THE MEDIATIONAL ROLE OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOURS IN THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE


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Abstract

School performance and attainment play a major role in individuals’ development, therefore it is crucial to investigate the mechanisms by which children’s academic adjustment is influenced. Several studies have stressed the relevance of Prosocial Behaviour (PB) - defined as voluntary actions aimed at benefiting others such as helping, consoling, donating (Eisenberg et al., 2006)- in predicting several adjustment outcomes, including school achievement (Caprara et al. 2000; Closson, 2009). Prosocial behaviour has been considered a relatively “malleable” variable that can be strengthened through appropriate educational actions (e.g., Caprara, Luengo Kanacri et al., 2015) and some studies have found that parental warmth, responsiveness, support, and involvement being positively related to children’s prosociality (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Although the relevance of parents as social agents in children’s interaction with their environment, few studies have focused on the specific associations between parent-child relationship and school performance. For example, Diener et al. (2008) found that quality of parent–child emotional relationship is linked to the child’s self-perception of competence, suggesting the potential role of family relational climate on school achievements. The present study aims to examine the relation between Parent- Child Relationship Quality - intended as the parents’ capacity to show affection and support toward their children (parental warmth) and to express interest and solicitude to their children’s needs (parental involvement) (Pastorelli et al. 2015) -, children’s prosocial behaviours and school performance. Our hypothesis is that parental warmth and involvement may influence children’s school performance through their engagement in prosocial behaviours. Interviews were conducted in Italy-Rome with 8 to 12 years old children (mean age=9.33, DS=.87; 51% boys), their mothers and their fathers, all involved in an ongoing longitudinal study (e.g. Lansford et al., 2014). Parent-child relationship quality was assessed via parent- and child-reports (The Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire-Short Form; Rohner, 2005), prosocial behaviour was child reported (Children’s Prosocial Behaviour Scale; Pastorelli,1996), school performance was assessed via parent-reports (Child Behaviour Checklist; Achembach,1991). Structural equation models revealed that child prosocial behaviour significantly mediated the associations between parent-child relationship quality and school performance. Specifically, a responsive and involving parent-child relationship tends to promote children prosocial behaviours and, in turn, a better school performance. These findings suggest that teachers, scholars and professionals in the field of education could take advantage of considering the relevance of prosocial behaviour as key mechanism through which children’s school performance could be ameliorated.

Keywords: Prosocial behaviours, school performance, parent-child relationship.