



## How does an individual's experience of crisis influence charitable giving?

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The world is in a state of 'permacrisis' and non-profits, reliant on the generous support of the public, need to continue to learn about the trends and motivators for giving, particularly how an individual's experience of crises influences their giving behaviour.

How does an individual's experience of existential threats, such as a pandemic, change charitable giving behaviour?

Experience of crisis does not result in a widespread change in charitable giving however those worst affected are more likely to change their giving behaviour – both positively and negatively. Additionally, non-crisis determinants of higher levels of charitable giving, such as religion and economic status, also apply in a crisis.

[#givingbehaviour](#) [#fundraising](#) [#crisis](#) [#givingmotivations](#)

### Background

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### Context



- Studying charitable giving during the COVID-19 pandemic provides a real-world opportunity to further understand what encourages and discourages people from making donations.
- 'Terror management theory' (TMT) is a stream of psychological research, which suggests that to protect oneself from crises, and fear of death, humans use two different coping strategies:
  1. Proximal defenses, resulting in inward looking/self-centred behaviour associated with a decrease in giving and
  2. Distal defenses, resulting in behaviour that looks outward and aims to create social meaning, resulting in an increase in giving.
- Using TMT enables an analysis of whether someone's ability to manage the stresses caused by crisis, in this case the pandemic, resulted in decreased or increased charitable giving.
- To analyse giving behaviour and an individual's experience of the pandemic, data was collected from 2,000 participants from Germany and Austria (1,000 each) using an online survey.
- Participants were asked questions to determine general social status, attitudes, their giving behaviour in the 12 months before and after the start of the pandemic, and how the pandemic affected their physical and mental health, finances, level of anxiety and life satisfaction.

# ERNOP Research Note

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## Take aways & Learnings



- In line with other studies conducted in the US, UK and Sweden, this study finds that for three-quarters of respondents, **the Covid-19 pandemic did not result in a change in their giving patterns**. It also found that factors such as affiliation with a religion, a higher economic status and being over the age of 60 positively influenced a person's decision to make a donation. This is in keeping with giving in 'normal times'.
- **It finds that being affected by a crisis does impact giving.** Application of TMT determines that those who experienced negative physical health and financial impacts of the pandemic, were most likely to be stuck in a state of self-preservation and therefore less likely to make a charitable donation, whereas those that experienced poor mental health both increased and decreased donations, and that this was determined by their ability to manage the threat and resulting anxiety.
- The learnings provide further insight into the factors that influence the public to give and are worthwhile for non-profit fundraising staff to be aware of it as they build marketing campaigns and work to raise funding for causes around the world.

Personal experience of crisis – such as  
COVID-19 pandemic

No change in giving  
behaviour in 75% of  
sample size

Positive and negative  
change in giving  
behaviour in 25% of  
sample size

Negative impact of  
crisis on physical  
health and finances  
> - impact on giving

Negative impact of  
crisis on mental  
health > +/- impact  
on giving

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