Introduction

Define Prosocial behavior.

Define culture. Matsumoto (2004). Culture can be defined as a dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and behaviours.

Below I will examine cross cultural differences in prosocial behavior and whether culture does play a role in one’s likelihood to help in some situations.

Main Body

Differences in child rearing practices- can cause cross cultural differences in prosocial behavior.

Whiting and Whiting (1975)

A naturalistic observation. Observed children between the ages of 3-11.Compared six different cultures as a result of child rearing practices. Kenya, Philippines, Japan, India, Mexico, USA.

Results:

Children from Mexico and the Philippines generally acted more prosocially than those from Japan, India and USA. The most prosocial children were from Kenya (a traditional society). The most egoistic children came from the USA.

An important factor was how much children helped with household chores and care of younger children. Prosocial children tended to live in extended families, the female role was important (economically). In the USA children were paid for chores.

Conclusion:

Degree of modernization seem to influence behavior and also individualism and collectivism. Collectivist cultures value helping family members (think about subsistence farmers). Individualistic cultures encourage competitiveness and personal achievement for future success. This does not seem to promote prosocial behavior.

Supported by **Graves and Graves**

Caring for younger children provides considerable opportunities to learn to behave in a social manner.

Cultural Norms

**Miller et al** – Interviewed 400 individuals on what to do in hypothetical situations where a person had failed to help someone in need. The situations involved parent’s obligation to help children, friend’s obligation to help a friend and people’s obligation to help a stranger. The situations also varied from life threatening to minor threat.

Hindu Indians tended to see it as a moral duty to help in ALL situations. North Americans saw it as more personal choice. They were influenced by factors like if they knew the person, if they liked the person and how much danger they were in.

Social Identity Theory **–** we favour our in-group.

**Katz**

Help members of own ethnic group (our in group) rather than another.

**Bond and Leung**

Chinese and Japanese had a strong in-group perception and offered more help than Americans. However, they are less likely than Americans to help out group.

Conclusion: We seem to help those we perceive as similar but more research is needed. It may be difficult to measure in some places that are very multi-cultural.

Population density

**Levine et al** throughout 1990’s investigated helpfulness towards strangers.

Independent field experiments into simple helpful acts. For example, a pen dropping, letter dropping, exchange money, blind person across the road.

Results for 36 large cities around the USA of all different sizes.

Small/medium cities in SE most helpful

Large cites in NE least helpful

Conclusion: The research indicated that the best predictor of helping behavior was population density

Results for 23 large cities around the world

In the blind person experiment. Most helpful (on every occasion): Rio de Janeiro, San Jose, Lilongwe, Madrid, Prague

But in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok help was offered less than half of the time.

In pen dropping, the chance of being helped in one third in New Yourk compared to Rio.

Conclusion: Helping was high in countries with low economic productivity

Helping was also higher in cities with a slow pace of life. Walking speed measured to access pace of life. However this trend was not found in all cases. Fast paced pedestrians in Vienna were very helpful but slow paced Kuala Lumpurians were not.

Interestingly, where people were raised had LESS effect than where they lived. Therefore helping may be due to the ‘norms’ of a place.

Evaluation:

Methodological limitations:

Levine’s tasks were different and cannot compare easily but are all helping but not demanding.

Do the tasks translate across cultures?

Can we generalize about an entire culture? Vienna does not follow the trend

Can we attribute meaning to a person’s refusal to help?

Ecological validity. Yes but many confounding variables.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Prosocial behavior is the result of a complex interaction between environmental and social factors. It is not possible to isolate individual variables (such as culture) to determine which play the most significant role in whether an individual helps or not. Cross cultural research is difficult due to the bias of researchers in defining, observing and interpreting helping behavior.