



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Journal of Experimental Child Psychology

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp)



## Children's intergroup helping: The role of empathy and peer group norms



Jellie Sierksma\*, Jochem Thijs, Maykel Verkuyten

European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER), University of Utrecht, 3584 CH Utrecht, The Netherlands

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 2 October 2013

Revised 6 June 2014

#### Keywords:

Helping behavior  
Intergroup helping  
National groups  
Empathy  
Group norms  
Social development

### ABSTRACT

Two studies examined children's (8- to 13-year-olds) intergroup helping intentions. In Study 1, 856 children indicated their intention to help national in-group or out-group peers in a high need situation and in either a public or private context. Results showed that children's empathic tendencies predicted their intention to help and that the context as well as recipients' group membership had no effects. In Study 2, 388 children indicated their intention to help in-group and out-group peers in either a low need or high need situation. Results of Study 1 were replicated. In addition, in the low need situation and when helping was public, children intended to help out-group peers more than in-group peers, particularly when they perceived an accepting descriptive classroom norm about the out-group. When the need was relatively high, empathy appeared to outweigh children's group norm considerations. In all analyses, no age differences were found.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

The human capacity to take care of others emerges early in life. Young children are capable of understanding another person's need (Eisenberg, 1992); they often respond with empathy and prosociality (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Thompson, Barresi, & Moore, 1997; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992) and offer help already at 18 months of age (Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). Children have a tendency to empathize and help others in need (e.g., Eisenberg, 1992). Yet, prosociality has been

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [j.sierksma@uu.nl](mailto:j.sierksma@uu.nl) (J. Sierksma).

predominantly studied in interpersonal contexts, and less is known about children's intergroup helping in which ethnic, national, or other group boundaries are salient. Furthermore, whereas an increasing number of studies examine the role of social group norms in children's negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., Abrams & Rutland, 2008; De França & Monteiro, 2013; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011), not much is known about the influence of these norms in intergroup helping situations.

The current experimental vignette research examines the roles of children's (8- to 13-year-olds) empathic tendency and perceived group norms in an intergroup helping context. In two studies, Dutch children's public or private intention to help Dutch in-group peers or German out-group peers was investigated. Study 1 examined helping intentions in relation to children's empathy when the need for help was relatively high. Study 2 also assessed a low need situation in which concerns about social group norms are likely to emerge. These concerns were examined by manipulating help within a public or private classroom context and by assessing perceived classroom norms about the out-group. Below, we first discuss hypotheses pertaining to the role of empathy in children's helping intentions (Studies 1 and 2). Next, we discuss expectations relating to the high need context (Study 1), followed by the hypotheses for the low need context (Study 2).

### *Empathy*

During primary school, children increasingly help others by sharing objects or money and assisting in emergency situations (Eisenberg, 1992; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Numerous researchers have shown that prosocial behavior is related to children's disposition to empathize with others (e.g., Eisenberg, 1992; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; Eisenberg et al., 1987; Malti, Gummerum, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009), and empathic children help more when there are clear cues indicating need and distress (e.g., Eisenberg, 1992; Gelfand, Hartmann, Cromer, Smith, & Page, 1975; Li, Li, Decety, & Lee, 2013). Therefore, we expect that in general more empathic children will intend to help more.

### *High need*

Whereas empathy can be expected to influence children's general intention to help others, additional considerations are likely to be important when children think about helping in-group or out-group members in a public or private context. Study 1 examined children's intention to help when need is relatively high. Children aged 8 to 13 years consider it a moral obligation to help in high need situations (e.g., Sierksma, Thijs, Verkuyten, & Komter, 2014). Social cognitive domain theory (Turiel, 1983) argues that moral considerations are general, obligatory, and inalterable. From early childhood onward, children understand and apply moral principles in their reasoning about social behavior (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002) and do not differentiate among different recipients when need is high (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). High need situations tend to evoke moral concerns that are general and not context or target specific. In these situations, one is morally expected to offer help independent of whether others are present and whether it is an in-group or out-group member who needs help. Therefore, in the context of high need (Study 1), we expected that children's intention to help would depend on their empathic disposition and not on the context of helping (i.e., public vs. private) or the group membership of the peer in need of help (i.e., in-group vs. out-group).

### *Low need and group norms*

When need for help is less urgent, children not only may feel morally obliged to offer help but also may consider peer group norms. Therefore, in Study 2 we compared a low need situation with a high need situation and considered group norms. Children have a basic desire to be accepted and to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and peers are significant others who function as important sources for appropriate behavior (Killen et al., 2002; Smetana et al., 2009). Peer group norms about intergroup relations become salient around middle childhood (Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013) and affect children's intergroup attitudes and behavioral intentions (Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; De França & Monteiro, 2013; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011). Moreover, children adjust their intergroup

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7275418>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7275418>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)