



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Benign Envy and Prosocial Personality Among Indonesian Undergraduates: Affective and Moral Dimensions

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Abstract: Prosocial personality is a stable disposition to help others, grounded in empathy, moral reasoning, and social responsibility. Benign envy is a constructive emotion arising from upward social comparison that motivates self-improvement through emulating admired others without hostility. Unlike malicious envy, which is directed at pulling others down, benign envy involves admiration and aspiration. The empirical association between these constructs remains underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts. This study examined their association in Indonesian undergraduates. A total of 348 students (70.7% female; aged 18–25 years) from 21 universities in Makassar participated in this cross-sectional correlational study. Prosocial personality was assessed using an Indonesian adaptation of the Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2002), and benign envy was measured with a researcher-developed scale based on Lange and Crusius (2015). Spearman's rank-order correlation was used for analysis. Results indicated a modest but statistically significant positive association between prosocial personality and benign envy ($\rho = .177, p = .001$). Benign envy was positively associated with sympathetic responsiveness ($\rho = .268$), empathic concern ($\rho = .218$), and moral reasoning ($\rho = .151$), and negatively associated with personal distress ($\rho = -.146$). Applying Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .006$), no significant associations were found for perspective taking, other-orientation, or social responsibility. These preliminary findings suggest that benign envy may be associated with the affective and moral components of prosocial personality, with implications for positive psychology and character education in collectivist settings.

Keywords: benign envy, empathic concern, moral reasoning, prosocial personality, sympathetic responsiveness

Abstrak: Kepribadian prososial adalah kecenderungan stabil untuk membantu orang lain, yang berlandaskan empati, penalaran moral, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Iri hati yang baik adalah emosi konstruktif yang muncul dari perbandingan sosial ke atas yang memotivasi peningkatan diri melalui meniru orang lain yang dikagumi tanpa permusuhan. Tidak seperti iri hati yang jahat, yang diarahkan untuk menjatuhkan orang lain, iri hati yang baik melibatkan kekaguman dan aspirasi. Hubungan empiris antara konstruk-konstruk ini masih kurang dieksplorasi, khususnya dalam konteks non-Barat. Studi ini meneliti hubungan mereka pada mahasiswa sarjana di Indonesia. Sebanyak 348 mahasiswa (70,7% perempuan; usia 18–25 tahun) dari 21 universitas di Makassar berpartisipasi dalam studi korelasional lintas-seksional ini. Kepribadian prososial dinilai menggunakan adaptasi Indonesia dari Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2002), dan iri hati yang baik diukur dengan skala yang dikembangkan peneliti berdasarkan Lange dan Crusius (2015). Korelasi peringkat Spearman digunakan untuk analisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang moderat namun signifikan secara statistik antara kepribadian prososial dan rasa iri yang baik ($\rho = 0,177, p = 0,001$). Rasa iri yang baik berhubungan positif dengan respons simpatik ($\rho = 0,268$), kepedulian empatik ($\rho = 0,218$), dan penalaran moral ($\rho = 0,151$), serta berhubungan negatif dengan tekanan pribadi ($\rho = -0,146$). Dengan menerapkan koreksi Bonferroni ($\alpha = 0,006$), tidak ditemukan hubungan yang signifikan untuk pengambilan perspektif, orientasi terhadap orang lain, atau tanggung jawab sosial. Temuan awal ini menunjukkan bahwa rasa iri yang baik mungkin berhubungan dengan komponen afektif dan moral dari kepribadian prososial, dengan implikasi bagi psikologi positif dan pendidikan karakter dalam lingkungan kolektif.

Kata kunci: benign envy, empathic concern, kepribadian prososial, moral reasoning, sympathetic responsiveness

INTRODUCTION

Prosocial behavior encompasses any voluntary action aimed at benefiting another individual or group, which includes helping, sharing, cooperating, and providing comfort (Fu et al., 2022). Studies consistently indicate that this type of behavior is not only beneficial to society but also enhances personal well-being. Individuals who participate in prosocial behaviors often indicate greater psychological

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well-being and experience more positive emotions, alongside a reduction in negative feelings, in contrast to those who do not engage in such acts (Kakulte & Shaikh, 2023; L. Li et al., 2023). On a larger scale, prosocial behavior enhances social cohesion, fortifies interpersonal relationships, and supports the overall functioning of communities (Gloster et al., 2020). The advantages highlighted here emphasize the significance of comprehending the factors that drive and maintain prosocial behaviors, especially in young adults who are in the process of shaping their identities and social responsibilities during a crucial stage of development (Arnett, 2018).

It is important to distinguish prosocial behavior from prosocial personality. Prosocial behavior refers to discrete, voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others, such as helping, sharing, or donating. Prosocial personality, by contrast, is a stable dispositional construct that represents an enduring tendency to engage in such behaviors across varied contexts and over time. Prosocial behavior is shaped by stable personality traits rather than situational factors alone. Penner et al. (2005) proposed that individual differences in prosocial personality form the dispositional basis for helping across varied contexts. These differences are captured by the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB; Penner, 2002), a multidimensional instrument comprising seven subscales: sympathetic responsiveness, empathic concern, perspective taking, personal distress, moral reasoning, other-orientation, and social responsibility. The construct validity of the PSB has been supported across multiple countries, with its core dimensions consistently reflecting prosocial tendencies in culturally diverse samples (Kanacri et al., 2021). Among university students and young adults in particular, empathic and moral dimensions have emerged as especially predictive of prosocial behavior (Cameron et al., 2022; Leng et al., 2020). Despite this body of research, relatively little is known about how social-emotional states relate to prosocial personality, especially in non-Western populations.

A significant source of social motivation that has not been thoroughly examined in the study of prosocial personality is envy. Envy occurs when people feel they are less than someone else in an area they find valuable (Smith & Kim, 2007). Social comparison theory suggests that individuals often assess themselves by looking at their qualities, accomplishments, and belongings in relation to others (Festinger, 1954). When these comparisons highlight the strengths of another person, feelings of envy often arise. Studies are showing that envy is not just one single emotion. It appears in two different forms, each leading to different motivations (Colmekcioglu et al., 2023). Malicious envy is characterized by hostility toward the envied person and a desire to diminish their advantages. Benign envy, by contrast, involves no such antagonism; instead, it generates motivation to improve oneself and attain comparable achievements through personal effort. A closely related but distinct response is admiration, which involves appreciating another person's qualities without any self-referential desire to acquire them. Benign envy differs from admiration in that it retains the motivational urgency to close the gap between self and other, whereas admiration is more passive and oriented toward esteem rather than emulation (van de Ven, 2017) (Ng et al., 2023).

Benign envy has become an increasingly popular topic of research as a positive social emotion. Crusius and Lange (2021) showed that benign envy involves thinking about what could have been, particularly the idea that one might have reached the same achievements as the person being envied. This thinking process encourages imitation and

motivation instead of anger. Research indicates that having a natural tendency towards benign envy is linked to setting more goals, having a stronger hope for success, and achieving better performance in different areas of achievement (Lange & Crusius, 2015). Research across different cultures has shown that benign envy is a common and useful emotion. This is especially true in collectivist societies, where social comparisons are very important (Dinić & Branković, 2022; Kwiatkowska et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2023). Benign envy may theoretically relate to prosocial personality through three interlocking pathways. First, through an affective pathway: the experience of benign envy involves emotional attentiveness to others and sensitivity to their qualities, which may heighten empathic responsiveness. Second, through a motivational pathway: the desire to emulate admired others can orient an individual toward prosocial models, reinforcing sympathetic and helping tendencies. Third, through a moral-social pathway: when the person being envied embodies moral or prosocial qualities, benign envy may stimulate moral engagement, promoting reasoning grounded in concern for others' welfare. These pathways suggest that benign envy may relate more strongly to the affective and moral dimensions of prosocial personality than to its cognitive or dispositional counterparts. Cognitive dimensions such as perspective taking involve deliberate inferential reasoning that is more closely anchored in stable traits like agreeableness, rather than emotional states (Leng et al., 2020). Broad dispositional tendencies such as other-orientation and social responsibility similarly reflect long-standing character structures that are less susceptible to influence by transient motivational emotions like benign envy (Yang & Tang, 2021). Thus, the predicted association is expected to be selective, concentrated in the affective-motivational rather than the cognitive-dispositional domain. Benign envy shares core features with the emotional and ethical aspects of prosocial personality: attention to others' qualities, orientation toward positive social ideals, and the motivation to close gaps between self and admired others. No empirical study has directly examined this relationship.

This discrepancy is notably apparent in the Indonesian context. Indonesia is a society that values collective well-being, where social harmony, mutual support, and helping one another are important cultural principles (Yusoff et al., 2022). This study focuses on Indonesian university students, who represent the emerging adult demographic. Indonesia is a collectivist society in which cultural values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), social harmony, and orientation toward exemplary peers are deeply embedded in everyday life (Yusoff et al., 2022). In this context, upward social comparison is unlikely to produce hostility; instead, admiring the prosocial qualities of others may naturally translate into aspiration and imitation. Benign envy, as a constructive response to admired others, may therefore function as a culturally consonant bridge to prosocial personality in this setting. This cultural framing is not merely background; it forms part of the theoretical argument for why the benign envy-prosocial personality association may be observable in the Indonesian context in particular. The present study examined the association between prosocial personality and benign envy among undergraduate students in Indonesia. Based on theoretical convergences across affective, motivational, and moral-social pathways, three hypotheses were proposed: (H1) benign envy is positively associated with overall prosocial personality; (H2) benign envy is more strongly associated with the affective dimensions of prosocial personality (sympathetic responsiveness, empathic concern) than with

its cognitive or dispositional dimensions (perspective taking, other-orientation, social responsibility); and (H3) benign envy is negatively associated with personal distress, given that self-improvement motivation redirects emotional attention outward rather than inward.

METHODS

Participant characteristics and research design

This study used a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between prosocial personality and benign envy. Correlational research is appropriate when the aim is to assess the direction and strength of an association between variables, without experimental manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Data were collected in a naturalistic setting through an online self-report questionnaire.

Sampling procedures

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. This technique selects individuals who are readily accessible to the researcher and voluntarily agree to take part (Stratton, 2021). The questionnaire was distributed via Google Form through WhatsApp groups and Instagram. All participants provided digital informed consent before completing the survey. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept anonymous.

Sample size, power, and precision

The final sample consisted of 348 undergraduate students ($n = 246$ female, 70.7%; $n = 102$ male, 29.3%) from 21 universities in Makassar. Participant age ranged from 18 to 25 years ($M = 21.79$), corresponding to the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2018). Universitas Negeri Makassar contributed the largest share of participants (57.2%). To be eligible, participants had to be active undergraduate students aged 18 to 25 years. Students who were not enrolled in an undergraduate program or who did not provide digital informed consent were excluded. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSSI) Code of Ethics and the Declaration of Helsinki. No formal institutional ethics committee review was required under the applicable guidelines for non-clinical psychological survey research. All participants provided informed digital consent prior to completing the survey, confirming their voluntary and anonymous participation. To prevent duplicate responses, each submission was linked to a unique Google account, and response timestamps were reviewed to flag anomalous entries. (Arnett, 2018).

Measures and covariates

Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB).

Prosocial personality was measured using an Indonesian adaptation of the Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2002). The PSB is organized into four broad dimensions: (a) social responsibility, (b) empathy, (c) moral reasoning, and (d) helping. These four dimensions are operationalized through seven subscales: the empathy dimension contains four subscales (Sympathetic Responsiveness, Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress), while social responsibility, moral reasoning, and other-orientation each correspond to one

subscale. Research has consistently shown that these dimensions are central to understanding prosocial tendencies in young adults, with empathy and moral reasoning playing especially important roles (Cameron et al., 2022; Pang et al., 2022). At the subscale level, the instrument yields seven scores: Sympathetic Responsiveness (SR), Empathic Concern (EC), Perspective Taking (PT), Personal Distress (PD), Moral Reasoning (M), Other-Orientation (O), and Social Responsibility (SRA). Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability of Prosocial Personality Subscales (Pilot Study, $n = 73$)

Subscale	Cronbach's α	Classification
Sympathetic Responsiveness (SR)	.785	Acceptable
Empathic Concern (EC)	.682	Questionable
Perspective Taking (PT)	.754	Acceptable
Other-Orientation (O)	.777	Acceptable
Moral Reasoning (M)	.766	Acceptable
Personal Distress (PD)	.755	Acceptable
Social Responsibility (SRA)	.880	Good

Note. Classification follows conventional alpha thresholds: $> .90 =$ Excellent; $> .80 =$ Good; $> .70 =$ Acceptable; $> .60 =$ Questionable; $< .60 =$ Poor (Taber, 2018).

The scale was adapted into Indonesian following a systematic translation procedure. First, one bilingual translators independently produced forward translations from English to Indonesian. A back-translation into English was then performed by a second bilingual translator blind to the original items. Discrepancies were resolved through expert review and discussion until conceptual equivalence was achieved. Content validity was assessed by three expert judges using Aiken's V coefficient (Aiken, 1985), producing values from .667 to .750. These values indicate adequate content validity. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection to screen item discrimination; items with corrected item-total correlations below .30 were removed. The remaining items were then subjected to CFA, which identified two additional items for removal based on poor fit (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). An initial pool of 30 items was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in JASP 0.14.1.0. The first CFA model (30 items) identified two items with poor psychometric properties: SR7 (standardized loading = .483, below the .50 criterion) and SRA4 (loading non-significant: $p = .485$). Both items were removed on statistical grounds, yielding a final 28-item model. The final CFA (28 items) yielded adequate model fit: $\chi^2(328) = 382.782$, $p = .020$, CFI = .893, TLI = .876, RMSEA = .051 (90% CI: .022–.072), SRMR = .090. All standardized factor loadings ranged from .505 to .966, exceeding the minimum threshold of .50 (Hair et al., 2019). McDonald's omega (ω) values are reported alongside Cronbach's alpha in Table 1 as additional reliability estimates (Hayes & Coutts, 2020): SR ($\omega = .785$), EC ($\omega = .687$), PT ($\omega = .759$), O ($\omega = .788$), M ($\omega = .776$), PD ($\omega = .800$), and SRA ($\omega = .806$). Sample items from the adapted PSB include: "I often have tender, concerned

feelings for people less fortunate than me” (Empathic Concern); “I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision” (Perspective Taking); “It is important to me to help people regardless of who they are” (Social Responsibility); and “When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces” (Personal Distress; reverse-scored). Table 1 shows internal consistency values for each subscale.

Benign Envy Scale.

Benign envy was assessed using a researcher-developed scale grounded in the framework of (Lange & Crusius, 2015). Benign envy is defined as the desire to improve one’s own position following an upward social comparison, without hostility toward the envied person (van de Ven, 2017). Recent research further identifies benign envy as a functionally distinct emotion that promotes self-improvement motivation, emulation of admired others, and constructive goal pursuit (Crusius et al., 2020). The scale measures three components: (a) *desire*, the aspiration to obtain others’ advantages without antagonism; (b) *motivation to improve performance*, which reflects striving and optimism toward comparable achievement; and (c) *emulation*, the tendency to use admired individuals as motivational references. Items follow the same five-point Likert format.

An initial pool of 20 items was reviewed by the same three expert judges. All items received an Aiken’s V of .750, indicating satisfactory content validity (Aiken, 1985). A pilot study was conducted prior to main data collection. Six items that did not meet the .30 criterion for corrected item-total correlation were removed ($B2 = .098$; $C6 = .153$; $C9 = .188$; $B11 = .038$, which also correlated negatively with the scale; $A13 = .094$; $B16 = .290$), yielding 14 items for CFA (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Subsequent CFA removed two additional items (B7 and B14) with standardized factor loadings below .50 (.494 and .399, respectively), resulting in a final 12-item scale. The CFA model fit for the final 12-item scale was: $\chi^2(51) = 113.315$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .795$, $TLI = .735$, $RMSEA = .139$ (90% CI: .105–.174), $SRMR = .125$. These indices fall below conventional acceptability thresholds (CFI and $TLI \geq .90$; $RMSEA \leq .08$; Hu & Bentler, 1999), indicating that the proposed three-factor structure of the researcher-developed scale requires further refinement. This represents a psychometric limitation of the scale and should be addressed in future studies through item revision or model respecification. Inter-factor correlations were: Desire ↔ Motivation to Improve Performance = .387, Desire ↔ Emulation = .622, Motivation ↔ Emulation = .695. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .522 to .920. The overall internal consistency was $\alpha = .844$ and McDonald’s $\omega = .825$, both classified as good (Taber, 2018). The final item structure is shown in Table 2.

Descriptive statistics were computed for both variables. Scores were classified into three levels based on hypothetical mean intervals: low ($X < \mu - 1.0\sigma$), moderate ($\mu - 1.0\sigma \leq X < \mu + 1.0\sigma$), and high ($X \geq \mu + 1.0\sigma$), where μ is the hypothetical mean and σ is the standard deviation.

The primary hypothesis and seven subscale relationships were tested using Spearman’s rank-order correlation (ρ). This non-parametric method was used because the data did not meet the normality assumption required for parametric correlation (A. Field, 2018). All analyses were conducted using SPSS 25.0. Given that eight correlations were tested simultaneously, a Bonferroni correction was applied to control for familywise error, setting the adjusted significance threshold at $\alpha = .006$

(.05/8). 95% confidence intervals for all correlation coefficients were computed using bootstrap resampling (1,000 iterations). Prior to analysis, data were screened for missing values, duplicate responses (identified via response-time logs and duplicate IP detection in Google Forms), and careless responding (flagged using longstring analysis). No missing values were found. The final analysis sample comprised $N = 348$ following these checks. With $N = 348$, this sample provides approximately 80% power to detect correlations of $\rho \geq .19$ at the Bonferroni-corrected significance level of $\alpha = .006$, and correlations of $\rho \geq .15$ at the uncorrected $\alpha = .05$ level (Cohen, 2013), confirming adequate power for detecting small to modest effects. Effect sizes were interpreted using Cohen’s (2013) benchmarks: small ($r = .10$), medium ($r = .30$), and large ($r = .50$).

Table 2. Final Structure of the Benign Envy Scale (12 Items, $\alpha = .844$)

Dimension	Indicator	F	UF	n
Desire	Aspiration to obtain others’ outcomes without hostility	10,	17,	4
		15	19	
Motivation to Improve Performance	Motivation toward others’ achievement	20	1	2
	Optimism toward others’ achievement	3	8,	
			4,	
			1	
Emulation	Using admired others as motivational references	5	12,	3
			18	

Note. F = favorable items; UF = unfavorable items. Dimensions are based on Lange and Crusius (2015).

Data analysis

RESULTS OF STUDY

Participant Characteristics

A total of 348 undergraduate students from 21 universities in Makassar participated in this study. The sample comprised 246 female students (70.7%) and 102 male students (29.3%). The higher proportion of female respondents reflects their greater voluntary engagement in completing the online survey. Table 3 presents the gender distribution.

Table 3 Participant Distribution by Gender (N = 348)

Gender	n	%
Female	246	70.7
Male	102	29.3
Total	348	100.0

Note. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 presents score categorizations based on hypothetical mean intervals. The prosocial personality scale (28 items; hypothetical $M = 84.00$, $SD = 18.67$; possible range: 28 to 140) showed that 315 participants (90.5%) were

in the moderate category ($66 \leq X \leq 102$), and 33 participants (9.5%) were in the low category ($X < 65$). No participant scored in the high category. The benign envy scale (12 items; empirical $M = 35.94$, $SD = 8.15$; hypothetical $M = 36.00$, $SD = 8.00$) showed that 339 participants (97.4%) scored in the moderate range ($29 < X < 44$). Only 7 participants (2.0%) were in the low category and 2 (0.6%) in the high category. The close match between empirical and hypothetical means indicates a well-centered distribution.

Table 4 Score Categorization for Prosocial Personality and Benign Envy (N = 348)

Variable	Category	Score Range	n	%
Prosocial Personality	High	$X > 103$	0	0.0
	Moderate	$66 \leq X \leq 102$	315	90.5
	Low	$X < 65$	33	9.5
Benign Envy	High	$X > 45$	2	0.6
	Moderate	$29 < X < 44$	339	97.4
	Low	$X < 28$	7	2.0

Note. Categorization is based on hypothetical mean intervals.

Assumption Testing

Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests confirmed that neither prosocial personality nor benign envy scores followed a normal distribution (both $p < .05$). Spearman’s rank-order correlation was therefore selected as the appropriate non-parametric method (Field, 2009). Benign envy (12 items; skewness = -1.307 (SE = .131), kurtosis = 3.921 (SE = .261). Prosocial personality (28 items; skewness = $-.785$ (SE = .131), kurtosis = 2.885 (SE = .261). Both variables showed non-normal distributions, as indicated by absolute skewness values exceeding 1.96 times the standard error and pronounced kurtosis (Field, 2018), justifying the use of Spearman’s rank-order correlation. Spearman’s rank-order correlation was therefore selected as the appropriate

non-parametric method (Field, 2009). Because eight correlations were tested simultaneously, a Bonferroni correction was applied, setting the adjusted significance threshold at $\alpha = .006$ (.05/8), to control for familywise error.

Hypothesis Testing

Spearman’s analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between prosocial personality and benign envy ($\rho = .177$, $p = .001$). This finding supports the hypothesis. The effect size is classified as small (Cohen, 2013), indicating a modest but statistically reliable association. Prior research also suggests that the relationship between envy and prosocial behavior is not straightforward; the direction and strength of the link depend on the type of envy involved (Behler et al., 2020).

At the subscale level, benign envy showed significant positive correlations with sympathetic responsiveness ($\rho = .268$, $p < .001$), empathic concern ($\rho = .218$, $p < .001$), and moral reasoning ($\rho = .151$, $p = .005$). A significant negative correlation was found for personal distress ($\rho = -.146$, $p = .006$), suggesting that individuals higher in benign envy may experience less self-focused distress in helping contexts. SPSS labeled this correlation as significant at the 0.01 level (**), indicating the unrounded p-value is below .01; at $p = .006$, this result meets the Bonferroni-corrected threshold of $\alpha = .006$ and is therefore retained as significant after correction.

After applying Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .006$), no significant associations were found for perspective taking ($\rho = .108$, $p = .044$; non-significant after correction), other-orientation ($\rho = .023$, $p = .674$), or social responsibility ($\rho = .099$, $p = .065$). Table 5 presents the full correlation results.

Prosocial personality and benign envy showed a significant positive association. The relationship was most consistent for affective empathy components and moral reasoning. An inverse pattern was observed for personal distress, suggesting that benign envy reduces the emotional cost of helping. Cognitive and dispositional dimensions showed no significant links with benign envy, which points to boundary conditions of this relationship.

Table 5. Spearman’s Rank-Order Correlations Between Benign Envy and Prosocial Personality (N = 348)

Relationship	ρ	p	Interpretation
<i>Overall Scale</i>			
Prosocial Personality × Benign Envy	.177**	.001	Significant, positive
<i>Prosocial Personality Subscales</i>			
Benign Envy × Sympathetic Responsiveness (SR)	.268**	< .001	Significant, positive
Benign Envy × Empathic Concern (EC)	.218**	< .001	Significant, positive
Benign Envy × Moral Reasoning (M)	.151**	.005	Significant, positive
Benign Envy × Personal Distress (PD)	-.146**	.006	Significant, negative
Benign Envy × Perspective Taking (PT)	.108	.044	Not significant
Benign Envy × Other-Oriented (O)	.023	.674	Not significant
Benign Envy × Social Responsibility (SRA)	.099	.065	Not significant

Note. ρ = Spearman’s rho. Significance was evaluated using Bonferroni-corrected threshold of $\alpha = .006$ (= .05/8). * $p < .006$ (Bonferroni-corrected). The perspective taking association ($p = .044$) is not significant after correction. 95% confidence intervals for all correlations should be added from bootstrap output. Effect size benchmarks: small ($\rho = .10$), medium ($\rho = .30$), large ($\rho = .50$; Cohen, 1988).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the association between benign envy and prosocial personality in a sample of undergraduate Indonesian students. The primary hypothesis was supported by Spearman's correlation analysis, which revealed a modest but statistically significant positive association between the two variables ($\rho = .177$, $p = .001$). The effect size is small by conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 2013), indicating a preliminary rather than a definitive link. Students with higher prosocial personality scores tended to also report higher benign envy. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature on envy, within which benign envy is associated with positive social motivations rather than animosity (Crusius et al., 2020; van de Ven, 2017). This finding supports the theory that benign envy is a self-improvement feeling that motivates people to meet the standards established by persons they respect without undermining prosocial impulses.

At the subscale level, benign envy showed its strongest associations with sympathetic responsiveness ($\rho = .268$) and empathic concern ($\rho = .218$). Both findings are statistically significant at $p < .001$. The findings indicate that students who experience higher levels of benign envy tend to have a prosocial orientation that is primarily emotional, grounded in their ability to empathize with others rather than merely engaging in cognitive reasoning about them. Pang et al. (2022) discovered that within a sample of Chinese college students, the components of affective empathy, particularly empathic concern, emerged as significant predictors of prosocial behavior. The current findings align with this pattern, indicating that benign envy and empathic awareness mutually enhance one another. When an individual appreciates the prosocial traits of another and desires to mirror those qualities, their emotional sensitivity towards others may intensify as a component of that aspirational journey (Leng et al., 2020).

The positive correlation between benign envy and moral reasoning ($\rho = .151$, $p = .005$) extends these findings into the moral domain. Moral reasoning, as measured by the PSB, reflects the tendency to ground decisions in moral considerations and concern for others' welfare. The assessment of moral reasoning, as indicated by the PSB, demonstrates an inclination to base decisions on ethical considerations and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. Studies involving college students have consistently demonstrated that moral reasoning serves as a significant predictor of prosocial behavior, indicating that individuals with more developed moral thinking tend to have a stronger inclination to assist others (Hu, 2022; Q. Li & Hu, 2023). The current finding suggests that benign envy may be associated with heightened moral engagement, such that observing prosocial behavior in others may not only prompt a desire to emulate those actions but may also coincide with greater moral attentiveness. This is consistent with Crusius et al. (2020), who characterize benign envy as encompassing both motivational and cognitive elements aimed at bridging the disparity between oneself and someone perceived as superior.

A notable finding was the significant negative correlation between benign envy and personal distress ($\rho = -.146$, $p = .006$). Personal distress is a self-focused emotional response to witnessing others' suffering. Unlike empathic concern, it tends to inhibit rather than facilitate helping because the helper prioritizes reducing their own discomfort over responding to the needs of others (Pang et al., 2022). The observed negative association with benign envy suggests that individuals higher in benign envy may be

less prone to self-focused distress when confronted with others' suffering. This is consistent with the work of Cameron et al. (2022), who highlight that successful prosocial behavior necessitates both emotional awareness and the capacity to manage one's own distress. The current pattern suggests that benign envy may be associated with reduced personal distress in helping contexts, possibly because its outward, aspirational orientation counterbalances self-focused emotional reactions, though causal conclusions await longitudinal or experimental testing (Kang et al., 2025; Salerno et al., 2019; Wei & Yu, 2022).

In contrast, benign envy showed no significant associations with perspective taking ($\rho = .108$, $p = .044$, non-significant after Bonferroni correction), other-orientation ($\rho = .023$, $p = .674$), or social responsibility ($\rho = .099$, $p = .065$). These null findings indicate that benign envy does not meaningfully relate to cognitive or dispositional forms of prosociality. Perspective taking involves the deliberate cognitive effort to adopt another's viewpoint, while other-orientation and social responsibility capture general, stable tendencies to help and contribute to others' welfare. According to Leng et al. (2020), cognitive empathy and prosocial disposition may be more firmly tied to personality traits such as agreeableness, and less susceptible to the influence of motivational states like envy. Similarly, Yang and Tang (2021) note that benign envy primarily activates behavioral striving and emotional emulation, processes that are more closely tied to affective systems than to deliberative cognition. This may explain why benign envy relates to the feeling components of prosocial personality but not to the thinking or trait-level components.

Most participants scored in the moderate range for both prosocial personality (90.5%) and benign envy (97.4%). The concentration of prosocial personality scores in the middle category is consistent with patterns reported in other student samples (Yusoff et al., 2022), and the absence of high scores may reflect the developmental characteristics of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2018) notes that this life stage is marked by identity exploration and self-focus, which can temper outward prosocial behavior even in individuals who hold prosocial values. The similarly moderate distribution of benign envy scores suggests that social comparison at this age tends to stay constructive rather than hostile, a pattern that aligns with evidence showing benign envy is a normative and adaptive emotional response across cultural contexts (Crusius et al., 2020; Inoue & Yokota, 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, the current findings contribute to the growing literature on the adaptive functions of envy. Behler et al. (2020) demonstrated that general envy tends to reduce prosocial behavior, yet this study found the opposite when benign envy is examined specifically within the context of prosocial personality. The distinction matters because benign envy, unlike its malicious counterpart, is characterized by admiration of others' qualities and the desire to reach them, not to diminish them (Lange & Crusius, 2015). The present results suggest that this constructive motivational orientation may amplify affective and moral engagement with others while reducing the emotional cost of helping, thereby supporting rather than undermining prosocial personality.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions, leaving open the question of whether benign envy is associated with prosocial personality, the reverse, or whether a third variable underlies both. Several such third variables are plausible. Social comparison orientation may independently predict

both higher benign envy and stronger prosocial tendencies. Trait admiration, which shares conceptual overlap with benign envy but differs in its relational focus, may partially explain the observed affective associations (van de Ven, 2017). Moral identity and self-efficacy are also likely to moderate or mediate the benign envy–prosocial personality link (Leng et al., 2020; Li & Hu, 2023). Emotion regulation capacity may further account for the negative association with personal distress. These alternative pathways should be tested in future research before drawing firmer conclusions. The sample was also limited to universities in Makassar, which may restrict generalizability to other Indonesian regions and broader Southeast Asian contexts. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures raises the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly for prosocial items given the cultural value placed on helping behavior in Indonesian society (Yusoff et al., 2022). Finally, the small effect size ($\rho = .177$) should be interpreted with appropriate caution. While it indicates that benign envy accounts for only a modest share of variance in prosocial personality, small effects in personality psychology are not uncommon and can carry theoretical importance. Prosocial personality is a complex, multidimensional construct shaped by a broad array of developmental, cultural, and trait-level factors; the identification of any consistent association with a transient emotional state such as benign envy is therefore notable and warrants follow-up investigation. The small effect also points to the likely influence of other factors such as trait empathy, social identity, and moral identity. A further limitation concerns the structural validity of the researcher-developed benign envy scale. The final CFA model yielded poor fit indices (CFI = .795, RMSEA = .139), falling below conventional acceptability thresholds. Although the reliability was good ($\alpha = .844$, $\omega = .825$) and all factor loadings exceeded .50, the inadequate model fit suggests that the item-factor structure requires refinement. Future research should revise the scale through model respecification, item rewording, or use of an established benign envy measure (e.g., Lange & Crusius, 2015) to strengthen measurement validity. Results from the present study involving this scale should therefore be interpreted with added caution (Li & Hu, 2023).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study confirms a significant positive relationship between prosocial personality and benign envy among Indonesian undergraduate students. The association is primarily affective and moral: benign envy relates most strongly to sympathetic responsiveness, empathic concern, and moral reasoning, and is inversely linked to personal distress. These findings suggest that benign envy supports rather than conflicts with prosocial personality. When individuals aspire to emulate the admirable qualities of others, their emotional sensitivity and moral engagement appear to grow alongside that motivation. This contributes a meaningful insight to social and personality psychology: a state-level emotion like benign envy can align with stable prosocial traits, particularly when it directs attention toward others' wellbeing. In Indonesia's collectivist cultural context, where social harmony is deeply valued, this alignment reflects a culturally coherent pattern in which admiring others' prosocial qualities can become a genuine motivation to care for them. That said, benign envy does not relate to cognitive or dispositional aspects of prosociality, namely perspective taking, other-orientation, and social responsibility. This boundary condition clarifies that benign

envy operates within the affective-motivational domain and does not penetrate deeper layers of stable character. For positive psychology and wellbeing interventions, this means that harnessing benign envy as a motivational tool is likely most effective when it targets emotional engagement with others, not broad trait-level prosocial development.

Future research should move beyond cross-sectional designs to test whether benign envy causally shapes affective empathy and moral engagement over time. Longitudinal studies following students across the emerging adulthood period would clarify the directionality of this relationship, while experimental methods using controlled upward social comparisons would provide stronger causal evidence. Researchers are encouraged to explore cultural moderation, particularly by comparing collectivist settings like Indonesia with more individualistic ones. Broader and more diverse samples across Indonesian regions, university types, and gender groups would also strengthen generalizability. Investigating potential mediators such as self-efficacy, social identity, or emotion regulation would help explain the mechanisms that connect benign envy and prosocial personality.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, NF, upon reasonable request.

Generative artificial intelligence

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude AI (Anthropic) and Quillbot AI for language refinement, including paraphrasing and grammar checking, to improve the readability and clarity of the text. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-generated output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Informed consent

Voluntary written consent was obtained from all participants subsequent to their being apprised of the study methodology, associated risks, and prospective benefits. All data management procedures conformed to the ethical standards governing psychological research.

Author Contributions

Nurfitriany Fakhri: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Writing, Review & Editing.

Mufliha Chaerati: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Writing Original Draft.

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