# **FACULTY & RESEARCH**

FIND Faculty, publications, topics

FACULTY RESEARCH FEATURED TOPICS ACADEMIC UNITS

#### WORKING PAPER | HBS WORKING PAPER SERIES | 2010

# Prosocial Spending and Well-Being: Cross-Cultural Evidence for a Psychological Universal

by Lara B. Aknin, Christopher P. Barrington-Leigh, Elizabeth W. Dunn, John F. Helliwell, Robert Biswas-Diener, Imelda Kemeza, Paul Nyende, Claire Ashton-James and Michael I. Norton

- PRINT
- EMAIL

#### Abstract

This research provides the first support for a possible psychological universal: human beings around the world derive emotional benefits from using their financial resources to help others (prosocial spending). Analyzing survey data from 136 countries, we show that prosocial spending is consistently associated with greater happiness. To test for causality, we conduct experiments within two very different countries (Canada and Uganda) and show that spending money on others has a consistent, causal impact on happiness. In contrast to traditional economic thought-which places self-interest as the guiding principle of human motivation-our findings suggest that the reward experienced from helping others may be deeply ingrained in human nature, emerging in diverse cultural and economic contexts.

Keywords: Spending; Giving and Philanthropy; Happiness; Motivation and Incentives; Welfare or Wellbeing; Uganda; Canada;

Language: English Format: Print 26 pages

### READ NOW

#### Citation:

Aknin, Lara B., Christopher P. Barrington-Leigh, Elizabeth W. Dunn, John F. Helliwell, Robert Biswas-Diener, Imelda Kemeza, Paul Nyende, Claire Ashton-James, and Michael I. Norton. "Prosocial Spending and Well-Being: Cross-Cultural Evidence for a Psychological Universal." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 11-038, September 2010.

Export Citation

Contact Division of Faculty & Research

Harvard Business School Soldiers Field Boston, MA 02163 infoservices@hbs.edu

Map/Directions



Michael I. Norton Marketing

VIEW PROFILE » VIEW PUBLICATIONS »

About the Author

## Related Links

Christensen Center for Teaching and Learning Global Research Centers

Global Research Centers Asia-Pacific Research Center Japan Research Center (English) Europe Research Center Latin America Research Center India Research Center

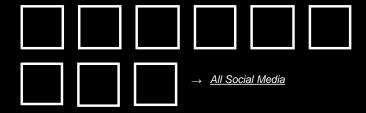
Intiatives & Projects

Initiatives & Projects Business & Environment Business History Entrepreneurship (Rock Center) Forum for Growth & Innovation Global Healthcare Institute for Strategy & Competitiveness Leadership Networked Business Public Education Leadership Project Social Enterprise U.S. Competitiveness

×



Harvard Business School Soldiers Field Boston, MA 02163



<u>Map & Directions</u> More Contact Information

<u>Site Map</u> Jobs Harvard Universit<u>i</u> Trademarks Privacy Policy

Copyright © President & Fellows of Harvard College