



Who Are We?

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The Big Picture

This study aimed to explore developmental changes in children's empathy, that is, their ability to understand and respond to the emotions of others, and helping behaviours toward other peers they have not met. In particular, we were interested in factors that may predict empathy and helping behaviours, such as perspective taking, intergroup attitudes, and other experiences outside of school.

Children with parental consent were invited to play a set of games with a trained researcher for about 25 minutes. For example, in the 'Prosocial Behaviour Game,' children were asked to match a series of four stickers to the corresponding animal to win a prize. However, the envelope with the animal stickers contained an extra sticker! Following the matching game, the experimenter explained that because there was an extra sticker in the envelope, a child from another school would not have enough stickers to play the game. The child could either choose to keep the sticker themselves or give it to the child from the other school, so that the other child could complete the game. No matter the child's decision to keep or give, they were awarded a small prize. There were no right or wrong answers to our questions, and all children received positive feedback regardless of their responses. After we finished the game, all children were offered a certificate of participation to bring home.

Through our research, we hope to better understand children's empathy and helping behaviours, and how these may change as children grow older. We hope our findings will help future scientists, parents, and educators foster prosocial development.

Thank You For All Your Help!

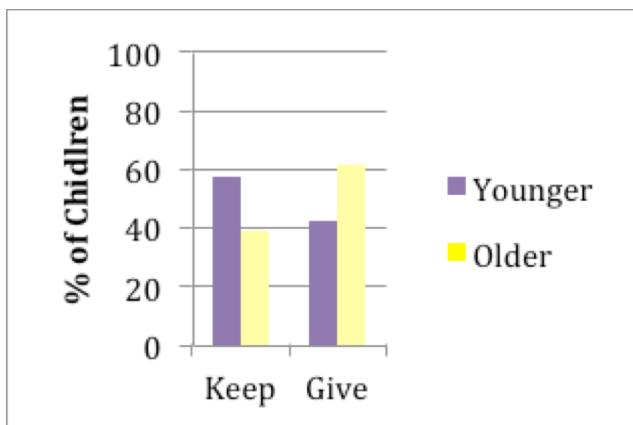
Throughout the course of our study, we travelled to primary schools in North, South, East and West Belfast to work with pupils between the ages of 5 - 10 years. We would like to sincerely thank the principals, parents and teaching staff for allowing the pupils to participate in our study.

Lastly, but certainly not least, we would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the pupils and parents who took part in our study. Without your participation, our study would not have been possible.

Prosocial Behaviour

Prosocial behaviours are defined as voluntary acts that benefit another person without personal profit or external reward. In the game described above, each child was given an extra sticker, and asked whether they would like to keep it or give it to a child at another school. Our study found that older children between the ages of 8 – 10 years were more likely to give the extra sticker away than younger children.

Older children may be more likely to give their extra sticker away because they have developed a more complex understanding of fairness and can more readily take the perspective of the child who did not have enough stickers to play the game. Both of these factors may ultimately lead to the participating child empathising with the child at the other school that needed the extra sticker; explaining why older children were more likely to give the extra sticker away.

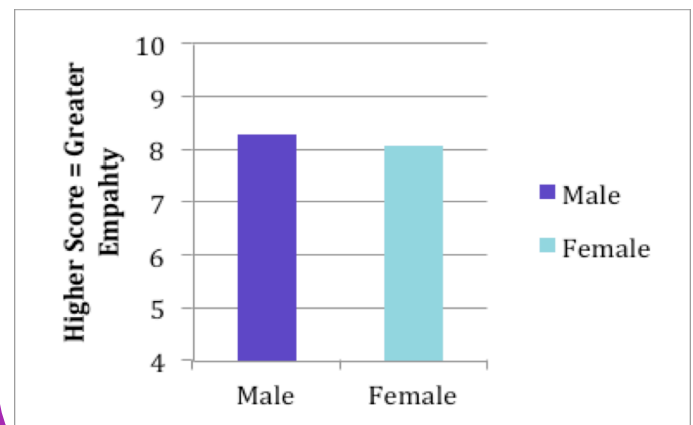


Empathy

Our study was also interested in the amount of empathy pupils displayed towards others. Each child was shown images of two children and told that these were pupils at another school.

To measure empathy, the experimenter then asked the child how they would feel if the other pupils were upset or sad, if no one shared toys with them, or if something bad happened to the pupils from another school. The child picked from a scale of smiley faces, each expressing a different emotion ranging from very awful to not happy/not sad.

Our study found that there was no difference in the amount of empathy male and female participating children displayed towards others whom they had never met.



On-Going Studies

Due to the success of the Helping Kids study, we have already begun phase 2! Phase 2 aims to examine the social categories, which children possess. By understanding how children construct social categories, this may allow us to understand the link between empathy and prosocial behaviours of children further. We believe that such information is crucial and we are excited to see what the findings reveal!

More Information and Participation

If you would like more information about our study or any of our other work, please visit our website, <https://helpingkidsqubblog.wordpress.com>, or contact us by email, helpingkids.qub@gmail.com. If you would like your child to take part in our study, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are also planning to conduct further research in primary schools throughout Belfast during the 2016 – 2017 school year.