

The Role of Parenting Styles and Self-Efficacy in Shaping Prosocial Behavior

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Abstract:

Prosocial behavior (PB), which refers to actions people take to help or support others, plays a key role in how people grow as individuals and function as a society. PB can influence mental health, social skills, and moral development. Prosocial behavior helps build cooperation, trust, and resilience in communities. Because of its far-reaching effects, researchers have been increasingly interested in the influence mechanism of prosocial behavior. This review compiles recent studies that examine the relationship between prosocial behavior and parenting practices and self-efficacy. Based on research conducted across various cultures and age groups, this study examines how parenting frequently influences prosocial behavior through concepts like self-control, moral identity, and a sense of community. At the same time, self-efficacy, or the belief that one can make a meaningful impact, has shown strong links to prosocial behavior. It appears to predict PB and may, in turn, be strengthened through engagement in prosocial acts. These findings underscore the importance of timing and context in understanding how multiple influences interact over time. Future research should conduct longitudinal designs. Involving more culturally varied populations may also aid in the development of inclusive and significant techniques that may be applied in a variety of social circumstances.

Keywords: Prosocial behavior, Parenting style, Self-efficacy.

1 Introduction

Prosocial behavior (PB), refers to voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others [1]. It supports individual psychological growth and shapes how society operates on a broader level. Helping, sharing, and consoling others are examples of behaviors that often

start early in childhood and seem to change over time according to a combination of environmental and personal factors [2-4]. PB can strengthen people's bonds with others and promote moral development, social advancement, and emotional health [5]. When such behaviors are common across a society, they help foster cooperation, build trust, and strengthen a

shared sense of resilience [3,5]. Researchers have become increasingly interested in what promotes or discourages PB.

Parenting style and self-efficacy are proved to have an influence on PB. Parenting style refers to the characteristic ways in which parents relate to and guide their children in daily life. Researchers commonly identify four types: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved, each differing in warmth, control, and communication [4,6]. Cultural context further influences parenting practices, highlighting the importance of situating developmental processes within broader social environments [7].

Self-efficacy, concerns a person's belief in their own capacity to take purposeful action [8]. This belief strongly influences whether someone feels capable of offering help, especially when situations are ambiguous or demanding. It is also linked to academic achievement [9]. Judicial officers' feeling of self-efficacy tends to rise when they believe their acts help others, which can enhance their effectiveness in their roles. Beyond educational settings, self-efficacy has lasting effects. For example, when judicial officers perceive that their actions benefit others, their sense of self-efficacy tends to increase, which in turn can improve professional performance [10].

2 Parenting Style and Prosocial Behavior

Parenting style plays a significant role in the development of PB among children and adolescents. This relationship has been observed across diverse populations and supported by both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. One longitudinal study focusing on U.S. Mexican adolescents found that parenting style influenced prosocial tendencies and contributed to academic achievement over time [11]. Building on this, Carlo and colleagues drew a distinction between broad parenting styles and more specific parenting practices, proving that increased empathy and PB were strongly correlated with elements like parental warmth and the application of inductive punishment. [12]. Moreover, Davis and Carlo further highlighted the role of empathy and perspective-taking through which parenting shapes prosocial outcomes, particularly in the context of low-income adolescents [13]. Collectively, these findings point to the complex influencing mechanism of parenting children's development.

Prior studies offer valuable perspectives on the impact of parenting styles on prosocial tendencies in adolescents. Backman and colleagues conducted a large-scale investigation in Finland, drawing on data from a nationally representative health and well-being survey [3]. Their research

emphasizes on the role of self-control and identification. They also investigated whether these effects were gender-specific or varied according to teenagers' exposure to antisocial peers. A standardized social adjustment subscale was used to measure PB, and adolescents' perceptions of parental warmth—which reflects understanding and emotional support—and parental monitoring—which includes behavioral control and parental knowledge—were used to evaluate parenting style. The study further evaluated self-control and social identification as mediating factors, with antisocial peer influence and gender considered as potential moderators. Standard control variables such as socioeconomic status, living conditions, and country of birth were included to strengthen validity.

The study employed descriptive and linear regression analyses to examine adolescents' PB. Results showed that girls reported higher PB, self-control, and parental monitoring, whereas boys reported greater parental warmth and more antisocial peers. With respect to the whole sample, higher levels of PB were linked to greater parental warmth and monitoring. These parenting dimensions were, in turn, connected to adolescents' self-control and their sense of identification with others. Mediation analyses indicated that parental warmth and monitoring influenced PB indirectly through self-control and social identification. Gender moderated these associations positively, while antisocial peers weakened only the effect of parental warmth. After controlling for background variables, parental warmth and monitoring remained significant predictors of PB. Analysis revealed that boys with low parental warmth or monitoring exhibited the lowest PB, suggesting heightened sensitivity to parenting in boys.

This study has several notable strengths. It utilizes a large, representative population-based sample of Finnish adolescents, enhancing the generalizability of the findings within this context. The research employs comprehensive and validated measures of key constructs, including parental warmth, parental monitoring, adolescent PB, self-control, and social identification with family and friends, ensuring robust and reliable data. Additionally, the study applies statistical methods, such as mediation analyses and moderation tests, which allow for a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships among parenting styles, adolescent characteristics, and PB. Moreover, the inclusion of both parental warmth and monitoring in the same study offers a holistic view of positive parenting influences on adolescent development.

Despite its contributions, the study also has some limitations. One concern is that all data were based on adolescents' self-reports, which may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects, potentially affecting the objectivity and accuracy of the measurements. Sec-

ond, the study did not distinguish between maternal and paternal parenting behaviors, overlooking possible differential impacts of each parent on adolescent PB. Additionally, although the moderating role of antisocial peers was considered, the study provided limited exploration of adolescents' antisocial behaviors, such as the interplay between antisocial and PB, and how different parenting styles influence negative behavioral development, restricting a fuller understanding of these dynamics. Finally, limiting the sample to Finnish adolescents may restrict the cross-cultural applicability of findings.

Fatima et al. explored the relationships among perceived parenting styles, moral identity, and PB in adolescents [4]. Through the mediating function of adolescents' moral identity, they sought to determine whether authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles would affect PB. They proposed that moral identity functions as a mediator in the link between parenting styles and prosocial inclinations. They also suggested that adolescents' perceptions of parenting would be predictive of both their moral identity and PB. Specifically, the study examined the associations between three parenting styles, two components of moral identity (internalization and symbolization), and six domains of prosocial tendencies. Fatima and her colleagues recruited 236 adolescents enrolled in school (mean age = 15.27), all living with their original families, from various schools in a Pakistani city. Self-report questionnaires were used to assess parenting styles for both mothers and fathers separately to explore differential effects. Participants also completed self-report measures to evaluate their moral identity, specifically the internalization and symbolization dimensions, and to assess their PB across different contexts.

The data analysis began with SPSS, followed by Structural Equation Modeling through AMOS to examine if moral identity acted as a mediator between parenting styles and PB. Findings indicated that authoritative parenting was a strong predictor of increased moral identity, encompassing both internalization and symbolization aspects, and that moral identity, in turn, significantly predicted higher levels of PB, indicating a mediating effect. Moreover, prosocial tendencies were positively associated with age, while permissive parenting was found to negatively predict both moral identity and PB. Specifically, moral identity (particularly internalization) was positively correlated with PB. The results showed that parenting styles influence adolescents' PB, not directly, but indirectly through the individual psychological mechanism of moral identity. In particular, authoritative parenting appears to foster a stronger moral self-concept, which in turn promotes PB. One notable strength of Fatima et al. lies in their theoretical contribution, by introducing moral identity as a medi-

ating variable, the study advances people's understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking parenting styles to PB. This mediation model moves beyond simple associations and offers insight into how internalized moral values mediate the influence of parenting on prosocial actions. Another methodological strength is the use of SEM, which allowed the researchers to test complex, multivariate relationships between constructs and assess the overall model fit.

The study does have some limitations. The relatively small sample size could reduce statistical power and affect the strength of the results. Additionally, the cultural context of the sample, urban adolescents from schools in Pakistan, may constrain the generalizability of the results to other regions, cultures, or rural settings. Cultural norms and parenting expectations vary significantly across societies, which may influence how moral identity is formed and expressed.

3 Self-efficacy and Prosocial Behavior

Existing research suggests that self-efficacy plays a significant role in facilitating PB. For example, Alessandri et al. found a two-way relationship between empathic self-efficacy and PB in young adults. Over a six-year period, their three-wave longitudinal study followed participants from age 16 to 22 and showed that higher levels of empathic self-efficacy predicted greater prosociality, and vice versa [14]. Davis et al. focused on young adults facing economic hardship [15]. Their results showed that community self-efficacy, which refers to the confidence in a group's capacity to bring about positive change, was linked to higher levels of participation in civic activities and PB directed toward both acquaintances and strangers. Together, these studies highlight the complex and far-reaching role of self-efficacy in promoting PB, both at the personal and community levels. Building on this foundation, the next section looks more closely at how different forms of self-efficacy, including general and social domains, are connected to specific prosocial outcomes.

Cruz et al. explored whether general self-efficacy and social skills help explain the link between early PB and later academic achievement among U.S. Latine early adolescents [16]. They also examined whether gender affected these relationships. The researchers used a three-wave longitudinal design over roughly 1.5 years, from fall 2003 to spring 2005, collecting data on participants' PB, self-efficacy, social skills, and academic performance at three different time points (T1, T2, T3). The study hypothesized that early PB would predict later self-efficacy, and in turn, enhanced self-efficacy would contribute to improved academic performance. Participants were 543 Latin elementa-

ry students from low-income families in the United States. PB and self-efficacy were assessed through standardized self-report questionnaires, while academic performance was obtained from official school records. Path analysis was conducted to examine how the proposed mediating relationships functioned within the theoretical framework. Results indicated that higher PB at T1 significantly enhanced self-efficacy at T2, which in turn significantly predicted academic performance at T3. These findings emphasize the crucial role of self-efficacy in connecting early prosocial behavior with later academic achievement, school-based interventions that promote social-emotional learning, and resilience as a pathway to academic success. A key strength lies in the three-wave longitudinal approach, enhancing the ability to draw valid causal conclusions. Second, the students' academic performance was assessed by teachers rather than through self-report, thereby minimizing self-report bias to some extent. Moreover, the study focused on a population that is often underrepresented in psychological research, which improves the applicability of the findings to practical educational settings and everyday community environments. Lastly, the study's theoretical model underscores the importance of early social competence as a foundation for academic motivation. However, one limitation of the study is that both self-efficacy and PB were measured through self-report instruments, raising the potential for common method bias.

Patrick et al. examined different variables, specifically focusing on social self-efficacy, moral identity, and moral judgment, to explore their effects on adolescents' PB [5]. The study involved a sample of 338 students from grades 6, 8, and 10 in a Central European public school, with teachers also participating in rating the students' PB. To comprehensively assess adolescent's PB, the study used multiple measures, including the Youth Inventory of Involvement (which assesses daily participation in school and community prosocial activities), the Request for Help scale (which evaluates willingness to volunteer), and the Prosocial Tendencies Measure-Revised (PTM-R), which distinguishes different types of PB. The findings revealed that social self-efficacy was an important predictor of PB, significantly predicting general PB (such as volunteering and social involvement), as well as direct, emotional, and compliant helping behaviors. Notably, although moral identity had significant effects on various forms of PB, social self-efficacy was the only variable to significantly predict public PB. The study controlled for age and gender, finding that girls scored higher in social involvement and emotional PB, while boys were more active in public PB contexts.

One of the strengths of this study is its large and diverse

sample of adolescents across different grade levels, which helps make the findings more widely applicable. The researchers used multiple methods to measure PB, capturing different dimensions and offering a more complete picture. They also took age and gender into account, helping to reduce the chance of confounding effects. Another strength is the use of both adolescent self-reports and teacher assessments, which enriched the dataset and added credibility to the results. Finally, the longitudinal design allowed the researchers to examine how the relationships among variables unfolded over time.

However, the study also has some limitations. Its generalizability is limited by the relatively homogenous sample, which was drawn from a specific cultural and regional context. In addition, the heavy reliance on questionnaires completed by adolescents and teachers, without including direct observations of behavior, reduces the ecological validity of the findings. As a result, it is harder to know how PB plays out in everyday settings. These limitations point to the importance of using more diverse samples and a wider range of research methods in future studies to improve both generalizability and real-world relevance.

4 Discussion

Overall, these four review studies indicate that both parenting styles and self-efficacy influence PB across different contexts, especially in adolescents. The findings suggest that parenting styles are key factors influencing adolescents' PB, typically exerting their effects indirectly through mediating variables such as self-control, social identification, and moral identity. Meanwhile, self-efficacy has emerged as an important mediator in related research, serving both as a pathway through which early PB impacts later academic achievement and as a critical psychological factor in predicting various forms of PB among adolescents. For future directions, self-efficacy can be considered a plausible mediating variable in the relationship between parenting styles and PB. For example, authoritative parenting may promote adolescents' PB by enhancing their sense of self-efficacy. Additionally, future studies could further explore how parenting styles and self-efficacy interact to influence prosocial development across different age groups and cultural contexts.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this review examined the relationships between parenting styles, self-efficacy, and adolescent PB. The studies consistently show that parenting styles influence PB mainly through mediators like self-control and moral identity, while self-efficacy acts as a key mediator

linking early PB to later outcomes and predicting various prosocial actions. Future research should further explore self-efficacy as a mediator between parenting styles and PB across different ages and cultures.

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