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Altruistic Prosocial Behavior and Attachments among Orang Asli Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Prosocial Value

Aini Azeqa Ma'rof & Hanina H. Hamsan

Institute for Social Science Studies, Putra Infoport, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Email: azeqa@upm.edu.my, hanina@upm.edu.my

Abstract

This study examined the mediating role of prosocial value (i.e., kindness) on the relation between attachments (i.e., parental, and ethnic group attachments) and altruistic prosocial behavior. This study involved 402 Orang Asli adolescents from 10 public secondary schools in Perak and Pahang. The study revealed that kindness value fully mediates the relationship between parental and altruistic prosocial behavior. Meanwhile, a partial mediation was reported on kindness value on the relation between ethnic group attachment and altruistic prosocial behavior. These findings indicate that the importance of kindness value that underlies the intention to help in an altruistic manner. Moreover, among this Orang Asli adolescents, attachment to the group itself serve as a strong bond in cultivating altruistic prosocial behavior among their community. Discussion focused on the role of parental attachment, ethnic group attachment and prosocial value in promoting altruistic prosocial behavior.

Keywords: Altruistic prosocial behavior, parental attachment, peer attachment, prosocial value, Orang Asli.

Introduction

Prosocial behavior refers to human actions that meet the expectations of society; one that provide benefits to other people. Prosocial behavior includes the social behaviors of helping, sharing, cooperating and modesty. According to Carlo and Randall (2002), prosocial behavior is defined as an act of voluntariness that received and given a positive assessment by the community and provide benefit to others. Meanwhile, altruistic behavior is a prosocial act that is defined as voluntary helping motivated primarily by concern for the needs and welfare of others. This behavior often induced by sympathy responding and internalized norms or principles consistent with helping others (Holmgren, Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). In other words, altruistic behavior is helping others solely without any other underlying intention.

A study by Eisenberg, Fabes, and Spinrad (2006) revealed that the determinants of prosocial behaviors are generally based on interactions between characteristics of the individual (e.g., needs,

role-taking abilities, biological factors) and the individual socialization experiences and situational influences (e.g., social expectations, relationship to others, and type of environment). One of the crucial environment to cultivate prosocial behavior is the provision of safety and security that build an affection bond by getting attached to certain groups. A study by Keskin and Cam (2010) found that adolescents who feel a secured attachment was significantly associated with increased level of prosocial behavior, and decreased level of emotional symptoms and peer relationship problems. Specifically, according to Bowlby (1980), adolescent who have strong emotional bonds with their significant others helps to form a secure attachment style which foster one's socio-emotional and well-being particularly among the adolescents. Social systems such as families (Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011), peers (van Hoorn, van Dijk, et al., 2016), school (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007), and ethnic group (Armenta et al., 2011) are the closest significant contacts that may influence and affect adolescents' helping behavior and prosocial value.

Previous studies have documented that group attachments, prosocial value, and altruistic prosocial behavior are interrelated. However, some gaps were identified from these existing studies. First, most of the studies were performed on mainstream society and Western adolescents. Having that said, research relating prosocial value and behavior to group attachment and adolescent outcomes among Asian context particularly in this study among the Malaysian indigenous is still unexplored. Additionally, prior studies generally focus on global prosocial behavior (Carlo et al., 2003) and did not differentiate the varied types of prosocial behaviors that might occur due to the attachment to different social groups and this might yield varied levels of prosocial value and behavior among different individual. Therefore, this study is in an attempt to provide initial view on the Orang Asli group attachment (i.e., parental, peer, school, and ethnic group), prosocial value and altruistic prosocial behavior.

Prosocial Behavior among Malaysian Orang Asli

The Malaysian indigenous is called as Orang Asli which is a collective term for some 18 ethnic groups of less than 150,000 in total. Orang Asli are widely regarded as comprising peninsular Malaysia's original habitants. They are generally divided into three distinct groups: the Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malay. Sharing and helping are both common traits among the Indigenous as they treasure their affiliating values – cherishing others, believe in harmony, and oppose fighting. Besides, the Orang Asli uphold egalitarian beliefs and concerned about nurturing others and satisfying their community needs.

Orang Asli is generally a collectivist culture that stresses harmony and deference (Low, 2010). Theorists have posited that cultures that emphasize a collectivist orientation promote and nurture prosocial values and behaviors in order to benefit societal groups and for survival (Triandis, 1996). Consistent with this, individuals from collectivist communities are more likely to act cooperatively and prosocially than are individuals from individualistic societies (Knight & Carlo, 2012). Thus, this explains the well-valued culture of prosocial behavior acts such as sharing, cooperating and providing help among the Orang Asli people.

According to Endicott (2004), Orang Asli have two primary moral values that is avoiding violence and sharing crop yields. These sharing experiences are important as a symbolic of their community, public statements of mutual dependence, nurturance, and close bond ties within them (Endicott & Dentan, 2008). Meanwhile, as culture is full of vitality, thus like other minority communities in Malaysia, the survival, health and development of Orang Asli culture is inextricably linked with their traditional helping culture within their ethnic group. Concerning on this, there is a strong obligatory membership

of group such as the extended family and neighborhood that makes the attachment between the communities well-built and thus developed their prosocial behavior.

Orang Asli which are also known as a *Gemeinschaft* community (Schaefer & Robert, 1998) is characterized by a small community where members generally have similar backgrounds and life experiences, knowing each other, and closeness in social interaction between them. Nevertheless, this community could not escape from being affected by the development that occurs around them. Malaysia's rapid physical development might significantly impact these communities' prosocial behavior and values.

Parental and Ethnic Group Attachments on Altruistic Prosocial Behavior

Feeling attached towards the surrounding social system might promote individual's acts in terms of the behavior patterns they have learned, normative beliefs and types of interactions that is adaptive or maladaptive (Osher, VanAcker et. al., 2004). This indicates that the quality of one's attachment to a social group will contribute to the level of prosocial action. Meanwhile, it also argued that the level and types of prosocial behavior dependable upon the development of psychological attachment (Keskin & Cam, 2010). According to Bowlby (1988), attachment is an emotional bond with significant others that contribute to individual's physical, emotional, and psychological development. Viewed from the primary ecosystem functionality perspective on attachment (Peacock, McClure & Agars, 2003), connectivity with the ecological factors will influence one's behavior which affects not only to the physical growth, but also in dealing with new situations and environments. This ecological attachment will then influence individual's social lifestyles and abilities to conduct lives. Moreover, according to Carlo and Randall (2002), attachment security facilitates openness and empathy towards others and consequently increases the probability of prosocial behavior.

The existence of bonding during interaction might contribute to prosocial behavior. Carlo, Raffaelli, Laible, and Meyer (1999) found that early adolescence presents opportunities for renegotiating existing relationships (e.g., with parents, ethnic groups, peers, neighbor) and for developing relationships that might impact (positively or negatively) their prosocial behaviors. In the perspective of Orang Asli as a collectivist society, those significant others particular among its adolescent are perceived as people attached closely to them, for example, parents and ethnic group. These ecological system might contribute to the welfare of these adolescents' prosocial behavior.

The importance of parents and ethnic group attachments in fostering prosocial behavior have been highlighted in several studies. For example, research suggests that secure attachment with parents contribute to the development of empathy (Cukur, Guzman & Carlo, 2004), increase moral behaviors and prosocial value (Carlo et al., 2007), and reactive prosocial behavior (Kumru, Carlo, et. al., 2012) that contribute to adolescents' prosocial behavior and empathic concerns. Meanwhile, attached to ethnic group activate the self-identification towards the ethnic group and this will influence one's upbringing. A study by Armental et al., (2010) found that Mexican-American adolescents who have strong attachment to their ethnic group was associated with greater tendencies to engage in anonymous prosocial behavior and more altruistic in nature. Therefore, in the Orang Asli context whereby they valued prosocial behavior especially for the survival of their tribes, it is therefore assumed that by engage strongly with their ethnic group may facilitate positive behavioral outcomes among the Orang Asli adolescents.

Prosocial Value as Underlying Mechanism

Several theories have conceptualized values as motives and standards for behavior (Schwartz & Howard, 1984; Feather, 1990). Meanwhile, researchers have identified prosocial value as a significant predictor for acting prosocially (Beutel & Johnson, 2004). According to Values Theory by Schwartz (1984), prosocial values which reflects the importance of helping and the sense of kindness is crucial in promoting prosocial behavior.

One plausible mechanism for associations between attachments and prosocial behavior is that attachment comes from the socialization of prosocial values, and that acquisition of prosocial values in turn leads to prosocial behavior. As empirical support for the connection between attachment and prosocial values, Schwartz (1992) reported that across multiple large adult samples from various cultures, secure attachment was positively associated with benevolence that includes helpful, honest, forgiving, loyal and responsible. Meanwhile, a study by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) reported that contextual priming of attachment security increased compassion and willingness to help even when there was reciprocal intention on being kindness to others. These findings fit well with the theoretical view that the sense of attachment security reduces the need for defensive self-protection and allows a person to activate the care-giving behavioral system, and engage in prosocial value with the primary goal of benefiting others.

According to Feather (1990), behavior is a reflection of one's life values. Prior research linking constructs such as values, beliefs and attitudes to behaviors however has been somewhat inconsistent. It is argued that the often disappointingly weak relations between values and behavior are largely due to the overly abstract nature of values, with their sometimes ambiguous connections to behavior (Kristiansen & Hotte, 1996). However, Bond and Chi (1997) found support for the relations between prosocial values and behavior. Their studies showed that prosocial values (i.e., universalism, benevolence, and conformity) related closely to 49 different civic behaviors (e.g., telling truth, respecting and being polite to teachers). Hence, these studies supported the correlation between values and behaviors, making prosocial value as a plausible mediator.

There is a glaring absence of literature on the relationship between attachment and adolescent altruistic prosocial behavior especially among Asian samples. Very few studies (e.g., Armenta et al., 2010; Carlo et al., 2002) had examined the relationships between prosocial value, attachments and adolescent prosocial behavior in a single model. Therefore, the goal of this study is to fill in these gaps by examining the association between parental and ethnic group attachment on altruistic prosocial behavior and whether prosocial value (i.e., kindness) mediate the relationship among Orang Asli adolescents which this community is widely known for their collective culture and well-valued society. Overall, this study indicates that adolescent's attachment to certain social groups would influence their prosocial value, and subsequently predict altruistic prosocial behavior among Orang Asli adolescents.

Method

Participants

A total of 402 Orang Asli adolescents that involved 10 secondary schools from the Malaysian state of Perak and Pahang were involved in this study. Both states are chosen as majority of the Orang Asli students were located in these states. Majority of the respondents were female (n = 245, 60.90%) and male (n = 157, 39.10%) aged 14 years old (n = 232, 57.72%) and 16 years old (n = 170, 42.28%). Majority of the respondents (96.76%) were from the Senoi tribe, 2.24% were Proto-Malays and 1.0% were Negritos. Majority of the Senoi Tribe live in the states of Perak and Pahang that explains for the

majority of respondents were from this tribe (sub-ethnic). Meanwhile, as this study was conducted in school, therefore majority of the respondents (77.1%) stayed in school hostels provided by the JAKOA as their settlements are far from schools and in the remote jungle, while the remaining 22.9% of the respondents lived with their family.

Data Collection

A quantitative approach using a self-administered questionnaire was adopted by using a cross-sectional design method. 10 secondary schools of Perak and Pahang were chosen considering the majority population are in these states. Students name lists were provided by the school counselors and classroom teachers' weeks before data collection. From the list, students' samples were selected using systematic random sampling. During the data collection, students were gathered in a classroom or the school hall. Self-administration questionnaire was used as it is more reliable because respondents are free to execute the task without any "interference" of the researcher. However, there were some students that have limited proficiency in Malay language and do not master basic literacy skills, therefore were unable to read and comprehend the task. Thus, the researcher with the help of a research assistant gathered these students in a group for one-to-one aid by reading and clarifying each item.

Measures

Altruistic prosocial behavior. Altruistic prosocial behavior was measured using the Prosocial Tendencies Measure-Revised (PTM-R) by Carlo and Randall (2002). The measurement consists of six subscales; altruistic, compliant, emotional, public, anonymous and dire. However, for this study; only two subscales were used which consists of altruistic and anonymous prosocial behaviors that represents the altruistic prosocial behavior by definition. Examples of the items are "I think one of the best thing about helping others is that it makes me look good" (altruistic), and "I think that helping others without them knowing is the best type of situation" (anonymous). Respondents were asked to rate to the statement on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*). The reliability was $\alpha = .76$.

Parental attachment. Attachment to parents was measured using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) by Kenny, Griffiths, and Grossman (2005). The PAQ contains three scales: Affective Quality of Attachment, Parental Fostering of Autonomy, and Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support. However, for the purpose of this study, 7 items were selected to assess the Affective Quality of Attachment. Examples of items includes, "In general, my parents understand my problems and concern", and "During time spent together, my parents were persons for whom I felt a feeling of love" with indicators of 1 (*Strongly agree*) to 4 (*Strongly disagree*). The reliability was $\alpha = .78$.

Peer attachment. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA, Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to assess peer attachment. The IPPA was developed to assess adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimensions or relationships with parents and close friends. 8 items from the inventory that particularly assess the students' attachment with their peer was used with a reliability of $\alpha = .79$. Examples of items are "My friends can tell when I'm upset about something", I like to get my friends' point of view on things I'm concerned about" with indicators of 1 (*Strongly agree*) and 4 (*Strongly disagree*).

School attachment. School connectedness Scale (SCS) by Furlong, O'Brennan, and You (1997) was used to measure adolescents' attachment to school environment. This scale is designed to measure

the school bonding and, as such, measures psychological and non-academic, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Examples of questions are “I feel proud to be in this school”, “I feel safe and comfort in school”, “I feel attached with people in my school”, “Teachers in my school treat students fairly” with the response scales of 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*). The reliability is $\alpha = .78$. *Ethnic group attachment*. Ethnic group attachment was measured using the Multigroup Measure of Ethnic Identity (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). MEIM consists of 18 items assessing three aspects of ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic behaviors or practices. Items are rated on a four-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items includes “I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to”, “I have spent time trying to find more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs”, “I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs”. The reliability was $\alpha = .77$.

Kindness. Values-in-action Inventory of Strengths for youth (VIA-youth; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was used to assess the extent to which adolescents valued and enjoyed helping and being kind to others. The VIA-youth assess 24 different values (e.g., bravery, creativity). As for the present study, 10 items from the kindness subscale was adopted to examine participant’s prosocial value. Respondents rated statements based on a four-point scale with 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The reliability was $\alpha = .84$.

Results

Multiple regression analysis has been used to determine prosocial value as a mediating variable on the relationship between parental, peer, and ethnic group attachments on altruistic prosocial behavior. Four regression equations were computed to examine the mediating relationship in this study. Results of the analyses are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 meanwhile Figure 1 presents the mediation model.

Table 1: Regression analysis on parental and adolescent’s altruistic prosocial behavior mediated by kindness.

Step	DV	IV	B	SE	β	t	p
1	Altruistic Prosocial Behavior	Parental Attachment	.215	.057	.185**	3.764	.000
2	Kindness	Parental Attachment	.542	.068	.370**	7.959	.000
3	Altruistic PBT	Kindness	.208	.038	.262**	5.430	.000
4	Altruistic PBT	Parental Attachment	.118	.060	.102	1.972	.059
		Kindness	.178	.041	.224**	4.334	.000

Note. **p < .01

Table 2: Regression analysis on ethnic group attachment and adolescent’s altruistic prosocial behavior mediated by kindness.

Step	DV	IV	B	SE	β	t	p
1	Altruistic Prosocial Behavior	Ethnic Attachment	.189	.030	.305**	6.399	.000
2	Kindness	Ethnic Attachment	.344	.035	.439**	9.781	.000
3	Altruistic PBT	Kindness	.208	.038	.262**	5.430	.000
4	Altruistic PBT	Ethnic Attachment	.146	.033	.235**	4.478	.000
		Kindness	.26	.042	.159**	3.025	.003

Note. **p < .01

As shown in Table 1, perfect mediation holds in this study in which the direct relationships of parental attachment ($\beta_{\text{parental}} = .102, p = .102$) to altruistic prosocial behavior dropped to be non-significant when the kindness value was controlled. Meanwhile in Table 2, ethnic group attachment to altruistic prosocial behavior was partially mediated by kindness. This can be shown as it yielded significant results for both the relationships between ethnic group attachment to altruistic prosocial behavior and kindness, and the regression coefficient of altruistic prosocial behaviors with ethnic group attachment is substantially reduced at the final step ($\beta = .24, p < .01$) when kindness was controlled. Overall, by using Sobel Test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), all the values ($Z_{\text{parental}} = 4.27$ and $Z_{\text{ethnic group}} = 6.04$) reached statistical significance of p value less than .01.

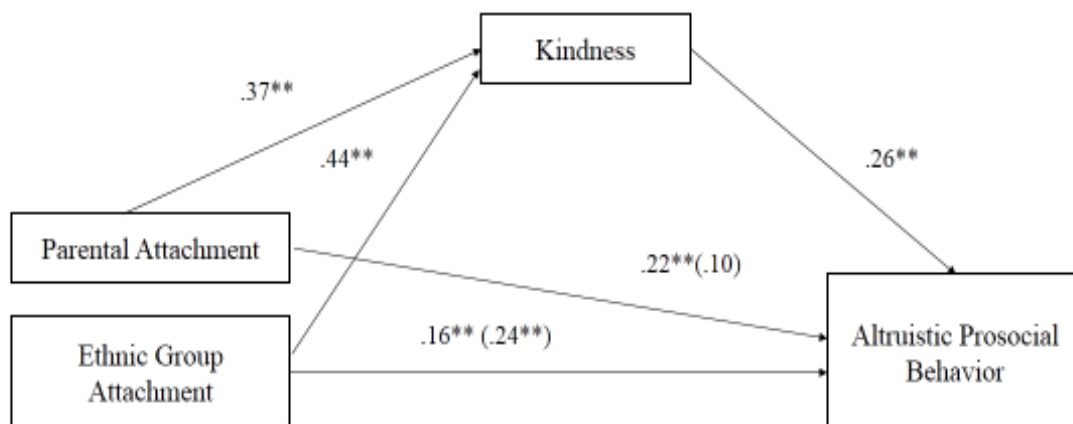


Figure 1: Kindness as mediator between parental, peer and ethnic group attachment on altruistic prosocial behavior.

Figure 1 shows the model of the mediating role of kindness on the relationship between parental, peer, and ethnic group attachment on altruistic prosocial behavior. Overall this model indicates that kindness value play a significant role in nurturing the altruistic prosocial behavior through parental and peer attachments. Meanwhile, on the other hand, ethnic group attachment is more significant that influence the participant’s altruistic prosocial behavior when kindness value partially contribute to its effect. However, this shows that in any condition, kindness value play a significant contribution in enhancing and cultivating the effect of prosocial acts.

Discussion

There is no doubt that the Orang Asli retained much of their identity and values to the present because of their relative isolation from other communities and the forces of integration or assimilation of the mainstream society. This is not to suggest that the Orang Asli lived in complete isolation whereby numbers of programmes were formed to improve the livelihood of this community including encouraging the Orang Asli children and adolescents to school. This however will indirectly expose them to the mainstream culture and values as a reaction of communication and socialization with other communities. This study therefore in the urge of examine the mediating role of prosocial value (kindness) on the relationship between social attachments and altruistic prosocial behavior.

The results revealed that prosocial value (kindness) value play a significant role in fostering altruistic prosocial behavior when attached to parental and ethnic group. This also indicate that by one's feeling of secure attachment and closeness to parents and ethnic group will contribute to the cultivating of kindness value and thus makes individual to act altruistically. Specifically, social environments and ethnic group are among the factors that can influence adolescents' to value prosocial acts. These results corroborate with the concept raised by Social Exchange Theory and the norm of reciprocity where in a collectivist society as experienced by Orang Asli, the existence of communal relationships within their community and significance others (e.g., parents and ethnic group) brings to treasure the kindness value as compare to their attachment with the outsiders (e.g., peers and school) where the relationships are more to exchange or reciprocal based. Previous study also has found that parental (Malonda, 2019) and ethnic group (Richman, Bowen, & Bogenschneider, 1996) act as advocates for adolescents to express positive attitudes and nurture the prosocial value. In the context of Orang Asli adolescents, the results revealed a substantial evidence on the maintenance of prosocial relationships despite the presence of challenging circumstances especially the influence of mainstream values. The results also suggests that the strength of attachment towards families and ethnic group ensuring the prosocial value and actions preserved. Therefore, understanding how aboriginal culture and ecological system can help to deliver appropriate programmes or activities in order to enhance this community socio-emotional well-being and prosocial acts.

Conclusion

The importance of secure attachment in cultivating prosocial value and altruistic act has been highlight in this study. Particularly among the Orang Asli adolescent and the Orang Asli community itself, as a collectivist society that emphasize on the prosocial acts in their survival, expose to outsiders (i.e., peer and school) have indirectly reduce their altruistic intention in helping others. This is not to said that the prosocial act was diminished, however, the intention to help may be underlies by egoistic prosocial behavior which is the intention to help is to gain benefit from the help given. Interestingly, staying attached with their parents and ethnic group increase their prosocial value and altruistic intention. This overall shows that the Orang Asli adolescents still valued kindness act and altruistic prosocial behavior when they are still in their community and it may reduce the act once they are exposed to the outsiders. This is important to take note as to bring further action in identifying activities that can instill the prosocial act in whatever environment one's is.

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