

Father Involvement in Parenting and Its Powerful Link to Prosocial Behavior in Early Childhood

Arsyizahma Wita^{1✉}, Andres Villanueva²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

²University of San Carlos, Philippines

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CONTACT: ✉ arsyizahmawita@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigates the relationship between father involvement in parenting and the prosocial behavior of preschool children in Tanah Datar District. The low prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing, cooperating, and providing comfort to others, prompted the exploration of fatherly involvement as a possible influencing factor.

Design/methods/approach – A quantitative correlational approach was employed, with a sample of 194 children selected from a population of 1,128 using probability stratified cluster random sampling. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using the product-moment correlation method with SPSS.

Findings – The results reveal a significant and strong positive correlation of 0.866 between father involvement in parenting and prosocial behavior in early childhood. This indicates that higher levels of father involvement are associated with greater prosocial behavior in children.

Research implications/limitations – The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inferences, and the reliance on self-reported data, which could introduce bias. Future research could expand on these findings by using longitudinal designs to better establish causality.

Originality/value – This research contributes valuable insights into the impact of father involvement on children's social development, particularly in a rural Indonesian context. The findings highlight the importance of fatherly engagement for fostering prosocial behaviors in early childhood, suggesting areas for future intervention and policy development.

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Introduction

Human life is inherently social, where cooperation and helping one another are fundamental, even for those who are considered independent (Nurhayati et al., 2023). As social beings, humans cannot prioritize individual ego but must consider the desires and needs of others. Therefore, mutual assistance plays a crucial role in daily interactions between individuals (Matondang, 2017). A key foundation for creating positive social relationships is prosocial behavior, which fosters a compassionate and supportive environment among individuals (Haque & Rahmasari, 2013). Prosocial behavior refers to actions that benefit others, either physically or psychologically, performed voluntarily (Nugraha, 2020). This behavior strengthens emotional bonds within a community, leading to a more comfortable environment for sharing both joy and sorrow (Munajat, 2022). Hanifah, (2023) further supports this view by stating that prosocial behavior involves helping, sharing, cooperating, and comforting others. These actions contribute to building social relationships that support and strengthen social networks within a group or society.

Prosocial behavior can be observed across all age groups, from children to adults, as individuals are inherently social beings and part of a community. For children, prosocial behavior is crucial for their social development (Rudi et al., 2022). Developing social skills early helps children understand their environment. Khasanah & Setiawan (2022) explain that prosocial behavior includes caring actions like helping and sharing, which are influenced by parenting practices and parental responses, directly impacting a child's prosocial behavior.

The development of a child is significantly influenced by parental interaction, as parents serve as the closest role models (Muslihatusun & Santi, 2022). Involvement of fathers in parenting plays a pivotal role in the growth and development of children (Munajat, 2022). According to Septiani & Nasution, (2017), father involvement refers to the active role a father takes in their child's life, encompassing physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. This view is reinforced by Wijayanti & Fauziah (2020), who define father involvement as the active participation in nurturing, educating, and guiding children, with an emphasis on regular and intense engagement across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of parenting.

In Indonesia, however, father involvement in parenting remains relatively low (Petren et al., 2021). According to KPAI (Indonesian Child Protection Commission), fathers spend only about one hour per day communicating with their children. The lack of understanding about parenting practices results in minimal awareness about the importance of fatherly involvement in child development, with many fathers primarily viewing their role as breadwinners.

Preliminary observations in Tanah Datar District's kindergartens revealed several social challenges among children, such as failure to share, reluctance to take turns, and disengagement from peers, indicating low prosocial behaviors. These findings align with (Rudi et al., 2022), who suggest that individualism and social withdrawal in children may stem from a lack of empathy and care for others and their surroundings. Additionally, Khasanah & Fauziah, (2021) found that limited interaction with peers leads to a decline in children's socialization skills, indicating developmental issues in emotional regulation, partly due to insufficient parental communication.

Previous studies, such as Haque & Rahmasari, (2013), have explored the relationship between father involvement and emotional intelligence, suggesting further exploration into the issues in school settings. Furthermore Hidayati et al., (2011) examined child-rearing practices from the father's perspective, and future studies could investigate children's perspectives to complement these findings.

This research is significant as it contributes to the understanding of the relationship between father involvement in parenting and children's prosocial behavior. The findings will provide a strong foundation for developing intervention programs aimed at enhancing father involvement, ultimately fostering a supportive family environment that positively influences children's social and emotional development. Additionally, this research may promote gender equality in parenting roles. The main hypothesis of this study is that there is a relationship between father involvement in parenting and prosocial behavior in children.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between selected variables. The research was conducted across multiple early childhood education institutions, including kindergartens (TK) and Raudhatul Athfal (RA), located in Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of 1,128 early childhood learners enrolled in TK and RA within the regency. A sample of 194 children was selected using stratified cluster random sampling to ensure representation across institutional types and geographical zones. This sampling technique allowed for a more comprehensive and proportional representation of the population.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a Likert-scale-based questionnaire and structured observation sheets. The instruments were designed to assess prosocial behavior in early childhood learners, covering domains such as cooperation, empathy, helping behavior, and respect for others. The items were carefully constructed to align with developmental indicators and learning outcomes relevant to early childhood education.

Instrument validity was established through item-total correlation analysis. Each item's correlation coefficient was examined to ensure content alignment and discriminative power. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, indicating the instruments' stability and reliability.

Data Collection Timeline and Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted between July and December 2024. Prior to data collection, necessary research permits and ethical approvals were obtained from relevant institutional authorities. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from school administrators and guardians to ensure ethical compliance.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate inferential statistical techniques to test the relationships between the identified variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant characteristics and variable distributions, while correlational analysis was employed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. All analyses were conducted using standard statistical software, and results were interpreted in line with established thresholds for significance and reliability. This methodological approach was designed to ensure the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research findings, thereby supporting the study's objective of contributing to evidence-based practice in early childhood education.

Result

After conducting a series of calculations and data tests, the researcher analyzes the gathered data.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Statistik	Father Involvement	Procosial Behaviour
Sample	194	194
Mean	117,32	97,58
Standart Deviasi	5.262	8.029
Max	128	115
Min	101	85

Table 2 shows that the average value of father involvement is 117.32, while the average value of prosocial behavior is 97.58. Overall, the minimum value of father involvement is 101, and the maximum value is 128. Meanwhile, for prosocial behavior, the minimum value is 85, and the maximum value is 115. The variance or distribution of students' scores, as indicated by the standard deviation, decreased from 5.262 to 8.029.

Table 2. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		RES_1
N		194
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	6.04936199
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	,051
	Positive	,047
	Negative	-,051
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		,051
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		,200

The second analysis focuses on normality testing, which aims to determine whether the data is normally distributed. Kadir in (Hanifah, 2023) study explains that the decision rule for this data is: if H_0 is rejected, the data is normally distributed; if H_1 is accepted, the data is not normally distributed. The normality test shows that the significance value (Asymp. Sig) is 0.200, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data is normally distributed.

Table 3. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1,098	21	167	,354

The basis for drawing conclusions from the tested data is as follows: a) If the probability value > 0.05 , the data is said to be homogeneous, b) If the probability value < 0.05 , the data is not homogeneous.

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that the value obtained from the homogeneity test is 0.354, and it can be concluded that this value meets the requirement to be said to have equal variance.

Table 4. Correlations

		Father Involvement	Procosial Behaviour
Father Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.866**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	194	194
Procosial Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.866**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	194	194

The decision rule is that if the significance is > 0.05 , then H_1 is rejected and H_0 is accepted; if the significance is < 0.05 , then H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. In the calculation of r_{hitung} and r_{tabel} , the decision rule is: if $r_{hitung} < r_{tabel}$, H_1 is rejected and H_0 is accepted; if $r_{hitung} > r_{tabel}$, H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. Based on the hypothesis test results, the value of r_{hitung} is 0.866, which is greater than the value of r_{tabel} (0.141). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the variable of father involvement in parenting and the variable of prosocial behavior in early childhood.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a statistically significant and strongly positive correlation between father involvement in parenting and prosocial behavior in early childhood ($r = 0.866$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as fathers become more actively engaged in caregiving roles—such as emotional support, play interactions, and disciplinary involvement—there is a concurrent enhancement in prosocial behaviors among young children, such as empathy, cooperation, sharing, and helping.

These results align with existing literature which emphasizes the unique and complementary role fathers play in early childhood development. For example, research by Lamb and Lewis (2013) highlights that paternal engagement—particularly through consistent, warm, and supportive interactions—has been positively associated with children's social competence and emotional regulation. A meta-analysis by Allen and Daly (2007) further supports this notion, indicating that children with involved fathers are more likely to exhibit higher levels of prosocial behavior and reduced behavioral problems compared to those with less-involved paternal figures.

The strong correlation found in this study also mirrors the findings of recent empirical research by Cabrera et al. (2018), who found that father-child interactions that are responsive and stimulating are positively linked with prosocial development in early years. Similarly, a study by Yogman et al. (2016) asserted that paternal presence

contributes significantly to the child's capacity for empathy and social adaptation, often through modeling cooperative behaviors and fostering moral reasoning.

Notably, none of the 194 respondents were categorized in the "very low" range for prosocial behavior or in the category of "very close" father involvement. This distribution indicates a moderate-to-high baseline of paternal presence and child prosocial tendencies within the studied population, which may reflect evolving cultural norms regarding fatherhood roles in Indonesian families, particularly in the context of shifting gender dynamics and parenting expectations in the post-pandemic era (Putra & Sumarni, 2022).

While the findings are consistent with prior studies, this research contributes further by emphasizing that father involvement must be viewed not merely as physical presence but as active, meaningful engagement in the child's emotional and social experiences. This nuanced view is supported by Pleck's (2010) conceptualization of fatherhood, which distinguishes between accessibility, engagement, and responsibility as critical dimensions of paternal involvement.

Future research is encouraged to investigate the mediating factors—such as father's emotional intelligence, marital satisfaction, socio-economic status, and cultural parenting beliefs—that may influence the strength of this relationship. It would also be valuable to explore how co-parenting dynamics or maternal gatekeeping practices interact with father involvement to shape children's socio-emotional trajectories.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study summarizes the key findings, which indicate a significant positive relationship between paternal involvement in parenting and prosocial behavior in early childhood in Tanah Datar Regency, with a strong correlation of 0.866. This demonstrates that closer paternal involvement can enhance children's prosocial behavior. The findings suggest that promoting fatherly engagement in parenting can have a positive impact on child development. In practice, efforts should be made to encourage fathers to become more actively involved in nurturing their children. For future research, further exploration is needed into additional factors that may influence paternal involvement and its broader effects on child development. Additionally, investigating strategies to increase paternal participation in parenting can contribute to improving child outcomes.

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