Empathy and Creativity as Foundations and Predictors of How Prosocial Behavior Develops in Preschool Age Children

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Abstract

Prosocial behavior is defined as actions intended to benefit others regardless of potential gains the person performing the actions or behaviors may receive. Prosocial creativity is described as an ability to produce a solution for someone’s problem in an effective, original, and convenient way. This study mainly investigated predictors of prosocial behavior (e.g., prosocial decision-making and prosocial creativity) in 3-to-5-year-old children and explored the role of demographics on empathy and moral behavior. The children completed a series of child appropriate computerized standardized picture-based tasks to evaluate their creativity, empathy, moral development, prosocial decision-making, and prosocial creativity. Parents completed questionnaires on their children’s prosocial skills and empathy, while researchers used the children’s task performance to determine their prosocial behavior and creativity levels. Binary and ordinal logistic regression indicated that children’s age, creativity, and cognitive empathy played an important role in prosocial decision-making and prosocial creativity. These elements likely construct the foundation of children’s prosocial behavior. Moral behavior was also important for prosocial decision-making, which was a precondition for prosocial creativity. A developmental pattern was also found for the emergence of empathy and moral behaviors, suggesting that these abilities may mature over time or may be learned as children mature.

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