

Prosocial Behaviours Exhibited by 3 to 6 Year Old Children In Pre-primary Schools of India

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Abstract

Young children can often be seen accompanying the adult to clean the house, to hang the clothes, to set the dining table and so on. It may appear unjustifiable for some to designate terms like helping, sharing, comforting and so on to young children as they cannot verbalise their intentions. Yet, certain intentions can be understood from the acts performed by the children. Prosocial behaviors like that of helping, sharing, cooperating, comforting, and informing form a very important part of social interactions in human beings. In this study, an effort has been made to understand four different types of other-oriented behaviors, exhibited by 3 to 6 years old children, in the pre-primary school settings of India. The data provided is based on narratives given by teachers of *anganwadis* and pre-primary schools. The children were found to exhibit these behaviours not just towards the adults, but also while having interactions with their peers. The implications of the study in the field of pre-primary and primary education have also been discussed.

Key words: *Prosocial behaviour; Helping; Sharing; Comforting; Informing; Early childhood education*

Major psychoanalytic theories like that of Freud, and cognitive theories like that of Piaget, portray young children as primarily being self-centred and egocentric. Attributing terms like helping, sharing, comforting and so on to acts performed by young children may appear unjustified to people who designate these terms for people old enough to verbalise their intentions. According to Bruner (1974), young children tend to display behaviours from which the intentions of the acts can be deciphered.

Prosocial behaviour refers to voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit other individuals or group of individuals (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989). Thus the acts of helping, sharing, comforting and informing all come under the broader umbrella of an act that can be described as prosocial. Children in the first three years of life are reported to help (Rheingold, 1982), share (Rheingold et.al, 1976), and comfort another in case of distress (Hoffman,

1981). Helping can be any action performed to facilitate the acquisition of another person's goal (Dahl, 2015). This behavior has been seen to emerge as early as the second year of life. Most infants at 14 months of age were seen to retrieve an out of reach object for the researcher (Warneken and Tomasello, 2006). Human infants understand that the other person is in need from their first year of life and begin to act upon those needs during the second year of life (Köster et al., 2016). In the second year of life, children get opportunities to participate in basic household chores, for which they are being praised or thanked by the parents (Dahl, 2015). These scaffolding provided by the parents act as an encouragement for the child to be more prosocial. Studies conducted by Warneken and Tomasello (2008) show that children are intrinsically motivated to help each other from the second year of life and external rewards undermine the already present intrinsic

motivation in children. Parenting practices in different cultures have an influence on children's helping. Infants in non-western families may understand helping as an interpersonal responsibility which has to be performed as a duty, but infants in the western context may understand helping as a matter of personal choice (Giner et al., 2017). It is easier for children to help in emotion-based and action-based tasks, compared to tasks where the child has to give up something (Svetlova, Nicholas and Brownell, 2010). Helping is also shaped by children's own experiences with the person who needs help, for example children do not help those who have previously harmed others and their help is based on the social interactional experiences that they had during previous occasions (Vaish, Carpenter and Tomasello, 2010).

“Helping others by expending a few ergs of energy like fetching a dropped pen is one thing, but sharing valuable resources with them is another” says Warneken and Tomasello (2009). The situations where a child gives his/her belongings to another can be termed as sharing. Forms of cooperation and sharing were studied with 12, 18 and 24 month old children by Hay, (1979). In the course of the second year of life, both sharing and cooperation were found to increase in a play setting where the children were interacting with their parents. Sharing behaviour starts right from the second year of life, when the recipient explicitly communicate the need to the child (Brownell et al, 2009). Sharing in children depends on the relationship that the children have with the recipients (Moore, 2009; Fehr et al., 2008) and on the socialisation practices followed in their culture (Rochatt et al., 2009; Robbins and Rochatt, 2011). 3-year-old children were seen to share most equally with a peer after they have worked together actively to obtain rewards in collaboration task, even when those rewards could easily be monopolised (Warneken et al, 2010).

Addressing the emotional need of the other can be termed as Comforting. In order to comfort another individual, the child should be able to identify other's emotional needs. Human children are born with certain innate reflexes that cause distress on hearing another's cry (Hoffman, 2000, 1981). Empathy-based concern develops after the child is able to differentiate between the self and the other, which happens by the time the child turns 1 year old. By about 2 to 3 years, they have rudimentary awareness that others have inner states independent of theirs, and by about 6 to 9 years, the children are aware that others have their own identities outside the immediate situations (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989). Hoffman (1981) suggests that, developmentally, at different stages, children react differently on seeing the other in distress. Children who are less than a year old respond to other's distress as though they themselves were in pain. Children between the age group of 1 and 2 years try to console others by doing things that would please themselves, for example, bringing a toy that comforts the child him/ herself. In the later stages of life, children understand others as having independent inner mental states and react accordingly. Kienbaum (2001) conducted a study with 5 to 6 year old German children in kindergarten where it was found that the children showed more comforting behaviour in classes where they had teachers who were warm and affectionate.

Informing is passing relevant information to someone who is in need. It can be performed either prosocially or communicatively to pass on interesting information. Human infants start informing from as early as twelve months of age by using natural gestures like pointing (Tomasello, 2009). Infants, at twelve months of age, point cooperatively to share their interest as well as to provide information to a communicative partner (Liszkowski et al, 2005).

The Present Study: Settings, Participants and Methodology

Most of the studies investigating pro-sociality are conducted with European and North American children in a laboratory setting. Very few researches have explored the occurrences of prosocial behaviour in natural settings. There is a major paucity of researches investigating pro-sociality of children in India. The present study, discussed here, is part of a larger study conducted to understand manifestations of prosocial behaviour in children of 1 to 6 years of age. In this paper, an attempt has been made to describe prosocial behaviour exhibited by children of 3 to 6 year in pre-primary school settings. Teachers from four different *anganwadi* and three different pre-primary schools (a private pre-primary school, a government aided pre-primary school run by Christian missionary and an International pre-primary school), situated in the Kannur district of Kerala in India, were interviewed in order to get an understanding of the different prosocial behaviors exhibited by children in *anganwadi*/ pre-primary school settings. Fourteen female teachers (four *anganawadi* teachers and 10 teachers from pre primary schools) participated in the interviews. Teachers were asked to provide examples of other-oriented behaviours like helping, sharing, comforting and informing that they have observed in children. *Anganwadi* is the terminology used to denote Indian pre-primary schools set up by the government to provide free education, care and food for children who are in their early childhood stage. Children who are admitted in the *anganwadi* mainly came from economically weaker sections of the society, whereas the pre-primary schools had children coming from middle class as well as upper class sections of the society. *Anganwadi* has got children from 3 to 6 years of age sitting together in one single class, however the private pre-primary schools have got sections like play areas for 3 to 4 year olds, lower kindergarten mainly for 4 to 5 year olds and upper kindergarten for 5 to 6 year olds. The narratives provided by the

teachers were transcribed and analysed for emerging common themes.

Major Findings of the Study

The descriptions of different prosocial behaviours exhibited by the children are given below and are based on the narratives provided by the teachers.

Helping: Teachers of the *anganwadis* have mentioned that children help and cooperate with them in cleaning the school premises by plucking grasses and weeds, help in spreading the mats for sleeping, pick up fallen things, help in putting toys back in the toy bin after playing. Children cooperate with each other and pool their energy and resources in moving heavy objects like tables/ stools, in stacking up chairs and so on. Children help each other by retrieving bags and slippers for others, picking up fallen or forgotten things, fetching others' water bottles, helping younger children if they have difficulty in closing or opening caps of their water bottles, combing each other's hair, assisting another in putting on clothes after visiting the toilet. Children who are in the play section of the government-aided pre-primary school help the teacher in spreading sleeping mats on the floor, picking up things that are fallen and unnoticed by the teacher, and stacking chairs. They also help each other by fetching water bottles, remind each other to take their belongings, help in keeping snack boxes back in the bag if someone is unable to do it and so on. Children in the kindergarten sections of all pre-primary schools help the teacher by distributing crayons and books in the class. The teacher of the International pre-primary school says that if a child is unable to remember and write the alphabet in a sequence, then some other child comes and helps them out. The children cooperate with each other whenever they do some exercises given in the text books and while colouring during the art class. They even motivate each other to complete their work.

Sharing: The teachers of the *anganwadis* and pre-primary schools have provided illustrations that help to understand that children do share, but not every time and not everything. Some children share things like pencil, rubber and so on, when they see that others don't have it, and some only share when the teacher asks them to. In case of toys, if there is a single toy, then children can end up fighting for that. Similarly, children have difficulty in sharing some special food/ snacks or chocolates that they have bought from their home.

Comforting: The narrations given by the teachers show clearly that children are very forthcoming in comforting their peers when they are distressed. Children, at all the institutes studied, comfort their peers by wiping off their tears and by enquiring and consoling them by saying things like, "don't cry, your mother will come soon", or by asking "what happened? who hurt you?" The intensity of comforting is seen to be higher among siblings and children coming from the same home. The siblings who come to the *anganwadi* are seen to be extra caring and protective towards each other. The twin brothers (at the pre-primary school run by Christian missionary) who were admitted in different classes met during lunch breaks and hugged and consoled each other on seeing the other cry. Children enquire if they see that the teacher is hurt, and in one situation, a teacher has even mentioned that the child went and told his parents and bought balm for the teacher to apply.

Informing: From the illustrations so provided by the teachers, it can be understood that across the institutions studied, most children inform when someone is searching for something, if they find something that belongs to someone, if they come to know that a peer has not got something while distributing in the class or if a peer lacks a pencil or gets hurt. Thus, it can be seen that prosocial informing is prevalent in children right from the age of three, when they are in the play sections of the school.

Responses given by the teachers to students showing prosocial behaviour

Teachers appreciate the children who demonstrate different acts of prosocial behavior (particularly when they help), by giving both tangible and intangible rewards and privileges. The most common reinforcers are: verbal praise like saying good boy/good girl, by saying thank you or by giving sweets or a hug. It is also noteworthy that the praise given by the teachers provides encouragement and also boosts up the confidence of the children. In the words of one teacher, "getting appreciation from the teacher is like winning a lottery for the children." Material rewards are also given by the teachers of the pre-primary schools like sweets, or a sticker, or a star. The tradition of sticking a star on the child's hand was mostly seen in the international pre-primary schools. One of the teachers at the kindergarten section of the pre-primary missionary school says that she always use to give sweets to the children whenever they helped her, for example, by carrying stacks of books to the staffroom for her. She says that once she had no sweets to give to a child when the latter helped her in bringing the stack of books; the child waited for some time and asked the teacher for the sweets. On realizing that the teacher had no sweet to give, the child told her that she can give the sweet whenever she has one. The teachers mostly held the view that once a material reward is given to the child then the child expects the same material reward later too.

Discussion

Children are seen to perform different prosocial acts while interacting with those around them- be it their teacher or peers. The act of helping is spontaneous in children, and is performed depending on the opportunities obtained. Children in the *anganawadi* get opportunities to help in variety of circumstances, like cleaning the yard with the teacher, serving food, assisting their younger peers in putting on clothes after visiting the toilet and so on, whereas children in

the pre-primary schools help each other and the teacher from inside the class by motivating and helping others in finishing the exercises in the text book or by helping the peer in remembering and writing alphabets in a sequence. Unlike helping, sharing in children is based on a decision of the other's need, but also on protection of their own pleasure and interest as well. This is indicated from the incidences where children readily share certain things but hold on to certain others, such as their favourite snack or toy. A sense of ownership is seen in children from as young as when they are three years old. Sharing behaviour unlike helping, in most cases comes across as a thought-out decision rather than a spontaneous one.

Children empathise with others when the others show distress and are also seen to comfort and console on seeing their peers cry. The care and comforting behaviour is not just restricted to their kin, but also is seen projected towards other members like peers or teachers in the class. Children are seen to inform pro-socially during circumstances when the other is searching for something or when the other has forgotten to pick something while leaving for home and so on.

Verbal appreciation given by the teachers is seen to boost up the confidence in the children, whereas material appreciation like giving a candy or a star can lead to all the behaviours being valued only for its instrumental purpose and consequences. Early childhood educators should be conscious of this and plan their teaching-learning techniques accordingly.

The pre-primary and primary school teachers have the space and opportunity to provide instances where they can create situations that require children to help each other and share their belongings with others. For example, in an art class, instead of scolding the child for not bringing the colour pencil, the teacher can encourage children to share. The teacher can also create activities where the children are required to share from a common colour pencil box. The prosocial acts of the children towards others should be noticed by the teacher and should be brought into the attention of the other members of the class. Teacher should also be a model of prosocial conduct that the children can look up to and learn from. Teaching of moral education should not be focused on teacher preaching good values to the children. The teacher instead should scaffold the children to learn about values from their own kind and selfish deeds through self-reflection and critical thinking.

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Understanding of Cyber Bullying amongst Parents and School Counsellors

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken with a primary objective to understand perspectives of parents and school counselors on cyber bullying. This was done by studying perceptions of parents of 10-12-year-old children and school counselors. All participants were located in Delhi. The participants were interviewed to know their understanding of cyber bullying and the ways that they used to prepare children to combat cyber bullying. Counselors were selected from four different private schools, who had at least two years of experience in counselling. Three counselors were from a psychology background and one was from Human Development and Childhood Studies. All the four counselors had an experience of more than two years.

Keywords: *Cyber-bullying, counselling, online behaviour*

Introduction

Childhood, in contemporary times, has been marked as a distinct stage through various guidelines and definitions and it can be both constructed and reconstructed for and by children. The UNCRC defines 'child' as a person below the age of 18 years, thereby marking childhood as a period of life lived from birth to 18 years of age. Research in the field of or relating to children/childhood has shown significant changes about how the meaning and construct of childhood has emerged, transformed and gained new dimensions over a long stretch of time.

One of the most famous works focusing on childhood is by Aries (1960). For his research, he studied medieval art, writings, games for children, clothing worn by children as well as other norms and representations of children and concluded that children in the medieval era were 'miniature adults'. The art portrayed children as shortened bodies of adults, having adult-like features, with clothes similar to what the elders

wore. He also pointed out that the era had less emotional loading or significance for childhood/children from the parent's side. His work was his interpretation of all the existing forms that he studied, and therefore, it can have varied views along with some loopholes.

Pollock (1983) argues that in order to understand the emergence of childhood as a distinct stage, it was important to look at the first-hand experience of parent-child relationship. Further, Shahar (1992) argued that medieval-age parents invested in the emotional and physical needs of the child, displaying care and affection. Although Aries never claimed that the medieval era lacked caring on the adult's part, these researches have been used to criticise and comment on Aries and his co-thinkers.

Childhood has largely been classified in stages/periods of infancy, preschool, early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence. The transition period between middle childhood and adolescence is also referred to as 'late childhood'. During late childhood, children gain