

Positive parenting and children's prosocial behavior in eight countries

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Background: Research supports the beneficial role of prosocial behaviors on children's adjustment and successful youth development. Empirical studies point to reciprocal relations between negative parenting and children's maladjustment, but reciprocal relations between positive parenting and children's prosocial behavior are understudied. In this study reciprocal relations between two different dimensions of positive parenting (quality of the mother-child relationship and the use of balanced positive discipline) and children's prosocial behavior were examined in Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States.

Methods: Mother-child dyads ($N = 1105$) provided data over 2 years in two waves (M_{age} of child in wave 1 = 9.31 years, $SD = 0.73$; 50% female). **Results:** A model of reciprocal relations between parenting dimensions, but not among parenting and children's prosocial behavior, emerged. In particular, children with higher levels of prosocial behavior at age 9 elicited higher levels of mother-child relationship quality in the following year.

Conclusions: Findings yielded similar relations across countries, evidencing that being prosocial in late childhood contributes to some degree to the enhancement of a nurturing and involved mother-child relationship in countries that vary widely on sociodemographic profiles and psychological characteristics. Policy and intervention implications of this study are discussed. **Keywords:** Prosocial behavior; parenting; cross-national; late childhood.

Introduction

The importance of reciprocal relations between parents' and children's behavior has been advocated by several theoretical models (Bell, 1968; Sameroff, 1975). However, few studies have tested such reciprocal effects for children's prosocial behaviors and positive parenting. Prosocial behaviors (i.e., voluntary, desirable actions aimed to help others) are beneficial for children's adjustment (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015) and successful youth development (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002). Children's tendency to help, share, and spontaneously offer emotional support predicts a successful school career and counters aggression and depression (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000).

In this study, we aimed to understand the reciprocal nature of interaction between positive parenting and children's prosocial behaviors in eight countries, using a two-wave longitudinal design. In particular, we examined how socialization processes and child characteristics may prompt, cultivate, or discourage the emergence and consolidation of prosocial behaviors during late childhood. Two distinctive dimensions of positive parenting were selected: the quality of mother-child relationships and balanced positive discipline. We reasoned that during late childhood these two parenting dimensions are important in fostering children's prosocial behaviors. Parents' warmth and involvement, characteristic of high-quality parent-child relationships, are associated with children's prosocial behavior (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000; Zhou et al., 2002). Likewise, positive discipline based on reasoning, explanations, and mild behavioral contingencies such as privilege removal convey an important

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