

# Effect of child rearing styles on pro-social development



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## PROSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT 1

### COMPARISON OF CHILD-REARING STYLES AND THE EFFECTS THEREOF ON PROSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

There are many factors that play a role in the development of prosocial behaviour in children. The two participants that I used are both mothers of 3 year old children. One of them is a stay at home mom with one child (a girl), and the other is a single mom, working full time, with two children (both boys), one of whom is autistic (the oldest child).

An Authoritative parenting style is generally considered the most successful parenting style, and is associated with the development of prosocial behaviours. Research participant 1 scored higher than Research participant 2 on the Authoritative and Authoritarian scale, however, the child of Research Participant 2 scored higher on the prosocial scale. This difference could be due to several other factors, besides the parenting styles, including family situation and context.

The child of Research participant 2 is the youngest of two boys, the older of which has severe autism. Due to the fact that his brother is ill, this little boy has learnt from an early age to care for others. He is very caring of his older brother, and helps his mother with him a lot. This has taught him to be caring towards others, and to consider their needs, as well as his own. This has flowed over into his interactions with other children and people he meets / socialises with.

Parenting styles play an important role in the development of prosocial behaviour in children, and even though the child of Research participant 1 scored lower than the child of Research participant 2 on the prosocial scale, she is still a caring and loving little girl, who displays prosocial behaviour. There are however, many other factors that influence these behaviours in children.

## PART B

### INTRODUCTION

Because of the importance of the consequences of aggression, criminality and immorality for society, not much importance was placed on prosocial development prior to 1970. Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) define prosocial behaviour as “voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another”. Prosocial acts include sharing, helping others and comforting others. There are many reasons why people act prosocially, but the subgroup of prosocial behaviours labelled as altruism is considered to be very important. Eisenberg & Mussen (1989) define altruism as being “intrinsically motivated, voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another; acts motivated by internal motives such as concern for others, or by internalised values, goals and self-reward or the avoidance of punishment”. However, because it is difficult to determine whether altruism or a less noble motivation drives the behaviour, a broader focus needs to be taken.

### CULTURAL FACTORS

It is evident from various research that environment plays a big role in the development of prosocial behaviour, and research on the cultural bases of prosocial responding provides insight into the role of the environment in the development of prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

Anthropological literature and Psychological studies in non-Western cultures clearly indicate that societies vary greatly in the degree to which prosocial and cooperative behaviours are normative (Mead, 1935). These studies show that some cultures value prosocial behaviours while there are some cultures in which prosocial behaviour is rare and hostility and cruelty is the norm. It is difficult to make cross-cultural comparisons as there seems to be differences across cultures with respect to the degree to which children display prosocial behaviour.

## THE FAMILY

Another influence in the development of prosocial behaviour in children is their parents. Children model their parents behaviour, so if the parents tend to display prosocial behaviour, the children will develop prosocial behaviour. Parental practices, beliefs, characteristics and emotional atmosphere at home plays a role in the development of prosocial behaviour. Staub (1992) found that prosocial behavioural development is enhanced by a connection to others, exposure to parental warmth, adult guidance and children's participation in prosocial activities.

In their study on the relationship between parenting styles, parental practices, sympathy on prosocial behaviours in adolescents, Gustavo et al. (2007) found strong evidence that parenting practices were closely related

to prosocial behaviour. They did find however, that the associations occurred mostly through the indirect relations with sympathy.

Dunsmore et al. (2009) conducted a study to determine whether a mothers expressive style and specific emotional responses to their children's behaviour is linked to their children's prosocial ratings. The results of their study show that the mothers positive and negative expressiveness is related to the child's lower prosocial self-rating, and the mothers happiness about the child's prosocial behaviour is associated with the child's higher self-ratings for prosocial self-rating.

#### CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) believe that social cognition and prosocial behaviour should at least be modestly correlated, and this has been shown to be true in studies, as prosocial children are more sociable, well regulated, low impulsivity and are not shy or anxious. " Prosocial children are also able to communicate and resolve their own needs, feel guilt and remorse about wrongdoing, exercise self-control when tempted to do wrong, and feel compassion for others (Hoffman, 1970; Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez, 1989).

Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) also believe that emotion plays a vital role in the development of prosocial values, motives and behaviours, with empathy-related emotions playing a larger role. There are various definitions of empathy, but Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) define empathy as an " affective response that stems from the apprehension / comprehension of another's

emotional state / condition, and that it is identical / very similar to what the other person is feeling / would be expected to feel”.

Many theorists argue that some or all humans are born with an innate ability to feel / exhibit altruistic behaviour, thereby being biologically predisposed to experience empathy and develop prosocial behaviour, including smaller children.

Many twin studies have been done to determine whether prosocial tendencies are inherited. Matthews et al. (1986) and Rushton et al. (1986) believed that if the correlation is higher for identical twins than for fraternal twins, then the difference can be attributed to heritability / genetics. Their study involved self-reported data from adults, and they found that 50% of the variance in the twin's empathy, altruism and nurturance was accounted for by genetic factors. The other 50% difference was accounted for by differences in the twin's environment.

There are also studies that have been done on the neurophysiological underpinnings of prosocial behaviour. Panskepp (1986) believes that the nurturant dictates of brain systems that mediate social bonding and maternal care is what leads to mammalian helping behaviour. Maclean (1985) believes that the limbic system is responsible for maternal behaviour, affiliation and play, which in turn forms the basis for altruism.

During the second year the prefrontal functions increase, which enables the child to identify which feelings are his / hers or which feelings belong to someone else. Researchers propose that (based on Keller's 2007 model of culturally informed development pathways), depending on the socio-cultural  
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context, toddlers may follow different pathways to the same development outcome, for example, prosocial development.

In their study using longitudinal genetic analysis, Knafo & Plomin (2006) found that genetics account for change and continuity in prosocial behaviour. Clark & Ladd (2000) found that prosocial children are relatively well-adjusted and have better peer relationships than children low in prosocial behaviour.

## CONCLUSION

Prosocial development in children is a complex multidimensional issue. Many factors play a role in the development of prosocial behaviours, and emphasis should not be placed on a single factor to the exclusion of others. Culture, family and genetics are but some of the factors or environments that influence the development of empathy, which in turn aids in the development of prosocial behaviour. All these factors should be considered together when determining what plays a role in prosocial development.