

*Psychology*

# Empathy as a Predictor of Cooperation and Compromise

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**Abstract.** This study explores the role of empathy in constructive crisis management, with a particular focus on cooperation and compromise as key behavioral outcomes. It examines how specific components of empathy – such as empathic caring and decentering – enable individuals to understand others’ perspectives, regulate emotions, and reach mutually beneficial resolutions. The research explores the extent to which empathy, as a social-emotional competence, shapes behavioral styles during conflict situations. The findings indicate that empathy strongly predicts cooperative and compromise-oriented tendencies, while personality traits show no significant effects within this model. Data drawn from Georgian participants highlight that empathic abilities significantly enhance prosocial behavior, emotional regulation, and constructive communication patterns. The study underscores the importance of empathy as a learnable psychological resource that supports healthier interactions, mutual understanding, and positive social functioning across diverse environments. Overall, the research demonstrates that empathy serves as a central determinant of cooperation and compromise and reinforces its value for educational programs, professional settings, and community-based initiatives aimed at strengthening social cohesion and constructive dialogue. © 2026 *Bull. Natl. Acad. Sci. Georg.*

**Keywords:** empathy, cooperation, compromise, behavioral style, prosocial behavior

## Introduction

In contemporary social psychology, empathy is increasingly recognized as a central factor shaping interpersonal behavior, cooperation, and constructive management of conflict. Empathy facilitates understanding of another person’s emotional state and stability, which in turn facilitates prosocial behavior and reduces the likelihood of destructive conflict responses (Batson, 2011; Davis,

1983). In societies characterized by diverse cultural and social dynamics such as Georgia, the role of empathy becomes especially important, as cooperative and compromise-oriented behaviors foster social cohesion, facilitate effective communication, and help prevent conflict in educational, professional, and family contexts (Davis, 1983).

Conflict management research typically identifies several behavioral styles, each reflecting distinct motivational, emotional, and cognitive tende-

ncies (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). While rivalry and avoidance often exacerbate interpersonal tension, cooperation and compromise are considered constructive strategies that help individuals achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Understanding the psychological predictors of behavioral style selection in crisis situations is essential for designing interventions that foster healthy communication and problem-solving practices.

Empathy has been consistently linked to prosocial tendencies, willingness to negotiate, and reduced aggression (Decety & Cowell, 2014). Various components of empathy, as measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983), may underlie destructive behavior. Empathic concern and decentration are associated with cooperative and empathic responses, while fantasy and empathic distress can have a dual effect, potentially fostering either constructive engagement or intense emotions depending on the context. Despite strong evidence from Western psychological research, empirical studies on how these dimensions shape behavioral management styles in the Georgian context are scarce.

Another important body of research emphasizes the role of personality traits – especially agreeableness, extraversion, and emotional stability – in predicting conflict behavior and cooperation (McCrae & Costa, 2008; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005). The Big Five personality model provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing individual differences relevant to interpersonal functioning. Agreeableness generally predicts a preference for compromise and cooperation, while high neuroticism may increase avoidance or emotional reactivity during conflict. Openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion also contribute to negotiation strategies, emotional regulation, and social responsiveness (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974).

Although interest in conflict management and social-emotional competencies is growing in Georgia, there is limited quantitative research examining how individual psychological characteristics and

empathic skills interact to shape constructive behavior in critical situations. With ongoing educational reforms and an increasing focus on social-emotional learning, understanding these relationships has practical implications for school programs, workplace training, psychological interventions, and broader societal development.

The present study aims to fill this gap. In particular, by studying empathy as a predictor of two key constructive behaviors in a critical situation – cooperation and compromise – using a quantitative approach. More specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: to how different dimensions of empathy predict cooperation and compromise, and to what extent personality traits strengthen or weaken these associations. A total of 470 respondents aged 18 to 36 participated in the study, using the following standardized scales: Thomas Crisis Behavioral Instrument (TCI), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) for multidimensional empathy, and the “Big Five” personality traits test.

By studying this issue in the Georgian population, engagement in the international, cross-cultural research space on empathy is promoted. Research findings like this provide evidence-based insights for applied interventions and deepen our understanding of the social-psychological factors that promote cooperation and compromise orientation in diverse interpersonal settings.

## Methodology

Our study used a quantitative design to examine the relationship between empathy and constructive behavior, namely cooperation and compromise. The aim of the study was to determine the predictive value of empathy for the choice of behavior style in a critical situation, taking into account differences in personality traits.

Data were collected using three standardized psychological instruments. Empathy was measured using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Davis (1983), which assesses four

subscales: fantasy, empathic concern, decentering, and empathic distress. Conflict management styles: rivalry, cooperation, compromise, avoidance, and adaptation – were assessed using the Thomas Crisis Behavior Instrument (TCI). Personality traits were measured using the Big Five model, which includes extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, and regression models. The extent to which empathy predicted cooperation and compromise, taking into account personality traits, was examined. The quantitative approach provided an objective assessment of the relationships between constructs, which allowed for the identification of predictive factors for the selection of constructive behavior in a critical situation.

## Results and Discussion

Quantitative analysis showed that empathy plays an important role in predicting the factors that determine the selection of constructive behavior in a critical situation. In our study sample, empathy predicts the selection of such behavior styles as cooperation and compromise in a critical situation. Individuals with high levels of empathic concern tended to be cooperative, which demonstrated the ability to prioritize mutual satisfaction and take into account the emotional needs of others. Decen-

tration, which reflects the ability to adopt another person's perspective, though less than compromise, significantly predicted cooperation, confirming its central role in the implementation of constructive behavior.

Although high distress predicted avoidance due to emotional tension, it did not significantly moderate the positive effects of empathic concern or decenteration on cooperative tendencies.

In the existing scientific literature, agreeableness is presented as a predictor of cooperation and compromise, with agreeable individuals tending to avoid aggressive tactics and prefer mutually beneficial solutions. However, our study data did not reveal any additional effects according to personality traits.

It is noteworthy that empathy remains a significant predictor in our studies. It is not only related to, but also functions as a determinant of cooperative and compromise-oriented strategies. These findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives that emphasize empathy as the basis for prosocial behavior, communication effectiveness, and emotional regulation in critical situations.

The results also have cultural relevance. In Georgia, where strong interpersonal and community-oriented social norms prevail, empathy may play a particularly important role in shaping cooperative behavior. Thus, the study adds new empirical evidence for the Georgian context on effective crisis management and socio-emotional skills.

*ფსიქოლოგია*

## ემპათია როგორც თანამშრომლობისა და კომპრომისის პრედიქტორი

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რაოდენობრივი კვლევის შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ თანაგრძნობა კრიტიკული სიტუაციების კონსტრუქციული მართვის, განსაკუთრებით, თანამშრომლობისა და კომპრომისის ძლიერი პროგნოზირების ფაქტორია. თანაგრძნობის კომპონენტებს შორის, ემპათიური ზრუნვა და დეცენტრაცია ინდივიდებს საშუალებას აძლევს გაიგონ სხვების პერსპექტივები, დაარეგულირონ ემოციური რეაქციები და მიაღწიონ ურთიერთსასარგებლო შედეგებს. ჩვენს კვლევებში პიროვნული თვისებების მიმართულებით რაიმე განსაკუთრებული ეფექტები არ გამოვლენილა, თუმცა თანაგრძნობა კვლავ ქცევის გამორჩეულ და ძლიერ განმსაზღვრელ ფაქტორად რჩება. თანაგრძნობა ცენტრალურ როლს ასრულებს კონსტრუქციული და თანამშრომლობაზე ორიენტირებული ქცევის ჩამოყალიბებაში და ხაზს უსვამს მის ღირებულებას, როგორც ძირითად ფსიქოლოგიურ რესურსს, მრავალფეროვან სოციალურ გარემოში თანამშრომლობის, კომპრომისისა და ჯანსაღი ურთიერთქმედების ხელშეწყობისთვის. კვლევის შედეგები არა მხოლოდ თანამშრომლობისა და კომპრომისის ფსიქოლოგიურ განმსაზღვრელ ფაქტორებს უსვამს ხაზს, არამედ ქართული კულტურის დიდი ხნის ელემენტებსაც ეხმიანება. ქართული საზოგადოება ტრადიციულად ხასიათდება ძლიერი ინტერპერსონალური კავშირებით, სტუმართმოყვარეობით, კომუნალური ღირებულებებით და სხვების ემოციებისა და საჭიროებების მიმართ მაღალი მგრძობიანობით. ეს კულტურული ნიმუშები მიუთითებს, რომ ემპათიის პოტენციალი ღრმად არის ფესვგადგმული ქართულ სოციალურ ცხოვრებაში, რაც ნაყოფიერ საფუძველს ქმნის ქცევის სტილის კონსტრუქციული მოდელის შერჩევას. აქ წარმოდგენილი ემპირიული მტკიცებულებები ამ მოსაზრებას ადასტურებს და აჩვენებს, რომ ემპათია საიმედოდ პროგნოზირებს თანამშრომლობით და კომპრომისზე ორიენტირებულ სტრატეგიებს ქართველ მონაწილეებს შორის. ამრიგად, მონაცემების მიხედვით ემპათია არ არის მხოლოდ ინდივიდუალური თვისება, არამედ კულტურულად თანმიმდევრული ძლიერი მხარე, რომლის შემდგომი განვითარება შესაძლებელია განათლების, პროფესიული განვითარებისა და საზოგადოებრივი ინიციატივების გზით.

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