

Empathy Levels In Vegetarians And Non Vegetarians

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Abstract

Food habits have been correlated to various ideologies that people hold whether consciously or unconsciously. One such factor is empathy. Empathy governs a person's overall and specifically social wellbeing. From society's point of view, people with substantially low levels of empathy are seen to be indulged in various criminal activities. Scientific studies prove through brain scans that vegetarians and vegans have higher level of empathy as compared to non vegetarians. The objective of this research is to find out the levels of empathy in people with vegetarian and non vegetarian food habits. A sample size of 120 has been taken through quota sampling out of which 60 were vegetarians and 60 were non vegetarians. People who consume non vegetarian food at least once in a week are taken as sample in this study. Also, people falling under the category of ovo vegetarians are excluded from the study to make a clear demarcation between vegetarians and non vegetarians. The level of empathy in the samples has been measured using Toronto Empathy Questionnaire.

Key words: VEGETARIANISM, NON VEGETARIANISM, EMPATHY.

Introduction

According to psychology today, empathy is defined as the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. You place yourself in their shoes and feel what they are feeling. Empathy is known to increase pro social (helping) behaviours.

Vegetarian has been given an operational definition of "a person who doesn't consume food that contains animal flesh or egg" and non vegetarian has been given an operational definition of "a person who consumes food that contains animal flesh at least once in week".

This research is significant as the eating habits have a huge influence on our personality as well as behaviour. Empathy level that a person has indicates his/her extent of pro social behaviour. Today, as the level of empathy in people has dropped down for fellow beings, resulting in higher crime rates, it is crucial to identify various reasons that are the cause behind this. One such attribute could be the eating habits of a person.

Objective

The objective of this research is to find out whether the eating habits, that is, being a vegetarian or non vegetarian has an effect on the empathy level of a person.

Hypothesis

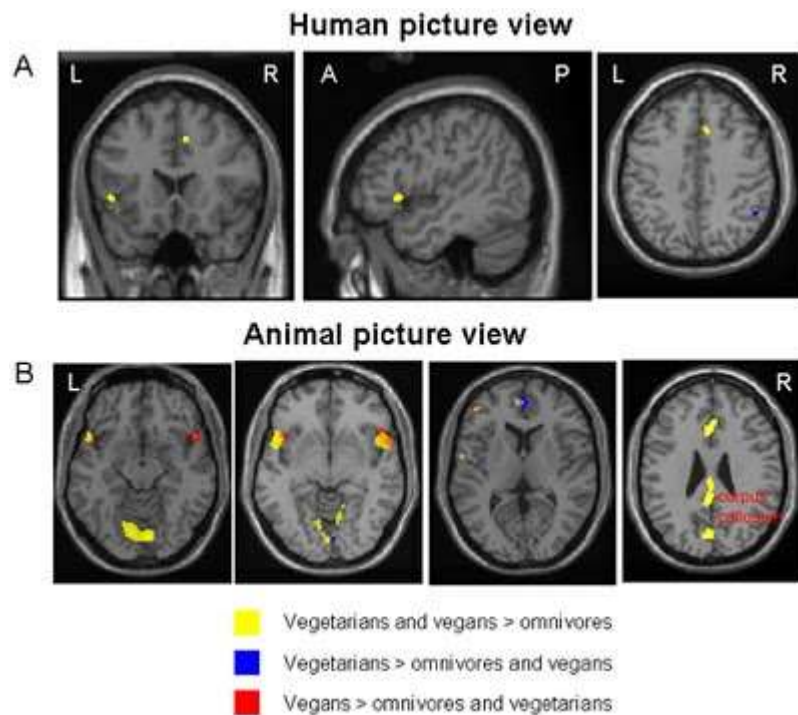
There is no significant difference in empathy scores between vegetarian and non vegetarian students of AUMP.

Literature Review

Empathy is a social factor that is closely linked with and can be judged through our food habits and the kind of attitude we have for animals. A research published in the Anthrozoos showed that the empathy levels as well as positive attitude towards pets were high in male vegetarians as compared to male non vegetarians. Further,

empathy towards humans and attitudes towards pets were seen to be positively correlated for both vegetarians and non vegetarians.

As addressed by Messina V, in a study by Filippi and colleagues (2010) 19 vegetarians, 21 vegans and 20 omnivores were made to take several forms of tests to measure their empathy levels. Firstly, they were made to take empathy quotient test, consisting of 40 questions. They were not informed of the goal of the experiment. The vegetarians and vegans scored significantly higher than did omnivores. The brain scans for these subjects were also taken and the empathy related part of the brain that is right supramarginal gyrus in the frontal cortex was screened. These screenings showed that the brain activity in right supramarginal gyrus of vegetarians and vegans was very high when they were shown images of human and animal suffering. Earlier researches have also put light on the likelihood of children with high IQ growing up to be vegetarians. (examiner.com)



Further, results of a research show that having compassionate thoughts improves our mental health. When people's brain scan was conducted while showing them videos of charity, the pleasure centres were activated, which means having compassion for animals and thus being a vegetarian would make life more pleasurable.

According to a Harvard School study, besides empathy factor, vegetarianism is also proven to yield a healthier life than non vegetarianism. Non vegetarians are more prone to heart diseases and high blood pressure as they consume more saturated fats than do vegetarians. A study involving 76,000 participants showed that vegetarians had 25% of less likelihood of dying from heart diseases.

Umpteen number of researches show that fruits and vegetables reduce the risk of cancer. Giving up red meat would reduce the chances of having colon cancer.

Research Methodology

Sample and sampling

A sample size of 120 has been set and selected from Amity University Madhya Pradesh. The study has been conducted on undergraduates of this institute. Out of 120, 60 samples belong to the category of vegetarians and the rest 60 to the category of non vegetarians in order to make a rational comparison possible. Quota sampling has been done as the sample was first divided into two categories that of vegetarians and non vegetarians and the samples fell into either one of these categories.

Research design

The research design adopted in this study is ex-post facto research design which is a quasi experimental method. Here, it examined that how the food habits of the sample affects the empathy of the sample.

Variables

Independent variable- food habit, that is, vegetarianism and non vegetarianism.

Dependent variable- empathy level.

Tool used

Toronto empathy questionnaire has been used to find out the empathy level in the sample. This questionnaire consists of 16 questions being rated on a five pointer scale from “never” to “always”. The reliability of the TEQ was calculated using the test-retest and Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency method. For the test-retest study, the questionnaire was applied once every three weeks to 77 students studying at Sakarya University’s Faculty of Education, and a correlation of .73 was found between two applications. The Cronbach- α internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire was .79. According to these results, the TEQ had a sufficient level of reliability.

Inclusion- exclusion criteria

INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
1. Vegetarians and non vegetarians.	1. Ovo-vegetarians.
2. Non vegetarians who consume non vegetarian food at least once a week.	2. Disinterested subjects
3. Sample of age group 17-22.	

Result

Research hypothesis

There is no significant difference in empathy scores between vegetarian and non vegetarian students of AUMP

Statistical Hypothesis

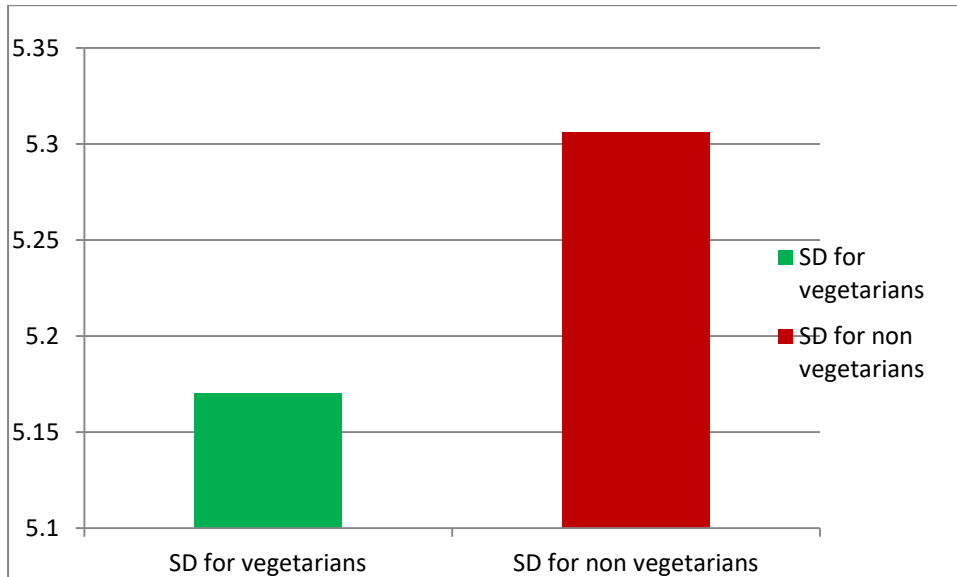
$$H_0: m_1=m_2$$

Table showing statistical analysis and result of the research

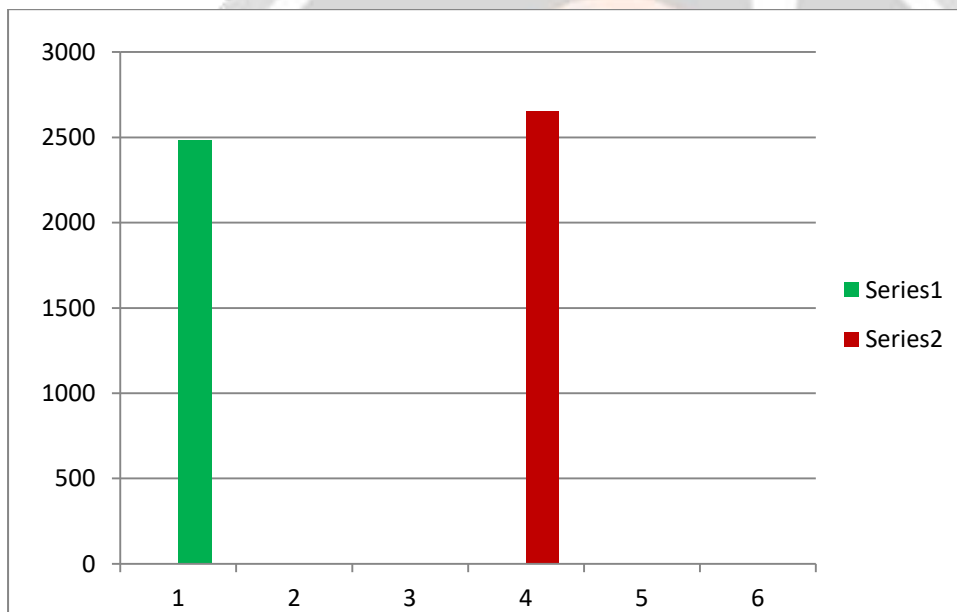
FOOD HABIT	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean	t-value	D _o	Level of significance
Vegetarians	60	44.25	5.175	0.668	2.978	118	0.05
Non vegetarians	60	41.4	5.306	0.685			

According to the result table, the t value is 2.978 which is greater than the critical t value which is 2.63 at significance level of 0.05. This means the hypothesis that is “There is no significant difference in empathy scores between vegetarian and non vegetarian students of AUMP” has not been accepted.

Bar graph showing SD scores in vegetarians and non vegetarians



Bar graph showing mean scores of vegetarians and non vegetarians



Interpretation

The hypothesis that is, “there is no significant difference in empathy scores between vegetarian and non vegetarian students of AUMP” has not been accepted which means there is a clear difference in the empathy scores of vegetarians and non vegetarians. Furthermore the results show that vegetarians have a higher empathy scores than non vegetarians. The results support various researches done in this field that have the same findings that vegetarians score higher on empathy scales and tests than non vegetarians. Furthermore, the brain scans between vegetarians and non vegetarians show that the areas of brain associated with empathy are more activated in vegetarians as compared to non vegetarians. This probably means that somewhere having compassion for animals is correlated with empathy towards human beings too, which is a very important aspect in today’s world as the crime rate is on hike. According to the results, the more vegetarians we have in our society, more amounts of empathy would stem and as a result there would be a better coordination between human beings.

Conclusion

Various neurological studies have successfully proven that empathy depends on a person’s eating preferences. Today’s society is in high need of empathy factor in people as the crimes rates are on a rise. Besides empathy, vegetarianism has also been linked to sustainability of the environment. According to _____, the poultry

management in the world is only leading us close to early extinction. If the poultry farms are replaced with agricultural production, the problem of hunger could easily be met. Also, non vegetarianism has various effects on health like increased blood pressure and heart problems. Non vegetarian food also is a source of numerous diseases that exist today, which otherwise would've had no chance of spreading. Altogether, assimilating all the pieces into one would be that vegetarianism is an empathetic, healthy and wise choice.

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