

It can't be helped: Factors involved in low-levels of helping in young children



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Introduction

Background

- Surprisingly, recent research has shown that children begin helping others early in the lifespan, as early as 14 months of age
- These research efforts have been focused on showing that children can help
- Very little is known about **individual** differences in these early emerging **prosocial behaviours (PSB)**, voluntary behaviours that assist others
- As a result, we don't know why some children **help less** and others **help more**. In particular, there is a great gap in the literature on factors that may contribute to **low-helping** in young children
- This limits our ability to design **interventions**

Objectives

- This study will look at different reported rates of PSB, and explore associated individual differences

Method

Participants

- 35 mothers of children** (24 girls) between the age of 1 and 4 years ($M_{age} = 32.38$)

Procedure

- Parents completed a 20-minute online questionnaire via Qualtrics and reported observations of their **children's helping behaviours** at home

Measures

- Demographics: Child's date of birth; languages spoken; province of residence etc.
- Strengths and difficulties – Early social behaviour (ESB): 5-item measure of prosocial tendencies (Goodman, 1997)
- Help at home: Investigates child's participation in everyday helping (e.g., routines and chores in the home) and autonomous chores (e.g., helping parent bathe child)
- Children's behaviour questionnaire (CBQ) – Very short form: Measure temperament on effortful control, surgency, and negative affect (Putnam & Rothbart, 2006)

Results

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics

Measures	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Strengths and Difficulties (ESB)	11.74	12	1.62
Everyday helping (EH)	17.63	18	6.25
Autonomous chores (AC)	7.26	7	2.75

Analysis

- Two categories: low and high helpers – within ESB, Everyday Helping, and Autonomous Chores (**median split**)

Table 2.
Early Social Behaviour (ESB) Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
High_low_ESB (1)								
Age in years (2)	.216							
Gender (3)	.116	.054						
Surgency (4)	.472**	.252	-.210					
Effortful Control (5)	.427*	.490**	-.005	.651**				
Negative Affect (6)	-.242	.315†	-.147	-.195	-.266			
Everyday Helping (7)	.521**	.212	.140	.232	.337*	-.215		
Autonomous Chores (8)	.245	.340*	.170	.144	.365*	.070	.549**	

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 3.
Everyday Helping Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
High_low_EH (1)								
Age in years (2)	.229							
Gender (3)	.089	.054						
Surgency (4)	.247	.252	-.210					
Effortful Control (5)	.324†	.490**	-.005	.651**				
Negative Affect (6)	-.170	.315†	-.147	-.195	-.266			
Strengths and Difficulties (7)	.539**	.367*	.161	.456**	.533**	-.182		
Autonomous Chores (8)	.443**	.340*	.170	.144	.365*	.070	.262	

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 4.
Autonomous Chores Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
High_low_AC (1)								
Age in years (2)	.275							
Gender (3)	-.011	.054						
Surgency (4)	.173	.252	-.210					
Effortful Control (5)	.232	.490**	-.005	.651**				
Negative Affect (6)	.103	.315†	-.147	-.195	-.266			
Strengths and Difficulties (7)	.284†	.367*	.161	.456**	.533**	-.182		
Everyday Helping (8)	.430**	.212	.140	.232	.337*	-.215	.524**	

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

PSB Instruments

ESB Questions

- Considerate of other people's feelings
- Shares readily with other children
- Helpful if someone is upset, hurt, or feeling ill
- Kind to younger children
- Often volunteers to help others

3-point Likert scale: Not true – Completely true

Everyday Helping Questions

Does your child take part in:

- Laundry
- Vacuuming/Sweeping
- Dishes
- Cooking/Food preparation
- Feeding others
- Groceries/Shopping
- Gardening
- Putting away toys/Cleaning own room
- Throwing away trash

4-point Likert scale: Always/Almost always – Never

Autonomous Chore Questions

Does your child help you with:

- Getting themselves dressed
- Changing their diaper/when they are using the toilet
- Feeding themselves
- Brushing their teeth
- Bathing themselves

4-point Likert scale: Always/Almost always – Never

Discussion

- There are individual differences in children's helping behaviours (e.g., high and low helpers)
- These differences vary across forms of prosocial behaviours
- Individual differences on different measures of prosocial behaviour are differentially related to child characteristics

Conclusion and Future Directions

- Some of these characteristics might be difficult to change (temperament); but others may be amenable to intervention (e.g., participation in chores in the home)
- Apply methods used in this study to remaining data collected (e.g., language measures)
- Increase the sample size
- Apply this approach to experimental data collected in the lab