

Moral conviction and volunteerism: The moderating role of empathic concern

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Abstract

A growing body of research has shown that moral convictions predict different forms of activist behavior (e.g., collective action, volunteerism). However, little is known about the conditions under which moral convictions are associated with activist behavior, such as volunteerism. The current study investigates how empathic concern might moderate the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions. We conducted an online survey study in the context of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war using a first-year psychology student sample ($N= 234$). In line with our hypothesis, empathic concern related to volunteerism intentions for both war immigration and Russian military invasion, and there was a marginal significance for the moderating role of empathic concern in the context of war immigration. Specifically, high levels of empathic concern lead to a stronger relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions. This relationship was not found in the context of the Russian military invasion. Finally, there was a potential relationship found between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions in both contexts but further research is needed to prove this. We conclude that empathic concern could act as a potential moderator for the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism.

Keywords: moral conviction, volunteerism, empathic concern.

Moral conviction and volunteerism: The moderating role of empathic concern

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has caused a massive displacement of more than four million Ukrainian citizens to neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2022). Since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, more than 100 companies have taken action in support of Ukraine (e.g., donating, boycotting Russia), and more than 31 countries have given support to Ukraine through either military, financial or humanitarian aid (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2022). Despite this, the United Nations Refugee Agency has made an emergency appeal to help Ukrainian families forced to flee their homes (UNHCR, 2022). Some have given their support to Ukraine through donating and volunteering. Understanding the mechanisms and what motivates these behaviors is thus a highly relevant topic for many humanitarian aid organizations, such as the UNHCR, as knowing what motivates people to volunteer might be a key to increasing voluntary aid worldwide.

Volunteerism is any activity that benefits another person, group, or cause and is carried out by an individual's own choice and without pay (Darity, 2008). A large body of research has investigated the drivers of volunteerism, such as guilt, sympathy, anger (see Thomas et al., 2009 for a review), and empathy (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010). Nevertheless, a gap in the literature remains on the role of moral convictions (i.e., absolute beliefs about right and wrong; Skitka et al., 2005) in driving volunteerism. A growing body of research has shown that moral convictions play a fundamental role in predicting behavior that induces social change (e.g., collective action, Skitka et al., 2010; van Zomeren et al., 2011). Therefore, we predict moral conviction to have a similar effect on volunteerism as other forms of activist behavior. Indeed, there is initial evidence revealing that moral conviction is one predictor of volunteerism in the context of the Hungarian refugee crisis (Kende et al., 2017).

In line with this research, we seek to replicate the relationship between moral convictions and volunteerism in a different context, that is, in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian crisis.

Despite the findings of Kende and colleagues (2017), research has not investigated the conditions under which moral convictions may relate to volunteerism. Given the large body of research showing empathic concern as a motivational force for volunteerism (Ottoni-Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Thomas et al., 2009), we will investigate whether moral convictions and empathic concern may relate to volunteerism intentions and how empathic concern moderates the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions.

Moral Convictions

Moral convictions are perceived as strong attitudes grounded in fundamental beliefs about right and wrong and are expressions of values (Skitka et al., 2005). For example, “I strongly support war immigration, and this is a matter of moral principle to me” exemplifies an attitude rooted in moral conviction. Moral convictions should not be conflated with attitudes rooted in conventions or preferences, as these are also forms of strong attitudes but are not grounded in notions of morality (Skitka et al., 2005). Laws and norms dictate attitudes rooted in conventions, or in other words, are dictated by what other in-group members believe and have decided is wrong or right. For example, “I strongly support war immigration because my family and country support it.” Thus, when people decide something is based on conventions, they look at how something is usually done and not according to their fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. In addition, an example of an attitude rooted in preference is “I strongly support war immigration because that is what I feel.” Unlike attitudes rooted in conviction, attitudes rooted in preference are a matter of taste or subjective inclination. Thus, people are more tolerant of differences in preferences than differences in moral conviction.

Several other characteristics distinguish moral convictions from other types of strong attitudes. First, attitudes based on a person's sense of right and wrong are experienced as an objective fact and thus, experienced as universal (e.g., "supporting war immigration is and should always be the correct position to have anywhere in the world"). Second, they have a higher emotional intensity than equally strong but different types of attitudes. Third, they are intolerant to authority (Skitka et al., 2010) in that people tend to rely more on their convictions than on duty when their moral convictions are at stake. Fourth, they stem from automatic visceral reactions (i.e., automatic feelings similar to a reflex related to an inward feeling rather than intellect) (Garrett, 2018), unlike other strong types of attitudes. Finally, moral convictions are a particular type of attitude, as they have a distinct influence on an individual's social behavior due to individuals feeling a moral motivation to act on them (van Zomeren et al., 2011; Kende et al., 2017). For example, moral convictions predict different forms of political engagement, such as voting (Morgan et al., 2010), participating in demonstrations (van Zomeren et al., 2011), contacting government officials (Sabucedo et al., 2018), and volunteerism (Kende et al., 2017; see Skitka et al., 2010 for a review) which are essential behaviors that can drive social change.

Moral Convictions and Volunteerism

Extensive literature has shown that moral convictions play an influential role in predicting different forms of social activism (e.g., collective action; Skitka et al., 2010; van Zomeren et al., 2011; Kende et al., 2017). One such form is volunteerism, which can be defined as a broad range of activities in which time is given freely to benefit another group, person, or cause (Wilson, 2000). In addition, it is usually premeditated, prolonged, and nonobligated (Penner, 2004). Substantial evidence has demonstrated that volunteerism can be explained by different motivations and factors, such as altruistic values (Haski-Leventhal, 2009), gender (García-Cano et al., 2016), education (Ajrouch et al., 2014), and religion

(Petrovic et al., 2021). However, we know little about how moral convictions may motivate volunteerism.

Kende and colleagues (2017) showed how levels of moral convictions among volunteers could predict volunteerism during the 2015 refugee crisis in Hungary. Results suggested that volunteerism was a means of expressing moral conviction based on opinion-based identity. This means that volunteerism is an expression of “who we are” (identities) and “what we stand for” (moral convictions; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). In this research, we expect to replicate the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism.

Moral convictions about a given issue may likely be associated with volunteerism aligned with what one stands for. According to Higgins’s (1987) theory of self-discrepancy and Festingers (1957) dissonance theory, the discrepancy between an individual’s beliefs and behaviors causes psychological distress and a feeling of guilt when a person’s ideal (e.g., who someone wants to be) and ought self (e.g., who someone is) do not align. In other words, one wants to align their beliefs (e.g., moral convictions) and behavior (e.g., cause-relevant volunteerism) to prevent psychological distress. In the moral conviction literature, Sabucedo and colleagues (2018) refer to this phenomenon as a moral obligation, a person’s decision to participate in an activity based on the belief that that is what should be done. Indeed, research has shown that individuals feel the need to act upon their moral convictions to reaffirm their beliefs (Tetlock et al., 2000) and validate their sense of identity (van Zomeren et al., 2011). In other words, one’s moral convictions lead to a moral obligation to comply with them (Sabucedo et al., 2018) through eliciting social change by volunteering. Therefore, we hypothesize that moral convictions will positively affect volunteerism intentions.

The Moderating Role of Empathic Concern

Even though some evidence shows that moral conviction can predict volunteerism (Kende et al., 2017), we know little about the conditions under which this effect can occur.

We propose that personality traits related to one's moral identity (Hardy & Carlo, 2011) may strengthen this relationship. Therefore, this study will mainly focus on empathic concern and how it moderates the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions.

Empathic concern can be defined as the tendency to experience concerned, sympathetic, or compassionate reactive outcomes in response to the needs of others (Wilhelm et al., 2010).

Extensive literature has shown that empathy and other compassion-based emotions increase volunteerism and prosocial behavior (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Thomas et al., 2009). For instance, one study on buddy volunteers serving HIV clients revealed that greater levels of empathic concern led to longer intentions to volunteer (Stolinski et al., 2007). In the present study, we aim to replicate these findings conceptually.

We expect that empathic concern is positively associated with volunteerism intentions. Indeed, a person's level of empathic concern influences what they choose to expose themselves to (Davis et al., 1999). Research has shown that those with a high level of empathic concern were more likely to watch a telethon (i.e., a long television program typically aimed at raising money for a charity) about muscular dystrophy (Davis, 1983) than those with low levels of empathic concern. Implying that empathic concern influences whether people choose to expose themselves to disadvantaged targets and put themselves in empathy-arousing contexts. For this reason, people tend to determine their behavior by the anticipated satisfaction they will receive when participating in that behavior (Davis et al., 1999). This anticipated satisfaction is, in turn, dependent on the expected emotional response from the behavior. Davis and colleagues (1999) predict that those high in empathic concern will anticipate less emotional distress in a helping situation than those low in empathic concern. Thus, people high in empathic concern will be more likely to put themselves in helping contexts such as volunteering. This fits with research suggesting that empathy induces affiliative motives and helps people connect with others through helping. In other words,

empathy felt towards a disadvantaged other causes cognitive recategorization of the other within their common in-group (Thomas et al., 2009). Given that category inclusion is one of the three main factors needed for helping in Reicher et al. (2006) Social Identity Model of Helping, empathic concern will lead to higher levels of volunteerism intentions. Therefore, we hypothesize that empathic concern is positively associated with volunteer intentions.

Although there is extensive literature (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Thomas et al., 2009) on the effect of empathic concern on volunteerism, a gap in the literature remains on how empathic concern may moderate the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism. Nonetheless, we propose that empathic concern plays a crucial role in strengthening the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions. This is based on the idea that one must identify with one's moral self-concept to act on one's moral convictions (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). That is, their self-concept related to traits of the prototypical moral person, such as caring, compassion, helpfulness, generosity, and kindness (Jordan et al., 2015), which are also traits related to that of an empathic person (Simmons, 2013). Thus, if one is highly empathetic toward others, they will identify more with their moral self-concept. Subsequently, those identifying strongly with their moral selves will be more prone to act on their moral convictions through a form of moral action (e.g., volunteerism) based on people wanting to avoid the threat of cognitive dissonance (Pletti et al., 2019). They want to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of not acting in line with their self-concept. In other words, highly empathic people will be more likely to volunteer to avoid their moral self-concept, moral beliefs, and behavior not acting in line with each other. Hence, we hypothesize that the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions is stronger for people with higher levels of empathic concern.

The Present Study

Therefore, this study will investigate: (1) the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, (2) the relationship between empathic concern and volunteerism intentions, and (3) the moderating role of empathic concern in the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions. First, we predict that moral convictions are positively associated with volunteerism intentions. Secondly, we predict that empathic concern is positively associated with volunteerism intentions. Third, we predict that empathic concern moderates the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, such that this relationship is stronger for those who score high on empathic concern. We test these hypotheses in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian war crisis, using war immigration and Russian military invasion as issues of moral conviction. We chose two issues of moral conviction to replicate our findings.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 234 first-year Psychology Bachelor students at the University of Groningen participated in the online study in exchange for 0.6-course credits. The sample consisted of 56 males, 176 females, one other, and one who prefers not to say, ranging in age from 18 to 27 ($M = 20.06$, $SD = 1.83$). Ninety-eight participants were recruited from the English Psychology program, 135 participants were recruited from the Dutch Psychology program, and one was unknown. We used a correlational study design, in which moral conviction was the independent variable, empathic concern was the moderating variable, and volunteerism was the dependent variable.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee for Psychology (ECP) of the University of Groningen on April 19th, 2022. Participants were recruited through the internal university participants pool of first-year psychology students of the University of Groningen (i.e.,

SONA) and completed the study online via Qualtrics. To participate in this study, participants were first asked to give informed consent and permission to collect, use, and treat their data in compliance with the GDPR (i.e., General Data Protection Regulation) guidelines.

In the first part of the study, participants were asked about their opinions on several societal issues, namely Russian military invasion, war immigration, racial inequality, and human-made climate change. Participants filled out a questionnaire about their attitudes (i.e., moral conviction) toward these four issues. The target issues of moral conviction were war immigration and Russian military invasion, and the others were filler issues. Next, participants were presented with two social movement contexts, namely “We stand with Ukraine” and the “Black Lives Matter movement,” and filled out measures of social activism (e.g., volunteerism intentions) in these contexts. The social movement of interest was “We stand with Ukraine,” and the other movement was not relevant to the hypothesis testing for this study. In the third part of the study, participants completed a questionnaire that included a measure of empathic concern and other variables that were not relevant to the hypotheses of this study. Finally, participants provided some socio-demographic information (i.e., age, and gender) and were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Moral conviction

First, we measured participants’ general attitudes toward the target issues of moral conviction. They were asked to indicate the extent to which they supported or opposed war immigration and Russian military invasion on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly oppose* to 7 = *strongly support*). To assess participants’ moral convictions about war immigration and Russian military invasion (Skitka et al., 2005), participants indicated how much their opinion on each issue was “a reflection of their core moral beliefs and convictions”, “connected to

their beliefs about fundamental right and wrong”, and “based on moral principle”. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). Cronbach’s alpha for moral conviction about war immigration was .882, and for moral conviction about Russian military invasion was .913. We averaged the items and created a composite score for each of the two moral conviction variables.

Volunteerism intentions

To measure volunteerism intentions toward Ukrainian refugees, we created six items (adapted from Kende et al., 2017). Participants indicated their willingness to “donate old clothes to a charity organization that is helping Ukrainian refugees”, “donate 15 euros to a charity organization that is helping Ukrainian refugees”, “volunteer in a Ukrainian refugee camp near me, for instance, by sorting the donated items, or helping in the kitchen”, “help Ukrainian refugees with their official documents”, “take part in a fundraising project to support Ukrainian refugees”, and “offer emotional support to Ukrainian refugees”. The items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *Very much*). We averaged the items and created a composite score for volunteerism intentions. Cronbach’s alpha for the volunteerism intention scale was .811.

Empathic Concern

Empathic concern was measured using four items from the Empathic Concern subscale from Davis’s (1980) Interpersonal Reactivity Index. The items used from the subscale were: “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me”, “when I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them”, and “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen”, and “other people’s misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal”. The last item was reverse coded. All four items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). We

averaged the items and created a composite score for empathic concern. Cronbach's alpha for the empathic concern scale was .783.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the correlations, mean, and standard deviations for all variables, as shown in Table 1. All correlations were positive and significant at $ps < .05$. Subsequently, we tested four assumptions: homogeneity, linearity, normality, and multicollinearity before running the regression analyses. These were all met as reported in Appendix A.

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation, Reliability, and Correlations for all Variables.

Variable	Scale point	α	M	SD	2	3	4
1. Volunteerism intentions	1-7	0.81	4.98	1.17	0.206**	0.153*	0.446**
2. Moral Conviction: Immigration	1-7	0.88	5.65	1.17	1	0.429**	0.278**
3. Moral Conviction: Invasion	1-7	0.91	5.45	1.78		1	0.146*
4. Empathic Concern	1-5	0.78	3.95	0.68			1

Note. ** = $p < .002$ and * = $p < .05$

Data Analysis Strategy

We first centered the independent variables (i.e., moral convictions towards war immigration and Russian military invasion) and the moderator variable (i.e., empathic concern). Additionally, we computed an interaction between empathic concern and moral conviction for each issue (i.e., war immigration and Russian military invasion). Afterward, we ran two multiple regressions, one with the independent variable being moral convictions toward war immigration (i.e., model 1) and one with the independent variable being moral

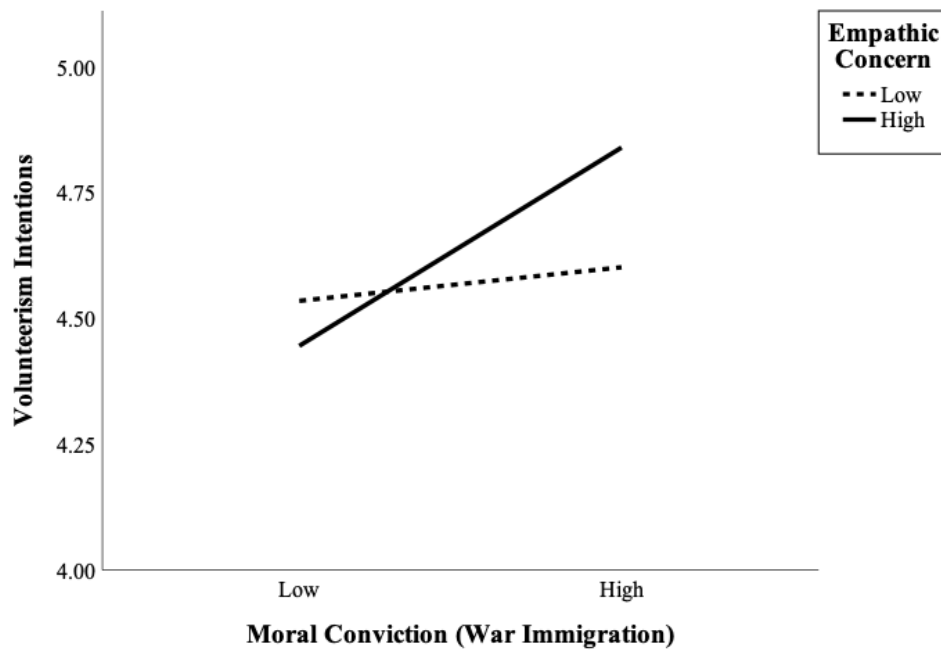
convictions toward Russian military invasion (i.e., model 2). For both models, this tested the relationship between (1) moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, (2) empathic concern and volunteerism intentions, and (3) the moderating role of empathic concern on moral conviction and volunteerism intentions.

Hypothesis Testing

In model 1, the overall regression was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.217$, $F(3, 230) = 21.23$, $p < .001$). In contrast to our first hypothesis, moral convictions toward war immigration was positively but not significantly associated with volunteerism intentions ($\beta = 0.098$, $t(233) = 1.61$, $p = .108$, 95% CI [-0.022, 0.218]). To add to this, in line with our second hypothesis, results showed a positive and significant relationship between empathic concern and volunteerism intentions ($\beta = 0.419$, $t(233) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.518, 0.932]). Finally, results showed a marginally significant interaction ($\beta = 0.103$, $t(233) = 1.77$, $p = .079$, 95% CI [-0.015, 0.274]). Simple slope analyses showed that for participants high in empathic concern, the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions was significant ($\beta = 0.186$, $t(233) = 2.28$, $p = .024$, 95% CI [0.518, 0.932]). However, for those low in empathic concern the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions was not significant ($\beta = 0.010$, $t(233) = 0.138$, $p = .891$, 95% CI [-0.138, 0.158]) (see Figure 1). Therefore, we found support for our third hypothesis specifically in the context of war immigration.

Figure 1

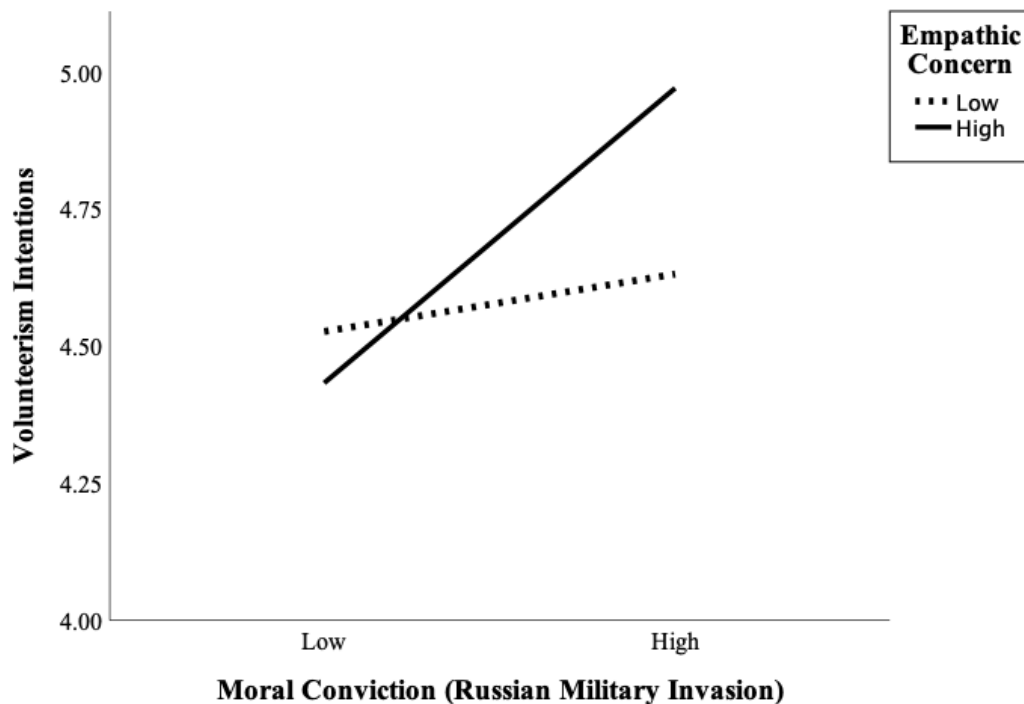
The Moderating role of Empathic Concern in the Relationship Between Moral Conviction (towards war immigration) and Volunteerism Intentions.



In Model 2, we ran a multiple regression with a different moral conviction issue, namely moral convictions towards Russian military invasion. The overall regression analysis was significant ($R^2 = 0.214$, $F(3, 230) = 20.93$, $p < .001$). Similar to Model 1, moral convictions toward Russian military invasion was positively but not significantly associated with volunteerism intentions ($\beta = 0.090$, $t(233) = 1.53$, $p = .128$, 95% CI [-0.017, 0.136]). To add to this, in line with our second hypothesis, results showed a positive and significant relationship between empathic concern and volunteerism intentions ($\beta = 0.412$, $t(233) = 6.78$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.506, 0.920]). Finally, results showed no significant results for the interaction effect ($\beta = 0.090$, $t(233) = 1.50$, $p = .135$, 95% CI [-0.031, 0.231]). Simple slope analyses showed that for participants high in empathic concern, the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions was significant ($\beta = 0.193$, $t(233) = 2.13$, $p = .034$, 95% CI [0.009, 0.244]). However, for those low in empathic concern the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions was not significant ($\beta = -0.012$, $t(233) = -0.137$, $p = .891$, 95% CI [-0.125, 0.109]) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Moderating Role of Empathic Concern in the Relationship Between Moral Conviction (for Russian Military Invasion) and Volunteerism Intentions.



Discussion

The current study aimed to test whether empathic concern moderates the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian war crisis. We conducted a correlational study in which we tested our hypotheses using two issues for moral conviction, namely, war immigration and Russian military invasion. We chose two issues of moral conviction to replicate the findings for our three hypotheses. The hypotheses we tested were: (1) moral convictions are positively associated with volunteerism intentions, (2) empathic concern is positively associated with volunteerism intentions, and (3) empathic concern moderates the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, such that this relationship is stronger for those who score high on empathic concern.

There were three key findings of the present research. First, moral convictions toward war immigrants and Russian military invasion were not significantly associated with

volunteerism intentions. However, both were positively and significantly correlated with volunteerism intentions. Second, consistent with the literature (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Thomas et al., 2009), empathic concern was positively and significantly associated with volunteerism intention. Third, we found mixed findings for our moderation hypothesis. In line with our moderation hypothesis, we found a marginal significance for empathic concern moderating the relationship between moral conviction toward war immigration and volunteerism intentions. As such, for individuals high in empathic concern, the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions was stronger. However, no significant results were found for the moderating role of empathic concern when using Russian military invasion for the moral conviction issue. Nonetheless, the simple slope analysis revealed a significant result for the relationship between moral conviction toward the Russian military invasion and volunteerism intentions when empathic concern was high.

Theoretical Implications

Our study gives several critical theoretical implications regarding the psychology of moral convictions and volunteerism intentions. First, in line with our hypothesis, the strong positive correlation and robust positive effect size between empathic concern and volunteerism intentions imply that empathic concern is a crucial driver of volunteerism intentions. In line with the literature (Davis et al., 1999), we believe this to be due to the increased anticipated satisfaction individuals have of volunteering when they score high on empathic concern, as well as their ability to recategorize the disadvantaged (e.g., immigrants) into their in-group resulting in higher volunteering intentions according to Reichers and colleagues' (2006) Social Identity Model of Helping.

Second, in contrast to our hypothesis, we did not find significant results for the relationship between moral convictions and volunteerism intentions. This suggests that moral convictions do not help explain differences in volunteering intentions in our model. One

explanation is that empathic concern and volunteerism are highly integrated constructs, as the literature suggests (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Thomas et al., 2009). Meaning empathic concern on its own explains most of the differences in volunteering intention causing moral convictions to not strengthen this relationship. However, the significant and positive correlation between both moral conviction issues (i.e., war immigration and Russian military invasion) and volunteerism intentions suggests a potential relationship. This fits with the literature (Kende et al., 2017), which shows that moral convictions play an important role in predicting social activism in the form of volunteerism. As such, our results show that moral convictions might drive social change through volunteerism in that an individual feels the moral obligation to act upon their convictions. However, these claims need to be handled with caution as not enough evidence is given in favor of this in this particular study. Thus, further evidence is needed to confirm these results.

Third, we found mixed results for the moderating role of empathic concern on the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions. A marginal significance was found for the moderating role of empathic concern using war immigration as the target issue for moral conviction. Specifically, those high in empathic concern showed a stronger relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, which is in line with moral identity theorists, who have argued that one must identify with their moral self-concept to act on their moral convictions (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Where a person's moral self-concept is one's self-concept related to a prototypically moral person (Jordan et al., 2015), such as empathic concern. In other words, our findings show that those high in empathic concern felt a stronger need to act on their moral convictions through volunteerism, as not doing so would risk damaging their moral identity and having an incoherent self-concept. No significant results were found for those low in empathic concern, which aligns with what we expected.

In contrast, we found no significant results for the moderation model for which Russian military invasion was the target issue for moral conviction. This could be due to a power issue, as when running the simple slope analysis, similar results were found for model one, for which we used war invasion as our moral conviction issue. Results showed that given that empathic concern was high, there was a significant relationship between moral conviction toward the Russian military invasion and volunteerism intentions. This indicates that empathic concern could be a potential moderator for the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism. However, given the mixed results, further research is needed to confirm these results.

Limitation and Future Research

Certain limitations of this study could be addressed in future research. First, our study was conducted with a highly homogenous sample regarding gender and education. Research has shown that psychology students are generally more empathic than other students (Harton & Lyons, 2003), as such, the standard deviation for empathic concern was relatively small. Thus, this study could potentially lack external validity in this aspect. Therefore, future research using a sample with more variance in education could help test our results' generalizability. To add to this, the homogenous sample also caused only a slight variance in the gender of the participants. Various studies have shown gender differences in both empathy levels (Agnieszka et al., 2020) and volunteering (Kamas & Preston, 2021). Due to our sample being predominantly female, the data is not an accurate representation of the general population, causing the study to lack external validity in this aspect. We thus believe that further research using a more balanced sample of males and females and different levels of education could potentially increase the study's external validity.

Second, this study measured volunteering intentions instead of actual behavior. Even though the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) states that intentions predict behavior,

there is still a margin of error in predictions. Therefore, the current study might be less relevant in predicting actual behavior. Thus, further research might profit from measuring actual behavior or frequency of volunteering.

A third potential limitation lies in the context used for the study. For both models, we used the 2022 Ukrainian war crisis context. This crisis was highly salient in the news at the time of writing (i.e., June 2022), meaning participants were most likely exposed to continuous emotionally (i.e., disgust) evoking images on the news. As an intensification of emotional reactions to an issue is one of the factors needed for moralization of attitudes (Feinberg et al., 2019), this could have potentially led to a stronger moral conviction towards the issue of the Ukrainian war crisis than other issues such as climate change. Consequently, this could potentially have led to our study lacking generalizability to other contexts. This limitation is further strengthened by the fact that the 2022 Ukrainian war crisis is a highly specific context making it difficult to generalize the results to other contexts. Future research should thus replicate this study using different contexts to test whether these results are generalizable to other contexts.

However, external validity was increased by replicating the study using two different issues: Russian military invasion and war immigration. To add to this, by using a real-life context highly relevant to the student sample, we increased the ecological validity of the study. Therefore, increasing the realism of the study, thus, making the 2022 Ukrainian war context an ideal first context to study the conditions under which moral convictions are related to volunteerism intentions.

Conclusion

This research can be seen as a first step towards understanding how empathic concern might moderate the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions, which has not yet been researched to our knowledge. Through a correlational study in the context of

the 2022 Ukrainian war crisis, our findings reveal that (1) moral conviction and volunteerism are potentially related but further research is needed to prove this, (2) empathic concern is related to volunteerism intentions, and (3) empathic concern enhances the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism intentions in the context of war immigration but not the Russian military invasion. This research line paves the way to a better understanding of how moral convictions give rise to social activism. Ultimately, our findings highlight how empathic concern might strengthen the relationship between moral conviction and volunteerism.

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Appendix A

Before running the regression, we ran the necessary assumption checks. First, the assumption of homoscedasticity was tested for model 1 (using war immigration as the target issue) and model 2 (using Russian military invasion as the target issue) using a scatterplot of standardized residuals. Both plots showed random patterns implying the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. Second, the assumption of normality was tested using P-P of standardised residuals which showed an approximately straight line for both models implying the assumption of normality was met. As both the assumption of homoscedasticity and normality were met the assumption of linearity was also met. Finally, there was no multicollinearity as for both models all VIF-values < 10 .

Figure 2

Scatterplot of standardized residuals showing that the data met the assumptions of homoscedasticity of variance and linearity for the model using war immigration as the target issue.

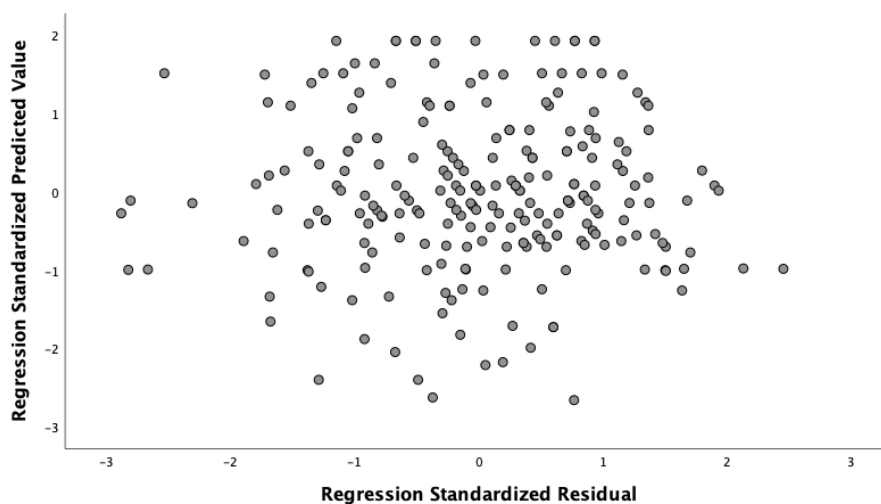
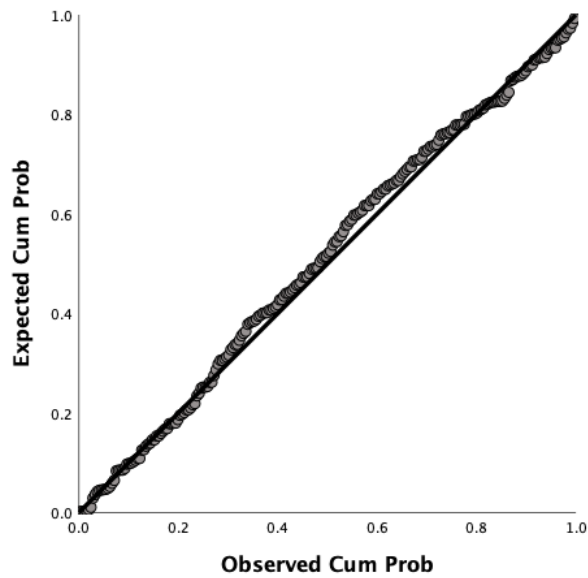


Figure 3

P-P plot of standardized residuals showed that the assumption of normal distribution was met for the model using war immigration as the target issue.

**Figure 4**

Scatterplot of standardized residuals showing that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity for the model using Russian military invasion as the target issue.

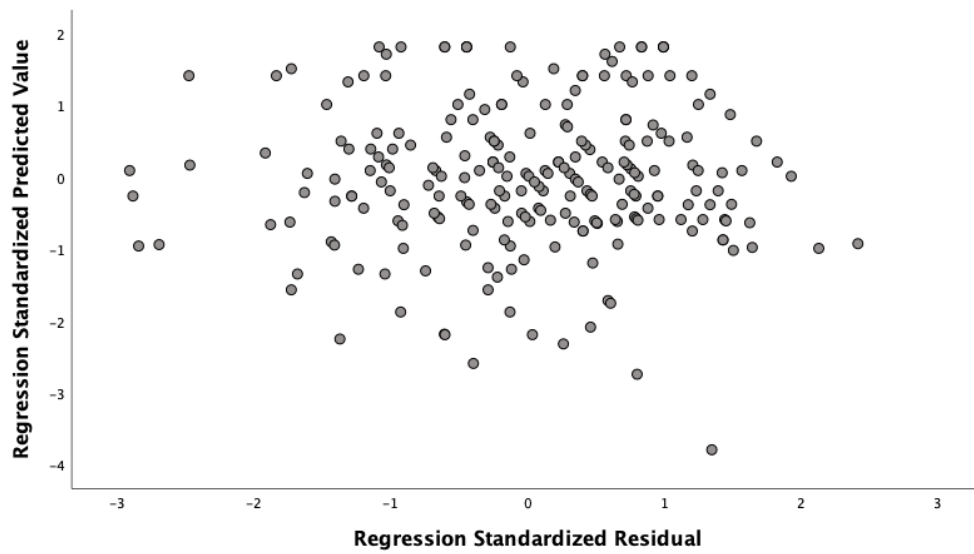


Figure 5

P-P plot of standardized residuals showed that the assumption of normal distribution was met for the model using Russian military invasion as the target issue.

