

Effecting Factors and Intervention Techniques of Children's Prosocial Behavior

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Abstract: Prosocial behavior is a common social phenomenon. Prosocial behavior refers to a type of behavior that conforms to social expectations and has no obvious benefit to the actor himself, while the actor voluntarily brings benefits to the recipient. It is an important factor to form and maintain a good relationship between people who affirmed and encouraged by human society. This essay mainly focuses on factors that influence children's prosocial behavior which include children's personal factors, family factors, and peer factors. A comprehensive understanding and explanation of prosocial behavior might be made after considering various motivational factors. And the interventions in children's prosocial behavior will also be clarified.

1. Introduction

The term prosocial behavior was first proposed by the American social psychologist Eisenberg in 1998 [1]. It is used to refer to the behaviors that are opposite to the negative behaviors such as aggression and can benefit others and the society. Prosocial behavior is essentially altruistic behavior; however, this kind of behavior has different motives. Some of them have obvious or subtle egoism, such as the good self-experience of helping others, obtain rewards or satisfaction, which is called self-altruism (ego-altruism); some are pure-altruism, that is, helping others for their happiness without any consideration for actor's own gain or loss. The promotion of children's prosocial behavior helps children better carry out interpersonal communication and adapt to the society, so as to lay a foundation for children's lifelong development. Detailly, the development of prosocial behavior helps them integrate into their environment much better. The friendly behavior is the signal of friendship and alliance, which can trigger the positive emotion of the object on communication and help to form a closer interpersonal relationship in the communication process. Children who exhibit prosocial behavior tend to be more success in social activities. Also, receiving thanks and praise from others for prosocial behaviors can give children satisfaction on the sense of competence and value, thus forming a positive sense of themselves.

At present, there are a lot of researches study on children's prosocial behavior, which mainly focus on the developmental process and influencing factors. In this paper, we aim to explain the effecting

factors of children's prosocial behavior from the perspectives of personal factors, family factors, and peer factors. And the interventions in children's prosocial behavior will also be clarified.

2. Personal Factors

Previous evidence suggests children's sympathy play very important roles in their prosocial behavior. Sympathy is a quintessential moral emotion, and it has been considered as an important cause of moral behavior. According to Eisenberg, empathy-related responding, particularly sympathy, have frequently been related to children's moral, social competence, and prosocial action [1]. For example, caring about a victim's fate can aggravate one's sympathy and thereby support the child's prosocial action tendency. However, a study done by Miller et al. [2] had proved sympathy doesn't affect prosocial behaviors by itself but moral motivation plays a role in the relation between sympathy and prosocial behavior. Because sympathy is a quintessential moral emotion, children's moral motivations may have an impact on sympathy and they can lead to differences in prosocial behavior. In the present essay, we conceptualized moral motivation as the willingness to abide by a moral rule which is considered to be valid, even if this motivation is conflict with other amoral desires and motives. Moral motivation implies children not only understand, but also accept these moral norms. Malti et al [3] assessed children's moral motivation by emotion attribution and their justification following moral transgressions and explored the effects of sympathy and moral motivation on prosocial behavior of children. The results indicated that both moral motivation and sympathy have independent influence on prosocial behavior, children with have a high level of prosocial moral motivation and sympathy were more prosocial than those with low sympathy. On the other hand, moral motivation has a mediator effect between sympathy and prosocial behavior, the group of children who have a low level of prosocial moral motivation was not different in presocial behavior whether they have high or low sympathy.

Gene also relates to prosocial behavior in children. Several recent studies have proved that the oxytocin receptor (OXTR) is a notable factor which influences adults other-oriented emotions and behaviors[4-7]This fact leads to the hypothesis that the OXTR gene might influence children's prosocial behavior as well. Some researchers have proved that children must consider other's mental states before they perform other-oriented behavior, typically referring to a theory of mind ability [8] which means to attribute mental states to oneself and other individuals as a method of making sense of and predicting behavior. A better theory of mind ability could help children understand others' feelings, therefore, lead to prosocial behavior [9]. There are individual differences in theory of mind ability, the twin studies have proved that the differences could be attributed to genetic factors. According to Wu and Su [10], the OXTR gene plays an important role in explaining individual differences in children's prosociality for the reason that the OXTR gene was associated with different subtypes of children's theory of mind ability and indirectly affect their prosociality.

3. Family Factors

In addition to personal factors, family factors also play a very important role in children's prosocial behavior. The typical family factors include parenting style, parental sensitivity, attachment and family structure.

Parenting style including two broad types, the positive parenting and negative parenting. Positive parental qualities refer to the parents show affection and support to their children and express interest and care to children's needs [11]. The positive parenting offer children feelings of security, trust and protection [12]. This kind of feeling enhance children's connection with other and lower their self-oriented concerns. Parents offer a model of emotional concern through positive parenting and comforting behavior are more likely to be emulated by children [13]. Besides, positive parenting can

scaffold children's sensitivity by leading their attention to understand their own and others' emotions and needs. The warmth of the mother-child relationship may enhance children's perception in parental information, thereby promoting the internalization of parental values related to respect and care for others [14]. While negative parenting increasing children's feeling of insecurity, this feeling makes children pay less attention on other's emotion which leads to the lack of empathy.

Parental sensitivity refers to the ability to correctly interpret and respond appropriately to children's signals [15], and it could be considered paly an essential role in parenting style, positive parenting often means sensitive parenting. Sensitive parenting indicated that parents are usually able to give warm, supportive and positive response to children's changes or needs. The sensitivity of parents to the implied meaning of children's behaviors could help children build up social-cognition awareness, and further enable children to form their own prosocial behaviors through learning and imitation to parents' prosocial behaviors. Therefore, it is obviously that the children's prosocial behavior relates to parental sensitivity. Newton et al[16] investigated among a large national sample of American children showed that paternal sensitivity was related to children's subsequent prosocial behavior, moreover, compared with father's sensitive parenting, the children's prosocial behavior has bidirectional relationship with maternal sensitivity. Also, with higher education level, parents tend to have greater parental sensitivity (especially mother) which can cause children's prosocial behavior more often.

Children's attachment also relates to prosocial behavior in children. Ainsworth [17] defined attachment as "the affectional tie of a child to her caregiver", this tie has to be long lasting, emotionally salient, person specific. Children has the attempts to use caregiver as a secure base whenever it comes to the time of threat. This leads to a concept of Internal Working Model [18] which describe the development of mental representations, specifically the worthiness of the self and expectations of others' reactions to the self. This model incorporated into generalization of other people, such as the nature of relationships and trustworthy which guide children's behavior in social situation. Secure Internal Working Model means the children would response social partners' expectations and believe others are well-intentioned [19]. These representations support children's prosocial behavior by instilling a view of others are worthy of care and arousing altruistic motivation. Conversely, insecure Internal Working Model of children can undermine prosocial behavior by considering other's behaviors are hostile.

Family structure is another role in the development of children's prosocial behavior. The different rate of development of children's prosocial behavior have a close relationship with children's adjustments of their family. Single parents and stepfamilies frequently face pronounced social and financial difficulties, and risks associated with parental mental health and wellbeing [20]. For example, research has showed in single- and step-parent family parents usually have higher risk of depression, depressed parents may be less likely to respond sensitively to their children s needs, and to monitor effectively their behavior, also including prosocial behaviors. Meanwhile, based on the study of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood on 4-year-old children, in different family environments, mothers' perceptions of their children's adaptability varied on average, with children from single-parent and stepparent families having higher levels of problems and lower prosocial scores than children from non-stepparent families. From which we can see the big impact the family structure caused on the development of children's prosocial behavior. The adjustment problems raised in single- and step-parent families may influence the prosocial behaviors of children.

4. Peer Factors

The one great group of people that children spend most time with is their peer. The interaction with peer provides children with social support and help to shape children's prosocial behavior.

The central group of peers defined as a group occupies a central location within the large social network [21]. The visibility of central group can be both positive (i.e., prosocial) and negative (i.e., aggressive, antisocial). Since central groups are the trend setters in school, they have highly influence with their peer members. To make sure the visible of central group, those deviant behavior and school misconduct would be magnified which causes the negative effect of children's prosocial behavior. On the other side, the central group, in order to protect their well-liked position, these groups tend to use prosocial strategies combined with positive affect because others would likely to enjoy the company and wish to join the group [22]. This leads to the inculcation of prosocial behavior of children. Therefore, it can be inferred that the influence of the central group of peers on children's prosocial behaviors may be influenced by the relationship between children and the central group. When children are in or close to the central group, prosocial behaviors may increase. On the other hand, prosocial behavior is likely to decrease if the child is farther away from the center group of the school.

The friendship features have great effect on children's prosocial behavior especially those who have not attended the age for school[23]. The study has found an association between support in friendship and positive social behavior[24]. This relationship, to be specific, is the cause and effect relationship which means a supportive friendship is the prerequisite of children's prosocial behavior.

5. Intervention Methods of Children's Prosocial Behavior

We have introduced the factors that influencing children's prosocial behaviors from different perspectives. In the current research, many researchers are interested in how to intervene and influence children's prosocial behaviors. Childhood is the critical period of prosocial development, however, due to the influence of "self-centered" personality, many children results in poor relationships with other people--- lack of compassion and other bad behavior. Especially now in many countries, there is only one child in one family, and some parents only pay attention to the physical care of their children and imparting certain kind of knowledge, ignoring the cultivation of some good social behaviors. If good interventions cannot be given on children's prosocial behavior, the result can be a damage to both children and society.

Behavioral parent training (BPT) has been widely used to intervene the children with antisocial behavior problems, and have been proven to be the most effective intervention method. The Incredible Years parent training [25] is a very useful program belongs to BPT, it has a special group-based format. In the IYPT training, the group leader will watch the videos of how the parents interact with the children in different kinds of situations and discuss with the parents, parents learn specific skills through the discussion and apply these skills into the actual process of getting along with the children. The IYPT training for parents to use behavioral techniques can affect their children's behavior and gives them chance to review their behaviors towards children and put learned techniques into practice through role-plays. Seabra-Santos et al [26] randomly assigned 124 children to an intervention group or a control group. In the intervention group, the parents were conducted with 14 session IYPT, The parents in the intervention group were taught to use interactive parenting strategy actively, so as to improve the mental health and a variety of prosocial behavior of children, while in the control group, either the children and their parents didn't accept any study plan. The results showed that the children in the intervention group had significantly improved social skills and prosocial behavioral, and the children's parents had improved self-confidence and parenting practice. In the meta-analyses research done by Menting et al [27], the IYPT was been proved as a very effective intervention since it successfully improved children's behavior by improving parents plans. Mean effect sizes were larger than that based on parents' or teachers' judgments. However, in this study, the sample size is not big enough to represent all of the situations. Also, the long-term effects

of IYPT had not been examined in this study either. So, in the future study, we recommend examine the long-term effects by within-group comparisons since it's very important to optimize maintenance of children's prosocial behavior.

Another intervention is done by operating the music. The hypothesis given by researcher in a study [28] is music has evolved into a tool which can increase prosocial behavior by fostering social bonding and group cohesion. In their research, they use the within-subject research method comparing the same group of 4-year-old children in the condition of having same level of social and linguistic interaction with or without music to support this hypothesis. Result shows that children in the musical condition showed greater empathy and social commitment than children who are not in a musical condition which supports the hypothesis said above. However, the explanation of why music has influence on children's prosocial behavior has not given in this study. Future research could focus on exploring the mechanisms of musical interventions.

6. Conclusion

Prosocial behavior of individuals is gradually formed in the process of socialization, the development of prosocial behavior can help children blend into the surrounding environment, access to more interpersonal relationship. Therefore, the development of children's prosocial behavior can make children better interpersonal and social adaptation, also will impact the sociality of adult period. From the previous of our summary, children's prosocial behavior would be affected by many factors, including children's individual empathy, the way of attachment between children and their parents, etc. Moreover, the impact of these factors may not separately on the development of children's prosocial behavior, but in a way of interaction in the process of development. For children with prosocial problems, BPT, especially IYTP, is considered to be an effective intervention method, while music therapy is also considered to be promising, and the current intervention should pay more attention to the differences with individual and try to find more alternative intervention methods.

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