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## SELECTED DETERMINANTS OF CHILDREN'S HELPFULNESS AT THE EARLY SCHOOL AGE ON THE BASIS OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN MYSLENICE COUNTY (POLAND)

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**Abstract.** Prosocial behaviour is not constant, it is continually being developed and enriched. It is developed most effectively through social activities and community involvement, but most of all through the participation in the family life. A child becomes a social being through social development. All these social and communal experiences determine children's willingness to deal and help other people. The aim of this article is to examine a particular type of children's social behaviour, which is helpfulness. There exists a clear correlation between the structure of the family and the helpfulness of the children which was partially confirmed by the author. There is also an average statistic relationship between the families' fertility and helpfulness. The author of the paper represents the impact of age peculiarities of a child on his/her social development.

**Keywords:** prosocial behaviour, children, helpfulness, family, social development, pedagogical determinants.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Prosocial attitude means sensitivity to other people and it is also associated with preventing wrongdoing. The number of such acts rises with age. Prosocial acts may occur at preschool age, e.g. a child may do something in behalf of other people, bearing the obvious costs of this act: devoting time and energy. Prosocial behaviour must be properly motivated. This may be done by:

- the child's internal sense of duty, which is a result of the normative standards acquisition in the process of socialisation;
- the feeling of resentment which often occurs if the child is sensitive to people's sadness and sorrow;
- acting under the influence of the stress generated by the discrepancy between the child's expectations and the factual state concerning another human.

Prosocial behaviour may be observed in many different forms and the range of these forms varies, nevertheless, all of them are connected with some sorts of helping. In a word, this means acting for the sake of the good of the people. According to Wilhelm Wosinski, this is something opposite to egoism, namely the willingness to do good for the others without consciously and intentionally planned self-interest [6, p. 398]. Prosocial activities are an important part of human behaviour. They let us live in

harmony with other people, bearing witness to the essence of humanity. D. Clarke perceives prosocial behaviour as each and every activity which is aimed at other people's benefit [3, p. 13].

P. Mazur has frequently stressed that preparing children for fulfilling their social obligations begins at an early age of child's development [4, p. 38]. The perception and the evaluation of social phenomena will be learnt through the child's own experiences, not through the verbal language. M. L. Hoffman presents several phases of the sympathy development in children [5, p. 67]. The first phase is a newborn's call as a reaction to crying of other children. The call is caused by conditioning and imitating. The next phase may be observed when a child is almost one year old. This is the time of egocentric and sympathetic suffering. The child's facial expression shows sadness, children curve their lips and cry a lot. The third phase starts at the age of two. This is pseudo-egocentric sympathetic suffering. At this stage the suffering becomes a prosocial motive. The child tries to help, but also assumes that the cure for the suffering of the others will be the same as his or her own. In the second half of the second year of life, it becomes visible that the child is conscious about other people's emotions and thoughts and the fact that they may differ from his or her own. It helps the child to feel the sympathy and people's needs more accurately and help them more effectively. This is the moment when the proper sympathetic suffering occurs. At the stage of early childhood, children understand the cause and effect relationship, e.g. the influence of emotions on facial expressions. At the preschool age (3 to 5 years old), children are able to talk about more complex emotions such as longing for their parents and at middle childhood age, they understand the connections between their own and other people's feelings. They can notice other people doing good and their behaviour is easy to modify. Another element which may be observed in this phase is self-reflection. M. L. Hoffman considers it to be a prerequisite for mature sympathy. In adolescence, children are already able to understand the discrepancy between the feelings of the person and the way most people feel in a particular situation [5, p. 68–70].

Good deeds occur when there is someone in need. The main condition of prosocial behaviour is noticing the needs of others. Empathy is the main form of prosocial behaviour among children. As far as 7-year-old children are concerned, prosocial behaviour occurs even when their motivation is unspecified, e.g. they do good to be praised or self-satisfied.

Social and communal experiences influence children's willingness to help other people, share and cooperate with them [2]. This behaviour undergoes the same process of learning as other social behaviour, namely reinforcement and learning by observation as well as active participation. Positive reinforcement with the use of prizes and praise plays an important role in developing prosocial behaviour. But even though there are no prizes and praise, the process of reinforcement may occur – the happiness of the person who was helped might constitute the reinforcement of behaviour. Observing prosocial behaviour among people facilitates the acquisition and occurrence of similar behaviour. When it comes to setting an example, the more attractive the person is, the more effective the process is. First and foremost, a child follows the observed behaviour. Modelling affects the child through his or her desire to be like the attractive person, from imitating the external behaviour to adopting the intentions hidden behind it. An important characteristic of modelling is the fact that a child is presented with specific patterns of prosocial behaviour, appropriate for particular situations. The essential condition of developing prosocial behaviour is the child being able to experience it in everyday life.

## 2. THE METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The main research problem was:

*What is the conditioning of helpfulness among children at the early school age?*

The following specific research problems were adapted to the main research problem:

1. *What is the relationship between the economic conditions of the family and the helpfulness of children at the early school age?*
2. *What is the relationship between the structure of the family and helpfulness?*

### 3. What is the relationship between the fertility of the studied families and helpfulness?

The following research hypotheses were proposed:

The main hypothesis:

1. The level of helpfulness among children varies and depends on family factors.

The sub-hypotheses:

1. There is a significant relationship between the economic conditions of the studied families and the helpfulness of the children.
2. A clear correlation exists between the structure of the family and the helpfulness of the children.
3. A clear correlation exists between the fertility of the families and the helpfulness of the children.

I have applied the method of diagnostic survey in the research work.

I have applied the technique of observation for the research of the problems.

The observation was directed at 7 and 8-year-old children attending primary schools in Myslenice County. In order to find the answers for the questions posed and continue further verification of the hypotheses, Student Behaviour Sheet by A. Markowska was applied as well as a survey for the parents. The results of the test by A. Markowska were summed up for each student. Because of the subject of the problem, the main focus was directed on the factor connected with socialisation, namely helpfulness. What is more, the statistic relationship for nominal scales was counted in order to determine the convergence between the variables (the structure of the family, the fertility, the economic condition of the family) and helpfulness.

The research was conducted among ninety-three 7-year-old children in year 1.

The sex of the interviewees is presented in Tab. 1. A slight majority of children are boys.

Sex	Number	%
Girls	44	47,31
Boys	49	52,96
<b>TOTAL</b>	93	100

Tab. 1. The sex of the interviewed children. Source: own study.

Tab. 2 shows the family structure of the interviewees. A substantial majority of the interviewed children comes from complete families. Only a few are raised by single mothers. That is why it may be stated that the interviewees are in a similar family situation.

Family structure	Complete		Single mother		Single father		Legal guardian		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex										
Girls	42	45.16	2	2.15	-	0	-	0	44	47.31
Boys	45	48.39	4	4.30	-	0	-	0	49	52.69
<b>TOTAL</b>	87	93.55	6	6.45	0	0	0	0	93	100

Tab. 2. The family structure of the interviewees. Source: own study.

The number of the children in the family has also a great impact on the child's behaviour.

The fertility of the interviewees is presented in Tab. 3. The majority of the children have at least one sibling. Every third child is an only child. A half of the interviewees have a sibling and almost one quarter come from a numerous family (they have two or more siblings).

Number of children	One		Two		Three		Four and more		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex										
Girls	14	15.05	21	22.58	7	7.53	2	2.15	44	47.31
Boys	19	20.43	21	22.58	5	5.38	4	4.30	49	52.69
TOTAL	33	35.48	42	45.16	12	12.90	6	6.45	93	100

Tab. 3. The number of the children in the family. Source: own study.

Tab. 4 gives information on the economic condition of the interviewed children.

Economic condition	Very good		Good		Average		Bad and very bad		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex										
Girls	12	12.90	17	18.28	15	16.13	-	0.00	44	47.31
Boys	18	19.35	22	23.66	9	9.68	-	0.00	49	52.69
TOTAL	30	32.26	39	41.94	24	25.81	0	0.00	93	100

Tab. 4. The economic condition of the interviewed children. Source: own study.

A family, being a primary unit of social life, constitutes the first and the most important upbringing environment of a child. It is an extraordinary community, a model and norm for every other social group. A child experiences first emotions here and acquires the norms and the rules of social life, but also identifies with the surrounding environment, looking for a place for him- or herself.

In the following research, the variables are: the family structure, the economic status and the number of children in the family. All the factors have a great impact on the upbringing of children, the development of their personality and they influence the development of their prosocial behaviour, including helpfulness.

Tab. 5 shows the impact of the family's economic situation on the helpfulness of the children.

Helpfulness	NEVER		RARELY		ON AVERAGE		OFTEN		ALWAYS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family's economic situation												
Very good	-	0.00	3	3.23	6	6.45	12	12.90	9	9.68	30	32.26
Good	-	0.00		0.00	6	6.45	24	25.81	9	9.68	39	41.94
Satisfactory	-	0.00	3	3.23	15	16.13	-	0.00	6	6.45	24	25.81
Unsatisfactory	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	0	0.00
TOTAL	0	0.00	6	6.45	27	29.03	36	38.71	24	25.81	93	100

Tab. 5. The family's economic situation and the helpfulness of the children. Source: own study.

Every third interviewed child who has a good economic situation is often helpful. Simultaneously, in this group of children, a huge number is always helpful. The children with a satisfactory economic situation are always or occasionally helpful. The groups of children with a very good economic situation are often or always helpful. Only a few children are rarely helpful and they come from wealthy families. There is no statistically significant relationship between the economic status and helpfulness.

Tab. 6 presents the impact of the family structure on the helpfulness of the children.

Helpfulness	NEVER		RARELY		ON AVERAGE		OFTEN		ALWAYS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>The family structure</b>												
<b>Complete</b>	-	0.00	6	6.45	21	22.58	39	41.94	21	22.58	87	93.55
<b>Single mother</b>	-	0.00	3	3.23	-	0.00	-	0.00	3	3.23	6	6.45
<b>Single father</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Legal guardian</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	-	0.00	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9.68</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22.58</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41.94</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25.81</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100</b>

Tab. 6. The family structure and the helpfulness. Source: own study.

The children from complete families are often and always helpful, only a few are rarely or occasionally helpful. The children who are brought up by single mothers are rarely helpful. There is a statistically significant relationship between the family structure of the interviewees and the level of social development in terms of helpfulness. This is an average relationship.

Tab. 7 shows the impact of the family's fertility on helpfulness.

Helpfulness	NEVER		RARELY		ON AVERAGE		OFTEN		ALWAYS		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Family's fertility</b>												
<b>One child</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	6	6.45	18	19.35	9	9.68	33	35.48
<b>Two children</b>	-	0.00	6	6.45	6	6.45	18	19.35	12	12.90	42	45.16
<b>Three children</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	6	6.45	3	3.23	3	3.23	12	12.90
<b>Four children</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	3	3.23	-	0.00	-	0.00	3	3.23
<b>More than four children</b>	-	0.00	-	0.00	3	3.23	-	0.00	-	0.00	3	3.23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.45</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25.81</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41.94</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25.81</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100</b>

Tab. 7. The family's fertility and helpfulness. Source: own study.

In families with two children, the interviewees are often and always helpful. Only children are always or often helpful. The children with two siblings are occasionally helpful, similarly to the children with more than three siblings. There is a statistically significant relationship between the fertility of the studied families and the social development in terms of helpfulness. This is an average relationship.

There is no relationship between the economic status of the studied families and helpfulness. This way sub-hypothesis 1: *There is a significant relationship between the economic conditions of the studied families and the helpfulness of the children* was not confirmed. However, there is an average relationship concerning the level of social development in terms of helpfulness. This way sub-hypothesis 2: *A clear correlation exists between the structure of the family and the helpfulness of the children* was partially confirmed. There is also an average statistic relationship between the families' fertility and helpfulness. This way sub-hypothesis 3: *A clear correlation exists between the fertility of the families and the helpfulness of the children* was partially confirmed. On the basis of the following research, the main hypothesis was confirmed. *The level of helpfulness among children varies and depends on family factors.* This hypothesis was partially confirmed.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, family conditions influence the level of helpfulness at the early school age. They are mainly connected with the fertility and the structure of the family. Children at the early school age are

often helpful, which is typical for their age. However, it must be remembered that at this age, the family, upbringing and patterns are crucial. "Heritage of family educational traditions is a powerful means of ethnic socialization of the youth, particularly enriching their understanding of national values and priorities of each country, patriotism, citizenship, spirituality, inter-ethnic tolerance" [1]. In the family circle children build emotional relationships with their parents and siblings. This is the environment, in which they begin their communication with other people. When a child begins school education, school environment is also an important part of acquiring norms, values and patterns of behaviour.

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Моніка Баяк. Обрані детермінанти дитячої безпорадності в ранньому шкільному віці на основі шкіл округу Мисленіце (Польща). *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, **5** (1) (2018), 162–167.

У статті висвітлено педагогічні детермінанти щодо безпорадності дітей. З'ясовано, що просоціальна поведінка особистості не є стабільною, вона постійно розвивається і змінюється. Її можливо розвивати найбільш ефективно за допомогою соціальних заходів та залучення громад, але, перш за все, у родинному соціумі. Доведено, що дитина стає соціальною істотою завдяки власному соціальному розвитку. Всі соціально-суспільні переживання зумовлюють її бажання ділитися інформацією з іншими людьми та допомагати їм. Автором виявлено кореляцію між структурою сім'ї та корисною поведінкою дітей. Метою даного дослідження було власне й вивчення певного типу соціальної поведінки дітей.

**Ключові слова:** просоціальна поведінка, діти, безпорадність, сім'я, соціальний розвиток, педагогічні детермінанти.