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Chimpanzees seek help, but not strategically

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Abstract

Seeking help can be a highly adaptive behavior. From an evolutionary perspective, strategic help-seeking can significantly improve an individual's fitness. However, it has not yet been investigated whether our closest living relatives –chimpanzees– seek help strategically.

In Study 1, we investigated whether chimpanzees seek help selectively when they need it. Chimpanzees (N=19) sought help when it was necessary, but not if they could solve the problem themselves (Chi2(1)=30.821, p<.001).

In Study 2, we investigated whether chimpanzees seek help strategically: Do they consider action-related costs of potential helpers as much as they consider their own? Chimpanzees (N=14) had a preference for a low-cost option when they had to obtain a reward on their own, but not when they sought help from others (Chi2(1)=7.989, p=.005).

These findings imply that chimpanzees seek help when they need it, but they do not strategically consider other's costs when deciding whom to seek help from.