, and conclusions are the work of the authors.

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