

Research Article

# Selfishness is an Endemic Pandemic: A Systematic and Meta-analysis Review

Salim Omambia Matagi\* 

Center of Excellence for Public Health, Kenya Medical Training College, Karuri, Kenya

## Abstract

Selfishness has become a pervasive social issue, undermining both individual relationships and societal well-being. The primary objective of this study is to employ a didactic approach aimed at mitigating the phenomenon of selfishness. This myopic mindset prioritizes short-term gains (STG) over long-term sustainability (LTS) and collective prosperity. Individuals driven by selfishness often disregard the broader consequences of their actions, diminishing cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect. This self-centered approach to life is a personal flaw that leads to self-destruction for both individuals and societies, undermining the social fabric needed for sustainable development. Team sports illustrate this well; while cooperation is essential for success, a culture of individualism can disrupt team cohesion and sabotage collective goals. The pursuit of personal recognition frequently hampers team success, highlighting the detrimental effects of self-interest in collaborative efforts. When viewed in the context of societal challenges, selfishness might even eclipse deeply rooted divides like racism, tribalism, religious intolerance, and regional biases. While these types of discrimination typically arise from shared group identities, selfishness goes beyond these limits by poisoning the fundamental essence of human connection and concern for one another. Unlike racism or tribalism, which at least have identifiable social or historical roots, selfishness is a more insidious force that undermines efforts toward unity and understanding. Ultimately, love offers the antidote to this pandemic. Love, in its truest sense, encourages selflessness, compassion, and the recognition of shared humanity, fostering cooperation and collective progress. In a world where selfishness thrives, it is genuine love that holds the power to heal, unite, and overcome the divisive forces that threaten our collective well-being. Selfishness, as a widespread issue, is not just a flaw of individuals but a societal problem that impacts almost every facet of contemporary existence. Its proliferation is driven by a cultural and institutional environment that values personal achievement more than the welfare of the community, thereby deepening divisions and inequalities. Recognizing and appreciating our human and environmental interdependence can serve as a catalyst for transformative change, fostering a more harmonious and connected world.

## Keywords

Selfishness, Altruism, Machiavellianism, Psychology, Myopic, Empathy, Otherish

## 1. Introduction

Selfishness, though often considered an individual flaw, can be seen as an endemic pandemic that spreads far beyond

personal behavior into the very fabric of society [1]. In a world that increasingly emphasizes individual success and

\*Corresponding author: [omasalim@yahoo.com](mailto:omasalim@yahoo.com) (Salim Omambia Matagi)

Received: 10 April 2025; Accepted: 19 April 2025; Published: 14 May 2025



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2025. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

material gain, selfishness has woven itself into the cultural and social fabric and seems as a normal practice. Machiavellianism and narcissism were conceived from the endemic pandemic [2]. Humans possess a remarkable ability for pro-social and cooperative actions that sets them apart from other animals. With the emergence of consumerism, competitive mindsets, and the elevation of self-interest in mainstream media, selfishness has become widely accepted. The ongoing chase for individual advantage, whether it be monetary, social, or emotional, has fostered a societal atmosphere where individuals frequently place their own wants above the needs of others. This has led to a systemic lack of empathy and concern for the collective well-being, fostering an environment where self-centeredness is seen as not only acceptable but even desirable [1].

Some claim that selfishness is inherently instinctual. The audience effect makes individuals modify their actions when another person is present. This phenomenon can result in improved physical performance and increased acts of kindness. Both real individuals and unseen figures can trigger this effect in both children and adults [3]. Self-centered motivation arises in social situations where actions can have either direct or indirect effects on others' welfare. Being self-serving doesn't necessarily imply a desire to harm others. Those who act selfishly may simply aim to gain personal advantages without reflecting on how their choices impact the well-being of others or modifying their behavior to consider the welfare of others. In some cases, individuals may purposefully seek to benefit themselves even if it adversely affects others [4]. This pandemic of selfishness extends beyond personal interactions and into larger societal structures, such as politics, business, and education [1]. In politics, leaders who prioritize their own power, wealth, or agendas over the needs of the populace are often celebrated, contributing to policies that widen social inequalities. In business, the relentless pursuit of profit leads to exploitation and environmental degradation, with little regard for the consequences faced by marginalized communities [5]. Educational institutions, too, can propagate selfish values, as competition for grades and status can overshadow collaboration, empathy, and the development of socially responsible values. The endemic nature of selfishness, therefore, is not confined to personal attitudes but is embedded in systems and institutions that perpetuate inequality and disregard for the greater good.

Everyone is susceptible to selfishness; awareness, principles and exposure are the difference in magnitude. At its core, selfishness undermines the sense of community and mutual support that is vital for societal well-being. Selfishness is fundamental to numerous theories regarding human immorality, but its psychological characteristics are often neglected [6]. The incubation, latent and window periods are more often than not, ignorance and arrogance. When individuals are more focused on their own advancement, they become disconnected from the struggles and needs of others. This erosion of collective responsibility has led to a rise in isolation, loneli-

ness, and mental health issues. The more we prioritize individual desires and accomplishments, the less we invest in the well-being of others, which weakens social bonds and creates a fragmented society. The rise of digital platforms and social media has further exacerbated this problem, as online personas are often curated to project an idealized version of oneself, leading to an obsession with personal image rather than fostering authentic connections.

Moreover, the pandemic of selfishness has tangible effects on global challenges, such as climate change, poverty, and inequality [1]. Climate change, for example, is fueled by industries and individuals who prioritize short-term gains over long-term environmental sustainability. Those in positions of power, especially in wealthier countries, are often unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to combat environmental degradation, while the most vulnerable communities bear the brunt of the consequences. Similarly, the widening gap between the rich and the poor can be traced back to systems that encourage selfish accumulation of wealth, ignoring the needs of those left behind [3]. The pursuit of self-interest not only exacerbates these issues but also obstructs collective efforts to find solutions, as global cooperation is stymied by nationalistic and self-serving agendas.

Selfish people believe not only in subtle approaches but have normalized egocentric precepts to their advancement. [6] proposed that individuals perceive selfishness in themselves and others when they notice a contextual inclination to act in a way that benefits themselves while disregarding a dominant social norm, which overlooks the wishes of others present in the situation. Selfishness is a frequently referenced yet poorly articulated concept in psychology [5]. Recognizing selfishness involves noticing a tendency to act in opposition to prominent social expectations, which often triggers a wide range of psychological reactions. The practice has profoundly impacted individuals, encasing them in a cycle of negativity that often turns them against themselves. Many forget their inherent worth or convince themselves that they lack what they genuinely need. In their relentless pursuit for more, they become increasingly spiteful, cultivating a fertile ground for egocentric traits to flourish. This transformation not only distances them from humanity but also diminishes their own sense of self-worth, leaving a trail of emotional desolation in its wake. The repercussions are atrocious despite the excuse that everyone is selfish and it is only the extent that varies.

## 2. Methodology

A comprehensive review of the available literature on selfishness is an endemic pandemic was conducted through an extensive search of Google Scholar, BASE, CORE, Science.gov, Semantic Scholar, Baidu Scholar, and RefSeek. It was conducted using combined keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms to capture the relevant literature. To find relevant literature, we limited the use of all keywords and MeSH terms to the title of the articles. This limitation was

implemented to focus exclusively on articles that specifically address the physical, emotional, and health consequences of selfishness. Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were then used appropriately to combine terms. The search was then limited to those published within the last 10 years, ending in 2025, to include recent literature. In the search engines, the keywords generated a batch of slightly over 27 articles. From these numbers, a total of 18 studies were considered to be relevant to the topic and included in this paper. The articles were drawn from recent peer-reviewed journals published worldwide, which dealt with loneliness and its effects on health: mental, physical, emotional, and social. Articles in English, those that were originally published in English, or translations which were provided by foreign journals, and that were based on both quantitative and qualitative methods were included. Articles whose full texts were not in English were excluded. Each of the studies had several participants sufficient to represent the targeted population to enhance the generalization of results. Only scientific articles describing experimental studies, descriptive or review articles which are published in peer reviewed journals were included. Exclusion: Any documents such as book chapters, doctoral theses, or conference/congress papers.

### 3. Selfishness Has Been Normalized

People are selfish and they don't know it is a negative trait. The normalization of selfishness in modern society is a consequence of several cultural, economic, and social shifts that have occurred over the past few decades. One of the primary factors contributing to this normalization is the rise of consumerism. The conflict between our altruistic and self-serving impulses is a fundamental aspect of numerous laws and is essential for comprehending social interactions and societal disputes. At present, there is limited knowledge regarding how to encourage prosocial behaviors, particularly within natural relationships [7]. In a world driven by advertising, the media, and market-driven incentives, individuals are constantly bombarded with messages that emphasize the importance of personal gain and material wealth. The focus is often on acquiring more, be it possessions, status, or experiences, rather than fostering relationships, empathy, or collective well-being. Consumerism has embedded the idea that individual success and satisfaction are paramount, creating a mindset where self-interest is not just acceptable but encouraged. This shift has gradually transformed what was once considered a personal flaw into a widely accepted and even celebrated part of modern life.

Neuroticism is a personality trait that involves a propensity to feel negative emotions. Selflessness refers to a self-concept that includes structures and beliefs (whether implicit or explicit) which define the self as lacking substance. The content, assessment, and awareness of the self are not viewed as the main factors influencing selflessness. Instead, over time, self-beliefs influence the foundational structure of the

self-concept, altering how the self-functions in various situations. Selflessness is different from self-centeredness; these contrasting self-concepts lead to distinct psychological configurations of the self [8]. We are living in a society where it is acceptable to compromise standards, to take the easy way out and not have integrity, to do what everyone else is doing. It is common. Complainers and compromisers are a dime a dozen. It is normal.

The trait is a recipe for envy, jealousy, hatred, just to mention a few and the cultural shift toward individualism has also played a significant role in normalizing selfishness [9]. Over the last few centuries, particularly in Western societies, individualism has become a dominant cultural value. The notion of "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" or "looking out for number one" has become a societal ideal, emphasizing personal autonomy and self-sufficiency. While these values can have positive effects, such as encouraging personal responsibility and innovation, they have also fostered an environment in which the needs and well-being of others are often seen as secondary. In this context, selfishness becomes less of a moral failing and more of a natural consequence of pursuing one's own goals in a competitive world. The celebration of individual achievement in politics, business, and entertainment further entrenches this mindset, with public figures often praised for their ability to prioritize their own needs over the collective good. Selfish motivation is associated with negative outcomes in psychological well-being, physical health, and interpersonal relationships. [4].

Another factor contributing to the normalization of selfishness is the prevalence of social media and the rise of "personal branding." In the digital age, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn encourage individuals to curate and promote their own lives, often at the expense of genuine connection or consideration for others. The pressure to present an idealized, polished version of oneself can lead people to focus primarily on their own image and success. Self-promotion becomes an almost automatic part of daily life, and the idea of doing so for the benefit of others or for a broader social cause takes a backseat [7]. This environment rewards self-centered behavior, as individuals gain likes, followers, and recognition based on their ability to project an image of success, wealth, or happiness. Over time, this constant focus on the self-fosters a culture where selfishness is not only normalized but becomes a central part of personal identity.

A study found little to no causal effect of studying economics on social preferences and beliefs regarding others' social preferences. Despite this, there is a common perception that studying economics may lead individuals to become more self-interested and politically conservative [5]. The economic system itself, particularly in capitalist societies, has further reinforced the normalization of selfishness. Capitalism thrives on competition, where individuals and companies are incentivized to prioritize personal or corporate gain above other considerations. In such an environment, success is often

measured by wealth accumulation, productivity, and personal advancement, with little regard for the social or environmental consequences. As people engage in this competitive framework, they internalize the idea that being selfish is a necessary component of success. When people see others around them reaping the benefits of self-interest, they are more likely to adopt the same mindset, especially when the rewards for cooperation or altruism seem less tangible. The result is a culture where individuals are conditioned to view self-centeredness as a survival mechanism or as the key to achieving personal fulfillment.

Engaging in taking and receiving can imply a sense of inferiority, dependence, and incompetence, and it may convey the notion that one is a burden to others. These dynamics can lead to feelings of isolation, social disconnection, and loneliness, which can adversely affect psychological health, physical well-being, and interpersonal relationships. However, taking and receiving are not inherently negative. In certain situations, seeking and accepting help, as well as receiving support, can demonstrate that a person is valued by others and is cared for, fostering a sense of belonging and social connection that promotes health, well-being, and relationships [4].

Finally, the normalization of selfishness can also be attributed to the erosion of community bonds and the decline of collective responsibility in many parts of the world. As people become more isolated due to factors like urbanization, technological dependence, and changing family structures, there is less emphasis on shared values, empathy, and mutual support. Communities that once relied on interdependence and collaboration have been replaced by more fragmented, individualistic social structures [1]. In such environments, people are more likely to focus on their own needs and desires, as there are fewer social or communal pressures to act for the greater good. The decline of traditional social networks, such as extended families or neighborhood associations, has left many individuals without a sense of collective responsibility, further reinforcing the idea that looking out for oneself is the most practical and reliable approach to life. This erosion of social cohesion contributes to the normalization of selfishness, making it appear as an inevitable part of modern existence.

#### 4. Selfishness Is Myopic

Selfishness can be considered myopic as it tends to focus on short-term gains and immediate gratification while often overlooking the long-term consequences of actions [5]. When people act selfishly, they often prioritize their own needs, desires, or ambitions in the present moment without considering how these choices might impact their future or the well-being of others. For example, an individual may make decisions that provide instant rewards, such as pursuing personal wealth or status, without considering the social or environmental costs. Over time, this narrow focus on immediate outcomes can lead to unintended negative consequences, such

as weakened relationships, environmental degradation, or social inequality [1]. By neglecting to look beyond the present moment, selfishness blinds individuals to the broader, long-term implications of their behavior, which often results in harm to themselves and society as a whole.

Numerous studies have established an association between self-presentational concerns and risky health behaviors. Research indicates that motivations centered on self-interest are correlated with negative physical health outcomes. A meta-analysis shows a significant relationship between materialism and engagement in risky health behaviors, such as smoking and alcohol consumption [10].

Moreover, selfishness limits personal growth and the potential for a more fulfilling life by narrowing one's perspective to self-interest [7]. When individuals are consumed by their own desires, they often miss out on opportunities for deeper connections, collaboration, and self-improvement. True personal fulfillment rarely comes from selfish pursuits alone; rather, it is often found in experiences that foster empathy, cooperation, and shared goals [5]. For instance, investing in relationships, contributing to the community, or striving for a meaningful cause typically leads to a more profound sense of satisfaction and purpose than self-centered endeavors. By focusing solely on one's own needs, selfishness inhibits the growth of a broader perspective that can lead to more enriching and fulfilling experiences in life.

Selfishness is also myopic because it undermines social cohesion, ultimately making it more difficult for individuals to thrive within a community or society. In a world where people only look out for their own interests, there is little room for collaboration, mutual support, or collective problem-solving [11]. Healthy societies are built on a foundation of trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility, where individuals work together for the common good. When people act solely in their own self-interest, it erodes these bonds and creates a fragmented, divisive environment [6]. This short-sightedness prevents individuals from recognizing the value of working together to achieve broader, more meaningful goals that can lead to long-term prosperity and well-being for all members of society. In the absence of such cooperation, communities and societies are more prone to conflict, inequality, and stagnation.

Studies suggest that individuals with egoistic (versus altruistic) caregiving motivations typically provide lower levels of support to their partners, resulting in adverse effects for both the partner and the overall relationship. Furthermore, when these individuals do extend support, it frequently takes forms that fail to adequately address their partner's needs [4]. In Africa myopia is evident from the sequels of selfishness manifested in individuals and cohorts who enjoy transient benefits of tribal regimes, nepotism and other forms of favoritism over competency-based hegemonies [12]. On the contrary, other continents have reaped the benefits of having one language, one culture among other unifying factors. Africa is persevering the pervasive effects and side effects of

selfishness products like tribalism, religionism, nepotism, regionalism and other forms of divisive politics.

Additionally, selfishness is myopic because it tends to ignore the interconnectedness of people, ecosystems, and systems of power [11]. Actions that benefit one individual in the short-term may have far-reaching, negative effects on others or the environment in the long run. For example, a company that pursues profits by exploiting natural resources or workers may enjoy financial success in the short term, but this is often achieved at the expense of sustainability, social justice, and the health of the planet. Over time, such myopic behavior can result in broader systemic issues, such as environmental collapse, economic inequality, or social unrest [9]. By failing to recognize how actions affect others and the world at large, selfishness perpetuates a cycle of harm that ultimately undermines the very foundations of long-term prosperity and well-being for all [14]

Finally, selfishness is myopic because it ultimately diminishes one's ability to experience true connection and meaning in life. Relationships, community engagement, and a sense of purpose are often the key ingredients to a fulfilling existence [7]. However, when people are primarily focused on themselves, they miss the deeper, more profound rewards that come from giving, sharing, and investing in others. The more someone focuses on their own desires and achievements, the less likely they are to build authentic connections or contribute to causes that transcend personal gain. This shallow focus on immediate gratification, rather than long-term enrichment through relationships and shared experiences, leads to a sense of emptiness and isolation [11]. In the end, selfishness fosters a short-sighted existence where personal fulfillment remains elusive, as it prioritizes transient desires over lasting, meaningful connections and a deeper sense of purpose.

## 5. Selfishness Is Self-destruction

Selfishness is inherently self-destructive because, in focusing solely on one's own desires and needs, it often leads to a neglect of the very things that contribute to long-term happiness and well-being [13]. At its core, selfishness can breed isolation, as it places individual desires above the importance of relationships and community. By continually prioritizing oneself, a person risks alienating family, friends, and colleagues, which are often the sources of emotional support, happiness, and resilience in challenging times. While pursuing personal gain might seem satisfying in the short term, the lack of meaningful connections and the erosion of trust with others can lead to profound feelings of loneliness, stress, and eventual emotional or psychological burnout [1]. In this way, selfishness undermines the very foundations that make a fulfilling life possible, driving individuals toward a path of isolation and dissatisfaction.

Moreover, selfishness can lead to self-destructive behaviors by encouraging impulsive decisions that are motivated by short-term pleasure rather than long-term well-being [11]. For

example, a person consumed by selfish desires may engage in excessive spending, unhealthy eating habits, or risky behaviors, seeking immediate gratification at the expense of their physical, mental, or financial health [8]. Over time, these choices can result in serious consequences—poor health, financial instability, or a damaged reputation that could have been avoided had the individual considered the broader implications of their actions. In many ways, selfishness serves as a blindfold, obscuring the long-term consequences of immediate choices, and ultimately leading to a destructive cycle of poor decision-making and harm.

Elections influence the distribution of resources within society and serve as opportunities for political elites to make appeals based on the self-interests of voters [14]. Therefore, elections could undermine altruistic values and lead individuals to act in a more self-interested manner. The likelihood of a link between elections and selfish behavior is particularly significant in East Africa, a region where elections are seen as opportunities to decide which group will manage the country's resources and to establish whose time it is to "benefit." According to [15], additionally, investigate the transfers in the Dictator Game concerning different election proximities, particularly concentrating on ethnic divides and exclusively on Kenya. Especially in contexts where clientelism is prevalent, there could be an adverse cycle stemming from clientelism, an intensified emphasis on personal gain during elections, and self-serving decisions made by voters [13].

In Kenya, a person's ethnic background can often be inferred from their "home town." Research indicates that an individual's level of dispositional cynicism influences how observers perceive actions as driven by selfish motives. It's not the elections themselves but the competitive environment created by elections that diminishes altruistic behavior. The significant variations in the level of electoral competition between Kenya and Tanzania provide insight into this theory [14]. Research indicates that coethnic bias in generosity is not evident; however, ethnic divisions have a significant impact in other ways. In Kenya, the decrease in generosity observed during election periods is particularly notable among ethnic groups that lost the national election in 2007, such as the Luo, Luhya, and Kisii. In contrast, the Kikuyu, who were the winners of that election, do not demonstrate a decline in generosity during election times.

Selfishness also prevents personal growth and fulfillment, which are vital for overall well-being and self-actualization. When a person is solely focused on their own needs, they are less likely to develop empathy, compassion, and the capacity for meaningful self-reflection [13]. These qualities are crucial for navigating the complexities of life and developing a deeper sense of purpose. By constantly seeking to fulfill only their own desires, selfish individuals miss out on the transformative experiences that come from helping others, contributing to a greater cause, or working collaboratively with others toward shared goals. This lack of growth and the failure to look beyond oneself stunts emotional and spiritual devel-

opment, which can result in feelings of emptiness and an inability to cope with life's challenges [1].

The self-destructive nature of selfishness also extends to one's impact on the world around them [5]. In a society that thrives on cooperation, mutual respect, and collective action, selfishness undermines the potential for positive change. A person who constantly seeks to further their own interests, regardless of the consequences for others, may contribute to social inequality, environmental destruction, or the perpetuation of harmful systems [9]. Whether it's a corporation exploiting workers for profit or an individual ignoring the needs of their community, selfish actions erode social bonds and hinder collective progress. As these destructive patterns accumulate, they can eventually contribute to systemic failures that affect not only the individual but society at large, ultimately causing widespread harm that undermines the individual's own quality of life.

Finally, selfishness is self-destructive because it fosters a mindset of scarcity and fear, which limits opportunities for collaboration, growth, and success [13]. When individuals are consumed by self-interest, they view others as competitors rather than allies, which can lead to distrust and missed opportunities for collaboration. This mindset perpetuates feelings of insecurity, as the selfish person believes they must hoard resources or protect their position at all costs [11]. Ironically, this fear of loss and competition often leads to the very thing they fear—alienation, stagnation, and failure. In contrast, those who focus on shared success and mutual support often find that collaboration leads to greater rewards, not just for themselves but for everyone involved. The self-destructive nature of selfishness lies in its ability to narrow one's perspective, creating a cycle where fear, isolation, and poor decisions perpetuate long-term harm to the individual's life and relationships. The benefits of generosity for mental well-being span throughout a person's life [4].

## 6. Selfishness in the Dynamics of Team Sports

Selfishness in team sports like football, basketball, hockey, volleyball, and athletics can have a profoundly negative impact on team dynamics, ultimately leading to poor performance and disarray [1]. When a player prioritizes personal achievement over the success of the team, it disrupts the flow of the game and hinders effective teamwork. In sports such as basketball or football, where passing, communication, and collective strategy are paramount, an individual's refusal to share the ball or make the necessary assist can break down these critical team processes. Instead of working together to create scoring opportunities, selfish players often take ill-advised shots or try to dominate the game, leading to turnovers, missed opportunities, and a lack of cohesion. This can undermine the trust between teammates and make it more difficult to develop the synchronicity needed to win [12].

A team may include a highly talented player, but that individual's exceptional skills can be undermined by a tendency toward selfishness. There have been cases where a team with extraordinary talent has been defeated by a more average team, frequently due to a lack of teamwork and the selfish behaviors exhibited by certain team members [9]. Research indicates that individuals with grandiose narcissism might avoid recognizing their own poor mental health, physical condition, or relationship problems as they work to uphold their favorable self-perceptions and outward appearances [4]. You can't be a narcissist unless you have graduated in selfishness. Consequently, narcissists might be doing less well in these domains than they are willing to report.

Moreover, selfishness can negatively affect the morale of the entire team. In high-pressure environments like sports competitions, athletes rely on one another for support, both on and off the field. When a player is selfish, it creates an atmosphere of frustration, resentment, and alienation [5]. Teammates may feel undervalued, unappreciated, and disconnected, which can reduce their motivation to contribute to the team's success. In team-based sports such as volleyball or hockey, where coordination and trust are key, players are more likely to disengage from the game and perform below their potential when they feel their contributions are ignored. This lack of unity often results in diminishing individual performance as well, as the selfish player's actions can lower the overall level of energy and collaboration within the group [9].

In the context of athletics, while the competition is typically more individualistic, selfishness can still hinder team-based events like relay races or team-oriented track and field events [1]. A selfish athlete might neglect the necessary teamwork, preparation, or support needed for success in such events, whether it's proper baton handoffs in relay races or maintaining focus during field events. Such actions could lead to disqualification or poor performance, ultimately reflecting badly on the entire team's results. A self-centered mindset also harms the culture of the team, promoting a toxic atmosphere that prioritizes individual glory over the collective goal of achieving victory together [9]. In essence, selfishness disrupts the essential elements of team sports cooperation, trust, and mutual support and impedes the achievement of optimal outcomes. It has been observed that the fastest athletes often perform better in relays than in individual races.

Human social life is inherently interdependent, and individuals' well-being is significantly contingent upon the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of social bonds. Self-serving motivations can undermine these mutually supportive connections, whereas motivations rooted in teamwork promote the development of such essential relationships [13]. Therefore, being guided by teamwork and professional motivation is beneficial for oneself in many situations. In various social interactions and contexts, working collaboratively yields rewards, not only in terms of time or money but also in team achievements, overall health, mental well-being, and

supportive relationships. Research findings indicate that both providing and receiving support motivated by altruism can contribute to personal well-being, although this area has received less attention in studies. When individuals express gratitude for the support, assistance, and help they receive, they tend to feel more connected to those who provide it, which can enhance their well-being and foster positive relationships. Conversely, it is observed that selfishness can impede teamwork, adversely affect mental health, undermine physical well-being, and hinder the development of healthy relationships [4].

## 7. Could Selfishness Be Worse Than Racism, Tribalism, Religionism and Regionalism Combined

Selfishness subjugated unity, equality and equity eons ago. In its most pervasive and unchecked form, the trait can be seen as a force more damaging than racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism combined, precisely because it transcends these divides and often exploits them [5]. While racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism focus on distinct and often artificial categories of division between people, be it based on race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or geographic origin, selfishness is a deeply individualistic force that undercuts cooperation, empathy, and collective well-being [9]. In many ways, selfishness is the foundation upon which these other forms of division thrive, as it encourages people to prioritize their own needs over the common good. This self-centered mentality drives people to perpetuate prejudices and perpetuate systemic inequities, often fueling divisiveness and inequality rather than promoting unity or understanding. It is not confined to any particular group but is widespread, making it more insidious and harder to address than any other social ills. Notwithstanding their explicitness and extensive application, behavioral games have faced scrutiny concerning their external validity [7].

Furthermore, selfishness is an inherently corrosive force because it diminishes empathy, the very quality needed to bridge divides caused by racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism. These divisive ideologies, at their core, are built on the belief that some groups are inherently superior to others [14]. However, they can be countered through education, exposure, and shared human experiences. When individuals develop empathy for others, they can transcend the limitations of these identity-based divisions. Selfishness, on the other hand, undermines this possibility by reducing human interaction to transactions, where people view others through the lens of what they can offer or what can be taken [9]. In a world where everyone is consumed by their own desires, there is little space for understanding or solidarity across racial, tribal, religious, or regional boundaries. Selfishness turns people inward, rendering them incapable of seeing the humanity in others, thus solidifying the barriers that divide society.

In social relationships, individuals engage in a dynamic exchange characterized by both altruistic and self-serving behaviors. They possess the intrinsic capacity to navigate between self-interest and the interests of others, reflecting a complex interplay of motives in their interactions [11]. A fight-or-flight system that encourages self-preservation can be lifesaving in certain situations. However, for the species to thrive, humans have developed an innate ability to care for one another. People have evolved to function cooperatively in social groups, where mutual support is crucial. Therefore, it is logical that individuals are psychologically designed in a way that makes sacrifices for others bring satisfaction, even with its clear material costs, while being self-centered can lead to negative consequences, despite its immediate benefits [4].

Another reason selfishness could be worse than these forms of division is that it perpetuates a cycle of inequality and exploitation that is more difficult to challenge. Racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism are all based on inherited or socially constructed differences that can be dismantled through conscious effort, collective action, and social reform. Selfishness, however, is a deeply ingrained psychological trait that manifests in almost every aspect of human behavior from economic systems to personal relationships [9]. It creates systems of power and control that prioritize the needs and desires of the few over the many, often at the expense of vulnerable populations. For instance, selfishness in the form of corporate greed exacerbates social inequalities by prioritizing profits over the well-being of workers or the environment, creating a far-reaching impact that cannot be mitigated simply by changing social attitudes or policies aimed at reducing racism or tribalism. The scope of selfishness extends beyond identity-based divides, making it a far more complex and entrenched issue [1].

Selfishness also erodes the possibility of meaningful collective action, which is essential to addressing the deep-rooted issues caused by racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism. These divisions often require large-scale collaboration to address; for instance, combating systemic racism requires solidarity and collective efforts to reform laws, social institutions, and cultural narratives [14]. When selfishness dominates, it disrupts any potential for cooperative movements, as individuals are more concerned with their own interests than with the collective good. In contrast, individuals motivated by a sense of shared purpose, compassion, and selflessness are more likely to engage in the hard work of dismantling harmful ideologies and systems. A society fueled by selfishness would struggle to unite around common goals, as individuals would constantly act in their own self-interest, undermining any collective attempts at progress. In this way, selfishness is the greatest threat to social cohesion and to the very idea of working together to overcome prejudice and injustice [6]. Numerous studies indicate that, particularly for older adults, engaging in volunteering offers a variety of psychological advantages. In samples of the elderly, volunteering is regularly linked to increased positive emotions and happiness, as

well as reduced feelings of loneliness. [4].

In Africa the vices are evident from the sequels of selfishness manifested in individuals and cohorts who enjoy transient benefits of tribal regimes, nepotism and other forms of favoritism over competency-based hegemonies [12]. On the contrary, other continents have reaped the benefits of having one language, one culture among other unifying factors. Africa is persevering the pervasive effects and side effects of selfishness products like tribalism, religionism, nepotism, regionalism and other forms of divisive politics [15].

Lastly, selfishness feeds off the very fears and insecurities that often underpin racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism [1]. At its core, selfishness is driven by the desire for personal security, status, and control often at the expense of others. This desire can manifest in the form of xenophobia, nationalism, or religious intolerance, as people seek to protect their perceived privileges and resources from those they see as "other." When individuals and groups become consumed by selfishness, they are more likely to view differences as threats to their own position rather than as opportunities for growth and understanding [16]. This sense of scarcity and fear creates a fertile ground for the flourishing of divisive ideologies. In contrast, overcoming selfishness requires a shift toward collaboration, empathy, and shared human values, which can directly challenge the harmful mindset that perpetuates racism, tribalism, religionism, and regionalism. Therefore, selfishness acts as both a symptom and a perpetuator of these other social ills, making it a far more destructive force in the long run. The findings of numerous studies indicate that in everyday life, acts of giving frequently have advantages for those who give. It is linked to enhanced mental well-being, better physical health, lower mortality rates, and stronger relationships [10].

## 8. Love Conquers All

Generosity is a widely observed social behavior, even in individualistic cultures that tend to emphasize self-interest. Giving to others can be good for psychological health. Research shows that giving one's money or time boosts happiness and psychological well-being [16]. Love has the unique power to conquer selfishness because it fundamentally shifts an individual's focus from their own desires to the well-being of others. Selfishness is often driven by the pursuit of personal gain and immediate gratification, whereas love encourages a broader view of what matters in life empathy, connection, and sacrifice [18]. When we love someone, we willingly put their needs ahead of our own, showing concern for their happiness, health, and emotional welfare. This shift in perspective diminishes the self-centered approach that defines selfishness and replaces it with a willingness to act in ways that prioritize the other person's needs. True love does not come with expectations of reciprocation or personal gain, but with the genuine desire to see others thrive, thereby breaking the cycle of self-interest.

The consequences of giving and taking can vary based on

the underlying motivations, whether they stem from self-interest or concern for others [4]. Additionally, love fosters empathy, which is essential for overcoming selfishness. When we love, we open ourselves to understanding and feeling the emotions of others. This emotional connection allows us to see the world through someone else's eyes, breaking down the barriers created by selfishness. Empathy is a key antidote to the isolation and detachment that often accompany self-centered behavior. By feeling the joy, pain, or struggles of others, we are less likely to act in ways that harm or neglect them. Love, then, builds bridges between individuals, fostering deeper bonds that are rooted in mutual understanding and care, rather than competition or individual gain [17]. It is this empathy, born of love, that makes selfishness seem trivial and unnecessary when we begin to truly value the lives of those around us.

If giving is common in social behavior, then taking should be nearly as common since what is given must be received [5]. Economists, psychologists, and sociologists have compiled a significant body of literature that outlines the conditions surrounding generosity, examining the influence of communication, group size, reciprocity, altruism, trust, reputation, competition, and cooperation on behavior in economic games or when faced with theoretical social dilemmas. We theorize that individuals who feel positive or anticipate feeling positive about helping others, along with those who believe that giving will alleviate their own discomfort, truly care about the welfare of others; their positive feelings suggest motivations that are focused on others rather than on themselves. If this is the case, emotions may assist both scientists and everyday people in understanding the motivations behind acts of giving [6].

Love also teaches the importance of selflessness and sacrifice, both of which are direct challenges to the nature of selfishness [4]. Love requires individuals to make sacrifices, whether it's giving time, energy, resources, or emotional investment for the benefit of others. These acts of selflessness, though often small and seemingly insignificant in the grand scheme of things, create a foundation of trust and mutual respect. Through love, we come to understand that true fulfillment often comes from giving rather than receiving. In a selfish world, where personal desires and ambition are frequently placed above the needs of others, love acts as a counterforce, teaching us that the joy of making someone else happy is one of life's greatest rewards. By practicing selflessness, love transforms individuals and relationships, promoting cooperation over competition and long-term satisfaction over fleeting gratification [17].

Moreover, love cultivates patience and forgiveness, qualities that are rarely found in selfishness [1]. Selfishness often arises from a place of impatience wanting things on one's own terms and in one's own time, without regard for others. Love, on the other hand, requires the understanding that relationships are dynamic and involve growth, compromise, and occasional conflict. Love fosters the patience to endure through difficult times and the humility to forgive others when

they fall short [17]. These qualities directly challenge the rigidity of selfishness, which demands things be done according to one's own desires and timetable. Love, in all its forms, encourages the practice of grace and understanding, enabling individuals to let go of their need to control or manipulate situations for personal gain, and instead embrace the imperfections of both themselves and others. Research indicates that compassionate goals can be contagious; when individuals adopt compassionate goals, their relationship partners may develop similar goals over time. This phenomenon appears to positively influence the relationship and benefit each partner individually [4].

Finally, love has the power to transform entire communities, extending far beyond individual relationships [16]. When love flourishes in a society, it nurtures a culture of mutual support, collective responsibility, and shared well-being. In such a society, selfishness becomes less tolerated, as the collective good takes precedence over individual desires. Love encourages collaboration, where people work together not out of obligation but from a place of genuine care and concern for one another [18]. This communal mindset fosters a sense of belonging, purpose, and interdependence, creating a society where the pursuit of the common good is celebrated. In this way, love can reshape societal norms, transforming selfishness into a force of collective growth, compassion, and shared prosperity. It is through love that we learn that we are not isolated beings but part of a larger whole, where the well-being of one is intrinsically tied to the well-being of all [17].

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, selfishness as an endemic pandemic is not merely a personal failing but a societal ill that affects nearly every aspect of modern life. Its spread is fueled by a cultural and institutional landscape that prioritizes individual success over collective well-being, reinforcing divisions and inequalities. From the systematic research reviews and various research findings on selfish and otherish motivations, there is stark evidence consistent with the hypothesis that otherish motivation has benefits, and selfish motivation has costs. To combat this pandemic, there must be a collective shift in values, where empathy, cooperation, and shared responsibility are championed over personal gain. Only by confronting the systemic roots of selfishness can we hope to heal the societal wounds it has inflicted and foster a world where the common good is prioritized alongside individual aspirations. Recognizing and appreciating our human and environmental interdependence can serve as a catalyst for transformative change, fostering a more harmonious and connected world.

## Abbreviations

STG Short-Term Gains

LTS Long-Term Sustainability

## Author Contributions

Salim Omambia Matagi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Disclaimer

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

## Consent

It is not applicable.

## Ethical Approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the publisher. The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) established.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## References

- [1] Almås, I., Cappelen, A. W., Sørensen, E. Ø., & Tungodden, B. (2025). *Global evidence on the selfish rich inequality hypothesis*. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2109690119/-DCSupplemental>
- [2] Lien, T. T. H., Anh, T. T., Anh, T. N., Anh, L. H. T., & Thao, N. T. T. (2022). Selfish personalities influencing start-up intention and motivation: a study of Vietnam. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-022-00208-5>
- [3] Yamaguchi, M., & Moriguchi, Y. (2020). Children Demonstrate Selfishness in the Presence of Their Personified Objects. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 40(1), 52-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276236620901345>
- [4] Crocker, J., Canevello, A., & Brown, A. A. (2017). Social Motivation: Costs and Benefits of Selfishness and Otherishness. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 68, 299-325. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010416-044145>

- [5] Girardi, D., Mamunuru, S. M., Halliday, S. D., & Bowles, S. (2024). Does studying economics make you selfish? *Southern Economic Journal*, 90(3), 792-814. <https://doi.org/10.1002/soej.12672>
- [6] Carlson, R. W., Adkins, C., Crockett, M. J., & Clark, M. S. (2022). Psychological Selfishness. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(5), 1359-1380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211045692>
- [7] Gloster, A. T., Rinner, M. T. B., & Meyer, A. H. (2020). Increasing prosocial behavior and decreasing selfishness in the lab and everyday life. *Scientific Reports*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-78251-z>
- [8] Wegemer, C. M. (2020). Selflessness, Depression, and Neuroticism: An Interactionist Perspective on the Effects of Self-Transcendence, Perspective-Taking, and Materialism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.523950>
- [9] Santiago-Torner, C., Corral-Marfil, J. A., Jiménez-Pérez, Y., & Tarrats-Pons, E. (2025). Impact of Ethical Leadership on Autonomy and Self-Efficacy in Virtual Work Environments: The Disintegrating Effect of an Egoistic Climate. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15010095>
- [10] Dittmar H, Bond R, Hurst M, Kasser T. (2014). The relationship between materialism and personal well-being: a meta-analysis. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 107: 879-924.
- [11] Kaufman, S. B., & Jauk, E. (2020). Healthy Selfishness and Pathological Altruism: Measuring Two Paradoxical Forms of Selfishness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01006>
- [12] Ojiaku, P. (2018). Wake up Africa: The continent will change when the notion of her citizens change.
- [13] Sembakutti, P., Sheen, J., & Johnson, S. G. B. (2023). *Selfish perceptions of selfless actions: How prosocial motivations are interpreted between the self and other.*
- [14] Bjorvatn, K., Galle, S., Berge, L. I. O., Miguel, E., Posner, D. N., Tungodden, B., & Zhang, K. (2021). Elections and selfishness. *Electoral Studies*, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102267>
- [15] Isa Ali Ibrahim. (2023). *Skills Rather Than Just Degrees* (1st ed.). University Press PLC. Ibadan.
- [16] Berge, L. I. O., Bjorvatn, K., Galle, S., Miguel, E., Posner, D. N., Tungodden, B., Zhang, K., (2020). Ethnically biased? Experimental evidence from Kenya. *J. Eur. Econ. Assoc.* 18(1), 134-164. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvz003>
- [17] Impett, E. A., Park, H. G., & Muise, A. (2024). Popular Psychology Through a Scientific Lens: Evaluating Love Languages From a Relationship Science Perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 33(2), 87-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214231217663>
- [18] Cassepp-Borges, V., Gonzales, J. E., Frazier, A., & Ferrer, E. (2023). Love and Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Romantic Relationship Stages. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00333-4>