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Iranian community-dwelling older adults' perceptions of prosociality: A qualitative study

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: The world population is aging at an accelerating rate, and prosociality aspects increase in people with age. This study aimed to explore Iranian community-dwelling older adults' perspectives of the prosociality concept.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This qualitative study was conducted among older adults aged 60 years and older in Qom City, Iran. A purposive sampling method was used to collect data between July and October 2022. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 older adults engaged in various types of prosocial activities. Data were analyzed applying a directed content analysis approach. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using MAXQDA 20 software.

RESULTS: Overall, 5 main categories and 19 subcategories emerged from the content data analysis. The two emerged categories were related to the predetermined dimensions of the prosociality concept, namely, "prosocial behaviors" and "prosocial dispositions." The remaining three newly emerged categories included "egocentric motives," "facilitators," and "barriers" to prosocial behaviors. As participants reported, "informal spontaneous helping" was the most prevalent subcategory of prosocial behaviors. "Prosocial norms" and "social reward-seeking" were identified as the most common subcategories of prosocial dispositions and egocentric motives, respectively. Likewise, participants mentioned "religious and metaphysic beliefs" and "social distrust" as important facilitators and barriers, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS: The results of this qualitative study provide a new understanding of the prosociality concept among older adults in the context of Iran. In conclusion, to improve prosocial behaviors in this population, the interaction between all factors that influence it such as motives, facilitators, and barriers must be considered.

Keywords:

Aged, Iran, perception, prosocial behavior, qualitative research

Introduction

The world population is aging at an accelerating rate, and the contribution of individuals to prosocial activities increases with age.^[1,2] "Prosociality" is an interdisciplinary concept in the social and psychological sciences. Due to the nature of these sciences and the inherent complexities of social phenomena, this concept has not yet been comprehensively and uniformly defined for old age.^[3-5]

However, prosociality is generally described as voluntary dispositions, motives, and behaviors that are beneficial to society and others.^[6] Prosocial tendencies and behaviors are referred to as "social glue" since they enable individuals of different ages to live together peacefully.^[7]

Prosociality is a contextual concept that contributes significantly to the perception of theories and models associated with well-being and prosocial dispositions and behaviors.^[8] One of these theories is Erikson's theory of psychological development, which

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asserts that older adults tend toward the well-being of the world and future generations.^[9] In relation to this theory, older adults express their concerns, care, and commitment to the future generation and offer their support.^[10] The Contributory Model of Successful Aging also shows that older adults' prosocial behaviors are motivated by various reasons, like empathic concerns about others' welfare, religious obligations, and doing the right thing. This model introduces prosocial behaviors as a normative and axial aspect of aging. In this theory, generativity is considered a direct expression of intrinsic motivation to help future generations and civil society.^[6]

Socioemotional selectivity theory asserts that as individuals age, they prefer those activities that are associated with immediate rewards, particularly meaningful emotional experiences.^[11,12] Social exchange theory refers to motivations and perspectives in family relationships and intergenerational support and exchanges between older adults and youths. According to this theory, such exchanges are based on social norms such as the reciprocity norm, the obligation to receive worthy assets, mutual services, or emotions.^[13,14]

Although numerous studies have examined prosociality in older adults, the number of qualitative studies is few.^[15,16] In fact, the arising gap in the literature is that previous research has rarely addressed the effects of context on prosocial behavior and the interactions between context, human nature, and prosocial behaviors.^[8,17]

This is significant because there are large cultural differences in prosocial dispositions and behaviors among countries around the world, supporting the contention that the culture of each nation determines the prosocial dispositions and behaviors of individuals in that society.^[8,18] Among international researchers, only Gottlieb and Sevigny (2016) qualitatively studied this issue in the elderly group.^[15] The results of their study revealed that older adults' different prosocial behaviors were influenced by several factors, like personality traits, motives (e.g., accountability, tending to respond to one's affections mutually, moral and spiritual beliefs), and benefits (e.g., happiness, pleasure, positive effects, and personal development).^[15] Some Iranian studies have also qualitatively explored older adults' experiences of participation in voluntary activities.^[19–21]

In the report published by Charities Aid Foundation (2020), Iran ranked 32nd out of 114 countries, which indicates the presence of a prosocial culture in Iranian society.^[22] On the other hand, the cross-cultural perspective of prosociality plays an important role in defining the conceptual framework of prosociality due to the different

cultural norms of prosocial behaviors and dispositions.^[18] Little research has been conducted on the prosociality concept among older adults worldwide. Even in Iran, this concept has not been investigated qualitatively in older population. Given the contextual nature of the prosociality concept in old age and the paucity of research on this topic, there is a substantial need for further studies, particularly qualitative studies, which extract concepts and meanings from the heart of older adults' experiences. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to qualitatively explore the perceptions of prosociality by community-dwelling older adults in Iran.

Materials and Methods

Study design and setting

This qualitative study was conducted by applying a directed content analysis approach, to identify the perceptions of a group of older adults on the prosociality concept in Qom City, Iran.

Study participants and sampling

The statistical population of this research was "community-dwelling" older adults in Qom City (the religious and cultural capital of Iran). They were capable of attending society and engaging in prosocial activities in different types and grades. The inclusion criteria included being aged ≥ 60 years, interest in being interviewed, ability in establishing relationships, expressing experiences of prosociality, and acquiring a score >7 on the Persian version of the Abbreviated Mental Test.^[23] The exclusion criterion was the unwillingness to continue the interview. This study was also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences in Tehran.

Twenty-five older adults aged 60 years and over (14 men and 11 women) from different districts of Qom City, participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was 65.92 years (SD Standard deviation = 5.75). 44% were employed, 36% were retired, and 20% were housewives. Besides, 88% of the participants were married and 12% were widowed. Regarding education, 4% were illiterate, 12% had elementary or guidance school education, 16% had high school diplomas, 40% had associate's or bachelor's degrees, and 28% had higher education levels.

Data collection tool and technique

Due to following a directed content analysis approach, this study started by reviewing the literature associated with prosociality in old age. With regard to the results of this review, the main dimensions of this concept (i.e., prosocial dispositions and prosocial behaviors) were employed as the basis for the interviews and data analysis. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews between July and October

2022. Interviews were conducted in the Persian language by the first author of this article (PhD candidate, female) with eligible older adults from retirement communities (Ministry of Education, Social Security Organization, and House of Omid), Qom Gardens (Narges and Shahriyar), Endowments and Charitable Affairs Organization, Ministry of Environment, nongovernmental organizations, and health benefactors of Qom University of Medical Sciences. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face at locations suggested by participants (e.g., a park or mosque) or through phone calls. Data were collected after obtaining an informed consent form from all participants. Each interview lasted an average of 63 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The initial interviews were first conducted specifically with some prosocial older adults in various fields (involvement in charitable organizations, endowment, volunteering, etc.). Then, other informed participants were introduced to the research team through snowball sampling. The interview guide included the following questions: "What prosocial activities do you engage in at this age?", "What are your motives for engaging in these activities?" and "What factors lead you to engage in more/less prosocial activities?" During the interviews, the interviewer could acquire more in-depth information about the examined concept by raising probing and following questions concerning the interviewees' expressions. Data saturation occurred after 25 interviews were analyzed.

Data analysis

The "directed content analysis" method was used to analyze the data. Directed content analysis is more structured than conventional content analysis. In this method, researchers identify the main concepts or variables to categorize initial codes by applying the present theories or previous studies.^[24] This study applied a two-phase process for its directed content analysis. First, previous studies on prosociality in old age were inclusively reviewed for the purpose of developing a conceptual framework. In this phase, 877 articles published in databases like Web of Sciences, PubMed, Scopus, ProQuest, and Google Scholar in the 1987–2022 period were identified. After reviewing 57 articles, the researchers found that prosociality in old ages encompassed two main categories, i.e., prosocial dispositions and prosocial behaviors, and seven subcategories.

Second, the collected qualitative data were coded and analyzed by the MAXQDA 20 software (<https://www.maxqda.com/new-maxqda-2020>) according to the predetermined categories. The coding process was accomplished by the first author. Every written word

or expression was considered a unit of analysis. Those codes that corresponded with the categories of the conceptual framework fell into these categories, and new categories were defined for those codes falling out of these categories. Hence, we could obtain 1293 initial codes that were subsumed under 3 main categories, besides the 2 previous ones, and 12 subcategories.

Validity and reliability of the findings

In order to maintain the trustworthiness of the data and increase the credibility of the qualitative data in this study, a conceptual framework based on a scoping review study was used. In addition, the researchers sought to increase credibility through prolonged engagement, allocation of adequate time, and establishment of proper relationships during the research process. Besides, they used member checks and compared the outcomes with the perspectives of three older adults to ensure that the results were consistent with their experiences and perceptions. The findings were also reviewed by specialists. To increase dependability, participants' characteristics were described and some of their statements were quoted.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences in Tehran (IR.USWR.REC.1400.276), and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The names and identities of the study participants were not used in the analysis of the data.

Results

The results indicated that the prosociality concept in Iranian older adults encompassed 5 main categories and 19 subcategories emerged from the content data analysis. The two emerged categories were related to the predetermined dimensions of the prosociality concept, namely, "prosocial behaviors" and "prosocial dispositions." The remaining three newly emerged categories included "egocentric motives," "facilitators," and "barriers" to prosocial behaviors. Table 1 displays the main categories and subcategories of "prosocial behaviors."

Table 1: Main categories and subcategories of prosocial behaviors in older adults

Main categories	Subcategories	Subclasses
Prosocial behaviors	Informal spontaneous helping	Helping close-others Helping strangers
	Formal planned helping	Helping charitable organizations Helping non-charitable, non-profit organizations
	Pro-environmental behaviors	Protective lifestyle Social environmentalism

In addition to prosocial dispositions, some egocentric motives such as material reward-seeking, social reward-seeking, and experiencing positive emotions influenced older adults' prosocial behaviors [Table 2].

Older adults' conversion of prosocial dispositions and egocentric motives to prosocial behaviors was accompanied by some facilitators and barriers. Facilitators included religious and metaphysic beliefs, elderly personality traits, prosocial families and peers, and vicissitudinous life, and barriers involved old age health conditions, weak financial situation, having multiple roles, social distrust, and the presence of ageist attitudes in society [Table 3].

Predetermined categories

Prosocial behaviors

The prosocial behaviors dimension in old age includes three subcategories of "informal spontaneous helping," "formal planned helping," and "pro-environmental behaviors."

Informal spontaneous helping

Informal spontaneous helping means helping close others and strangers. Helping relatives includes providing various types of helping, including tangible support (financial and instrumental), emotional support (expressing kindness and custodial care), and informational support for family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. "Recently, my son wanted to move to a new house, and he was short of money. When he came and said it so, I found that he was more important despite all

my hardships and construction work. I said I could postpone the construction for four months since it was important to help him" (P3: a 63-year-old male).

As mentioned by participants, prosocial behaviors are not limited to close others and also encompass monetary and non-monetary assistance (in typical and serious situations) to needy strangers. "Sometimes, the right job is that I do a physical act; for example, I push one's car or help someone lift a burden when he cannot do it by himself" (P9: a 62-year-old male).

Formal planned helping

Formal planned helping, the second subcategory of the prosocial behaviors dimension, includes the subcategories of helping charitable and non-charitable non-profit organizations. Helping charitable organizations encompasses monetary and non-monetary assistance (e.g., goods donation or spending time for voluntary tasks) in these organizations. "There is a charity through the membership of which I can provide my help. I said to its authorities that I am a member of your family. I can help with this amount per month, and you can spend it based on your discretion. My aid is mostly financial" (P6: a 61-year-old male).

Helping non-charitable, non-profit organizations includes monetary and non-monetary assistance to these organizations (e.g., spending time on voluntary activities like endowing lands or constructing and equipping structures for educational, cultural, sports, and therapeutic activities) to meet various requirements of needy people. "We should endeavor to build what our quarter needs; for example, a mosque, library, and the like. We can even build a football field for the quarter kids if we can. We should help if they want to build a bridge or road, anything that improves people's lives" (P21: an 82-year-old male).

Pro-environmental behaviors

Pro-environmental behaviors include the subcategories of protective lifestyles and social environmentalism. Protective lifestyles are prosocial behaviors that are a mix of one's own and others' interests since climate pollution is detrimental to the person's own and others' lives in society, as well as the future generations. Social environmentalism also refers to verbal reminding, participation in active organizations in the environmental domain, and willingness to cooperate with individuals in the environmental domain. "When my grandchildren and I go to a park, I tell them not to throw garbage on the ground or to take and throw it into a can. We aim to sit here, so it should be clean. If others and I throw pieces of rubbish, here will change into a dump" (P10: a 67-year-old male).

Prosocial dispositions

The main category of prosocial dispositions among participants includes four subcategories of "empathy,"

Table 2: Prosocial dispositions and egocentric motives influencing prosocial behaviors in older adults

Main categories	Subcategories
Prosocial dispositions	Empathy Prosocial norms Innate tendencies Generative desires
Egocentric motives	Material reward-seeking Social reward-seeking Positive emotions

Table 3: Facilitators and barriers of prosocial behaviors in older adults

Main categories	Subcategories
Facilitators	Religious and metaphysic beliefs Elderly personality traits Prosocial family and peers Vicissitudinous life
Barriers	Old age health conditions Weak financial situation Having multiple roles Social distrust Ageist attitudes

“prosocial norms,” “generative desires,” and “innate tendencies.”

Empathy

Empathy encompasses two components of empathic concern and perspective-taking. Empathic concern reflects older adults' tendencies to have concerns about others' peace and welfare. On the other hand, empathy is possible when one imagines the circumstances of needy individuals. “When I see someone is sad, I really get upset till I can somehow help him/her” (P16: a 75-year-old female).

Prosocial norms

Prosocial norms include social responsibility, social justice, and reciprocity. The participants' expressions revealed that social responsibility encompassed various domains such as family, friends, needy individuals in society, and the environment. According to the reciprocity norm, prosocial behavior arises when people tend to help since they have also been assisted. Concerning the social justice norm, the participants believed prosocial behaviors reduced social inequalities. “Our responsibilities are defined according to people's needs. That is to say, we are responsible for meeting their needs and filling their gaps. We are responsible for needy individuals and should try to fill the gaps for which they need help” (P22: a 64-year-old male).

Generative desires

Generative desires reflect older adults' concerns, care, and commitment to future generations, as well as their efforts to support them. “It is enough to leave behind a word, a movement, an action, or something for my grandchildren as a memory of myself. So, they say God bless our grandpa who taught this to us or told this to us” (P13: a 65-year-old male).

Innate tendencies

Innate tendencies embrace agreeableness and other-oriented moral judgment. Agreeableness is a personality index for prosocial dispositions toward others. Other-oriented moral judgment reflects the ability to make decisions based on inner ethical principles to meet others' needs and act according to these principles. “I love to endow myself to others, either my family and friends or fellowmen. I generally live to help my congeners, all grooms, bridegrooms, kids, friends, citizens, countrymen,... We should help them” (P12: a 63-year-old female).

Newly emerged categories

Egocentric motives

From the perspectives of the participants, egocentric motives that impact prosocial behaviors involve “material reward-seeking,” “social reward-seeking,” and “positive emotions.”

Material reward-seeking

The older adults asserted that some individuals were oriented to prosocial behaviors to benefit from financial

profits, e.g., receiving tax incentives. Some participants were unaware of these incentives, and neither said they profited from such financial discounts. “A benefactor comes and says I do this job and expect this amount. If someone wishes to help us, we inform the government that a certain percentage will not pay taxes. They request to introduce them. Some have such expectations, while others don't. Lately, an old benefactor gave me one billion and asked if I could give him a letter to take to the tax administration. I said yes. He paid one billion, and I bought a CT scan machine for a children's hospital” (P23: a 69-year-old male).

Social reward-seeking

Another motivation for prosocial behaviors among older adults is benefiting from the social advantages of these behaviors, e.g., attaining social reputation, dignity, and acceptance. “There are individuals who perform such deeds for fame. For example, have you seen a benefactor speaking on TV saying that he has bestowed trousseau to new brides” (P11: a 71-year-old male).

Positive emotions

Concerning the motive for positive emotions, some participants declared that they were directed to prosocial behaviors due to some emotional experiences such as satisfaction, enjoyment, peace, and, in scientific terms, “warm glow.” “When I do something and see one's happiness, I really enjoy and feel pleased. This is my motive. If I am given ten kilograms of gold, I may not be as glad as that moment I found one happy” (P16: a 61-year-old female).

Facilitators

From the perspectives of the participants, the facilitators tied to prosocial behaviors encompass four factors of “religious and metaphysic beliefs,” “elderly personality traits,” “prosocial families and peers,” and “vicissitudinous life,” explained in the following.

Religious and metaphysic beliefs

Religious and metaphysic beliefs are among the significant factors pushing older adults to prosocial behaviors. The older adults' beliefs in religious values like otherworldly rewards and God's blessings for right deeds, encourage them toward prosocial behaviors. “In our religious teachings, we have been frequently advised about this topic. Not everybody has the prosperity of serving God and his creatures. It is a fortune when God grants you the opportunity to take steps in this cause” (P7: a 70-year-old male).

Elderly personality traits

Some personality traits, like extraversion, pragmatism, self-worth, and self-esteem, were the paramount factors among the participants' expressions. Older adults with self-worth senses further participate in prosocial activities. “When a person values him/herself, it means that

others like me; I love myself; thus, my relationships are ok and have no problem. Well! When one builds right and excellent relationships with himself/herself and others, s/he can take benevolent steps. I always say that if you love yourself, you also love others and your fellowmen and can help them" (P18: a 60-year-old female).

Prosocial families and peers

The "prosocial families and peers" is another facilitator of these behaviors in older adults. This subcategory includes the upbringing background of the older adults and the approval and accompaniment of their families and friends for prosocial behaviors. "Thank God, my husband supports me. That is, when I intend to do a philanthropic deed, I tell him so, and he endorses it. He is not like those who disagree by questioning my action" (P16: a 75-year-old female).

Vicissitudinous life

Some of the participants believed that they spent a vicissitudes life and could hardly achieve high social and economic positions. According to them, this experience of life hardships in the past made them better perceive needy individuals and help these people. "I had many vicissitudes in my life. I was not financially satisfied during my adolescence and younger adulthood and experienced hardships. Well, I found a good career over time after my marriage. I tried and earned adequate capital. Thus, I decided to aid others" (P14: a 61-year-old female).

Barriers

According to the perspectives of the participants, the barriers of prosocial behaviors are five factors including "social distrust," "weak financial situation," "old age health conditions," "having multiple roles," and "ageist attitudes."

Social distrust

Social distrust is introduced as a chief inhibitor in the course of older adults' prosocial behaviors. In this study, it was found that the interpersonal trust among the participants was higher than the trust in social institutions such as charitable organizations. Furthermore, generalized trust was low among older adults in society, and individuals preferred to carry out their prosocial activities individually in the form of known groups. "I say it is incorrect to help strangers financially. We first should possess such high awareness that we don't help anyone who begs and claims that s/he doesn't have money. We should help actual needy individuals" (P1: a 69-year-old female).

Weak financial situation

The participant older adults believed that suffering from a weak financial situation prevented them from engaging in monetary prosocial activities. "Our ancestors believed

that if a man earned money, he could spend some part of it and give the rest to others. But when his economic conditions are not ok, he is rarely able to help in basic affairs. I myself like to provide pecuniary aid, but, unfortunately, I cannot. Now, I am a pensioner. With this inflation rate, my salary is not enough to provide monetary aid" (P23: a 69-year-old male).

Old age health conditions

Based on the interviews, it was found that the precedent for older adults' participation in prosocial activities was their possession of minimal physical and operative abilities and psychological health. "Since I do benevolent deeds myself, I cannot take further steps concerning my present conditions since I have undergone angiography and had surgery on my retina" (P4: a 68-year-old male).

Having multiple roles

Some older adults asserted that they could not participate in prosocial activities, especially formal planned and voluntary types, due to their multiple roles and lack of time. "I usually try to provide monetary assistance since I don't have time to participate in voluntary activities. I wish to do many things, but I cannot since my old mother is sick and doesn't have anyone except me to take care of her" (P20: a 61-year-old female).

Ageist attitudes

The presence of ageist attitudes about older adults in society can play a significant role in suppressing their participation in prosocial activities. "The attitude of society toward older adults' abilities to perform a useful deed for society is not proper. They think we cannot handle it. This perspective is not nice. This thought bothers me" (P18: a 61-year-old female).

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of prosocial behaviors among older adults in Iranian society. As observed, some facilitating and inhibiting factors influence the conversion of prosocial dispositions and egocentric motives to prosocial behaviors among older adults.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the Iranian community-dwelling older adults' perceptions of prosociality concept and identified five main categories of prosocial behaviors; prosocial dispositions, egocentric motives, facilitators, and barriers. The results reflected various dimensions of prosocial behaviors among Iranian older adults. "Informal spontaneous helping" and "helping close others" were the most frequent category and subcategory of prosocial behaviors, respectively. This issue can be explained by the inclusive fitness principle and hierarchical compensatory model.^[25,26] Accordingly, the prosocial behaviors of older adults are first directed toward blood relatives (parents and

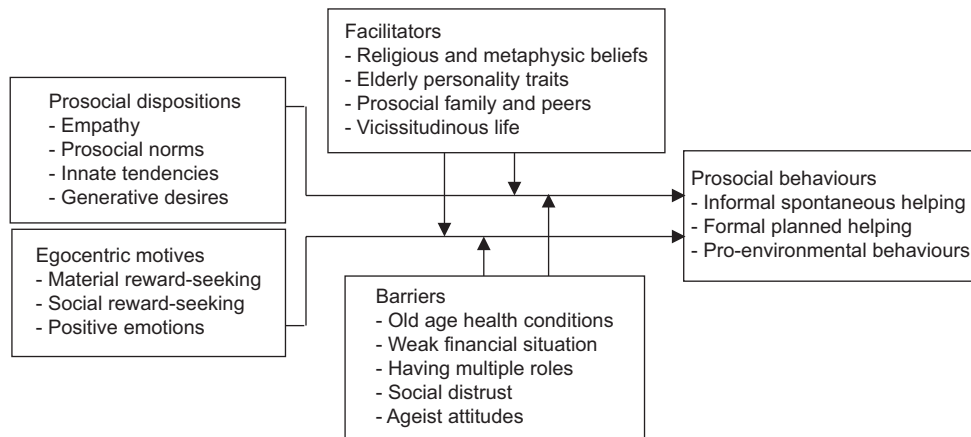


Figure 1: A conceptual model of the prosocial behaviors in Iranian community-dwelling older adults

children) and then toward distant relatives, close friends, neighbors, and strangers.^[27]

Older adults' prosocial behaviors are unlimited and not reserved for a particular type in Iranian and Islamic culture. It is executable from the small family environment to the large society and encompasses all emotional and behavioral aspects of life.^[16,17,20,28] According to the World Giving Index (2020), Iran is a predisposed country to different prosocial behaviors, especially financial contributions in the form of charities and endowments.^[22] Since, *waqf* (endowment) is an inseparable component of the Islamic civilization and plays a pivotal role in social, economic, and political domains due to religious beliefs,^[29] Iranian older adults have a long history of constructing religious, scientific, educational, and therapeutic sites in the form of the endowment tradition.^[16] Another evidence of older adults' monetary prosocial behaviors is *sadaq*, which is money donated to the helpless people for God's reward, preservation of health, and removal of misfortune for oneself and family.^[30] Thus, religious values and beliefs have a great influence on the extent, depth, and retention of these traditions among older adults. On the other hand, although older adults contribute adequately to monetary assistance, their presence in voluntary activities is fader.^[22] This is while other needs, except for cash aids, may be prior and influential in society.

According to the available evidence, the motivational basis for prosocial behaviors falls along a continuum of egocentrism and other-centeredness. Prosocial behaviors are aligned with others' tendencies and needs.^[31] Among prosocial dispositions, "prosocial norms" and "generative desires" were the most frequently mentioned dimensions in participants' expressions. Social responsibility is one of the most important of these norms. In this regard, many participants stated that they were sensitive to the shortcomings of people in society, from their family members to needy strangers, and perceived that serving

them was their responsibility.^[32] Concerning generative desires, according to Erikson's theory of psychological development,^[9] older adults are not ignorant of future generations and reveal their concerns in various types of prosocial behaviors.^[5,10,33,34] Accordingly, older people desire to have a good impact on the lives of future generations or to leave them a legacy.^[34,35]

Some participants referred to egocentric motives for participating in prosocial activities. In their comments, the most prevalent motives were "social reward-seeking" or "signaling." Furthermore, their emphasis on leaving the right title is significant since it provides them with social dignity.^[2,15,36] However, some participants perceived that the pursuit of social profits violated good faith and was synonymous with *hypocrisy*.

According to the participants' statements, the most recurrent facilitators of prosocial behaviors were "religious and metaphysic beliefs" and possessing "prosocial families and peers." Regarding religious and metaphysic beliefs, it should be mentioned that, in the social context of Iranian society, despite the existence of religious beliefs governing the behavior of the older adults, due to their greater familiarity with religious concepts, prosocial behaviors are mostly influenced by religious beliefs.^[17] In their utterances, the participants referred to the term *baqiat-al-salehat*, adapted from these beliefs. This phrase refers to ever-abiding good work. It seems that the evidence for this interpretation can be found in the permanence and observability of structures built by older adults for the benefit of those in need and, in a deeper sense, in the transmission of teaching to others. Moreover, several other cases have been highlighted such as the importance of the blessing that prosocial behavior brings to the lives of older adults, their families, and the future generations, the success of doing a good deed for God's sake, the grace of serving people, the negation of greed and covetousness, and the preference of spirituality over material things.

Some studies have also referred to the roles of religious beliefs^[15-17,19] and some universal rules, like the law of *karma*^[37,38] in older adults' prosocial behaviors.

Possessing prosocial families and peers is another significant facilitator for the older adult's participation in these behaviors. The older adults' upbringing background in the family and the approval and accompaniment of the family can be driving factors for their participation in prosocial activities despite the special health conditions of old age.^[19] Thus, the presence of prosocial persons in the family is discussed as a chief mechanism for sociability and benevolence learning in children and the next generation who witness the actions of their precedent generation.^[37,39] On the other hand, participants' perceptions about the expectations of friends and peers and their efforts to satisfy them influence their prosocial behaviors.^[16,40] Hence, employing the peer influence method can raise older adults' degree of participation in prosocial behaviors, especially volunteering.

From the participants' perspective, the most common barriers to prosocial behaviors were "social distrust" and "weak financial situation." Institutional social distrust among older adults may prevent their cooperation with charitable and non-charitable organizations.^[16,19,28,41] Therefore, the managers of these institutions should report the outcomes of older adults' contributions and introduce new domains for their involvement by holding meetings with them to encourage them to continue their commitment. Likewise, economic and financing issues can be a serious barrier due to the straitened circumstances in societies,^[42] especially for older adults who are often retired and living on minimal wages and compensations. Further attention needs to be paid to this issue by the country's authorities and policymakers.

As with the majority of studies, the current study was subject to limitations. First, the sample was not representative of rural older adults, and the participants were selected from an urban area. However, rural older adults' perceptions may differ from those of urban elderly. Second, the sample did not include the resident older adults in nursing homes or hospitalized ones. Hence, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations. Nevertheless, conducting similar studies with rural older adults and nursing homes' residents may shed light on different aspects of this issue.

The strength of the current study was its attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the perspectives of the Iranian community-dwelling older adults, as well as key points for creating a conceptual model of the prosocial behaviors in this population.

Conclusion

The present study used a qualitative approach to explore the dispositions, motives, facilitators, and barriers associated with older people's participation in prosocial activities in an Iranian context. The results showed that the prerequisite for older people's contribution to prosocial activities is the consideration of the four categories of prosocial dispositions, egocentric motives, facilitators, and barriers. Since the mentioned factors are interrelated, it would be inefficient to consider each factor in a one-dimensional manner. Furthermore, in order to develop and support older adults' social and contributory plans, focusing on the identified themes may pave the way for addressing the challenges associated with older adults' participation in community-oriented activities. The present study found that older adults' participation in prosocial activities is influenced by the cultural context of the country. Therefore, the findings may help authorities in the elderly field to plan for the improvement of prosocial behaviors in this age group, especially in developing countries such as Iran.

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Conflicts of interest

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