FOUNDATIONS AND PREDICTORS OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR DEVELOPMENT ACROSS PRESCHOOL YEARS*

Nahide Gungordu, Maria Hernandez-Reif, & David I. Walker
The University of Alabama

Abstract

Aim: To investigate the predictors of prosocial creativity and the links between empathy, personality, and prosocial behavior in preschool-age children.

Procedure: Children (N=122) individually participated in a series of computerized standardized picture-based assessments to evaluate their creativity, empathy, moral development, prosocial decision making, and prosocial creativity. Parents also reported their children's home environment, prosocial behavior, empathy, and personality.

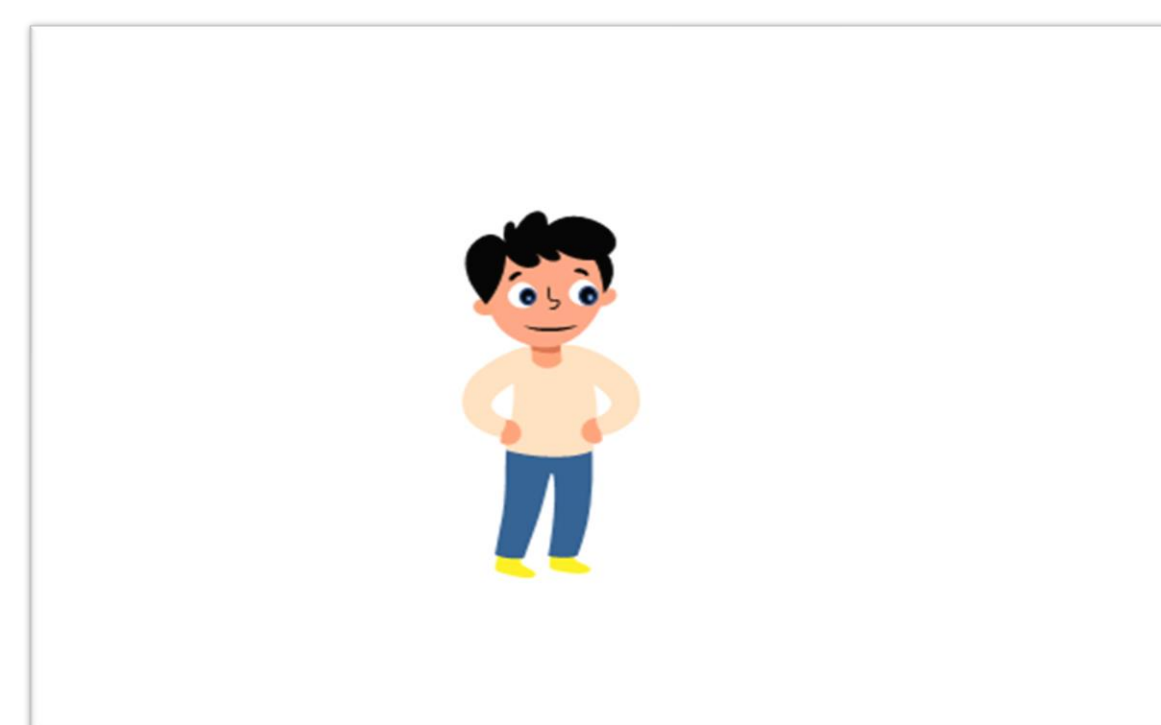**Data Analysis:** The data were analyzed using ordinal logistic regression and a path model.

Results: Age, creativity, cognitive empathy, and prosocial decision-making plays an important role in prosocial creativity, and affective empathy mediated prosocial behavior and cognitive empathy.

Research Questions

1. To what extent—if at all –do age, gender, creativity, affective empathy, cognitive empathy, moral judgments, conventional judgments, and prosocial decision making contribute to preschool-age children's prosocial creativity?

2. How are the direct and indirect links between empathy, prosocial behavior, and personality?

Participants

Participants were N=122 children (age M=3.90, SD=0.85; range: 3-5 years) and their parents (either mother or father). The majority of the participants were White, first-born, had one sibling, and were of middle SES.

Method

The study was offered both online via Zoom and in-person if the parent preferred to come to the lab.

- ✓ Health-check survey
- ✓ Demographic questionnaire,
- ✓ The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire
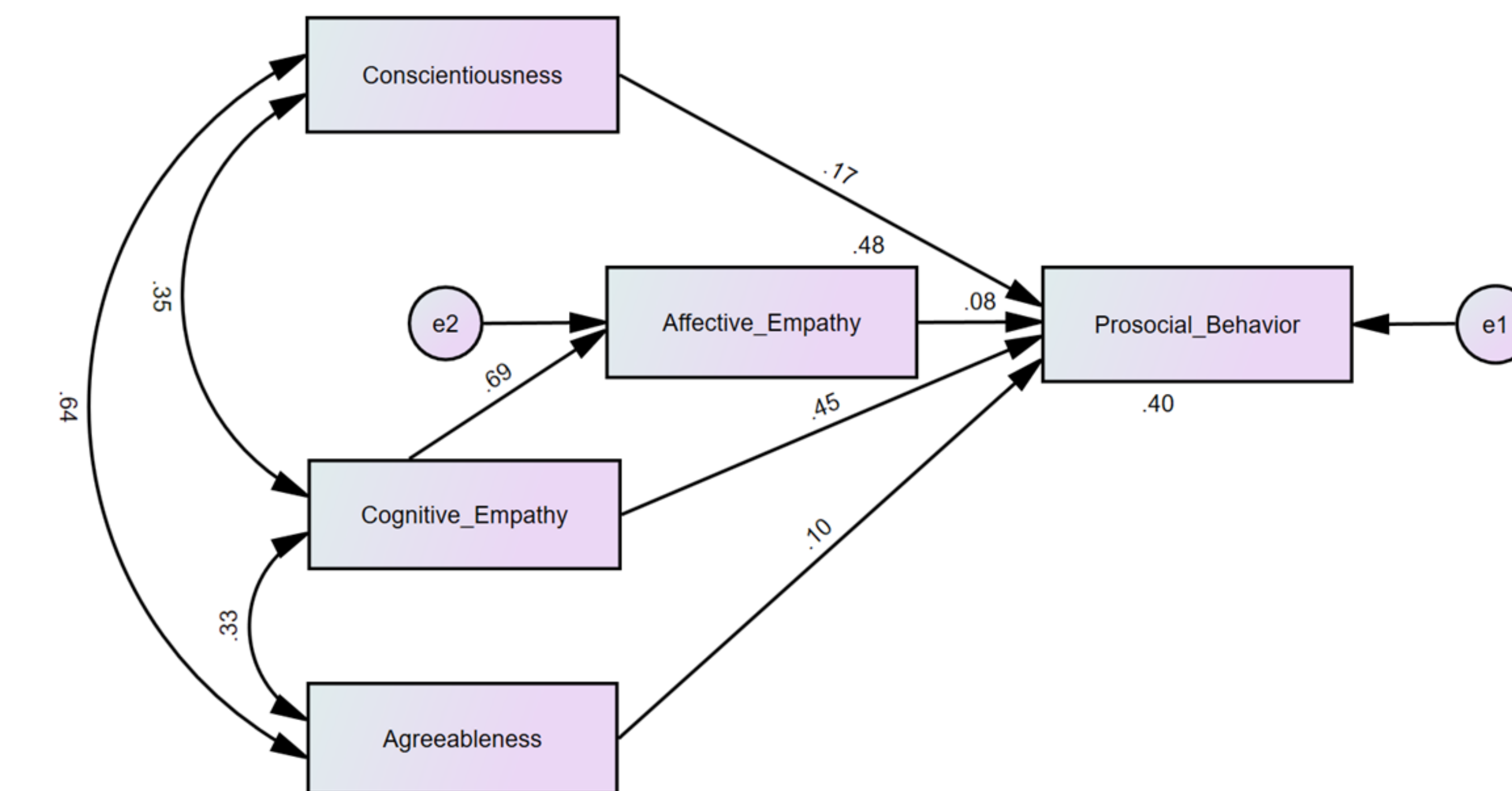- ✓ The Griffith Empathy Measure
- ✓ M5-PS-35

Parental Tasks

- ✓ A warm-up activity
- ✓ Multidimensional Stimulus Fluency Measure
- ✓ The Empathy Measure for Preschoolers
- ✓ Moral-Conventional Judgment Task
- ✓ Prosocial Decision Making and Prosocial Creativity

Children's Tasks

Data Analysis and Results

- ✓ The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS versions (26.0).

- ✓ An ordinal logistic regression analysis was conducted with prosocial creativity serving as the dependent variable and age, gender, creativity, empathy subscales, moral judgment subscales, conventional judgment subscales, and prosocial decision making serving as independent variables.

- ✓ A five-component path model (cognitive empathy, affective empathy, prosocial behavior, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness) was designed.

Pro-C ~ age (r=0.24 p=0.007)
Pro-C ~ creativity (r=0.34 p<0.001)
Pro-C ~ cognitive empathy (r=0.24 p=0.007)
Pro-C ~ Pro-DM (r=0.80, p<0.001)

SRMR (0.06), CFI (0.967), and NFI (0.960)

Discussion

- ✓ Overall, the following picture emerges: A child's age, creativity skills, cognitive empathy, moral maturation, and personality (Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) contribute to whether, or not, the child will behave prosocially.

- ✓ Various elements of morality, empathy, and personality emerge and develop in the early years.

- ✓ These elements are likely to construct the foundation for children's prosocial tendencies that help children navigate complex social and moral circumstances in everyday life.

- ✓ Cognitive empathy has the greatest influence as a predictor of prosocial behavior and affective empathy may be the spark that leads to the path of prosocial behavior.

References